

Airman battles PTSD with the aid of a service dog

Brian Brackens

377th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

Arriving home after deploying to a war zone can bring new challenges to military members. Many discover that their fight isn't over and they end up facing an unseen enemy, with sometimes serious consequences. That enemy is post-traumatic stress disorder.

According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, PTSD is an anxiety disorder that may affect individuals who have experienced extremely stressful and traumatic events. Such events may include witnessing the loss of human life, as well as being a victim of a violent attack.

Master Sgt. Justin Jordan, Air Force Support Integration superintendent with the Air Force Inspection Agency at Kirtland AFB, suffers from PTSD. Sergeant Jordan is a tall, athletic man, with 17 years of experience in the Air Force, including numerous overseas deployments and assignments with mortuary affairs.

"Constantly dealing with death, dismay and putting soldiers in the ground at record pace is what led me to having PTSD," said Jordan. "Your brain is just not equipped to take that all the time."

Looking at him, you couldn't tell that he suffers from PTSD, because the signs are not always obvious.

"People who worked around me had no idea that I had these issues,"



Photo by Brian Brackens

Master Sgt. Justin Jordan, takes a break his with two-year-old English Bulldog, Dallas. Dallas is a service dog trained to help Sgt. Jordan recover from PTSD.

he said. "I could be totally freaking out and holding a conversation with them at the same time."

Some of his symptoms include, zoning out for hours at a time, flashbacks to stressful events, fear of crowds, avoidance and constant worry.

"There were times when I would drive 20 miles an hour down the highway because I was positively certain that a tire would pop."

His family was affected

by his condition as well.

"My children suffered, for there were times when I didn't let them go outside to play because I was so worried that something was going to happen."

All of these things led his friends and family to tell him that something was wrong and that he needed help. While attending an event on base with his daughter, Sergeant Jordan met Jim and Lindsey Stanek, founders of a non-profit organization called

"Paws and Stripes." The sole purpose of the organization is to train and provide service dogs for veterans dealing with PTSD and other mental and cognitive disabilities at no cost. Talking with the Stanek's gave Sergeant Jordan hope that this could be exactly what he needed, and after extensive research and consulting with his doctor he decided to enroll in the program.

Paws and Stripes trains dogs to be constant companions of their owners, so where ever the owner goes, the dog goes. This includes trips to the store, doctor, work and elsewhere. Because they are service dogs, in the same category as Seeing Eye dogs for the blind, by law, business establishments, and airlines must admit them.

While Paws and Stripes provides veterans with service dogs, Sergeant Jordan elected to have the organization train a dog he already had, a two-year-old English Bulldog named "Dallas"; after his favorite football team the Dallas Cowboys.

Having a canine companion in the workplace is an important part of the therapy that the dogs provide. Leaving the dog at home would be the equivalent of not taking your medicine for the day. For this reason, Sergeant Jordan sought and

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