

Bond With Animals Strengthens Veteran's Resolve

Trained by K9s on the front line, service dog Beau helped Army veteran Joy Haddad return to work after a leave of absence to undergo treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS)

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Joy Haddad served seven years in the Army. After returning home from a tour in Baghdad, she lacked support as she tried to readjust.

“I found it difficult to connect with other members of my unit,” she said. “Plus, I was married, but my spouse was stationed more than 500 miles away. Typical barracks life didn’t really agree with me.”

She ended up at Fort Hood. There, she awaited a permanent change of station (PCS), which would reunite Haddad and her spouse.

“My love of horses led me to spend most of my weekends riding at nearby BLORA Ranch,” she said. “In retrospect, this was the first indication that interactions with animals would become part of how I cope with trauma.”

Later that year, Haddad’s PCS orders came through. Although relieved to be reunited with her partner after more than two years apart, it also meant leaving the ranch and horses. Soon after, Haddad experienced a personal trauma, which brought into focus the importance of her connection with animals.

“My spouse at the time suggested we get a dog to help me process my grief,” she said. “The bond I built with that dog was instrumental in helping me move past traumas and cope with the everyday stresses of active duty and a dual military life.”

Haddad had to say goodbye to her first dog when she moved across the country, but after leaving the service a few years later, she welcomed black Labrador Beau into her life.

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Trained by K9s on the Front Line, service dog Beau helped Haddad return to work after a leave of absence to undergo treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS).

“I may not have been able to continue my military career, but I still had a strong desire to serve my country,” said Haddad. “Beau allowed me to return to federal civilian service and accomplish that goal.”

Specially trained to help individuals coping with PTS, Beau was the first service dog of his kind approved to work at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Main. Others beside Haddad benefited from Beau’s presence as well.

“He was a support to many of my veteran coworkers too and is still spoken of fondly,” she said.

After a life of service, Beau passed away in 2019. Recently, Haddad transferred to the Defense Logistics Agency at the shipyard. Encouraged by the support she received from her supervisor in navigating the reasonable accommodation process to bring Beau onto the yard, she plans to continue serving through her work there as well as by volunteering with help from her new service dog Raine.

“I often volunteer to do STEM educational outreach within my community, and recently, I became a life member of the VFW,” she said. “Hopefully, with Raine’s help, I can continue on this track.”