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## Corpsman gets service dog to help PTSD

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### HOPE HODGE

You can't see Navy Corpsman Buf Kloppenborg's war injuries. And they took something more than traditional medicine to begin to heal.

Kloppenborg, a petty officer 2nd class, awoke disoriented in the back of a jeep in western North Carolina on Jan. 31, 2009, a few months after returning from a third deployment to Iraq. He didn't know where he was or who he was, and he couldn't remember the events of the last 14 years, including the entirety of his service in the Navy, his seven deployments and his wife and three children.

Soon after, he was diagnosed with dissociative amnesia, a result of complex post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries sustained from the detonation of an improvised explosive device in Iraq. Then stationed at Camp Lejeune, Kloppenborg sought help at the Naval Hospital. High stress levels kept him from being able to venture out in public, go shopping or even come into close contact with family members.

The department head of mental health at the hospital, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Rebecca Webster, first thought of finding Kloppenborg help through a service dog. She had previously worked with Marine Sgt. Paul Martin, a PTSD and TBI patient and the first Camp Lejeune recipient of a service dog through the organization Paws4Vets.

"When (Kloppenborg) was seeing me, it was clear he had a problem; and it was getting progressively worse," Webster said. "He didn't see how things were going to get a whole lot better."

In November, Kloppenborg traveled to West Virginia, where the Paws4Vets service dogs are trained at a number of federal prisons, for a "bump" — a first interaction with service dogs. A golden lab, Sally, chose him, lying down on the floor near him. From January on Kloppenborg would spend one week a month with Sally, traveling first to W.Va., and then to Ft. Stewart, Ga., to work with her.

On Wednesday, Sally became his to keep in a short ceremony attended by Kloppenborg's father and brother, hospital officials and directors of Paws4Vets.



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[Don Bryan/The Daily News](#)

Petty Officer 2nd Class Buf Kloppenborg and his service dog Sally, a yellow Lab, play in the shade Wednesday at the Camp Lejeune Naval Hospital.

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As Kloppenborg and the dog paraded down the hospital's corridors, patients and medical personnel stopped what they were doing to watch and smile.

"Everybody really brightens up. It's like walking a ray of sunshine down the hall," the organizations director of medical evaluations, Allison Kaminsky, said.

Kloppenborg demonstrated a few of the 167 commands that Sally has been trained to respond to, including "pay attention" and "alert." When someone approaches the corpsman from behind, the dog will nudge his hand or leg to warn him. And if a person comes from behind with an outstretched hand, Sally will bark urgently.

To have that extra sense of security greatly decreased his stress levels in public, Kloppenborg said. For the last eight or nine months, he has been buying all his food at gas station mini-marts, he said. But this week, he and the dog were able to go out to a local restaurant with greatly diminished stress and anxiety.

With Sally by his side, "I'm looking forward to just going grocery shopping," he said.

Kloppenborg's brother, Neil Kloppenborg, who traveled from Franklin, Neb., to be present Wednesday, said the improvement his brother has made was dramatic.

"When I was down here in August, there was absolutely nothing we could do. I couldn't touch him. He would pull back from everybody, totally withdrawn," Neil Kloppenborg said.

With the dog, he said, "it's a total change in his entire outlook."

The comfort that Sally brings even ministers to the corpsman's physical ailments: While stiffness in his back and legs sometimes makes him walk with a limp, having the dog nearby lessens the tension and stress that aggravate that pain.

For Buf Kloppenborg, what the dog represents can be summed up in a word: "Freedom," he said.

Now stationed at Camp Geiger, Kloppenborg works with the battalion aid station for Camp Devil Dog. He's looking forward to resuming a more interactive role with medical patients as he continues to heal.

And this summer, Camp Lejeune will become the base with the most Paws4Vets dogs in the country as at least two more wounded warriors are united with service animals. Organization directors hope they may be able to establish a more permanent presence on base in the future: Last week, they met with officials with Wounded Warrior Battalion East to discuss the option.

To learn more about Paws4Vets, visit [www.paws4vets.org](http://www.paws4vets.org).