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## The Last Battle: Pfc. Chasa Hosey fights to get honorable discharge, VA benefits



Staff photo by James Robinson

Pfc. Chasa Hosey, who served two deployments in Iraq, says he has been fighting Fort Bragg's attempts to discharge him for misconduct for the past few weeks. After a review of his records, Army officials say he will receive an honorable discharge and be eligible for veterans benefits.

**By Greg Barnes**

Staff writer

If he didn't get help soon, Chasa Hosey thought, he would kill himself or someone else.

Hosey said he had just been told he was going to be separated from the Army for misconduct, and the news pushed the mentally ill Fort Bragg soldier close to violence.

He said he became so agitated that he checked himself into the psychiatric ward at Womack Army Medical Center to protect himself and others.

Last week - after the Quaker House and The Fayetteville Observer looked into Hosey's case - Fort Bragg said it was backing off a captain's intent to discharge Hosey for misconduct. Fort Bragg officials now say they plan to put Hosey out of the Army on a Chapter 5-17, which allows separation for a physical or mental condition.

that is not considered a disability. The officials say Hosey will receive an honorable discharge, which should entitle him to benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs. He is also being promoted to specialist.

The officials made the decision Thursday after Hosey's chain of command reviewed his record of service, deployment, conduct and performance history, and his mental and medical health. Fort Bragg had not notified Hosey of the decision Monday.

Lenore Yarger, who helps soldiers through the Quaker House, is baffled by the decision. She says Army regulations call for soldiers found to have post-traumatic stress disorder to be provided fair and equal treatment through the Army's physical disability system.

"I really just don't understand the urgency of putting him out and not giving him a fair hearing," Yarger said. "It doesn't make any sense to me."

Hosey readily acknowledges that he has behaved badly in the past few years, but he blames his conduct on his mental health problems.

He said he never faced discipline while serving in the Navy in the 1990s or in the Army until after he came home from 15 months of heavy fighting in Iraq in 2008.

"That kind of destroyed me over there," Hosey said. "I saw more than I needed to see, did more than I needed to be doing."

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In January 2010, medical records provided by Hosey show, a doctor on Fort Bragg diagnosed him with depression disorder. Hosey said he was provided counseling but little else.

Hosey, who served with the 82nd Airborne Division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team at that time, said he began drinking heavily and arguing with his wife in front of their children. Before he knew it, Hosey said, his wife had left him.

About the same time, he said, he was caught driving drunk, which resulted in a loss of rank - from sergeant specialist. His misconduct also caused him to miss a deployment to help Haiti recover from an earthquake.

But that didn't stop Fort Bragg from sending Hosey to Iraq again in May 2011.

During that deployment, Hosey said, he got into more trouble when he "verbally blew up" at a senior noncommissioned officer. Again, Hosey said, he was demoted in rank, to private first class.

Hosey's problems did not stop when he returned home from Iraq in November.

In February, his wife filed separation papers, leaving him in "a house that used to be a home."

About a month earlier, Hosey said, he had gone to Military One Source looking for help. In April, doctors at Fort Bragg prescribed him medications for PTSD, anxiety, depression and sleep problems.

Hosey said he had another verbal outburst in May. The following month, his commanding officer wrote a letter telling Hosey he intended to discharge him out of the Army for serious misconduct. Hosey contends that he did not commit an offense that warranted a misconduct discharge.

Hosey said the efforts to discharge him caused his psychological problems to intensify.

"These people are seeing my life disintegrate right in front of them ... and they come here with, 'We really don't care, we just want him out of the Army,' " he said.

Hosey said he became so angry one night that he knew he would "hurt somebody" if he went to work the next day.

Instead, on July 11, he checked himself into Womack. Records show that he was diagnosed with anxiety and adjustment disorder, alcohol abuse/dependence and an "occupational problem." Hosey disputes the alcohol abuse, saying that diagnosis stems from his drunken-driving charge.

A doctor wrote that Hosey should resume medications - including Zoloft, Seroquel and Buspar - and be tested for PTSD and depression. The Army has never officially diagnosed Hosey with PTSD.

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Two weeks before Hosey checked himself into Womack, Spc. Ricky Elder fatally shot his commander and then himself on Fort Bragg. A month later, the Department of the Army announced that Army suicides and suspected suicides had reached an all-time high in July, with Fort Bragg leading the way.

Elder and the Army's newest suicide report pushed the issue to the national forefront.

Interviewed shortly after Elder's death, Col. Chad B. McRee, Fort Bragg's director of suicide prevention, said he and other commanders review all suicide attempts to make sure those soldiers receive the care and attention they need. McRee said he insists that no soldier is left behind and that Fort Bragg does everything it can to get soldiers contemplating suicide the help they need.

"As quickly as we know about it, we try to dog-pile on it and help it as fast as we can," Mcree said.

But in an interview Sept. 13, McRee and other high-ranking Fort Bragg officials said they had never heard of Hosey. McRee said he can't be expected to oversee all of Fort Bragg's more than 50,000 soldiers. That's the job of the brigade commanders, he said.

McRee also was not aware of the final disposition of former Pvt. Eric Watson. He did not immediately recall who Watson is or what he had done. A reporter had briefed McRee about Watson in July and wrote a story about him later that month.

Watson's parents said their son returned from a deployment troubled. Despite mental health interventions, he got into trouble and attempted suicide in May, they said.

Three days later, Fort Bragg notified Cumberland County deputies to pick up Watson on an outstanding warrant. Jail officials said they were not told about his suicide attempt. Records show that Army officials visited Watson only after he had been in jail for 19 days.

In July, Watson was kicked out of the Army on an other-than-honorable discharge that could bar him from VA benefits.

McRee cautioned that both sides of every story need to be known, but that isn't always possible because privacy laws limit what the Army can say about an individual soldier without his or her permission.

"You are automatically assuming that we are doing the wrong thing and those guys getting the attention are doing the right thing," said McRee, commander of the 16th Military Police Brigade.

Fort Bragg Sgt. Maj. Eric Brooks sat near McRee during the interview. Brooks, a trained suicide-prevention specialist, said he has undergone treatment for anxiety and depression for years. Still, Brooks has risen through the ranks. He attributes that to the Army's programs to eliminate the stigma of seeking help.

"A diagnosed disorder does not excuse patterns of misconduct. I still make my own decisions," Brooks said

He said a soldier's mental health disorder "didn't cause him to be disorderly. Those are his own personal choices."

According to a major new Army report, that is not necessarily the case.

In January, the Army issued "Generating Health & Discipline in the Force Ahead of the Strategic Reset." The report was a follow-up to a critical self-assessment in 2010 that examined reasons for Army suicides and sought ways to prevent them.

The latest report says "one of the most important lessons the Army has learned" is the relationship between discipline problems and mental disorders.

"To view soldier misconduct in isolation," the report says, "fails to capture the real likelihood that the misconduct was related to an untreated physical or behavioral health condition, such as increased aggressiveness associated with PTSD or depression."

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With help from the Quaker House - an organization that often provides guidance to soldiers separating from the Army - Hosey spent the past few weeks fighting Fort Bragg's attempts to discharge him for misconduct. According to records provided by Hosey, a civilian psychiatrist in Winston-Salem diagnosed him with PTSD and depressive disorder on Aug. 18. Four days later, a licensed clinical therapist provided by Tricare diagnosed him with PTSD, anxiety disorder and adjustment disorder with depressed mood.

"I highly recommend that his disposition with the military be handled in a positive, nonpunitive manner," psychiatrist Rebecca S. Valla wrote on Hosey's behalf. "If this can be accomplished, it has the potential to be a therapeutic rather than counter-therapeutic experience."

The therapist, Victoria Rush of Fayetteville, wrote a letter questioning how Hosey would continue to get the medical care he needs if he was processed out of the Army for misconduct.

"This soldier is in need of psychotherapy and medication management now and in the future," Rush wrote. "He lives in a constant state of anxiety and frustration, worried that he will not be able to continue counseling or receive medication once the Army puts him out."

In late August, Hosey said, he went to Fort Bragg's Inspector General's Office, where he was told he should be eligible for an "Army Retention Control Point" chapter because of his length of service. Such a chapter would entitle him to VA benefits.

On Sept. 7, Hosey said, Fort Bragg officials told him they were backing off the misconduct discharge and discharging him under the Chapter 5-17 regulation.

Hosey said he spoke with his captain Sept. 12 and again asserted that he wanted to be medically separated from service. He said he took a psychological test at the captain's insistence.

The next day, he said, the captain told him the test revealed that "seemingly I was lying and over-exaggerating my symptoms and feelings. ... He said it showed I was a malingerer."

In April, the Army's Office of the Surgeon General issued guidelines on the treatment of PTSD that discount using such tests by themselves as a way to determine malingering.

Fort Bragg officials say they "adhere strictly" to those guidelines but offered no explanation of why a captain would accuse Hosey of malingering. The officials said they cannot comment specifically about a soldier's behavioral health without his permission.

Yarger, of the Quaker House, said she will advise Hosey on what to do after his commanders tell him how they plan to proceed with his discharge.

To put Hosey out of the Army under a Chapter 5-17, Yarger said, "seems completely irresponsible to me ar against the regulations."

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