

June 27, 2011 7:28 PM

8,000 homeless veterans on the streets of LA

By **Bill Whitaker**

LOS ANGELES - In four tours in Iraq, Sgt. Freddie Cordova saw friends blown up by IEDs, and learned to kill or be killed.

"What keeps you warm in Iraq during the winter is your hate," he tells CBS News correspondent Bill Whitaker.

Back home in 2008, he was diagnosed with severe depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"I know for a fact that I am different now," Cordova says, "that I experience anger and hate at a whole 'nother level."

[Watch 60 Minutes: Homeless Veterans: Stand Down](#)

After intensive [Veterans Affairs](#) (VA) counseling he keeps his rage under control and channels the negative into positive.

He helps veterans with even worse PTSD, like Vietnam veteran John Aldridge who can't hold a job, and lives by a freeway in LA.

[Services for Homeless Vets](#)

LA is the homeless veteran capital of the U.S. with more than 8,000 on city streets. It makes Cordova angry again especially since just blocks away sits almost 400 acres -- half the size of Central Park -- donated to the U.S. government after the Civil War expressly to provide housing for disabled veterans.

While today there is a large VA hospital there and an old-age home for veterans, most of the land and buildings that once housed homeless vets have been vacant and dilapidated for decades.

With the city encroaching on all sides, the VA now leases about one-third of the property for private use: to a bus company, to Enterprise Rent-A-Car, for UCLA's baseball stadium and a private school's athletic field. There's even a golf course and a dog park.

There's no public record of where the money goes.

"I just get furious about it," says Bobby Shriver.

For seven years, Shriver the former mayor of nearby Santa Monica, has been pressing the VA spend the money to provide housing for homeless, traumatized vets.

"To let them live on the street and die when we have this sort of facility is un-American," Shriver says. So he joined veterans and the ACLU in a lawsuit to force the VA to rehab this facility to house two to three hundred veterans with PTSD.

"They served this country in it's time of need," says lead counsel, Marc Rosenbaum. "So it is our moral and civic duty to serve them in their time of need."

The Department of Veterans Affairs declined to talk to us, but insists it has gotten thousands of homeless vets off the streets and into community shelters. Last week the VA announced a master plan to rehab buildings for vets suffering PTSD, but the plan had no timetable, and no budget.

Which likely means no help any time soon for homeless vets like Luis Gonzalez and his wife. He says Vietnam was easier than the streets.

"Because in the military it is survival," Gonzalez says. "But out here is hard."

While the courts decide the best use of this property, Freddie Cordova will do the best he can, helping one vet at a

time. "If we don't get him off the streets, he's another MIA - missing in America."

© 2011 CBS Interactive Inc.. All Rights Reserved.