

Mr. Tristan Wyatt

Statement of  
Mr. Tristan Wyatt  
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?Back from the Battlefield, Part II: Seamless Transition to Civilian Life?

I would first like to say that it is an honor to be here. My name is Tristan Wyatt. I enlisted in the Army as a combat engineer in October of 2002. After completion of basic training and airborne school I was assigned to the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment out of Ft. Carson, Colorado, with whom I deployed with in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom in March of 2003. During a firefight in the city of Fallujah two of my squad members and I all lost a leg on August 25th 2003. We were transported to Germany and then to Walter Reed Army hospital where I spent the better part of 6 months in recovery and therapy.

Understanding the severity of my wounds, and against my best wishes, I knew it was highly unlikely I would ever see a battlefield again. I was very disappointed and even more scared; I did not know what my next step should be. As soon as I was coherent, physical therapists began to show up at my bed side and so did personal from the VA. Everyday I was given information about benefits, entitlements and health care. It was often an overwhelming amount of information but what was most impressive; there was always an answer to my question. They had a simple and effective way of passing the information to me in ways I could understand and retain. This was very important. Leaving the hospital I felt confident I had a good understanding of what to do and where to begin when I returned home to Colorado. The process for most of my benefits and entitlements had begun at Walter Reed, so when I returned home it was only a matter of weeks before my entitlements and benefits were in order. It was a fairly quick and effective process. The longest portion was the medical boarding process. Although not a huge issue for me, a single soldier. This was a big financial and emotional set back for the soldiers with families. It was very tough for these guys to wait around for months on the boarding process in order to be home with their families and begin their new lives.

On top of everything that the VA has done for me and my family, they offered me a job which I accepted earlier this month. It was a product of the Vet IT program at the Regional VA office here in DC. I cannot say enough about this program and the people that run it. This program offers returning disabled Vets the opportunity at hard to attain GS positions within the VA IT office. Between this program and vocational rehab there were many more opportunities available to me than I could have imagined. It would be great to see this program implemented in other VA offices around the country. Many vets are not willing to come to Washington DC because of the difficulty of moving a family. This is my main concern. Not something that is wrong, but I believe we are on the verge of something great. I had an opportunity and was able to take because I had no family or children. I was able to move on a whim. These soldiers with families deserve the same opportunities and more than likely need it. It seems to me the system is much more stressful and financial draining of the soldiers with families. From my experience and the experiences of my comrades, this should be a main focal point.

My separation from the Army was made a lot smoother than expected because of these people

who truly care and willing to take a chance on a busted soldier. My life after combat injury was put back on course quickly and the result was better than I could have ever hoped for. I will forever be in debt. It was my pleasure and honor to fight for this great country and I am grateful for the opportunity to work for this outstanding organization dedicated to veterans.