

Crystal Hampton, Army Veteran

Hello Ladies & Gentleman

My Name is Crystal Hampton. I am 26 years old and from Vancouver, WA. I served 6 years in the U.S. Army as a CH47D or ?Chinook ? Helicopter Crew Chief. My First Duty assignment was at C159th Avn At Ft. Bragg, NC. Then to Bco 2/52 Avn in Camp Humphrey, Korea, where I spent 2 Years and 3 days in a military hospital after being ran over by and odeshi. Then to K159th Avn at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, GA Where I was then deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom 3. Home of foot long camel spiders. While in the desert I had various duty assignments including Section Sergeant in charge of 9 soldiers. Phase Team Leader (a phase is a period of 200 hrs at the end of which the helicopter is give a mainenance overhaul. This usually takes 20 days and costs approximately \$5 million dollars). I was also the Confined Space and Fuel Cell Repair team leader and Downed Aircraft Recovery Team Leader. I was a busy girl. However, I want to tell you I did love my job and serving in the Army was the best thing I have ever done. I reached the rank of Corporal and was honorably discharged in September of 2004.

When you are about to leave the Army you are sent to ACAP classes, (sorry I don't remember what that stands for). Acap is where they teach you to be a civilian again. They teach you things like how to write a resume and job interview skill, and finally about your VA benefits. I received a 30 min block of instruction about the VA. Which mostly covered the VA Loan. I did NOT learn anything. I did not know I was entitled to anything. I would not have known of the benefits if it had not been for Bob Cruze coming through my parent's oil change shop. So basically it's by random chance I have benefits.

Now thinking about this. I asked my fiancé SSG David Luke, Who is in Iraq at this time. David didn't know anything about VA and he's been in for 13 years. So he asked some of his officers and a few enlisted, and they didn't know. They were excited and relieved to hear that they were entitled to some benefits. My point is that the men and women coming back from war and serving out country are not aware of the VA, and what it does. We need to find a way to inform these future veterans, of what they are entitled to. Lucky for me Bob found me and made my personal transition to the VA Medical system as easy as possible.

Being in the military is a physically and emotionally demanding job. Being a petite female in a predominately man's job definitely took its toll on me. I have a displaced kneecap from the running. Some of us were not meant to run. I have tendonitis in my wrists from turning wrenches and from push-ups and some hearing loss from working on the helicopters for 6 years. The VA has done a wonderful job trying to accommodate me and care for my afflictions considering the number of veterans they serve and the amount of resources they have. I feel with more resources (like better O/GYN and women's services for example) they could do their job better and more efficiently. They also would be able to process paperwork with more ease. So the claims for former soldiers like myself would go a little quicker.

Finally I think that career training or college grants for the Vets returning home and for spouses of disabled veterans would be of considerable help. It occurs to me now that I'm out, I don't know how to do anything but work on helicopters.

Granted that it is a good job in the civilian world, but I don't want and physically can't do that for the rest of my life. And if I have no skills, I'm sure there are many other Veterans like me. Also the spouses of disabled vets who have now become the primary bread winners, if they were

given the opportunity to go to school or get a better job with a little training so they could make more money to support their family they would be less stressed. In closing the Veterans Administration does a world of good for those who know about it. With more resources the things they could do would be unbelievable. Thank you all for your time.