



## ***Editor's Corner***

# **Memorial Day Gets Personal: Remembering a Soldier who was a Member of the Zablocki VAMC Family**

By Bruce H. Campbell, MD, FACS

*On this Memorial Day Weekend, Dr. Campbell invites you to read about a Zablocki VAMC employee who embodies why we must remember the sacrifices that our military personnel are called to make ...*

Russell Seager was an advanced prescribing nurse practitioner (APNP) in the Red Clinic at the Zablocki VAMC. After the attacks of 9/11, he decided to join the Army Reserves, which he was able to in 2005 after losing 100 pounds to qualify. He believed that by being in the military, he would be better able to care for veterans as they returned to civilian life.

He was the first mental health provider who was directly integrated into our VA's primary care clinics, and his practice included the care for returning Soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. His colleagues noted that his humor and listening ability made him an outstanding provider who always "went the extra mile." His students said he was a positive and caring influence on them.



In 2009, Captain Seager looked forward to joining his unit, the 467<sup>th</sup> Medical Company based in Madison, as it deployed to the Middle East to focus on combat stress control, watching for warning signs among front line Troops. He told his colleagues that he was looking forward to working with Soldiers closer to the front lines. He left his wife and 20-year-old son behind in Racine and went to Fort Hood in Killeen TX for three months of preparation prior to the unit's overseas deployment, scheduled for December.

On Thursday, November 5, 2009, Captain Seager was one of about 300 in the Soldier Readiness Center at Fort Hood getting vaccinations, exams, and eye testing. As he waited, an Army psychiatrist with two handguns opened fire on the group, killing thirteen and injuring more than thirty. Captain Seager was the first to die in the attack.

One of his Zablocki VAMC friends was Dr. Michael McBride, Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine at MCW. Dr. McBride is a Commander in the US Navy Reserve and, although he was not at Fort Hood at the time of the attack, he joined the unit later in Iraq.

Captain Seager's photo hangs in the first floor hallway next to the Red Clinic at the Zablocki VAMC, and many of us walk past it regularly on the way to-and-from the parking lot. As we prepare to celebrate Memorial Day, I urge you to stop for a moment and read the words that accompany his photo. Consider and celebrate the life of Captain Russell Seager, a person who felt a calling, committed his life to making a difference, and saw his dream through to the end.

As Dr. McBride reminds us that "we must remember that Memorial Day is the saddest day of the year for many Veterans." Even as we witness violence and unspeakable inhumanity in Ukraine and in many other places both here and abroad, let us take a moment and thank those who have borne the battle.

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