

# 'In Waves and War' screening highlights transformative hallucinogenic therapy for PTSD

## ASU Shufeldt medical school dean speaks about research into promising treatment

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News  
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When DJ Shipley was home from a deployment as a Navy Seal, he couldn't remember his four-month-old daughter's name as he held her.

Suffering from traumatic brain injury — and decades of emotional trauma — from his military service and his childhood, he fought headaches, depression, nightmares and persistent thoughts of suicide.

After years of suffering, he was treated with two psychedelic compounds — ibogaine, derived from the bark of a tree that grows in Africa, and 5-MeO-DMT, which is obtained from toads.

And the fog lifted.

Shipley and two other former Navy Seals, Marcus Capone and Matty Roberts, are featured in "[In Waves and War](#)," a new Netflix documentary exploring the transformative effects of hallucinogens in treating veterans' post-traumatic stress disorder.

The documentary was screened at the Media and Immersive eXperience Center in Mesa on Thursday night as part of Arizona State University's [Salute to Service](#) activities, and was sponsored by [The Sidney Poitier New American Film School](#) and the [Pat Tillman Veterans Center](#) at ASU.

Shipley, Capone and Roberts traveled to Mexico for their treatment because the psychedelics they used are not approved in the United States. However, this past summer, Arizona set aside \$5 million for clinical research trials into the use of ibogaine — only the second state to do so, after Texas.

“In Waves and War” told the stories of the three men who formed powerful bonds during multiple deployments to Afghanistan. In 2005, 11 of their fellow Navy Seals were killed during a mission and the loss haunted the three men, exacerbated by the brain injuries they suffered from repeated exposure to blasts.

When they returned home to their families, they couldn’t cope.

After Amber Capone found Marcus drunk with a loaded gun, she was desperate for alternative therapies for her husband, and began researching ibogaine.

At first Marcus was dismissive, but finally agreed. After the first treatment, which took 12 hours, he said he “felt the weight was lifting off.”

The Capones went on to found [VETS](#), Veterans Exploring Treatment Solutions, which provides resources for veterans to benefit from psychedelic-assisted therapy. VETS partnered with the Stanford Brain Stimulation Lab for the initial [study](#) of ibogaine therapy for PTSD, published in Nature Medicine.

All three men found relief after the treatments but emphasized that it was only the first step in reclaiming their mental health. Still, ibogaine was effective when years of medication and other therapies didn’t work.

After the film screening, a panel of experts discussed the treatments, including [Holly Lisanby](#), a psychiatrist and the founding dean of the newly launched John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering at ASU.

Lisanby said that she will be researching the family of psychedelics for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder.

“There’s a need for research for this to be available in the United States, and the Food and Drug Administration is going to need to see evidence of safety and efficacy and also more knowledge about how to apply it safely,” she said.

“Every treatment has side effects and there's a risk-benefit ratio. We need to learn more about how to mitigate those side effects, how to provide this safely and how to understand who's most likely to benefit from it so that it can be used properly.”

Michael Lawton, a brain surgeon who is president and CEO of Barrow Neurological Institute, told the MIX Center crowd that Barrow is the ideal setting for researching the ibogaine family of psychedelics.

“This is a serious medication that can have cardiac side effects that can be lethal, so it has to be done in a very monitored setting with people who can respond if there are side effects and complications,” he said.

“It’s not to be taken lightly. ... It really needs to be done in the right center with the right medical team around.”

In the documentary, three veterans described their hallucinogenic experiences in different ways, but all of them said it allowed them to process memories of past trauma.

Their “trips” were illustrated with evocative animation — a technique praised by Alex Rivera, a filmmaker and professor in the Poitier School, who moderated the panel discussion.

“In this film, there were two rounds of what was unseeable, and one was the fog of war — the memories of our characters.

“And the other was the world of the hallucinations. And I found it very interesting that the filmmakers decided to depict the real memories, the memories of life, as a kind of a blurry, foggy, unknowable world,” he said.

“And the realm of the hallucinations on the medicine was clear. And that lined up with a lot of other inversions of the film — that the horrors of war were perhaps not as challenging as daily life.”

"In Waves and War" rang true for Shawn Banzhaf, executive director of the Pat Tillman Veterans Center at ASU.

“There was a reality to this that that just struck so many chords,” he said, adding that he has lingering trauma 20 years after his deployment to Iraq.

“We shouldn't have to go to Mexico. We need to have it so that the right people get the right treatment in a timely manner so that they don't have to live their lives worried about somebody sitting in the back of the room," he said.

“We take care of student veterans and they're trying to make their way in higher education, get a degree, get a job to take care of their family. And underneath all of that drive to be successful, there's a lot of trauma, a lot of stuff going on.”

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*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Main image**



Matty Roberts (center) is comforted by Marcus Capone (left) as Roberts undergoes psychedelic-assisted therapy in Mexico in a scene from the documentary "In Waves and War," directed by Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk. The film was screened at the MIX Center in Mesa on Thursday night as part of Arizona State University's Salute to Service activities. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

**Text image(s)**



An artist's rendering of what one of the Navy Seals was going through while being treated with the psychedelic agent ibogaine, during the screening of "In Waves and War." The film's animation was praised by filmmaker and ASU Professor Alex Rivera, who took part in a post-screening panel discussion. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

## Gallery





Holly Lisanby, a psychiatrist and the founding dean of the John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering at ASU, spoke on a panel after the screening of "In Waves and War."



Shawn Banzhaf, executive director of the Pat Tillman Veterans Center at ASU, said that "In Waves and War" rang true to him, and he knows many veterans who are seeking alternative treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder.





The screening of "In Waves and War" was followed by a panel discussion. From left: Alex Rivera, a filmmaker and professor in The Sidney Poitier New American Film School; Holly Lisanby, founding dean of the John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering; Michael Lawton, president and CEO of Barrow Neurological Institute; and Shawn Banzhaf, executive director of the Pat Tillman Veterans Center.