

SERVING THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED

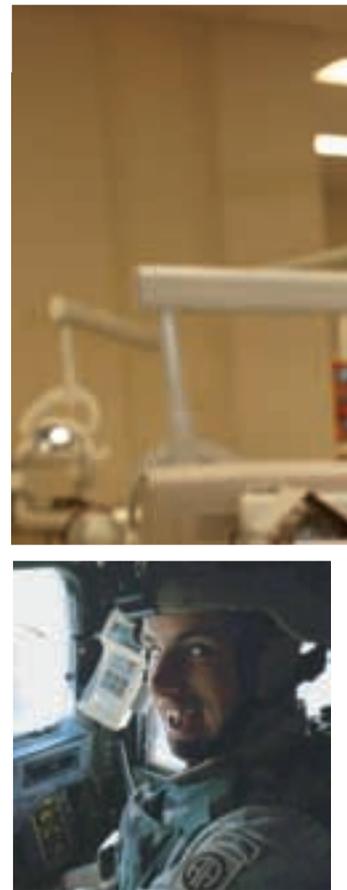
by Chelsea Patten, staff writer, *Dentaltown Magazine*

Sergeant Clint Ferrin was killed by a roadside bomb on a dusty street in Baghdad in 2004. There was a memorial service, a 21-gun salute and the awarding of well-deserved posthumous medals... but John Ferrin had a different and less conventional idea to keep his brother's legacy alive.

The dedicated soldier and family man had lost an anterior tooth during combat training. He went two years before receiving a temporary prosthodontic appliance and never received a permanent prosthesis. John combined the frustration regarding the lack of affordable and available dental care with the appreciation and honor he had for his personal hero and he ran with it. His vision: a free dental clinic to serve those like his brother who put mission before all else.

The men and women of the Armed Forces often neglect their oral and general health care in order to focus on the mission at hand. Dental work requires taking time off from duties and fronting out-of-pocket expenses. Since John knew there was a large population of underserved veterans in his immediate area, he and other like-minded people began the Sergeant Clint Ferrin Dental Clinic to provide accessible and affordable dental care.

The kernel for the idea started in 2007 when John first entered dental school at University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Dental Medicine (UNLV-SDM). It developed quickly into a brick-and-mortar,





John Ferrin (above), founder of clinic and brother of Sgt. Clint Ferrin (above left).

Group photo, from left: Jeff Roberts, Mike Uffens, Dan Salus, John Ferrin, Jeremy Manuele, Chad Aitken, Jesse Falk, John Quinn, Nadim Guirguis and Brian Hirsbrunner.

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fully functioning clinic by July 2008. Students use the clinic as a way to gain experience with dental procedures all while helping vets who need care.

Michael Lloyd, fundraising chair member for the clinic, says, "Saturday is the heart and soul of the Sergeant Clint Ferrin Dental Clinic." Held one Saturday every month and lasting for about four hours, the university provides clinic space, dental materials and staff for the operation. Currently, UNLV-SMD is the only dental school which operates a clinic for veterans.

An average of 35 veterans are treated by dental students each Saturday the clinic is open. The students are supervised by licensed dentists, all of whom volunteer their time. From simple restorations to full-mouth extractions, the clinic aids in treating the overwhelming number of veterans in need.

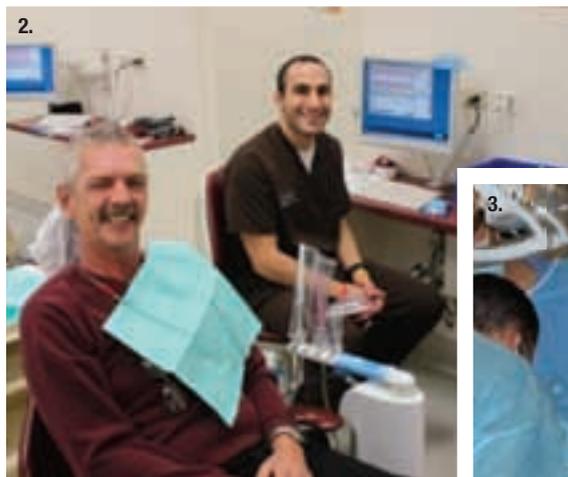
The majority of veterans do not qualify for free dental treatment through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), says Lloyd. The VA has strict guidelines to determine whether a veteran is eligible. Lloyd uses a current patient as an example:

Sam served three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan as an Army scout. During his last tour he was injured by a grenade that went off near his face, sending shrapnel into his jaw. The injury resulted in him being medically discharged from the military. Unfortunately, the VA would not cover any of his dental care because he is not 100 percent disabled and because the injury to his face was written up as a jaw injury instead of as an injury to his teeth (even though two of his teeth were extracted due to the injury).*

Unfortunately this is only one of many situations returnee soldiers face. Veterans are often put in the predicament of needing, but not being able to afford quality care. The clinic tries to provide care to anyone who meets the criteria, but with the demand reaching more than 100 applications per month, they have to set some guidelines. In order to qualify for care at the clinic, the recipient must be a U.S. Veteran, must have an income of less than \$25,000 per year and must not have dental insurance (and have the documentation to prove all three).

From there, priority is based on need and wartime experience. Veterans from WWII, Korean War, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom and/or Operation Iraqi Freedom qualify for eligibility. Another group served in the clinic is members of the National Guard. Unlike active duty troops, National Guard troops do not get full dental coverage and have often joined the National Guard to aid in their struggling budgets. "Our mission is to serve those who have served," says John.

The clinic is recognized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and therefore is funded from donations and grants. Their



2. George Bitar, class of 2013, with oral surgery patient.
3. Dr. Daniel Orr, UNLV surgeon.

1. Jesse Falk (left), 2011 graduate.
4. Sarah Kitchen, class of 2012 and Colby Meeder, class of 2014 with oral surgery patient.

sponsors include: Henry Schein, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Veterans for Freedom, American Legion, Anthem Periodontics and Dental Implants, Mvestor Media, Ballard Spahr (community partner), Acrylic Works, Astratech Dental, Performance Dental Lab, Two Ocean Dental Lab, CloudPeak Dental Lab and Sunstone Dental Care, just to name a few of the generous philanthropists which believe in the clinic's mission. The American Dental Association is also a subsidiary. Additional funding comes from National Guard screenings. The National Guard will pay the clinic to come out to their various facilities and perform screenings on soldiers.

Saturday clinics are funded by the UNLV-SDM, which provides the materials to complete most of the procedures. The clinic itself has to pay for the prosthodontic materials. Fortunately, many gracious labs in the area donate units.

The clinic may be "officially" open on only one Saturday per month, but students are constantly working on veteran patients during UNLV-SDM's normal business hours. The students are able to get needed experience and the veterans are able to receive

needed dental care. It's a win-win situation. "Most of the veterans who we treat have not seen a dentist for years, if not decades, due to their financial constraints," says Lloyd.

Sergeant Clint Ferrin served in the U.S. Army 82nd Airborne division and left the legacy of his hard work and service to the country. Now, thanks to his hero-like persona and his brother who thought of him as just that, his legacy lives on in more than name alone.

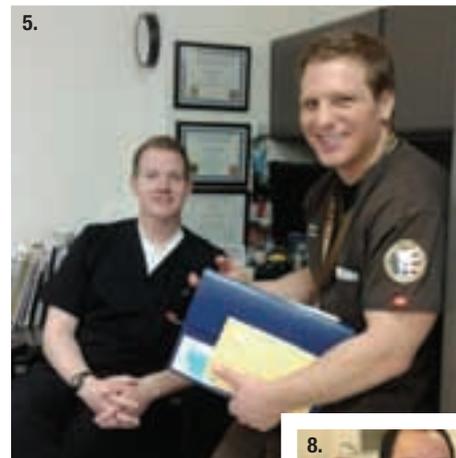
If you would like more information about the Sergeant Clint Ferrin Dental Clinic, visit www.veteransdentistry.org. The site also houses the volunteer application, patient application and a portal to donate funds. ■

**Names of patients have been changed*



6. UNLV faculty that help with the clinic, back row from left: Dr. William Leavitt, Dr. Richard Walker, Dr. Gerald Fox and Dr. Douglas Ashman. Front row from left: Dr. Andrew Ingle, Dr. Richard Hamilton, Dr. Wendy Woodall and Dr. Daniel Orr.

9. Saliem Tsighe, left, class of 2012, with Dr. Richard Walker.



5. John Ferrin, left, and Todd Davis, right.

7. Marlow Rillera, class of 2014, patient coordinator with patient.

8. Dr. Adam Gatan, UNLV endodontist with patient.



10. Top row, from left: Nadim Guergis (class of 2011 went on to ortho at UOP), Chris Capua (class of 2013), Broc Hammon (class of 2014), John Ferrin (founder, class of 2011), Spencer Armuth (class of 2014), Zac Soard (Class of 2014) and Chad Hanson (class of 2014). Bottom row: Cody Besso (class of 2014), Todd Davis (class of 2013), Austin Burnett (class of 2013), Heather O'Dell (Class of 2013), Benjamin Brown (class of 2014), Marlowe Rillera (class of 2014) and Jeremy Manuele (class of 2012).