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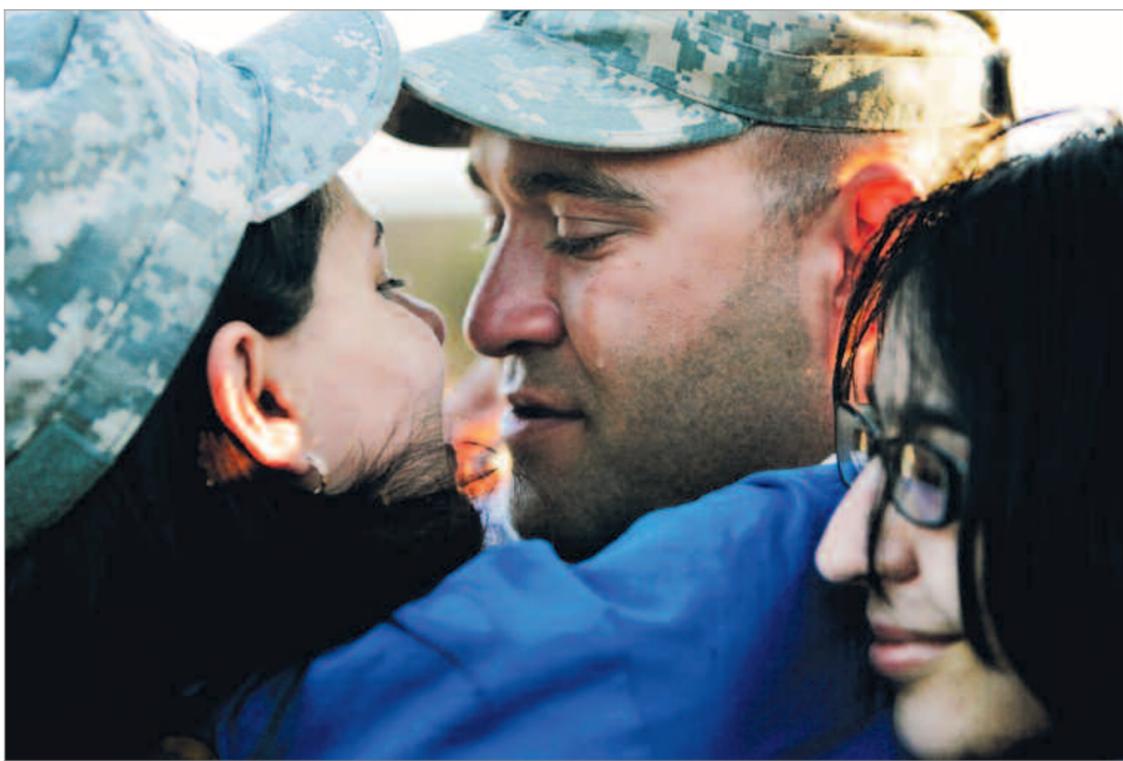
Dallas, Texas, Sunday, June 6, 2010

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THE WAR AT HOME

PRIVATE BATTLES

Military families face struggles as loved ones head off to fight



SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Sgt. 1st Class Mario Sierra embraced his wife, Amparo Bracero-Sierra, and sister, Annakaren Bejarano, at a homecoming ceremony for the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade at Fort Hood in April. Sierra may have to deploy again as soon as next May.

Story by DAVID TARRANT
Staff Writer
Photography by SONYA N. HEBERT
Staff Photographer

The story of war is not just about combat on the battlefield. It's also about the families that remain behind to fight their own private battles.

It's the story of Aimee Ybarra, a mother of two grade-school children, whose husband came home after his fifth combat tour and told her he wanted to leave their 15-year marriage because he had gotten used to being gone.

It's the story of Lisa Bernreuther, who's steeling herself for her husband's sixth deployment; he's only been home from his last tour since April. She keeps his Army boots by the door, she says, "because sometimes I forget I even have a husband."

And it's the story of Gwendolyn Roberts, a bright, outgoing sixth-grader and "Daddy's girl." When her father left for war for the third time in five years, the spark went out of her and she tumbled into severe depression.

After nearly nine years of war, military families like these at Fort Hood in Central Texas find themselves in a relentless cycle of crisis and stress.

Over the next several months, *The Dallas Morn-*

ing News will examine how:

• Repeated combat tours to Iraq and Afghanistan have split up marriages and forced kids to grow up without one or both parents for chunks of their childhood.

• Troops return home from combat tours with severe injuries and psychological disorders, thrusting spouses and other family members into new roles as long-term caregivers.

• Suicides in the military have risen to record levels, and the divorce rate has climbed steadily since the U.S. went to war in 2001.

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Fort Hood's Resiliency Campus offers programs to help troops and their families handle the stress. **11A**

Guard and Reserve members often have difficult transition back to civilian life. **12A**

Military kids suffer during parents' repeated deployments. **12A**

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Airlines loaded down with debt

Carriers survived the economic downturn, but they have billions to pay back.

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GUIDESUNDAY

Denton singer's CD draws cheers

Denton-based songwriter Sarah Jaffe has received widespread acclaim for her debut CD.

IE



METRO

Seniors offer famous last words



In their graduation speeches, area valedictorians look to the future with truth and optimism. We share excerpts from some of the best. **1B**

Isolated showers



Metro, back page

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The Dallas Morning News

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Carissa Picard moved five times during her marriage to Army helicopter pilot Caynan Picard. In the midst of a divorce in March, she had to move again, off Fort Hood.

Burdens fall heavily on families

Continued from Page 1A

These burdens of war have fallen heavily on the troops — who represent less than 1 percent of the U.S. population — and their families.

"Injuries that result in long-term changes in behavior or abilities can seriously challenge marriages, thrusting the spouse into a caregiving role, increasing the risk of depression and other psychological problems and increasing the likelihood of divorce," said a March report published by the Institute of Medicine.

Yet "there are not enough mental health providers to meet the demand, case managers and providers are overwhelmed, wait times are too long for appointments and between appointments for those in need of mental health and other services," the report stated. The institute's two-year study was mandated by Congress to help veterans readjust to civilian life.

The extended military operations and multiple combat tours are not just a short-term problem for military families. They will have a lasting impact on the well-being of the next generation — the nearly 2 million children who are growing up in military households.

"This isn't going away," said Ybarra, 33, the mother of a 10-year-old girl and a 6-year-old boy, who lives near Fort Hood. She has been separated from her husband, a first sergeant, for a year and is in the process of divorce. He is leaving soon on his sixth deployment.

"I can guarantee you that in the next 10 years," she said, "we'll still be seeing the effects on my children."

Uncharted territory

The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have developed into the longest sustained combat operations since the Vietnam War. The all-volunteer military, which replaced the draft in the mid-1970s, finds itself in uncharted territory: a seemingly endless era of military operations and deployments.

"We've never been here before in history," said Maxine Trent, a licensed professional counselor who has seen hundreds of military family members from Fort Hood. "We've never asked our military families to do what we're asking them to do."

Family Readiness Groups are the traditional approach to supporting military spouses during deployments.

Made up of soldiers, family members and volunteers with each unit,

the groups offer a network of communication and support. While many of these groups have been effective, others have split into cliques or deteriorated into gossip-mongering, according to military spouses interviewed by *The News*.

That lack of social bonds can further isolate military families already suffering from stress or depression.

One of the first studies to look at the psychological impact of deployments found that spouses of troops sent to Iraq or Afghanistan were "more likely" to have depression, anxiety, sleep disorder and other mental illnesses compared with spouses of those not deployed.

Researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill looked at recent medical records of more than 250,000 female spouses of soldiers who had five or more years of military service. (Men married to female soldiers made up only 5 percent of the sample, a size too small from which to draw conclusions.)

The report, published in January, also found that the longer the deployment, the more likely the spouse was to be diagnosed with a mental disorder, said Alyssa Mansfield, the study's lead author and a research epidemiologist.

Since October 2001, more than 2 million troops have been deployed to fight the two wars. No military installation has been busier than Fort Hood, the country's largest active-duty base, with more than 50,000 active-duty soldiers. More than 85 percent of its units have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan for at least one yearlong tour. Most units have served at least two tours. Several are on their third or fourth combat tours.

Fort Hood is also home to more than 100,000 Army family members. About 85 percent live off post.

Trent, the lead counselor at Military Homefront Services, a private, nonprofit clinic, said her center has been "really, really swamped," since it opened two years ago to meet the psychological needs of military families at Fort Hood.

From its start in January 2008 through this May, the clinic, part of Scott & White Healthcare system in Central Texas, has served nearly 5,000 patients — more than five times the number anticipated.

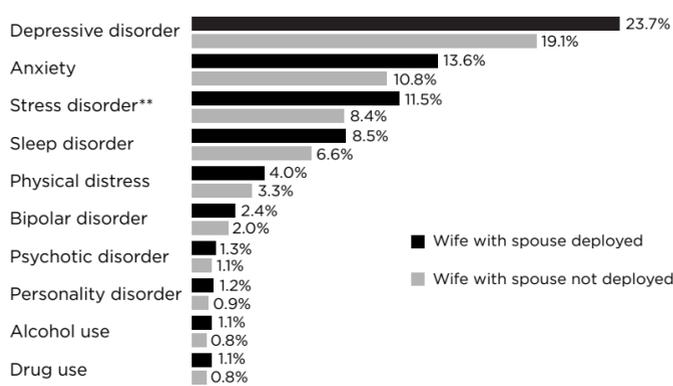
"A lot of times, moms will initially come in with concerns about their kids" before acknowledging their own difficulties, Trent said. "What they're telling us is, 'We're exhausted. Our



A mover took boxes from the Picard home under the watchful eyes of Caleb, 9, (left) and Connor, 6. The boys and their mother moved to San Antonio while she looked for work.

The effects of deployment

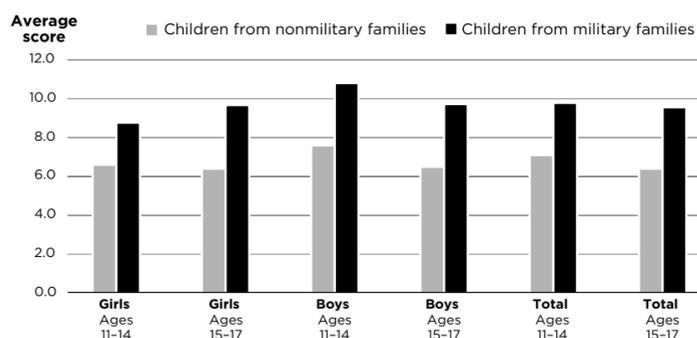
Mental health diagnoses in U.S. Army wives according to the deployment status of their spouses (2003-2006)*



* Study polled 250,626 wives

** Includes acute stress reaction or adjustment disorder, neurotic disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder

Children of deployed parents have higher rates of anxiety, depression and behavioral difficulties than children in the general population. The scores are based on a variety of emotional and behavioral difficulties observed in children.



SOURCE: *New England Journal of Medicine*; American Academy of Pediatrics

TROY OXFORD/Staff Artist

kids are exhausted.'

Breaking point

Even in normal times, military life demands much from families. Service members move from one installation to another every two to three years and often spend months away from home in training.

These are not normal times for mil-

itary families.

"Because of the need, we have recycled the same folks back to the front lines," Trent said. "This was never intended to be — back-to-back deployments — never intended to be part of the military lifestyle."

At times, combat tours have been extended from a year to 15 months. "That's another birthday. That's another Christmas," Trent said. "In

terms of milestones, particularly in a child's life, you've just missed another."

The majority of military personnel are married — more than 50 percent in the enlisted ranks and more than 70 percent of officers. Of those married, more than two-thirds have children.

Few studies have looked at children of parents who have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. The Rand Corp., a Washington, D.C., research center, published a report in March that found that children from military families with a deployed parent reported higher rates of anxiety, depression and behavioral difficulties than children in the general population.

The study, commissioned by the National Military Family Association, also showed that the longer the parent was deployed, the greater the number of difficulties the children reported.

Martha Roberts' experience reflects the report's findings. The 40-year-old Army wife from Killeen has made it through each of her husband's three deployments with help from her church, Unity Baptist. But when her daughter Gwendolyn became depressed, Roberts sought the help of counselors at Military Homefront Services.

Gwendolyn, 12, went to therapy for a year and feels better — especially now that her father has returned home. Sgt. Glenn Roberts, with 22 years of military service, has decided to retire this summer.

"I made a promise to her when she was 7 years old that I would be out of the military by the time she turned 11," Roberts said. "I'll be a little late, but close."

The divorce rate in the armed forces has risen steadily in the past decade. It stands at 3.6 per 1,000 couples, compared to with a rate of 2.6 per 1,000 in 2001 when the war in Afghanistan started. (The U.S. Census has estimated the civilian divorce rate also at 3.6 per 1,000 couples in 2007, the latest figures available.)

However, those statistics offer only a snapshot of military marriages and do not count veterans who get divorced after leaving the military.

Other surveys indicate more military marriages are in trouble — especially for deployed soldiers. The Army's latest annual survey of troops in Iraq found that the percentage of married soldiers who said they expected to get a separation or divorce grew from 12 percent in 2003 to 22 percent in 2009.

Pam Posten, an Army wife at Fort Hood, said deployments are particularly hard on young spouses: "I think the majority struggle with being away from their families and home for the first time. And if you add to that a first-time mom whose husband's deployed — that's a lot to take on."

Aimee Ybarra was a young military

Spouses struggle with separation

Continued from Page 10A

wife with a preschool daughter when she and her husband moved to Fort Hood in August 2003. Just afterward, she learned she was pregnant with her second child. Three months later, her husband left for Iraq on his third combat tour. And two weeks after that, a burglar broke into Ybarra's off-post house.

With no friends yet in their new community, and their closest relatives in California, Ybarra and her daughter, who was 4 at the time, had only each other for support. For weeks after the break-in, they would huddle together in bed at night, sometimes crying themselves to sleep.

"It was a scary time," Ybarra said.

Spouses who get divorced can face economic devastation, including the loss of health benefits.

Carissa Picard moved five times during her eight-year marriage to an Army helicopter pilot. In March, after the couple agreed to divorce, Picard and her two sons, ages 6 and 9, had to leave her house at Fort Hood. She moved into a temporary residence in San Antonio while looking for work.

More should be done to help divorced military spouses get back into the job market, said Picard, who also believes divorced military spouses should be eligible for unemployment compensation.

"It's such a drastic change in your life status," she said. "It's just like transitioning out of the military for a soldier."

Coming home

Like clockwork, counselors typically hear from military spouses about two to three months after a deployed unit returns. The initial euphoria has worn off and reality has set in.

"What I usually get from the spouse is that, 'My husband's been back from Iraq or Afghanistan. ... He's a different person. I don't understand it,'" said Ashley Koonce, a therapist in Killeen.

Sometimes the soldier seems more angry and temperamental than before, or he or she has withdrawn from family life.

"You will get a lot of spouses saying, 'I've had to be so strong for so long, and I expected relief when he got back,'" Koonce said. "But now there's more stress."

These changes are often resolved after a short adjustment period. But other times, they point to a deeper medical or psychological issue.

Defense Department figures show that 163 active-duty Army personnel committed suicide in 2009, up from 140 in 2008 and more than double the 77 suicides reported in 2003. The Ar-

See **FAMILIES** Page 12A

Noelle Peaster sat with her children, Breanna, 3, and Aden, 1, and waited to see her husband, Spc. Christian Peaster, at the homecoming ceremony at Fort Hood's Cooper Field.



Sgt. Glenn Roberts greeted his daughter, Gwendolyn, 12; son, Glenn, 1; and wife, Martha, after coming home from work. Roberts is retiring this summer. "I made a promise to [Gwendolyn] ... that I would be out of the military by the time she turned 11," he says. "I'll be a little late, but close."

A focus on learning to handle the stress

Fort Hood's Resiliency Campus offers programs for troops before they leave base

Standing 6-4, with a head shaved smooth as a mortar shell, Monty Mitchell looks the part of a battle-hardened soldier with three combat tours and a Bronze Star to his credit.

The 44-year-old staff sergeant loves working on his vehicle — a Chevy Tahoe equipped with a four-wheel-drive lift. He relaxes by watching NASCAR on the Speed Channel.

He's not the kind of guy you'd expect to see taking a cooking class with his wife.

But that's where he was in late

March, gamely by Deana's side, as the couple spent the day at a family resiliency program at Fort Hood. Mitchell, who supervises a dozen soldiers in a field artillery unit, believes in leading by example.

"If I'm asking my soldiers to do it, then I should be able to do it," said Mitchell, who has 16 years of military service.

The military has ramped up the number of programs for military families in recent years, with a major focus on resiliency training. It's part of an effort to help soldiers learn how to better handle combat stress and the strain of military life in general.

Fort Hood, the largest base in the nation and a three-hour drive south

of Dallas, offers a broad assortment of services. At the center is the new Resiliency Campus, a complex of buildings with a wellness center and classrooms that became fully operational in September.

The campus is the first of its kind and showcases physical, psychological, financial and spiritual programs, said Col. Bill Rabena, the facility's commandant.

A gym includes weights and exercise equipment, as well as tai chi, yoga and massage therapy. Instructors teach personal finance, weight-control and marital classes, plus state-of-the-art breathing, focusing and calming techniques. Chaplains can be reached there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Counselors with the

Military and Family Life Consultant program are also based at the campus and provide short-term, problem-solving counseling and services.

"We deal more with the preventive side, trying to build that resiliency and inner strength before the [deployment]" to the war zone, rather than wait to fix soldiers and families after they have suffered a mental health crisis, Rabena said.

Last fall, the Army rolled out the servicewide resiliency training program, which will include all soldiers from young recruits on up the ranks.

Beginning Oct. 1, all active-duty and reserve soldiers will take a confidential, online evaluation of their resiliency. A similar assessment for military family members is in the

works. The evaluation will offer advice to soldiers and family members based on their resiliency scores.

After attending the resiliency day program in March, the Mitchells, who have two teenage children, started working out every week at the wellness center. Deana, 42, also leads their unit's Family Readiness Group. "I know what [being in the Army] means to him," Deana said. "That's why I stand behind him."

But Deana and the kids are already bracing themselves for Mitchell's next deployment. "We try not to get too attached to him when he's here," Deana said, "so it's easier to deal with it when he's gone."

David Tarrant and Sonya N. Hebert



Photos by **SONYA N. HEBERT**/Staff Photographer

Above: Staff Sgt. Monty Mitchell plays with Avery Zimmerman, daughter of Spc. Bryan Zimmerman, in front of his Killeen home while his wife leads a Family Readiness Group meeting inside.

Left: "We try not to get too attached to him when he's here," Deana Mitchell says of her husband. She and the couple's children, Tyler, 18, and Mackenzie, 15, are already bracing for his next deployment.

Families becoming caregivers

Continued from Page 11A

my suicide rate is higher than that of civilians. There is no single explanation, Pentagon officials say, but the wear and tear of repeated deployments appears to be a major factor.

Roadside bombs — the most common cause of U.S. casualties — have produced many cases of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Rand Corp. estimates that more than 300,000 troops who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan report symptoms of PTSD or major depression.

The report, issued in 2008, noted that only slightly more than half of service members with PTSD or TBI had sought treatment within the past year.

More than 36,000 service members have been wounded in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In many cases, their injuries would have resulted in death in previous wars — advances in protective armor and medical technology have helped more survive. And that means more spouses, parents and other family members are taking on new roles as full-time caregivers.

Kelly Russell, 28, an Army spouse who lives near Fort Hood, needed help adjusting to her husband's behavior after he returned from his second combat tour in 2007. He was eventually diagnosed with PTSD and TBI.

"His patience level was almost to zero," said Russell, the mother of two young boys. "I needed an outlet as far as dealing with his mood changes. It wasn't just the normal mood swings. With PTSD and TBI, it's drastic from one minute to the next."

One day, her husband, who declined to be interviewed, brought home a leaflet promoting the Military Homefront program. "I called immediately," she said.

"I was getting overwhelmed most of the time," she said, recalling that she told her therapist: "I feel like a single mother. Even though he's home with me, I feel like I'm raising these kids by myself, and it's frustrating."

With her husband's five deployments in eight years, Lisa Bernreuther might be one of the most seasoned leaders of a Family Readiness Group — one with an answer to just about every problem. She became friends with Amparo Bracero-Sierra, whose husband was deployed to Iraq for the first time in their marriage. When Bracero-Sierra was hospitalized with a brief illness, Bernreuther came to her aid. And Bernreuther stood next to the nervous Bracero-Sierra, for the homecoming ceremony in April when both of their husbands returned from Iraq.

But Bernreuther, 48, said that every family deals with deployments differently, depending on variables such as the ages of their children and whether the spouse works.

Her advice boils down this: Try not to follow the news about the war too closely, and keep your personal business off Facebook and other social media websites, where husbands and boyfriends can read it. "It could be misconstrued," she said.

Her final suggestion sounds like the 11th Commandment: Trust your spouse.

"If we didn't have trust, there's no way I'd be able to survive," Bernreuther said. "I don't know how some women, if they don't trust their husbands, how they get through a deployment. I really don't — because it's very hard."

She still has trouble adjusting each time her husband returns home. With her only child grown and living on her own, she works full time and gets into her own routine.

"It's like I'm a single person," she said, "because I'm here by myself for so long."

Tougher transitions for Guard, reserves

They must return to civilian jobs, don't have support active-duty counterparts get

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have required an unprecedented use of the National Guard and Reserve. But these traditionally part-time service members live in civilian communities that lack the level of support that active-duty bases offer military families during deployments.

More than 500,000 reservists and National Guard troops have deployed since 2001. They face "a more complex transition back to their civilian lives" than their active-duty counterparts,

according to an Institute of Medicine study mandated by Congress and released in March. They "must deal with the stresses of reconnecting with their families and returning to their civilian employment. In addition, the communities to which reservists return are unevenly prepared to provide care for service-related conditions."

Lee Cothren, a reservist who has twice been deployed to Iraq, agrees: Returning home after each of his year-long deployments was a quick and bewildering experience.

After the sergeant's second deployment to Iraq in 2009, he spent just five days at a U.S. base, making the transition back from the war zone — a

typical experience, he said. He arrived at his house on a Sunday and went to work the next day to his job as a sales account executive.

"About three weeks [later], I found myself sitting at my desk thinking, 'What am I doing here?' You go from a rifle and helmet to a pen and notepad," said Cothren, a Plano resident who has spent six years in the Army Reserve.

Cothren's wife, Stacey, understood his disorientation. She was an active-duty soldier when they met in Iraq in 2007.

The Cothrens have four children. To help bring stability to their lives, Stacey left the Army in 2008. She is

now working on a master's degree and plans to teach in public schools. Cothren now works as paid staff member for Vets4Vets, a nonprofit veterans support group funded by the Dallas Foundation.

The group reaches out to veterans, including reservists like him, to find the services they need. There are support services available in civilian communities, Cothren said, but it can be hard to take advantage of them.

"If you do have a full-time job, you can't always just take off to go to a vet center whenever you feel like you're having problems."

David Tarrant

'The invisible children'



Photos by SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Stephen Stewart, 4, talks on the phone with his father, veteran Jeffrey Stewart, who now works as a contractor in Afghanistan, at Conder Park in Killeen. Stewart and Robyn Schultz, with Stephen's brother, Tristan, 1, divorced last year; the boys live with Stewart's parents in Alvin, Texas.

Texas' 100,000 military kids suffer during their parents' long, repeated deployments

By DAVID TARRANT
Staff Writer
dtarrant@dallasnews.com

Gwendolyn Roberts likes to draw. Her dad appears in many of her sketches. He and Gwendolyn hold hands, and she wears an ear-to-ear smile. But in one drawing, Gwendolyn watches as her father leaves home. Her eyes are wide, her mouth is turned down and a big teardrop sits on her cheek.

Starting when Gwendolyn was 4, her dad, Sgt. Glenn Roberts, has gone on three deployments in eight years — twice to Iraq. Each time, he has been gone a year.

Her dad went on his last deployment to Iraq in December 2007. Gwendolyn, then 10, did not handle his leaving well.

"She was withdrawn, quiet and very worried," said Gwendolyn's mom, Martha Roberts, from her family's home near Fort Hood. "She worried a lot about her dad. She wasn't talking very much. She would just start crying because she missed her dad so much."

Parents, educators and policymakers have all expressed concern about military children whose parents deploy to a war zone. Yet there has been little research done on the effects of combat tours on their performance in school and social well-being, said Anita Chandra, a behavioral scientist at Rand Corp., testifying before Congress in March.

Advocates know that children in military families — especially those who have gone through long deployments — are experiencing problems. But they lack essential data, including basic information such as where military children live and what schools they attend.

Mary Keller, president of the Texas-based Military Child Education Coalition, estimates that Texas has 100,000 military children. But even that guess might be too low.

"They are the invisible children in the state of Texas," Keller says.



Gwendolyn Roberts, a bright, outgoing "Daddy's girl," fell into depression after her father left for war for the third time. She went to therapy for a year and feels better — especially now that her dad is home.



Sp. Bryan Zimmerman sits with his stepdaughter, Trinity, 3, while his wife, Brittany, takes part in a Family Readiness Group meeting.

Collecting that data would enable support organizations to know where and how to target their services, Keller says. "We have to have information that's precise. That way we can also understand where to target programs and which ones work the best."

In one of the few studies of its kind, Rand Corp., with Chandra as the lead investigator, found that children in military families reported more symptoms of anxiety than children in the

general population.

The study, published in December in the *Pediatrics* medical journal, also found that children whose parents had been deployed for longer periods over the past three years experienced more difficulties in school and at home. This was especially true for older boys and girls, the study reported.

Two years ago, Scott & White Healthcare opened a clinic in Killeen to serve Fort Hood military families.

The hospital surveyed its primary care physicians. Those doctors reported seeing an increase in anxiety-related physical ailments among children.

"There wasn't anything really physically wrong, but the kids were having chronic headaches and tummy aches," said Maxine Trent, a counselor and coordinator for Military Homefront Services. "Those of us in behavioral health care know that's often [emotionally] related."

With more than 20 years of military service, Glenn Roberts was eligible to retire. He had promised Gwendolyn he would do so by the time she turned 11. But he still had one last tour to complete. This deployment was extra hard on the family because there was a newborn in the house. Gwendolyn's younger brother was named Glenn after his father.

A friend told Martha Roberts about the free counseling offered for Fort Hood families at Military Homefront Services. Gwendolyn started seeing a therapist there in summer 2008, about halfway through her father's deployment.

Gwendolyn talked about her fears to her counselor. Drawing became part of her therapy, another way to express her feelings. She mailed many of her drawings to her father — "pictures of me and him holding hands," she said.

"When your dad is deployed, you miss out on some of the father-daughter stuff," Gwendolyn said. Like bowling. Or playing video games, especially the Wii. "We usually would relax by watching TV together."

She particularly loved when her dad could make it to her dance recitals. But during his last deployment, she grew sad when she learned he wouldn't be able to attend.

The Friday night of the recital, she was getting ready in her room when her mother told her she had to leave the house to pick up a package. When her mother returned, she asked Gwendolyn to come to the kitchen. There, on leave from Iraq, stood her father.

"And she walked in and her face just lit up," Martha Roberts said.

"I was really happy," Gwendolyn said. "I couldn't stop smiling."

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Cowboys recover, find victory



MICHAEL AINSWORTH/Staff Photographer

The Cowboys' Terence Newman (left) and Brandon Williams (right) cheered Barry Church after his fumble recovery in Saturday's preseason game at San Diego. A late safety gave Dallas a 16-14 win. **(Coverage, 1C, 8C)**

DROWNING IN DEBT | CORPORATE BORROWING

Firms' bets on future can have long odds

By WILL DEENER
Special Contributor

Debt and credit are the lifeblood of corporate America.

Whenever a company takes on debt, it's placing a bet on the future. Companies borrow to build plants, add product lines and sometimes to buy back their own stock. They raise money by issuing bonds, taking out bank loans or expanding credit lines, and the public rarely notices.

It's easier for companies to become overextended with debt than it is for individuals. That's because companies have an array of interesting ways to incur and pay back debt.

If companies have difficulty meeting debt payments, they have flexibility to renegotiate terms with banks and bondholders. Some is-

sue more debt or stock.

It's no wonder companies become so larded up with debt that they default. Last year, businesses defaulted on \$331 billion in bonds and loans.

When the specter of default arrives, companies look to survive by cutting workers, slashing salaries, closing plants or selling off business segments.

These stories chronicle how Energy Future Holdings Corp. and Freescale Semiconductor Inc. have dealt with incurring too much debt.

Ultimately, companies face the same truth as individuals: If you live beyond your means, you will suffer financial and emotional heartache.

How they fought back, 28-30A



Drowning in Debt
One in an occasional series

An in-depth examination of the effects of debt at home and in business, the country and the global economy.

EDUCATION

Racial gaps on TAKS growing

Minorities, poor perform better, but others' gains greater at highest level

By HOLLY K. HACKER
and JEFFREY WEISS
Staff Writers

Rising passing rates on the state's school exams suggest that black, Hispanic and poor children are catching up with their wealthier, white and Asian classmates. But the number of students scoring high enough to be considered on-track for college shows that racial and economic gaps persist — and some are growing.

DISTRICT-BY-DISTRICT TAKS results, 13A

It's a trend across North Texas and the state, a *Dallas Morning News* analysis found. A review of TAKS scores from 2006 to 2010 shows that more poor and minority students are scoring at the higher "commended" level, which is considered a good indication of college readiness. But higher-income, white and Asian students are making even bigger gains.

The startling reality is that while achievement is rising for all groups of students, so are the disparities between them.

"Every subgroup has made

See **AS SOME** Page 12A

PRIVATE BATTLES

A war rages within



Mike Nashif, who served two Army tours in Iraq and was based at Fort Hood, took early retirement after learning he has post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. He suffers frequent migraines.

For Iraq veteran, severe PTSD is the enemy that stays on the attack, but he's fighting back

One in an occasional series

Story by DAVID TARRANT
Staff Writer

Photography by SONYA N. HEBERT
Staff Photographer

On the road ahead, a turkey vulture lurches into the air. Mike Nashif, driving at a 60-mph clip with an 18-wheeler bearing down in the oncoming lane, realizes that a collision with the bird is unavoidable. His girlfriend, Anndra Mulholland, shuts her eyes and covers her face with her arms.

As if in slow motion, Mike sees the vulture hurtle toward him. He sees it hit the windshield and explode. He sees the web of

cracked glass smeared with blood and feathers.

He slams the brake and swerves to the side of the road. He stumbles to the shoulder, swallows deep gulps of air and sinks to his knees with a groan. As he crouches by the side of the road, Anndra rubs his neck and back, saying: "It's OK, we'll be all right."

Mike, a two-tour Iraq war Army veteran, checks the car. It looks like it's been hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. A direct hit, too.

The collateral damage to his psyche will prove far more difficult to measure.

See **HORRORS** Page 20A

INSIDE

THE MILITARY must rely on partners in the community to help provide mental health services. **21A**

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURIES present long-term difficulties. **22A**

VIEW a multimedia presentation of Mike Nashif and his struggles with PTSD. dallasnews.com/photosvideo

ANALYSIS

Obama's fine line on Iraq

As mission shifts, president must take credit carefully

FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — The official end of the U.S. combat mission in Iraq fulfills the campaign promise that helped vault Barack Obama to the White House, but it also presents risks as he seeks to claim credit without issuing a premature declaration of victory.

As columns of vehicles crossed the border and troops arrived to happy homecomings last week, Obama released a restrained written statement and made a one-sentence reference at a pair of fundraisers. While some called it the

See **MISSION'S** Page 2A

DMN IN DEPTH

Gas drilling heads toward Dallas, slowly

City could face debates on noise, safety, environment

By RANDY LEE LOFTIS
Environmental Writer
rloftis@dallasnews.com

A bit of nearly abandoned industrial land holds a different future for Dallas. Which future is anybody's guess.

The expected drilling of Dallas' first natural gas well at the former Dallas Naval Air Station, with others on the way, could help bring cleaner energy to the nation — and desperately needed income to the city, which owns the site.

Or it could mean more air and water pollution, noise, traffic and safety risks — the same worries that have mobilized entire neighborhoods in Tarrant County to oppose

See **GAS** Page 4A

Scattered storms



Metro, back page

©2010, The Dallas Morning News



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NATION

Test of tolerance

With rancor over a proposed mosque near New York's Ground Zero, Americans are examining tolerance. **6A**

WORLD

Iran plant loaded

Iranian and Russian engineers loaded nuclear fuel into Iran's first atomic power plant. **14A**

GUIDESUNDAY

Can a puzzle make you smart?

That's the claim made by KenKen. Check it out starting today. **1E, 10E**



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Logan Mulholland, 10, watches from his home in Belton as his mother's boyfriend, veteran Mike Nashif, says goodbye to a friend. The family is preparing for a move to East Texas.

Horrors of Iraq follow veteran

Continued from Page 1A

Married with kids

In April, after eight years in the Army based at Fort Hood, Texas, Mike took early retirement for medical reasons. He spent 27 months in Iraq dodging roadside bombs, rocket-propelled grenades, mortars and snipers. He saw friends die.

Army doctors noted his searing migraines, frequent nightmares, memory lapses, hyper-vigilance and anxiety. They diagnosed severe post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury and recommended him for medical retirement.

He lost much more than a military career. His marriage of 12 years fell apart, and he saw his four kids only every other weekend.

Experts say that there are hundreds of thousands of veterans like Mike. That PTSD is a dangerous enemy that destroys relationships. That families of veterans with PTSD often suffer deep psychological trauma, too.

After learning how to survive in the world's most hostile environment, Mike's mission these days is to relearn how to survive as a civilian.

Fishing is one of the few activities that helps Mike relax. That's why he and Anndra, the woman he's been seeing for about a year, spent a few quiet days at a lakeside retreat before heading back home to Belton, near Fort Hood. Driving through southeast Texas, Mike had felt calm in his Honda Passport, rolling past wide-open ranches dotted with broad-limbed live oaks.

But now, as he kneels by the side of the road, inspecting the damage caused by the turkey vulture, it occurs to him that life has just fired another lesson at him.

And it's knocked him to his knees.

In 2001, Mike was 24 and married with two children and one on the way. He'd met his wife, Dena, in Oregon, where they'd grown up. They'd moved to Texas to be close to Dena's mother in Waxahachie. Before enlisting, Mike had worked as an assistant manager at a grocery store, making \$12.50 an hour. He was ready for a change.

In boot camp, Mike's drill instructor repeatedly harped on how soldiers needed to train hard because the world could change in a split second. Sure enough, Mike's graduation took place on Sept. 12, 2001, as the nation reeled from the terrorist attacks the day before in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.

Just over two years later, in March 2004, Mike deployed from Fort Hood for a year in Iraq. He was one of the forward observers, who scouted enemy targets. Their base was in the volatile southern Baghdad sector. His 12-month tour of duty coincided with the heaviest fighting in Iraq since the initial invasion. Insurgents attacked troops with hit-and-run tactics. They ambushed convoys of Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles with roadside bombs, or what the Army calls improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

On nightly missions, Mike would be either in the Bradley or a Humvee in a squad of three vehicles. The missions included patrolling hostile neighborhoods, checking houses for weapons or enemy combatants, and rebuilding roads and schools.

They were repeatedly exposed to roadside bombs. "I think my traumatic brain injury came from the repeated explosions. At least once a week, we were being hit by something," Mike says. "I think I had about 30 IEDs go off next to my vehicle, or within 25

yards of my vehicle."

One of them was a 250-pound bomb rigged to blow up in a parked car as he rolled by in his Bradley. Mike says he never heard the blast.

"You feel it, you smell it and you taste it," he says. "It's one big beat on your body. It's like somebody slapping you very hard on both sides of your body. You feel it on your toes, chest, head, fingers — all over your body."

Luckily, no one was seriously injured. Mike received a Purple Heart for shrapnel wounds on his hands and wrists, but it could have been worse. He found a piece of shrapnel embedded in the Bradley's hatch.

"A few inches closer," Mike says, "and it would have taken off my head."

During his tour, three close friends in his unit died. One was a medic who was sent home with a gunshot wound in his foot. He asked to rejoin his buddies in Iraq and was back less than a month when he was killed by an IED.

When another friend was killed by an IED, it was Mike's job to clean the shattered Humvee, removing blood and tissue from the electronics and radio gear that needed to be salvaged. "It took four hours to clean the blood out of the Humvee," he says.

Halfway through his tour, he faced perhaps his most traumatic moment: He was riding in the back of a three-vehicle convoy when the patrol was hit by a roadside bomb, mortars and gunfire. One of his closest friends, Spc. Raymond White, was killed in the attack.

Mike learned to become hard and leave his feelings behind whenever he went "outside the wire," military jargon for leaving the relative safety of the base.

"Everywhere you go, people are trying to kill you. You learn not trust anyone," he says.

War at home

When Mike returned home in March 2005, his wife noticed right away how much he had changed.

"He pretty much distanced himself to the point that whatever I did while he was gone, I continued to do," Dena says. "The bills, the children, the schooling, the doctors' appointments ... anything that needed to be taken care of here, I did."

At the time, Mike and Dena had three children, ages 4 to 10, and Dena was pregnant with their fourth child. Mike was scheduled to return to Iraq within 12 to 18 months. That didn't give him enough time to re-engage in the lives of his children, only to pull away again.

"It was like I was standing outside my house, watching my family through a window," he says.

When he did become emotional, he went off like a rocket. Mike admits he struggled with his short temper. "It was hard to control when I came back [from Iraq]," he says. "I went from zero to 90 in a half-second."

In a house with kids and dogs, the chaos and noise could be overwhelming. Once, when Mike's oldest son wouldn't stop poking his brother with a toy, Mike exploded in a flash. "I grabbed him by his throat and held him up against the wall," he says.

When one of the boys broke a wooden airplane model that belonged to his sister, Mike ordered his son to bring his favorite monster truck into the living room. Then Mike picked up a baseball bat and smashed the toy to bits.

In a war zone, instant obedience can save lives; disobedience is tantamount to mutiny. However, Mike could not distinguish between the battlefield and his living room. "My own

anger scared me," he says.

He was having other problems, too. During a family road trip to Oregon to see Mike's father, Dena noticed that whenever Mike drove under a highway overpass, he would clench the steering wheel and open his mouth. In Iraq, insurgents would use overpasses to ambush convoys.

"I had to rub his arm and tell him he was OK. There were no insurgents, no bombs," Dena says.

He also struggled with searing migraines and bouts of dizziness and nausea — signs of possible traumatic brain injury.

Seeking professional help, Mike says, "was out of the question. He didn't want the Army to know he had psychological problems, 'especially when your livelihood depends on your being promoted,'" he says.

He sought out his own forms of therapy. He began to spend a lot of time at fishing holes. "I had a hard time doing just about anything in public except for fishing," Mike says.

In many ways, he was still living as though he were deployed — putting up emotional walls and doing things that recreated the adrenaline rush he'd felt in a war zone.

While in Iraq, Mike had spent some spare time in Internet chat rooms, talking to women. For a soldier deployed thousands of miles from home, even virtual relationships could provide an outlet from the grinding tedium of life in Iraq. But one of those connections eventually led to an affair. Dena found out a few months after Mike deployed on his second tour in 2006. She was devastated. They quarreled during phone calls for the first three months of his deployment. Then Mike stopped calling.

See **PUTTING** Page 21A



Mike (right) and his girlfriend, Anndra Mulholland, visit with Spc. Ernie Chainey. Mike runs Take a Soldier Fishing, an organization that provides support to soldiers returning from war.

After driving several hours from Belton to their soon-to-be new home on Lake Sam Rayburn, Mike and Anndra become frustrated after realizing they left behind needed cleaning supplies.



Putting a life back together

Continued from Page 20A

"He pretty much told me he wasn't coming home," Dena says. "He didn't want to be a dad or a husband anymore."

Mike said he quit calling home because he felt helpless to fix his marital problems and he needed to stay focused on his mission in the war zone. When his second deployment ended in 2007, he and Dena had decided to make one last effort to save their marriage. They talked to a chaplain. They went on a marriage retreat. "It was kind of touch and go," Dena says, but at least they were living under the same roof.

About this time, Mike was put in charge of the recreation program for Fort Hood's Warrior Transition Brigade, a unit of soldiers trained to provide medical and other forms of support to wounded service members. Mike arranged fishing events in what would grow to become Take a Soldier Fishing, the nonprofit organization he runs today.

As he got to know wounded soldiers, Mike began to pay closer attention to his own medical problems. He suffered chronic headaches. He slept fitfully and suffered from nightmares. He hated crowded places — he wouldn't shop at Walmart and avoided busy restaurants. He met soldiers



Dena Nashif and her children (from left), Brandon, 13, Alex, 15, Christopher, 8, and Devin, 4, live in Gatesville. Dena's 12-year marriage to the children's father, Mike Nashif, fell apart after his Iraq deployments.

with similar symptoms, who were receiving treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury. Eventually, he asked for help, too.

Meanwhile, he and Dena were working together to organize fishing events. But then came one final blow to the marriage. About mid-summer in 2009, Mike told his therapist about a dream he couldn't put out of his mind. In the vision, he saw his wife lying dead in the shower. He found the image disturbing enough to bring up in therapy.

Mike wasn't prepared for what happened next. He was immediately admitted to Fort Hood's psychiatric ward for five days of observation. He says he was put there because his dream was considered a "homicidal ideation." Mike vehemently disagreed and called his confinement a huge overreaction. Eventually, he and his therapist talked again and Mike concluded that his dream probably re-

presented the death of his marriage.

Dena says Mike's dream extinguished any hope she had for their relationship. They agreed to divorce.

Mike said they tried for almost two years to fix their marriage. "I was living with my wife and kids, trying to do the right thing," he says. "But what I thought was right and what I felt was right were two different things.

"I know it's right to stay with your wife and kids and to provide for the family. At the same time, I needed to stop worrying about everybody else and worry about me."

At a crossroads

He met Anndra when he was at a crossroads, shortly after he was discharged from his short stint on the psychiatric ward. Weary and dejected about his future, a shadow of his former vibrant self, he was living out of a duffel bag in the Army barracks. He felt frozen in place, unable to go back



While packing to move belongings to their new home in East Texas, Mike gives Anndra a rose from one of her transplanted rosebushes. "Being with her has changed my life," he says.

to the way he had lived and afraid to leap forward into the unknown.

He responded to a long and quirky personal ad from Anndra; she said she liked guys with a mischievous sense of humor. That's how Mike used to think of himself: playful and impish. They arranged to meet — and immediately connected.

Anndra empathized with Mike's PTSD. Her first husband, a Navy veteran, had suffered a massive seizure and died suddenly in her arms, when she was 21. She lost her dad when she was 25 and her mother at 28. A mother of three young boys, she felt emotionally blocked and empty.

"Within the first week of seeing her, she knew everything there was to know about me," Mike says.

Over the last year, Mike and Anndra have been living together in Belton with her sons. But they plan to move soon to Lake Sam Rayburn in East Texas. The owner of a campground in Broaddus has donated a

mobile home to use as the headquarters for Take a Soldier Fishing. Mike and Anndra are cleaning it up and planning to move in with her children this fall.

Anndra is learning to deal with Mike's PTSD. Whenever the artillery range at Fort Hood is in use, the sound of cannon booming makes Mike jumpy, she says. At such times, she scratches his head and rubs his neck and shoulders.

Safe and relaxing forms of recreation, like fishing, can provide an antidote to soldiers returning from war. That's one reason Mike decided to continue running his organization after leaving the Army. It's also good for his own therapy. "Take a Soldier Fishing gives a purpose to my life," he says.

He hopes the fishing events will create stronger family bonds. During previous fishing events, wives have seen their husbands open up with other vets about the war in ways they couldn't around their own families.

"I've had spouses come up to us and say, 'I learned more in 30 minutes of listening to them war-storying than I did in two years of asking questions,'" Mike says.

He thinks a program like this might have helped him. "If I had a program like this when I came back from deployment, I might still be married," he says.

But Mike's life has always been about change. Relearning to live as a civilian won't be easy. He knows there will be setbacks — like when a turkey vulture comes out of nowhere and ruins a perfectly good trip.

That day, Mike and Anndra climbed back in their car and continued driving home. Mike spent the next 50 miles feeling tense, white-knuckling the steering wheel and straining to see through the cracked windshield. He prayed it wouldn't rain and honked the horn to scare away any critters lurking by the side of the road.

But Iraq taught Mike that there's only so much you can control. That life can change in a split second. At times, that knowledge fills him with dread, and at other times, a kind of serenity.

"For me," he says, "the grass is a little greener, the trees are a little taller and the water's a lot prettier, just knowing it can be gone in a flash."

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Andy Mulholland, 12, finds a picnic table the ideal spot for a view of the area at Lake Sam Rayburn where his family and his mother's boyfriend, retired Army soldier Mike Nashif, plan to live soon. The veteran will move the headquarters for his Take a Soldier Fishing program to the area.

Some get help, but needs far from being met

By DAVID TARRANT
Staff Writer
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MORE TROOPS survive injuries that would've killed them in previous wars. **22A**

Two summers ago, Alexander Onzures was an Army medic assigned to a bomb removal squad in Afghanistan. The mission was to clear roads of improvised explosive devices.

"We had a saying," says Onzures, 24. "Sometimes we find them, and sometimes they find us."

Onzures was in Afghanistan only a month when an IED found his team. The explosion killed one soldier and wounded four others, including Onzures. Temporarily blinded, his back severely injured, he spent months recovering from his injuries.

In the meantime, four friends he'd lived with in Afghanistan were killed by another roadside bomb. By the time Onzures returned to Fort Hood, Texas, he was dealing with full-blown, untreated post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I was very withdrawn," he says. "If I was at work, then I was in a corner by myself. If I was at home, I was in my room, doors locked, lights off."

He tried to numb his physi-

cal and emotional pain, taking a daily dose of painkillers prescribed for his back and drinking half a bottle of Jack Daniels every night. Finally, a friend and fellow soldier suggested he enroll in a special program for soldiers with PTSD called Warrior Combat Stress Reset Center.

"He knew I was hurting," Onzures says. "He was a very good friend."

Opened in August 2008, the three-week program focuses on one of the core problems of PTSD — hyper-arousal, a state of mind that feels like a "stuck fire alarm," in which every situation seems to pose a threat, says Jerry Wesch, a clinical psychologist with the Fort Hood program. Hyper-arousal leads to avoidance behavior and social isolation, he says. Treatment combines traditional and alternative therapies, including counseling, biofeedback, breathing exercises, yoga and acupuncture.

Onzures' case had a positive



Alexander Onzures, severely injured during an explosion in Afghanistan two years ago, suffered from PTSD when he returned. The Warrior Combat Stress Reset Center at Fort Hood helped pull him through.

outcome. But the military still says it falls short of meeting the mental health needs of all active-duty soldiers and veterans who need help.

Even Fort Hood, the country's largest base with 50,000 soldiers, is scrambling to meet the demand for services. Though Fort Hood offers a broad range of mental health services, it still must rely on local hospitals in Central Texas, such as Scott & White Healthcare, as well as independent therapists, to meet the needs of its military

community, which includes more than 100,000 family members.

"We are not able to serve the entire population. So we are relying on our partners in the community to help provide some of that care," says Dr. Adam Borah, chief of Fort Hood's Resiliency and Restoration Center, which provides on-base outpatient mental health services. "We're lucky we have a relatively speaking robust network of community providers we can rely upon."

Nearly 20 percent of all combat veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars — about 360,000 in all — report symptoms of PTSD and depression. Yet only a little over half of those have sought treatment, according to a study by Rand Corp. Many cite the stigma attached to mental illness for not seeking treatment, saying that doing so might harm their careers.

At Fort Hood, the number of soldiers diagnosed with PTSD has more than doubled — from 1,006 in 2007 to 2,390 through May of this year, according to the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center. In recent years, Fort Hood has hired more therapists to try to meet the demands for mental health services and make it easier for soldiers to find help. In January 2007, the Resiliency and Restoration Center had about 80 mental health specialists. As of July 2010, that number had doubled to 161. A year ago, Fort Hood opened a new resiliency center, a one-stop wellness hub. The sprawling campus houses a gym and meeting rooms with a choice of services, including licensed mental health therapists, chaplains, massage and acupuncture.

ture.

Increasing numbers of war veterans are leaving active-duty service and returning to their communities. There are 12,038 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans enrolled in the VA North Texas Health Care System. Various programs, both public and private, are reaching out to them and others who are not yet in the system.

The local VA recently expanded services for recent combat veterans. New community-based clinics have opened in Mesquite, Arlington, Fort Worth and Far North Dallas to supplement services offered by the Dallas VA Medical Center in southeast Dallas.

The VA also has begun offering special classes for spouses and other family members. "When you're dealing with readjustment issues, the role of the family has unfortunately been downplayed in the past," says Michael Heninger, a licensed clinical social worker at the Vet Center in Arlington.

"We are here for families of war-zone veterans," offering classes and services at no cost, Heninger says. "They've already paid the price."

Survival rates on rise, but so are challenges

Brain injuries present long-term difficulties, and many go untreated

By **DAVID TARRANT**
Staff Writer
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Thanks to advances in combat gear and battlefield medicine, more troops survive injuries that would have killed them in previous wars.

This is good news, but it also presents some long-term challenges. The soldiers are "surviving, but with things like post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury," said Dr. Carol Tamminga, professor of psychiatry at UT Southwestern Medical Center.

Traumatic brain injury, or TBI, is caused by a blow or jolt to the head, or a penetrating head wound, that disrupts the function of the brain. Because of its prevalence, TBI has been called one of the "signature injuries" of today's wars, along with PTSD.

An estimated 19 percent of the 1.8 million troops who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan — about 342,000 — may have experienced a traumatic brain injury during deployment, according to Rand Corp., a California-based non-profit research organization.

More than half of those cases, however, go undiagnosed and untreated, the Rand study said. The reasons: There is no simple check, such as a blood test, to diagnose TBI, and many soldiers do not seek treatment for concussions.

About 75 percent of all injuries to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan have been caused by blasts, including roadside

AT A GLANCE About this series

In the midst of the longest U.S. combat operations since the Vietnam War, military families are struggling through a relentless cycle of crisis and stress. Many suffer their own wounds of war: Depression. Anxiety. Divorce. Suicide. Staff writer **David Tarrant** and photojournalist **Sonya N. Hebert** have spent several months meeting dozens of military families and chronicling their journeys through these perilous times. This is the second of a series of reports that will appear over the next several months.

bombs. Only the most severe head injuries are visible. Most head injuries remain hidden inside the skull. Symptoms of the more common mild TBI can include headaches; dizziness; temporary loss of balance and memory; insomnia; and depression.

Researchers don't completely understand TBI's long-term health effects. One of the problems is that TBI's symptoms are so general, they "can be associated with something serious or not so serious," said Tamminga, who served on an Institute of Medicine panel examining TBI.

The TBI panel looked at previous studies that didn't include soldiers in the current wars. The panel found that those who suffered moderate or severe brain injury were more likely to have dementia, Parkinson's disease, diabetes and PTSD.

But the panelists cautioned that there has been no comprehensive review of head injuries from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. They recommended that the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs conduct such research as soon as possible.

In Texas, Fort Hood's TBI clinic has seen 3,081 patients

since opening in November 2008. "What we don't know is how many of those are simple screenings, and how many needed follow-up [care]," said Heath Steele, spokesman for the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center.

PTSD and TBI are separate conditions but can go hand in hand. While PTSD can be caused by a brain injury, it "can be associated with any kind of stressful, life-threatening experience, not necessarily TBI," Tamminga said.

TBI and PTSD are "associated with traumatic memories and traumatic situations. These memories are seared into the mind ... almost permanently implanted. So the treatment is really long term," Tamminga said. "You can give pills to help people sleep, and pills that decrease anxiety. But you can't give pills that cure troubling memories. You have to really work through with the person those troubling memories."

Doctors can work through disturbing memories in a professional way, Tamminga said, but families also can play a role.

"Patience and understanding will do an awful lot to support people as they go through this process," she said.

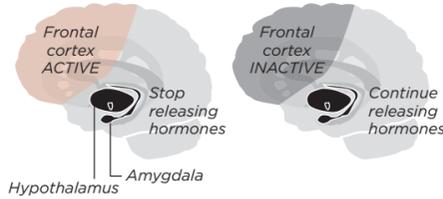
Traumatic brain injuries

A traumatic brain injury (TBI) is caused by a blow or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain. The blast pressure from explosives can cause injury without a direct blow to the head.

Post-traumatic stress disorder occurs after a traumatic event causes the brain's limbic system, which controls the body's physical reaction to stress, to perform differently.

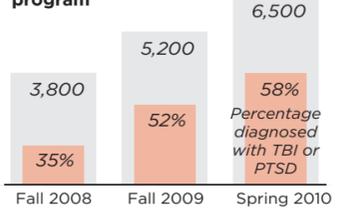
In a normal brain, the frontal cortex signals the hypothalamus and amygdala to stop releasing elevated levels of hormones to the body.

In a PTSD brain, the frontal cortex shuts down and the brain kicks into overdrive. Prolonged secretions of hormones can cause a host of physical and mental ailments.



The best way to prevent TBI is to allow the brain to rest after a concussion. PTSD can be treated with therapy. The number of soldiers being treated for TBI and PTSD has increased in recent years.

Total soldiers in Army Wounded Warrior program*

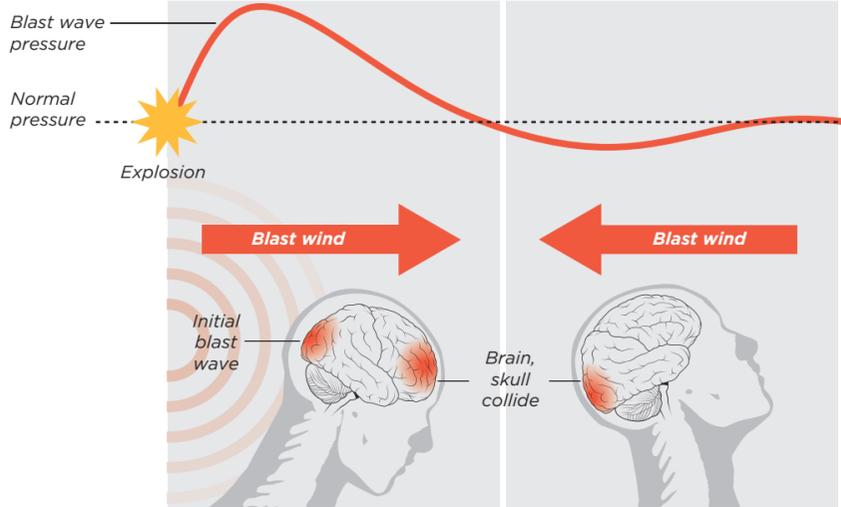


*Set up to assist soldiers who became severely injured or ill during service in overseas contingency operations since Sept. 11, 2001.

How explosions affect the brain

Phase 1: The initial blast wave of high pressure jolts the head away from the blast.

Phase 2: This is followed by a drop in pressure, resulting in a reversed blast wind.



Symptoms of TBI

- Loss of consciousness
- Headache
- Confusion
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Ringing in the ears
- Fatigue
- Behavioral or mood changes
- Memory loss
- Lack of attention
- Sleep disorders
- Blindness
- Hearing loss
- Speech problems
- Seizures

SOURCE: Dallas Morning News research; The Washington Post

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Brimming with pride

Oklahoma defensive captain Travis Lewis (28) and linebacker Tom Wort celebrate with the Golden Hat, given to the winner of the annual game against Texas at the Cotton Bowl.



TOM FOX/Staff Photographer

SPORTSDAY2: In a 28-20 win, Oklahoma had a playmaker and Texas didn't, says Kevin Sherrington. Plus: More Texas-OU coverage. **ICC, 6-9CC**

METRO: DART does its part, getting fans to the Texas-OU game on time, avoiding a repeat of last year's dismal performance. **1B**



DMN INVESTIGATES | EMERGING TECHNOLOGY FUND

\$16M given to firms tied to Perry donors

Governor denies politics influenced his selections on awards to startups

By **JAMES DREW, STEVE McGONIGLE and RYAN McNEILL**
Staff Writers

When Gov. Rick Perry announces that a company will get

money from the Texas Emerging Technology Fund, he often describes it as an important investment in the state's future.

Behind the scenes, some of the governor's biggest political supporters have been making investments of their own — in Perry and in companies getting money from the tech fund.

An investigation by *The Dallas*

Morning News found that more than \$16 million from the Emerging Technology Fund has been awarded to companies with investors or officers who are large campaign donors to Perry.

The governor denied that politics influence his decisions on tech fund awards.

See **FUND'S** Page 30A

PRIVATE BATTLES

An unexpected enemy



Charles McKinney clutches the Army uniform of his son, 40-year-old Master Sgt. Jeffrey McKinney, who fatally shot himself during his second combat tour of duty in Iraq. Military suicides have occurred with disturbing frequency recently.

Bedford couple stunned at son's suicide during military tour in Iraq

One in an occasional series

Story by **DAVID TARRANT**
Staff Writer

Photography by **SONYA N. HEBERT**
Staff Photographer

Just home from work, Charles McKinney sat in his Bedford home watching TV with his 13-year-old granddaughter. He glanced out the window of his front door and saw two soldiers in dress uniforms striding up his front walk.

He bolted into the kitchen, where his wife, Rhonda, was cooking supper. "Don't let them in!" he yelled.

"Don't let them in!"

Charles knew there would be only one reason why the soldiers would be coming to his house: to inform him that his only son, 40-year-old Master Sgt. Jeffrey McKinney, had died during his second combat tour of duty in Iraq. The only question was how.

When they learned that their son had fatally shot himself, the McKinneys sat in stunned disbelief.

Suicides among service members have occurred with disturbing frequency during the nine years of the wars in

See **SOLDIER'S** Page 24A

INSIDE FORT HOOD is once again thrown into the spotlight. **25A**

MAJ. GEN. Mark Graham understands loss. **25A**

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Southwest CEO: We are 'low fare'

Kelly disagrees with analysts who say mergers bring hikes

By **TERRY MAXON**
Staff Writer
tmaxon@dallasnews.com

If you want to see Gary Kelly get riled up, suggest to him that airfares will go up when Southwest Airlines closes its deal to acquire low-fare competitor AirTran Airways.

Some industry observers are saying it. Some news media are saying it. Kelly, Southwest's chairman and

BUSINESS: AirTran's hub attracted Southwest. **1D**

chief executive, isn't buying it.

"We are a low-fare carrier. That is who we are. That is how we've established trust over 40 years," Kelly fumed in an interview last week after Southwest offered \$1.4 billion in cash and stock to buy its Orlando-based rival.

The planned acquisition would eliminate a low-fare carrier that serves as a "fare

See **MERGER'S** Page 33A

TEXAS RANGERS

After misstep, slugger's recovery grows stronger

Hamilton focuses on faith, support system

By **S.C. GWYNNE**
Staff Writer
sgwynne@dallasnews.com

On the chilly morning of Jan. 22, 2009, when everything else in her life seemed to be working out perfectly, Katie Hamilton received a phone call at her home outside Raleigh, N.C.

It was her husband, Josh, calling from Tempe, Ariz., where he had gone to a boot camp for athletes. Hamilton had become famous the year before for leading the American League in runs batted in and making the All-Star team in his first full

INSIDE

EVAN GRANT presents his annual awards to the Rangers. **1C**

TIM COWLISHAW:

Josh Hamilton is the clear AL MVP pick. **1C**

RANGERS beat Angels, 6-2, as Hamilton homers. **7C**

See **HAMILTON** Page 12A

Mostly sunny



H 73
L 53

Metro, back page

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NATION

Bank bailout bill to end

An unpopular government rescue program credited by economists with preventing another Great Depression will go out of business today. **14A**

Justices return Monday

The new Supreme Court term includes cases about protests at military funerals and illegal immigration. **6A**

WORLD

Counterinsurgency's new face: women

Female Marines take part in Afghanistan campaign. **22A**

GUIDESUNDAY

Fashion plates

Leslie Brenner taps the top 10 dining trends in Dallas this fall. **1E**

INSIDE Special anniversary section



The Dallas Morning News celebrates 125 years of publishing with a look back at pivotal events that shaped Dallas, including photos, a timeline and readers' memories. **Section M**

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"I spent hours at the cemetery by myself with Jeff. I cried a lot. I just kind of poured it all out. I just had to get it out, because we never really let go."

Charles McKinney, about returning to his son's grave in Germany two years after his death

Soldier's troubles still unclear

Continued from Page 1A

Iraq and Afghanistan, leaving family members and military leaders struggling for answers.

Jeff's death, during a routine morning mission on July 11, 2007, was one of 115 suicides in the Army that year — a record total at the time, but one that would be broken continually over the next three years. In 2008, the number increased to 140, and last year, 163 soldiers took their own lives. Altogether, the Army's suicide total has doubled since 2004.

In Texas, Fort Hood has seen a similar spike. Military police are investigating four suspected suicides in the last 10 days. With 14 confirmed suicides already this year, Fort Hood is on pace to shatter its previous record of 14 suicides set in 2008.

The Army's vice chief of staff, Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, says the suicide issue is the most frustrating problem he has faced in his 38-year military career. The reasons for the rash of suicides are unclear. Combat deployment is not necessarily the prime reason for the increase, according to experts. The Army is one year into a groundbreaking study with the National Institutes of Mental Health that could help explain the root causes.

The Army, along with the other military branches, is adding mental health counselors and behavioral health programs to combat a problem still not fully understood. "It's about the mental well-being of the force, both soldiers and families," Chiarelli said.

For the McKinneys, the fact that Jeff could take his own life was the furthest thing from their minds. This wasn't the son they knew, the man with a wife and newborn son in Germany, where he was stationed before deploying to Iraq. This wasn't the beloved first sergeant who liked to sing *Sesame Street* songs to his men — some as young as 18 — to cut the tension during dangerous patrols. This wasn't the caring leader who always made sure his soldiers had their needs met before he ate or rested.

"No, he didn't do that," Charles heard himself saying to the soldiers who'd come to his door. "There's no way."

Top enlisted soldier

Whatever troubled Jeff McKinney is still not clear, even three years later. He did not leave a note. He wasn't having any financial problems. He was looking forward to retiring from the Army in about a year and a half.

Just two months earlier, he had been appointed first sergeant of his



Master Sgt. Jeffrey McKinney had married his longtime girlfriend, Christina Maurer, in her hometown of Muehlthal, Germany, in 2005.

McKinney, surrounded by kids while on patrol in Iraq in 2004, was haunted by a battle there in which he saw children killed in the crossfire.

unit. "He was so proud," Charles said. "He e-mailed me and said, 'I'm the top enlisted man in the company.'"

At their modest one-story home in Bedford, Charles and Rhonda spend each day trying to balance the pain of losing Jeff with their fond memories of him. Charles remained close to his son after divorcing Jeff's mother when his son was in grade school. Jeff was an adult when Rhonda married Charles, but she loved Jeff like her own family.

Their living room is filled with mementos and photographs of their son. One photo placed prominently on the TV set shows their son at a castle in central Germany where he and his German bride were married in 2005. Jeff is smiling broadly and looking tanned and fit.

Another shows Jeff at about age 10, holding a .22 rifle and striking a soldier's pose. Jeff had always wanted to follow his father, a former Marine and Vietnam veteran, into the military. Jeff joined the Army while still finishing up at DeSoto High School, under a program that allowed him to complete boot camp the summer before his senior year. When he graduated in 1985, he was already ahead of most of his peers.

Jeff's best Army buddy was Kevin Floyd, a fellow first sergeant. He got to know Jeff at Fort Polk, La., and later joined him in Iraq. Jeff never showed any signs of depression, Floyd said. He loved fishing and mountain biking, and he spent many weekends at Floyd's house for crawfish barbecues. "He was always very outgoing and active," Floyd said.

As a soldier, Jeff was an "excessive perfectionist," Floyd said, always going above and beyond. He recalls an officer asking Jeff to put together a work space

for a tactical operations center in Iraq. Most people would have shoved a few card tables together, Floyd said. But Jeff persuaded some civilian contractors to build a U-shaped desk space, complete with built-in shelving for TV monitors and other communications equipment. "It looked really awesome," Floyd said.

Jeff's first assignment took him to Germany. He fell in love with the country and managed to get stationed there three times, teaching himself to speak German fluently. He was assigned to Berlin during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and thought he had missed his only chance at combat.

But in 2004, his turn came when he deployed to Iraq with the 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment out of Schweinfurt, Germany. His unit fought in the Battle of Samarra in central Iraq, which had fallen under the control of insurgents. He was repeatedly exposed to improvised explosive devices, known as IEDs. He was haunted by one battle in which his patrol fought insurgents holed up in a school and some children were killed in the crossfire.

"He lived with that every day afterward," Charles said. "He said he could still hear the mothers screaming and crying and wailing."

After that deployment, Jeff lost interest in hunting and the rifle his father had given him the Christmas before he left for Iraq. "I just don't think I like guns anymore," he told Charles.

He married his longtime girlfriend, Christina Maurer, in a church wedding in her hometown of Muehlthal, a small community southeast of Frankfurt. By the time Jeff left for Iraq again in the summer of 2006, Chrissi was pregnant. That November, she gave birth to a son, Jeremy.

Jeff was doing a 15-month tour of duty in east Baghdad, a stronghold of the Sunni insurgency. Midway through, he was appointed the top sergeant of Alpha Company. In an e-mail on June 16, 2007, to wish his dad a happy Father's Day, he grumbled about the extended deployment and "brutally hot" temperatures. He said he was looking forward to retirement and to being "able to come home each day at a normal hour."

That was the last time that Charles heard from his son.

Enduring casualties

Five days later, on June 21, 2007, one of the 1st Battalion's Bradley armored vehicles drove over a roadside bomb, exploding into flames and trapping its five soldiers inside. Jeff and other soldiers arrived quickly but were too late to save the men.

Jeff stayed to help pick up body parts.

"This seemed to be the first of a few incidents that affected" Jeff, a medic told investigators, according to records that were released to the McKinneys. On June 24, another roadside bomb exploded two feet in front of Jeff's vehicle. His driver told investigators: "There is no doubt that if this IED had struck the vehicle, we all would have been killed."

After that, Jeff's behavior began to change. He openly worried that he wasn't doing a good job. His company commander said Jeff repeatedly expressed concerns that he was "failing the company" as the senior noncommissioned officer. "His complaints were unfounded, and I explained this to him each time," the commander told investigators.

On the Sunday before his death, Jeff called his wife in Germany. He told her he was having trouble sleeping. "We were talking, and he said he felt pretty weird and not right and very tired," Chrissi said. "He fell asleep on the phone, and I told him it's better for him to go to bed. He promised me to see a doctor in the morning."

The company commander also observed that Jeff wasn't sleeping and appeared gaunt. On July 10, the day before his death, Jeff met with the company commander, who later told investigators that he gave Jeff "a handful of Benadryl" and ordered him "to get at least 10 hours of sleep" or else he could not go out on the next morning's mission.

The next day, as the platoon gathered for the pre-dawn patrol, Jeff was supposed to give the casualty evacuation briefing. But Jeff responded with only "a blank stare," the commander reported. "I took over the rehearsal and conducted the briefing."

Even so, the commander decided not to remove Jeff from the patrol. "If I would have sent First Sergeant McKinney back to his rack, I'm afraid his soldiers would have lost confidence in his leadership. ... I believe this would have broken him and his self-confidence," the commander told investigators.

According to statements from soldiers in Jeff's Humvee, he sat silent in the front passenger seat and played with a round from his M-4. When he got a call on the radio, he stared mutely at the receiver. "But we did not think anything of it," one soldier said, "just figured he was tired."

When the mission ended about 2 p.m., an Iraqi interpreter asked for a ride back to base. After some grumbling from the other soldiers, Jeff ordered them to make room for the interpreter.

Then, according to statements from soldiers at the scene, Jeff threw down the round he'd been holding, opened his door and yelled "[Expletive] this!" He took a couple of steps and fired two rounds into a vacant building. Then he placed the muzzle of his M-4 under his chin and pulled the trigger.

"As he pulled the trigger, I saw in his face that he realized what he was doing and did not want to do it," the Humvee's driver said. "He tried to move his head, but still the round caught him."

'He just cracked'

Jeff was buried near his wife's home in Germany. Charles and Rhonda traveled from Texas to the memorial service and were joined by more than 200 sol-

See **WITH** Page 25A



Photos by SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Charles McKinney holds his son's combat knife, one of the few things he has to remember him by at his home in Bedford. His son was buried near his wife's home in Germany.

Focus back on Fort Hood after recent rash of suicides

By **DAVID TARRANT**
Staff Writer
dtarrant@dallasnews.com

KILLEEN — A wave of apparent suicides, including a suspected murder-suicide of a soldier and his wife, has once again thrown the spotlight on Fort Hood and mental health issues at the country's largest base.

This year, officials have confirmed 14 suicides of soldiers and six more suspected suicides, according to figures released by Fort Hood and the Army Suicide Prevention Task Force. That's an increase from the 11 suicides of Fort Hood soldiers confirmed in 2009. It equals the record high of 14 recorded in 2008.

Maj. Gen. William Grimsley, the post's senior commander, called the most recent cases "very frustrating. ... Sol-



SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Sherry Ramirez (center) and other soldiers attend a mandatory suicide prevention program at Fort Hood.

diers, for whatever reason, make a conscious decision to choose a terminal solution to what most often are temporary problems."

The suspected suicides include four deaths reported in the

last 10 days. All four soldiers had overseas combat deployments, including one who had served four tours in Iraq and was found dead of a gunshot wound in his home near Fort Hood.

With 46,500 troops, the

sprawling Central Texas base is the largest in the United States. Most Fort Hood soldiers are assigned to high-tempo units that have deployed more than once. But Grimsley said he doesn't believe deployments are a primary factor for the suicides. "Some have a deployment history and others don't," he said.

The Fort Hood suicides reflect those across the Army, Grimsley said. The soldiers tend to be under 25 years old — junior-grade enlisted personnel who are struggling with financial problems and multiple deployments. Some of the cases involve substance abuse. The majority of cases, he said, involve "a significant relationship or emotional issue."

Grimsley said that Fort Hood soldiers from the rank of sergeant and below — more

than 32,000 soldiers — were scheduled to receive visits in their barracks or off-post homes this past week to get "a better sense" of how they are doing. Their superiors also will make sure weapons privately owned by soldiers are properly registered, he said.

In the aftermath of the Nov. 5 shootings at Fort Hood, in which Army Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan is accused of killing 13 colleagues and wounding 32, base officials began a concerted campaign focusing on the psychological needs of soldiers, civilians and military family members at the base.

One phase of the plan involves quarterly comprehensive surveys of health care providers, soldiers and their families to learn the mental health needs of the military community.

Fort Hood has begun putting emphasis on proactive programs that help soldiers maintain good mental health and resiliency. Last fall, Fort Hood opened its Resiliency Campus, the Army's first multifaceted facility intended to help soldiers and families prepare for the stress and uncertainty of combat deployments.

The Army is trying out some new programs to better engage soldiers. At Fort Hood, more than 15,000 soldiers have participated in role-playing exercises aimed to spark conversations and raise awareness about suicide, said Tim Block, who runs Fort Hood's employee assistance program.

"We're trying to turn the tide on suicide and reduce the stigma of folks asking for help," he said.

Speaking out about suicide

Couple share their son's story to help others

By **DAVID TARRANT**
Staff Writer
dtarrant@dallasnews.com

Nobody wants to help distressed soldiers get help more than Maj. Gen. Mark Graham and his wife, Carol. In June 2003, their 21-year-old son, Kevin, a promising ROTC cadet at the University of Kentucky, killed himself. He had been diagnosed with depression.

"I think we've come a long way. It will never be fast enough for any of us," said Mark Graham, deputy chief of staff of Forces Command in Georgia. "And it's not an easy issue. If there's a physical wound you can see, it's a lot easier to tackle it."

Kevin was the middle child of three children and was more sensitive than the others, Carol Graham said. His older brother Jeffrey, nicknamed "G.I. Jeff," looked forward to a military career. Kevin wanted a similar career, but

on the medical side. "From the time he was a child, he'd always wanted to be a doctor," Carol Graham said.

The moves that military families make every two to three years helped the Graham kids draw close together. "They were each other's best friends," said Carol Graham. Later, when Kevin followed Jeff to the University of Kentucky, they shared an apartment.

The Grahams were aware that Kevin suffered from clinical depression and was taking Prozac, an anti-depressant medication. At the time, Carol thought that Prozac was like taking an antibiotic and that, after a while, he wouldn't need the pills.

In fact, Kevin stopped taking his medication at some point in the spring of 2003. He was scheduled to attend an advanced ROTC training camp that summer and didn't want to report that he was taking medication for depression.

"He was the top ROTC cadet," Carol said. "He had been selected to be battalion commander his senior year. He didn't want anyone to know."

But in June 2003, he hanged himself in his apartment at the University of Kentucky. "We blame ourselves, and we always will," Mark Graham said. "We missed it and didn't see it coming with Kevin."

That tragedy was compounded eight months later when Jeff died in Iraq after a bomb exploded while he led a foot patrol.

The Grahams mourned privately for several years. But as the military struggled with an increase in suicides, they decided to tell their story to raise awareness

about depression.

"Kevin wanted to be a doctor, and he wanted to help other people," Mark Graham said. "We decided that if people wanted us to talk, we would do that, especially if it could help other people become aware so this wouldn't happen to someone else."

Mark Graham was a featured speaker at a spring conference in Dallas sponsored by Contact Crisis Line, the nonprofit 24-hour suicide prevention hotline.

The Grahams plan to continue telling their story as long as needed.

"People need to know that you can die from depression. You can die from untreated depression," Mark Graham said.

"I think we've come a long way. It will never be fast enough for any of us. And it's not an easy issue. If there's a physical wound you can see, it's a lot easier to tackle it."

Maj. Gen. **Mark Graham**, whose son Kevin, an ROTC cadet, committed suicide. His oldest son, Jeff, was killed by a bomb in Iraq.



Photos by SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer



Maj. Gen. Mark Graham and his wife, Carol, are raising awareness about depression and suicide after their 21-year-old son, Kevin — a promising ROTC cadet at the University of Kentucky — killed himself in June 2003.

Kevin Graham (left) had been diagnosed with depression but stopped taking his medication before his suicide. The family's tragedy only became worse months later when another son, Jeff (right), was killed in Iraq.

With support, couple attempts to move on

Continued from Page 24A

diers from their son's base in nearby Schweinfurt. But the ceremony provided no emotional closure.

"We expected that he possibly could get shot by somebody or by a roadside bomb ... but not this," Charles said. "This wasn't planned suicide. It wasn't a premeditated suicide. I think Jeff was in a daze. He just cracked at that time."

The autopsy report indicated there were no drugs in Jeff's system. But photographs of his barracks that came with the investigative report showed several bottles of sleeping pills, including Ambien. The McKinneys have requested but have been unable to get any records from the Army that would shed light on their son's medical history.

Still, the photographs offer clues to Jeff's mental state during his final days. He was a stickler for neatness from the time he was a child, but his sleeping area was in complete disarray. "That wasn't like him," Charles said.

Charles believes his son was probably



CHARLES MCKINNEY talks about his son's death.
dallasnews.com/photosvideo

taking sleeping pills and that might have affected his thinking. He also believes Jeff was probably suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or a traumatic brain injury aggravated when the bomb exploded in front of his vehicle three weeks before his death.

Rhonda and Charles fault the commanding officer for allowing their son to go out on the patrol — even when he was acting strangely during the pre-mission briefing. "I'm not a military person, but wouldn't that be a red flag?" Rhonda asked.

For a long time, Charles had trouble sleeping. "I would wake up at night sobbing having had a dream that I'd been with him," he said.

Because he couldn't easily visit his son's grave, he started attending other military funerals. "I didn't have him nearby to go visit. I needed to pay my respects somewhere, so I'd go do that," Charles said. "I felt like I could relate to those people, and I

needed to be there and share their grief. I would stand off to the side and just observe the funeral."

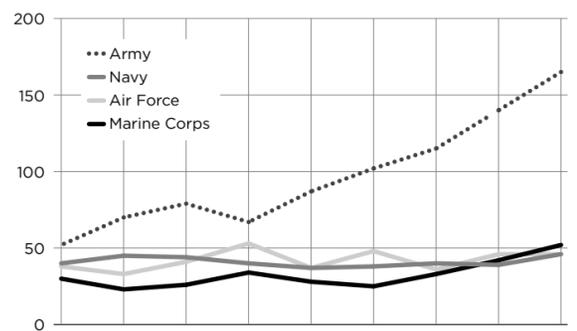
Charles and Rhonda eventually found support among other military families who, like themselves, had suffered the loss of a service member. That led them to the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, a national, nonprofit organization. They met and bonded with other families grieving over the loss of loved ones.

Two years after Jeff's death, Charles decided to fly back to Germany and visit Jeff's grave. He stayed for 10 days. "I spent hours at the cemetery by myself with Jeff," he said. "I cried a lot. I just kind of poured it all out. I just had to get it out, because we never really let go."

"And when I left there, I felt like a weight had been lifted off of me. It was like Jeff had said, 'OK, Dad. I'm fine. I'm not hurting anymore. You need to get on and live your life.' I was able to come back home."

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Military's suicide total by year



SOURCE: Mortality Surveillance Division, Armed Forces Medical Examiner System, AFIP

TROY OXFORD/Staff Artist

AT A GLANCE About this series

In the midst of the longest U.S. combat operations since the Vietnam War, military families are struggling through a relentless cycle of crisis and stress. Many suffer their own wounds of war: Depression. Anxiety. Divorce. Suicide. Staff writer **David Tarrant** and photojournalist **Sonya N. Hebert** have spent several months meeting dozens of military families and chronicling their journeys through these perilous times. This is the third of a series of reports that will appear over the next several months.

Coupons & savings of **\$314** (Not all areas)

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College football SportsDay 2, 1-6CC

25. Baylor.....30	SMU.....31	14. Nebraska.....31
Texas.....22	Tulane.....17	Missouri.....17
Texas A&M.....45	17. Oklahoma State.....24	North Texas.....33
Texas Tech.....27	Kansas State.....14	Western Kentucky.....6

Attention TV Watchers: Big TV Book news inside! More details on A27



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GAME 3 WORLD SERIES

RANGERS 4 GIANTS 2

Series: Giants lead, 2-1
Next game: Today at Texas, 7:20 p.m., Channel 4

Series looking up

Colby Lewis stifles Giants' offense as Rangers notch first win



LOUIS DeLUCA/Staff Photographer

Neftali Feliz pointed to the sky after striking out Giants third baseman Juan Uribe to end Game 3. The rookie closer's first save of the postseason sealed a historic win for the Texas Rangers and cut the Giants' lead in the Series to 2-1.

By **BRAD TOWNSEND**
Staff Writer
btownsend@dallasnews.com

ARLINGTON — On this doubly momentous Saturday night, the Rangers earned a must-have victory in the first World Series game ever played in North Texas.

The Rangers fought off San Francisco,

COMMEMORATIVE poster, 12C
COWLISHAW: Colby Lewis provided a spark. **1C**
TAYLOR: Bullpen is key. **1C**
MOMENTS from a historic day. **9A**

4-2, as a Rangers Ballpark at Arlington-record crowd of 52,419 twirled white rally towels and serenaded the home team

with a fifth-inning chorus of "Deep in the Heart of Texas."

Mathematically, Texas simply narrowed its Series deficit to 2-1. Emotionally, the Rangers propelled themselves back into the best-of-seven fray, with big contributions from pitcher Colby Lewis,

See **RANGERS** Page 8A

TERRORISM

Jet bombs were viable, officials say

Devices in failed cargo plot look professional; 2 arrested in Yemen

Passenger planes also at risk from cargo. **22A**

FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — The bombs concealed inside cargo packages and destined for the United States were expertly constructed and powerful enough to take down airplanes, officials said Saturday, further evidence that al-Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen is improving its abilities to strike on U.S. soil.

U.S. officials said evidence was mounting that the top leadership of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, including U.S.-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, was behind the attempted attacks.

Yemeni officials announced the arrest of a young woman and her mother in connection with the plot. The two were not

identified, but a lawyer in contact with the family, Abdul Rahman Barham, said that the younger woman was a 22-year-old engineering student.

Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, said that his country's security forces had identified the younger woman based on a tip from U.S. officials.

The terrorist plot was made public Friday after two packages containing explosives from Yemen and addressed to Chicago synagogues were intercepted in Britain and Dubai, setting off an international dragnet.

Investigators said the bomb discovered at the Dubai

See **BOMBS** Page 23A

ELECTIONS '10 | GOVERNOR

For 1 day, running at different speeds

It's full steam ahead for White; Perry kicks back, goes to game

By **WAYNE SLATER** and **CHRISTY HOPPE**
Austin Bureau

Bill White showed up Saturday morning at his Houston campaign headquarters in jeans, a lavender shirt and chocolate-colored ostrich boots, ready to knock on doors and ask for votes.

Rick Perry just knocked off. He canceled a tentatively set foray into East Texas and instead went to College Station to watch the Aggies play the Red Raiders.

ON DALLASNEWS.COM

Beginning **7 p.m. Tuesday:** Follow our live coverage of the election returns.

11 a.m. Wednesday: Dissect the results in a live chat with political reporters Gromer Jeffers Jr. of *The Dallas Morning News* and Brad Watson of WFAA-TV.

INSIDE
More Elections '10 coverage, **3-7A**

Both candidates for governor said the race is yet to be won, but there were telling signs that the polls might be

See **CANDIDATES** Page 2A

PRIVATE BATTLES

Love, loss and a fight to live

A year of despair, hope for Fort Hood shooting victim, fiancée

By **DAVID TARRANT**
Staff Writer
dtarrant@dallasnews.com

When Jessica Hansen awoke that Thursday morning, she found a text message on her cellphone.

"Happy Nov. 5th. I love you."

It was from Staff Sgt. Patrick Zeigler of Fort Hood. He and Jessica, a senior at Boston University, met 11 months earlier on Dec. 5, 2008, and they liked to cele-

brate each new month of their relationship. They kept in constant communication, so when Patrick followed up his text with a noontime call, it wasn't unusual — except for the way it ended:

"I love you, Jessica," he said.

"I love you, too," she replied.

"No, really, I love you," he insisted.

He sounded serious, unlike his usual

See **'I JUST'** Page 24A



SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Staff Sgt. Patrick Zeigler bears scars from the gunshot wound he suffered in the Fort Hood shooting last year and subsequent surgeries.

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ELECTION '10

Thousands attend 'Sanity' rally in D.C.

Tens of thousands attended the star-studded "Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear" on the National Mall. **4A**

DROWNING IN DEBT | Last in a series

When readers take a whack at deficit, ax goes deep, wide

By **BRENDAN CASE**
Staff Writer
bcase@dallasnews.com

Putting the U.S. government's fiscal house in order is apt to be a lengthy exercise in pain management — just ask John Lovetere of McKinney.

He tried his hand at cutting the federal deficit through a federal budget simulator linked to *The Dallas Morning News'* website, dallasnews.com.

"It was harder than you'd

See **CUTTING** Page 18A

"Drowning in Debt" is an in-depth examination of the effects of debt at home and in business, the country and the global economy.

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'I just want to hold your hand one more time'



Jessica Hansen

Staff Sgt. Patrick Zeigler served two tours in Iraq. His second came after he had met Jessica Hansen, a college student who vowed to be his girlfriend while he was away.

Continued from Page 1A

wisecracking self. She wondered if he was having a hard day.

Hours later, after the news broke of a mass shooting at Fort Hood, after her frantic calls to Patrick's cellphone went unanswered, after the late-night call from Patrick's father telling her Patrick had suffered a gunshot wound to the head, Jessica replayed that last conversation over and over.

"I love you, Jessica. No, really, I love you."

Jessica needed to see Patrick right away, even if it was to say goodbye. When she boarded the Delta Air Lines flight from Boston through Atlanta to Killeen, she had no idea what lay ahead. She steeled herself with this prayer: *Please stay alive until I get there. I just want to hold your hand one more time while it's warm.*

In her take-on bag, she carried only pictures of Patrick, his letters and a black dress — for a funeral.

Critical condition

One out of every 12 people shot in the head survives. Two-thirds die on the way to the hospital. Recovery varies widely; many are severely disabled or linger in a persistent vegetative state.

Patrick's father told Jessica that Patrick was "currently alive," but in critical condition. He had been shot four times, with wounds in his arm, shoulder and hip. But the bullet that struck the right front side of his skull — that was the worst.

In fact, Patrick, now 29, was one of the most seriously wounded in the slaughter at Fort Hood where 12 soldiers and one civilian died and 32 others were wounded. The shooting took place one year ago this week at the Soldier Readiness Processing Center, where soldiers prepare to deploy for war in Afghanistan and Iraq. Police wounded the alleged shooter, Army Maj. Nidal Hasan, and took him into custody.

They took Patrick 30 miles to Temple's Scott & White Memorial Hospital, the closest Level 1 trauma center in Central Texas. But Patrick's father, whose name is the same as his son, warned Jessica to expect the worst.

"He's gone," she recalled Patrick's dad telling her. "You need to get down here right away."

Tears held in check all night began to flow. "I just kept saying we were going to get married," said Jessica, now 22. "It was supposed to be fate."

What else could explain how a soldier from Fort Hood, about to deploy to Iraq, and a college student from Boston would meet and fall suddenly in love in Hawaii?

The son of a career Navy man, Patrick had moved around. But he spent his formative years in Honolulu. In late November 2008, with a couple of weeks off before going to war, he decided to get together with some old buddies in Hawaii.

Back in Boston, two of Jessica's best friends wanted to celebrate their 21st birthdays in Hawaii. She couldn't really afford to go, but they persuaded her to join them over Thanksgiving break.

On the flight over, she asked everyone she met what to see in Hawaii, and where to go. One spot was the Mai Tai Bar in Waikiki. When the three friends got there, the manager of the band playing there sug-



SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Jessica helped Patrick get ready to report for duty at the Warrior Transition Brigade for therapy at their home at Fort Hood in September. He has started riding a modified bicycle, and he plans to ride in this week's events at Fort Hood marking the first anniversary of the shooting.

About this series

In the midst of the longest U.S. combat operations since the Vietnam War, military families are struggling through a relentless cycle of crisis and stress. Many suffer their own wounds of war: Depression. Anxiety. Divorce. Suicide. Staff writer David Tarrant and photojournalist Sonya N. Hebert have spent months meeting dozens of military families and chronicling their journey through these perilous times. This is the fourth of a series of reports that will continue over the next several months.

How we reported the story

Interviews with Staff Sgt. Patrick Zeigler and his fiancée, Jessica Hansen, took place in Killeen in September, shortly after they returned from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. Information about Patrick's wounding during the Nov. 5 shooting came from his testimony at Fort Hood during an Article 32 hearing, a military proceeding to determine whether Maj. Nidal Hasan, an Army psychiatrist, will stand trial on charges of murder and attempted murder.

gested that Jessica meet his friend Patrick. "He's been to Iraq before and he had a really rough time," the manager explained. "He's going back. Don't bring it up."

When Patrick walked up, Jessica introduced herself and said, "I hear you're going back to Iraq."

Nevertheless, the two hit it off. As they were leaving the bar, Jessica slid down a handrail in her dress and high heels and hopped to a stop, her arms outstretched like an ice skater nailing the landing.

"That was awesome," Patrick gushed. "I think I love you."

They sat in the lobby of Jessica's hotel, talking until sunrise. By the end of her trip, Jessica found herself fending off marriage proposals from Patrick. He had sung in a ska band



Jessica Hansen

After the shooting, Jessica packed a funeral dress for her flight to see Patrick. She recalled Patrick's father warning her: "He's gone. You need to get down here right away."

and graduated from Florida State University. After serving in combat in Iraq a year earlier, he now wanted to become an officer. She told him that she was studying neuropsychology and wanted to help combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, the two signature wounds of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As she was about to return to Boston, he made another pitch for her hand. "I can't just get married," she said. "My parents don't even know I'm here."

Making plans

But two weeks later, when Patrick deployed to Iraq, Jessica vowed to be his girlfriend for the year he was away. Patrick's deployment in 2009 wasn't as intense as his first combat tour two years earlier. He kept in daily touch with Jessica by Skype and e-mail. He also was accepted into officer candidate school. But his entry was delayed until Nov. 23, 2009, the earliest a slot would open up at Fort Benning, Ga.

He arrived back at Fort Hood on Oct. 23. Jessica visited



Jessica Hansen

After emerging from comas, Patrick worked hard at his rehab. "For me, it wasn't really a choice," he said.

for a week. They made plans to live together the following spring, after her graduation from college and his completion of officer candidate school.

After Jessica left, Patrick concentrated on the paperwork to transfer to Fort Benning.

worked, toward the back exit. Blood poured from his head, pooling on the floor. He grabbed for a chair but it fell over. Everything faded to black.

It was the next morning when Patrick regained consciousness. He was in a bed at Scott & White Hospital, surrounded by family members and Jessica.

'Jessica, is that you?'

The slug entered the right side of his skull and left fragments of bone and bullet embedded in his brain. Surgeons operated immediately and removed a fist-sized portion of the damaged brain matter. When Jessica walked into Patrick's room the next morning, she could only see the right side of his face. His eye, she said, was "the blackest black I've ever seen."

A cast covered his whole left arm except his fingertips. She grasped his fingers. "Patrick, it's me, I'm here." He opened his uncovered eye. "Jessica, is that you? How'd you get here so fast?"

Patrick's recovery astonished his family and friends. Despite the brain damage, his memory and intellect seemed unimpaired. He was talking and in good spirits. Although he had lost use of his left arm and leg, he was determined to walk again. The medical staff was more cautious. "After each bit of progress," Jessica recalled, they'd say, "Don't get excited. That might be how he is forever."

Six weeks after the shooting, Patrick was admitted to the Texas NeuroRehab Center in Austin. He wondered if Jessica would follow him.

Jessica's parents wondered the same thing. They didn't like the idea of her dropping out of school. Jessica's mother, Lori Hansen, thought her daughter couldn't possibly be so in love "that she would need to drop everything in her life to be with him." After talking to Jessica, "we realized she was where she needed to be, and she needed to

In scary times, a study in strength

Continued from Page 24A

be there to take care of him," Lori Hansen said.

On Dec. 18, Patrick took Jessica out on their first date since the shooting six weeks earlier. A volunteer drove them to the Oasis, a restaurant with a beautiful view of Lake Travis. Patrick wore his best suit; Jessica helped to dress him, somehow without noticing the small box he had hidden in his coat pocket. He wore a helmet to protect his skull and leaned on a walker for balance. He hadn't anticipated the cobblestone path that led up to the restaurant.

"Oh, God, what do I do? This is not what I practiced for," he said to Jessica. But she had a firm grasp on the gait belt tied around his waist, and he made it to their table. When the waiter brought a dessert of chocolate cake and coffee, Patrick took the small case from his jacket. It contained a diamond ring.

"Thank you for staying and taking care of me," Patrick told her. "And will you take care of me the rest of my life?" Jessica doesn't remember her exact words, but her answer was never in doubt. He had her at "thank you."

Turn for the worse

In mid-January, Patrick returned to Scott & White for what was described as routine surgery: A custom-fitted plate would be placed over the opening in his head. But after the procedure, Patrick fell into a coma, and doctors removed the plate. "We weren't sure if he had come down with an infection or if he had a reaction" to the plate, Jessica said.

Patrick drifted in and out of consciousness for the next six weeks. By March, he was back at the Austin rehabilitation center — still without a plate. "He had to wear a helmet all the time. He had to relearn how to walk again," Jessica said. "We were back to square one."

In late April, surgeons tried again to insert a plate. Once more, Patrick's health rapidly declined. All through May, Patrick was virtually comatose. He'd awaken for a few minutes and fall back into a troubled sleep. He was having night-



Jessica and Patrick look forward to next summer and their wedding. Much has happened since their chance meeting in Hawaii in 2008. He proposed six weeks after the shooting and told her, "Thank you for staying and taking care of me."

mares. His condition was precarious.

It was a crushing time for Jessica. Patrick's recovery, which looked almost assured at first, now seemed like a cruel trick. Some medical staff reminded her that Patrick's brain had been severely injured, and he might never be his old self again.

Before the first surgery to put a plate in his skull, Patrick gave Jessica power of attorney to make medical decisions on his behalf. He told her that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life in a coma. His life was in her hands, and now she agonized over the prospect of making a life-or-death decision.

She wondered if she should push to have the plate removed. She didn't want to subject him to more surgeries. But she felt it was too dangerous for him to spend the rest of his life forced to wear a helmet to protect his exposed brain.

She spent all her time tracking down and talking to neurologists elsewhere in the Army and private practice, scanning the Internet, reading medical texts for hours. At the end of

Events mark attack anniversary

Events to commemorate the anniversary of the Fort Hood shooting that killed 13 people and wounded dozens more will take place Friday and Saturday at the Army base in Killeen.

On Friday, Fort Hood will hold a 10 a.m. awards ceremony recognizing dozens of soldiers and civilians whose deeds during and after the shooting went above and beyond the call of duty. The invitation-only event will include families of the victims. At 1 p.m., a "Remembrance Ceremony," which is open to the public, will pay tribute to the victims with a moment of silence and a post-wide retreat ceremony. All soldiers will be released early from duty.

On Saturday, the installation will host a variety of musical entertainment and athletic events. "Run to Remember" includes a one-mile fun run, a 5-kilometer race and a half-marathon.

Each mile marker of the half-marathon will display a photo of one of the 13 people killed in the shooting. Also, more than 550 gold stars, commemorating all of the Fort Hood soldiers killed during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, will be placed along the route. The races are scheduled to start at 8 a.m., and all events are open to the public. For information on registration, call 254-285-5459 or visit www.hoodmwr.com and click on the "Run to Remember" icon.

May, doctors found that the shunt in Patrick's head — which was supposed to drain built-up fluid — had become clogged. They put in a new shunt, but Patrick's condition barely improved. By this time, Jessica was considering moving Pat-

rick to another medical facility, hoping a change of venue might bring new results.

By coincidence, Jessica's father had just sold a house to a doctor from Temple who was moving to Jessica's hometown of Rochester, Minn. The doctor,

a neurologist, planned to study neurosurgery at the renowned Mayo Clinic. He talked to Jessica and suggested that Patrick transfer to the Mayo Clinic, which had a well-regarded rehabilitation program for head injury patients. The Army agreed to the transfer, and Patrick was admitted the first week of June.

At the Mayo Clinic, doctors adjusted Patrick's shunt to permit a higher level of fluid to drain. The change was dramatic. "Within 24 to 48 hours, Patrick was cognitively back to where he was," Jessica said.

But he had lost one-third of his body weight. Before the shooting, Patrick was a sturdy 6-foot-1 and weighed 210 pounds. "He was pure muscle when he came back from Iraq," Jessica said. Now, he was a shade of his former self. "Bony with a beard," she said. "I have a picture of him in his hospital gown, and you can see his left shoulder sticking out."

Once again, he had to relearn the basics: Sitting up in bed. Walking to the bathroom. Willing the dormant muscles in his legs, arms and shoulders to

move, even if only a fraction of an inch.

"For me, it wasn't really a choice," Patrick said. "I wasn't going to be in a hospital or in that situation for the rest of my life."

He drew on his combat experience, especially that first tour in Iraq in 2007 when his unit suffered many casualties. "You just have to push forward and put things out of your mind and put your head down and attack it," he said.

Face-to-face

On Oct. 14, Patrick came face-to-face again with the man accused of shooting him. He walked slowly into a military courtroom at Fort Hood, the rhythmic click of his metal cane accompanying him, willing himself forward step-by-step.

After relating his experience during the shooting, Patrick rose to leave the stand. He paused and looked straight at Hasan, the man accused in the Fort Hood massacre, who sat motionless in a wheelchair. Then Patrick and Jessica walked from the courtroom. Two days later, he received a hero's welcome during a football game at his alma mater, Florida State.

He's now back at Fort Hood, living on base with Jessica. He goes every morning to the Warrior Transition Brigade for his daily rehabilitation. He has started riding a modified bicycle. His goal is to do the Ride 2 Recovery race from San Antonio to Arlington in April. He plans to ride his bike in this week's events at Fort Hood, commemorating the anniversary of the Fort Hood shooting.

They are looking forward to next summer and their wedding — a slender hope just five months ago. At one of Jessica's lowest points, when Patrick was in a coma and fighting for his life, she recalled thinking not how weak he seemed, but how strong. She watched him and took heart from his courage.

"He's 140 pounds, he can't talk, I'm changing his diapers, and I'm thinking, 'That's the strongest person I've ever seen,'" she said. "He won't give up. He kept me strong."

Staff writer Lee Hancock contributed to this report.



Photos by SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Patrick has had to relearn some of life's basics, including walking. "You just have to push forward and put things out of your mind and put your head down and attack it," he said.

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HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL



JOHN F. RHODES/The Dallas Morning News

Dynasty meets its match

Eules Trinity, last year's state champions, failed to repeat on Saturday at Cowboys Stadium. The Trojans lost to Pearland, 28-24, in a battle of unbeaten teams. Above, Trinity linebacker Brian Nance hears comforting words from a friend. Both Denton teams fall; see Page 1CC for coverage.

DMN INVESTIGATES | HEALTH CARE

Dying on the learning curve

Lax supervision of residents at teaching hospitals nationwide puts patients at risk

By MILES MOFFEIT
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A college freshman shaking with fever seeks help at a hospital. A disabled man struggling to breathe is rushed to the ER. A teenager suffers internal bleeding after surgery.

All patients in great need. All treated by resident doctors-in-training, with little supervision. All dead after receiving substandard care.

The tragedies of Libby Zion, Dev-

ron Matthews and Lewis Blackman echo cases of compromised care that have emerged this year from Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas. But they span decades and come from teaching hospitals nationwide.

Such institutions treat about half of the nation's hospital patients and account for about 70 percent of all charity care costs. Their role is so important to American welfare that the federal government pays to train residents. Amid ongoing efforts to

overhaul health care, however, there is growing concern about patient safety.

The prevalent training model, in which residents move rapidly from observing to practicing on patients, is known as "see one, do one, teach one." To that, Dr. Bertrand Bell, the elder statesman of efforts to reform resident supervision, adds: "sometimes kill one."

See PATIENT Page 33A



MELANIE BURFORD/
Special Contributor

Dr. Bertrand Bell helped New York become the first state with resident oversight rules.

PRIVATE BATTLES

Couple struggle with new roles as deployed mom, stay-at-home dad



Staff Sgt. Erin Miller gave her 2-year-old daughter, Abby, a kiss at the Wyndham Hotel in Las Colinas before leaving for Afghanistan in July. "Mama going bye-bye," said her husband, Russell, as he softly bounced Abby in his arms.

Stress of separation takes its toll

"You get used to not seeing her, and then it's harder when you do, because you realize how much she's changed."

Erin Miller, who occasionally gets to talk to her daughter, Abby, using a Web camera when she is deployed

One in an occasional series

Story by
DAVID TARRANT
Staff Writer

Photography by
SONYA N. HEBERT
Staff Photographer

Russell and Erin Miller met while deployed in Iraq in 2005 and discovered a shared passion for Dungeons and Dragons. Their interest in the popular role-playing game led to their marriage and settling down in Rice, 45 miles southeast of Dallas.

The husband and wife, both in the Texas Army National Guard, now have new roles: Erin, 28, as a soldier deployed to Afghanistan;

Russell, 30, as a stay-at-home dad with 2-year-old daughter Abby.

How their marriage fares during Erin's 12-month deployment is a question of keen personal interest to the Millers — as well as a matter of urgent national security.

Two wars and multiple deployments have caused enormous strains within the ranks, contributing to a rising military divorce rate that is outpacing the civilian divorce rate, as well as a sharp increase in mental health problems.

While e-mail and video chats have made it easier for

See FAMILIES' Page 22A

CONGRESS

'Don't ask' is history

Senate votes to repeal ban on gays in military

FROM WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Saturday voted to strike down the Pentagon ban on gay men and lesbians serving openly in the military, bringing to a close a 17-year struggle over a policy that forced thousands of Americans from the military and caused others to keep secret their sexual orientation.

By a vote of 65-31, with eight Republicans joining Democrats, the Senate approved and sent to President Barack Obama a repeal of the Clinton-era law known as "don't ask, don't tell," a policy critics said amounted to government-

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INSIDE

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DREAM ACT fails in the Senate. 12A

YOUNG SUPPORTERS of the DREAM Act vow to continue the fight. 12A

DALLAS | ALCOHOL SALES ELECTION

Finances unclear for Caraway-led 'dry' bid

PAC can't detail use of \$6,500; he slams scrutiny

By STEVE THOMPSON
Staff Writer
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In the battle over last month's election to expand beer and wine sales across the city, Dallas Mayor Pro Tem Dwaine Caraway emerged as the proposal's fiercest opponent.

His voice boomed from radio ads and in the City Council chambers, where he predicted that expanded alcohol sales would trigger crime and de-grade neighborhoods in his southern Dallas district.

Less widely known is the ag-

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CHARTING CHANGE

Funds misuse, nepotism feared at charter schools

Leaders defend 6-figure pay, relatives on payroll

Last in an occasional series
By HOLLY K. HACKER
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Focus Learning Academy, a charter school tucked in a strip mall in Dallas' Red Bird area, takes pride in teaching students with learning disabilities. For founder and Superintendent

Leroy McClure, whose brother struggled with a learning disability, it's a personal mission.

McClure earns \$146,000 to run the school of about 700 students, about \$50,000 more than the typical superintendent of a traditional Texas school dis-

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Mostly sunny

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Photos by SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Staff Sgt. Erin Miller watched her daughter, Abby, play with her husband, Russell, at their home in Rice, Texas, during a break in packing for her deployment in July.

Families' sacrifices go unnoticed

Continued from Page 1A

couples to stay in touch, the dangers of war can wear down the feelings of intimacy and togetherness that keep marital bonds strong. "It's all on you," said Russell. "You have to make so many decisions, and you don't get to bounce ideas off each other. And even when you do talk, you lose a lot of personal connection in the conversation."

In response to the strain on families, the Pentagon has increased spending to a record \$9 billion on family support programs, including more for child-care services and family counseling.

"Military families are stressed — really, really, really stressed," said Dr. Benjamin

Karney, a professor of social psychology at UCLA who has studied military marriages for the Rand Corp., a California think tank that often does studies for the military.

For citizen soldiers like the Millers, the needs are greater than ever. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, 787,000 Guard members and reservists have been called to active duty, the most since World War II. A half-million have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan — and 200,000 have served multiple tours. Nearly 100,000 Guard members and reservists are currently serving on active duty.

Members of the nation's reserve component leave behind careers and families. Their spouses and children do not

have a built-in support structure, as full-time active duty service members who live on military installations do. But outside the military community, few Americans realize the sacrifices made by these families.

More than 50 percent of military personnel are married, and 70 percent have children. The divorce rate for active-duty military personnel has risen from 2.6 percent in 2001 to 3.6 percent in 2009, when there were an estimated 50,000 military divorces, the Pentagon reported. That's slightly higher than the civilian divorce rate of 3.4 percent.

The Pentagon's divorce records don't tell the whole story because they leave out the National Guard and reservists.

The overall percentage of Guard members and reservists who are married has decreased from 53 percent in 2001 to 48 percent in 2008, according to other military records.

The Pentagon also doesn't account for soldiers who get divorced a year or two after leaving the military, Karney said. And divorce rates aren't the only indicator that marriages are in trouble. It's not unusual for estranged couples in the military to remain married to continue receiving higher housing payments. In addition, a civilian spouse who divorces a service member loses his or her military health coverage.

Meanwhile, combat veterans are at an increased risk of marital problems, according to studies. The rate of post-trau-

matic stress disorder (PTSD) has increased almost sixfold from 2003 to 2008, according to the Defense Department's Medical Surveillance report issued in November.

Couples dealing with post-combat stress go through a period of trying to make their relationships work. "And this will serve to depress divorce in the short term. The problem is that families might not be able to sustain this [work on their relationship] over the long term," Karney said.

His research found that military women have the harder time staying married. Divorce rates are two to three times higher for female service members than for men. The highest divorce rate occurs with military women married to civilian

men.

One possible reason is that there are fewer role models for stay-at-home dads. "There are very few movies about the loyal, stay-at-home husband of a female soldier," Karney said. "The support available in the military to the stay-at-home spouse is geared toward women."

Sergeant Dad

Russell Miller, a sergeant with 10 years in the Guard, is used to playing the role of the loyal, stay-at-home husband. After Abby was born, Erin went back to work full time as a paralegal for the Guard. Russell quit his telecom job installing fiber optic cables to stay home with

See LIFE Page 23A



Russell, a sergeant with 10 years in the Guard, is raising Abby with the help of his parents at their house in Santa Fe, Texas. "How do you explain a year to a 2-year-old?" he asks. "I don't know how to."

Erin lets Abby help prepare her gear for the deployment with the Texas Army National Guard. The 28-year-old worries she'll miss out on memories with Abby while she's gone for a year in Afghanistan.



Spouses work out sorrows with Zumba

By DAVID TARRANT
Staff Writer
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Zumba has invaded Fort Hood.

The trendy dance exercise has become popular at the nation's largest military base, particularly among spouses whose husbands are deployed to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Zumba combines a high-energy, aerobic workout with the contagious beat of Latin dance — the perfect antidote to the deployment blues, according to several military spouses.

"This is how I deal with deployment," said Carolynn Torres, a Killeen resident whose husband is a soldier in Afghanistan. "It helps me to get out of the house and to keep myself going and not think about how is he doing and if he's OK."

Susan Araujo, whose husband also is in Afghanistan, discovered Zumba at Fort Carson, Colo., a year ago and instantly made it her primary workout. "I noticed a lot of improvement in myself physically and mentally," said Araujo.

When her husband trans-

ferred to Fort Hood this spring, Araujo started teaching Zumba at a gym on base and at a Curves studio in Killeen. "I just love it. It's not just a workout. You're having fun."

Torres, who is also a Zumba instructor, said that the workout originated in Colombia, and incorporates the sounds and movements of merengue, salsa and other Latin dances. It's spreading around the country and showing up at other military bases, too.

Torres' husband has seen a big difference in her life since

she took up Zumba. "He noticed I wasn't crying anymore and missing him, so he doesn't have to worry about me," she said.

Zumba has helped Torres and Araujo meet other spouses of deployed soldiers, and they've started getting together outside of the gym, too. "There are five of us who like to go to Starbucks. Or we'll get together at someone's house for a potluck and karaoke," Torres said.

"And somehow we end up doing Zumba."



SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

Carolynn Torres (center) leads a Zumba class with the help of Isaura Matthews (right) at a Curves studio in Killeen, Texas. "This is how I deal with deployment," Torres says.

Life as the odd man out

Continued from Page 22A

Abby. He also took online courses to complete a bachelor's degree in history. "It's been the greatest time of my life ... watching Abby grow up and bonding with her," Russell said.

At times, he's felt like the odd man out. During one of the Guard's Yellow Ribbon events for spouses of deploying soldiers this summer, Russell met only one other stay-at-home dad. That man's wife also was headed to Afghanistan, but not with Erin's group.

Erin, a staff sergeant and an eight-year veteran of the Guard, is assigned to the headquarters company of the 176th Engineer Brigade. The brigade held its farewell ceremony at TCU before deploying in July.

Before the ceremony, Erin and Russell watched as their petite, sandy-haired Abby scampered around the tiled walkway encircling the arena. Erin wore her camouflage combat uniform. Russell leaned against a wall in his brown cowboy boots, faded jeans and a red T-shirt inscribed with the words "Proud Army Family," issued by the 176th's family readiness group.

Erin tried not to think about her impending departure. "Otherwise, you have a meltdown," she said. She did not want to cry in front of Abby. "She's not going to understand if I cry."

Abby bounced up and down in her new cherry-red cowboy boots, staring at them with delight. "We went to three or four stores looking for just the right boots," Erin said.

Abby took off down the hallway, and Russell chased after. When they returned, Abby held a book she'd been given at a table staffed by the family readiness group. It was a new version of *Over There* for preschool children of deployed parents. "Oh, they finally have the Mommy version!" Erin said. "We have the Daddy version."

The next morning, several buses waited at a hotel to take Erin and her fellow soldiers to the airport. Erin's unit was scheduled to fly to Wisconsin for eight weeks of training before heading to Afghanistan.

Standing near the entrance, her eyes welling up, Erin held Abby tightly and buried her face in her daughter's hair. At last, she gave Abby back to her



Top left: Russell and Erin Miller, with daughter Abby, arrived at the Texas Army National Guard Armory in Dallas in July, days before Erin deployed. The couple used the Guard's family readiness resources to prepare for the separation. **Top right:** Erin showed a photo of Abby to Spc. Heather Fagan at the armory, where she got a fitness test (bottom right). **Bottom left:** Erin stood with the 176th Engineer Brigade before a deployment ceremony at TCU.

husband, turned and quickly walked toward the buses, wiping away tears.

"Mama, mama," said Abby, reaching out toward Erin. In her other hand, she clutched a baby bottle.

"Mama going bye-bye," said Russell, his voice thick with emotion as he softly bounced her in his arms.

Left behind

Russell and Abby made the five-hour drive back to Santa Fe, Texas, a small town near Galveston where he grew up and his parents still live. He and Abby have lived with his parents since then. Russell visited Erin briefly in Wisconsin before she left for Afghanistan. He also attends training one weekend a month with his Army National Guard unit in Waxahachie. When he's away, his parents take care of Abby.

Even with good support at home, the first four months of Erin's deployment weren't easy for Russell. He became moody and depressed. The problem started after he tried to quit smoking. He took a prescription for Wellbutrin, an antidepressant also used to quit smoking. He began to feel intense anxiety and paranoia.

"I thought I was having a hard time with Erin's deployment," he said.

He became preoccupied with negative thoughts, worrying about Erin getting hurt or if she was going to divorce him. "We all have thoughts about worst-case scenarios, but I couldn't use logic to counter those daydreams," he said. "I couldn't emotionally detach." He tried ignoring the feelings but felt "needy and emotionally unstable," he said.

Russell and Erin talked every day, mostly via military phone lines or Skype. "This wasn't the person I left for deployment. [He was] a little emotionally insecure," she said.

In November, Erin returned to Texas for two weeks of R&R. Russell had stopped taking the medication because of the side effects. His mood improved, but he slipped back to smoking. Erin put a stop to that.

In Afghanistan, she quit smoking with the help of a "quitters' club" she joined. She gave Russell fair warning. "I told him, 'I'm not a smoker anymore, and I don't want you to be a smoker, either.'"

The couple attended several pre-deployment Yellow Ribbon events. Topics included managing stress and anger, and learn-

ing how to talk about personal problems that can drive a wedge between couples.

When Erin visited in November, Russell felt they weren't in sync. He brought it up with her. "It was awkward at first, and we were just getting used to being around each other again," he said. "So we talked about it."

He and Erin are on the same page about one thing — that it's easier to be the one who deploys than the one who stays home. Her schedule revolves around work, exercise (she lost 10 pounds her first three months overseas) and socializing. She helped organize a knitting club for other female soldiers. She's already knitted scarves and hats for Russell, Abby and several friends.

Her routine also helps with homesickness. When the Internet is working, she can see and talk to Abby using a Web camera. But such moments have proved bittersweet, Erin said. "You get used to not seeing her, and then it's harder when you do, because you realize how much she's changed."

Something special

Russell and Abby are not scheduled to see Erin until her

deployment ends sometime in June. By then, Russell will be nearly finished with his studies. He also plans to work on their house in Rice, in preparation for moving back when Erin returns.

Most days find him parked in a recliner in his parents' spacious living room. He studies on his laptop while keeping an eye on Abby as she plays on her rocking horse or watches *Ponyo* and *Sesame Street*, her favorite programs.

Russell tries not to look too far ahead. "If you look at it as one big chunk of time, it's self-defeating," he said.

Still, he's a little worried. "It's been a hard four months, and I've seen [Erin] twice. We'll make it to Christmas and then to New Year's and then the next milestone," he said.

Erin will probably be working on Christmas Day, so she has planned ahead to do something special for Abby. She got her daughter a special copy of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, one with a built-in tape recorder that allowed Erin to record herself reading the classic.

She said, "I don't want her to forget my voice."

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AT A GLANCE About this series

In the midst of the longest U.S. combat operations since the Vietnam War, military families are struggling through a relentless cycle of crisis and stress. Many suffer their own wounds of war: Depression. Anxiety. Divorce. Suicide. Staff writer David Tarrant and photojournalist Sonya N. Hebert have spent several months meeting dozens of military families and chronicling their journeys through these perilous times. This is the fifth in a series of reports that will appear over the next several months.

SEE A VIDEO and slideshow following the Miller family.

SEE PREVIOUS installments in this series. dallasnews.com/photosvideo



Photos by SONYA N. HEBERT/Staff Photographer

During an R&R leave in November, Erin cherished some playtime with Abby at her in-laws' house. While Erin was home, Russell felt they weren't in sync.