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## Hidden Wounds: Military, community not ready for wave of damaged soldiers

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Fort Bragg Spc. John Brack is broken.

He's a backwoods Georgia boy who joined the Army and became a combat medic to save people.

Now, he's so swallowed up by post-traumatic stress disorder that he has only one real emotion left for the world: anger. The rest, he says, he fakes.

Brack is 30 years old and his third marriage is over. He's in a custody fight over his children. A few weeks ago, he was in a Cumberland County courtroom awaiting trial on an assault charge when the case was dismissed because the alleged victim decided not to testify.

For more than a year, Brack has taken a cocktail of medications to relieve PTSD the anger and other problems that began after his time in a region of Iraq known as the Triangle of Death.

"I have one pill to be this way, and one to be that way," Brack says. "One to sleep, and one to wake up. One for no nightmares, and one for the headaches and the migraines."

He sees a psychiatrist at Womack Army Medical Center once a month. He sees psychologist every two weeks. Two of his children needed counseling, as well.

When his children weren't living with him, he says, he drank to pass out and keep the nightmares at bay.

Now he takes enough pills to stay what he calls "comfortably numb" while he waits for a medical discharge from the Army.

He doesn't look much beyond that. As he says, with PTSD "your give-a-damn is shattered."

Brack is one of thousands of service members suffering from the hidden wounds of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. No one can say just how many Fort Bragg soldiers are fighting their own battles with PTSD, depression or other lingering effects of combat. No one knows how many will stay in Fayetteville and the surrounding area after their service.

What is clear is that the community - military and civilian - isn't ready to provide the resources that damaged soldiers and broken families will need.

The Fayetteville Observer has spent months examining the handling of mental health issues created by nine years of war. That reporting shows that the Army, Fort Bragg, the veterans health system and the civilian community are doing more than ever before to address the problems that soldiers and their families face.

But the problem is growing; more soldiers are suffering.

"They were saying there'd be an epidemic of PTSD cases 10 years from now," said Richard Varela. He's a Vietnam veteran turned counselor in Fayetteville. "It's a problem which is still on the horizon and getting bigger. What we have seen is the beginning of the worst of it."



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Above, John Brack digs through his garage for a piece of clothing he got while he was deployed overseas.

