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## Court diverts ex-military into treatment program

Carol Ann Alaimo Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Thursday, July 15, 2010 12:00 am

When police arrested him for domestic violence, Iraq war veteran Parker Tibbetts knew it was time to get help.

For years after his 2004 homecoming, he tried to suppress his combat stress symptoms.

Then one day, the former Army National Guard soldier flew into a rage and started screaming at a family member - in front of his 9-year-old daughter.

The recent episode led to criminal charges against Tibbetts - and ultimately, to a better life.

On Wednesday, fresh from therapy at Tucson's veterans hospital, he was among the first graduates of a new program that diverts troubled veterans out of the court system and into treatment.

Veterans Court, a collaboration between Tucson City Court, the Southern Arizona VA Health Care System and several other agencies, is one of the first of its kind in the country, said presiding Judge Michael Pollard.

Pollard, himself a Marine Corps veteran who served in Vietnam, said the program marks a big step forward in the care of former service members.

"Veterans are reluctant to admit any kind of weakness," Pollard said. "They don't want to reach out for help."

Criminal behavior often is related to untreated mental health issues, experts say, and getting veterans into treatment allows them to get better instead of racking up criminal records.

The program is open to those charged with misdemeanors. Charges are dropped if they finish treatment and stay out of trouble.

For Tibbetts, 38, who drove fuel trucks in Iraq with the 2222nd Transportation Company and also supported operations in Afghanistan, the reprieve means a fresh start with his family.

"I'm very happy for him that he's gone through this program," said Tibbetts' father, David Tibbetts, 66, an Air Force veteran who served in Vietnam. "This kind of help wasn't available back in my day."

Air Force veteran Martin Hamilton, who has bipolar disorder and anxiety disorder, was a homeless alcoholic before an assault charge recently led him into a VA rehab program.

"I've been sober for seven months now, and this is the first time I've been sober that long since I was 14," said Hamilton, who is 49.

"It's like I'm not the same person anymore," he said.

For the first time in a long time, he said, "I'm happy."

"This kind of help wasn't available back in my day."

David Tibbetts, 66, Air Force veteran

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