

Welcome to the U.S. Army Warrior Transition Command

By BG Gary H. Cheek, Commanding General, Warrior Transition Command and the Assistant Surgeon General on Warrior Care and Transition

As the commander of the Warrior Transition Command (WTC), I'm honored to be given the opportunity to serve Soldiers and Families in this important capacity. The fact that I'm not a medical professional—instead I'm a career Field Artillery officer—is evidence that the Army sees the care and support of wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers not as just a medical responsibility, but as an overall Army responsibility.

The establishment of WTC will better enable the Army to support you with one command to serve as the Army's organizational focal point for Army warrior care—under the purview of the Army Medical Command (MEDCOM).

As part of this larger team, the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2) has the strength and support of MEDCOM and WTC to provide oversight and unified resources to take care of Soldiers, Veterans, and Families. This marks a major milestone that provides focused leadership for Soldiers and comprehensive program management across the Army and beyond.

My top three priorities for the command are:

1. Develop an effective Warrior Transition Program for Soldiers, Families, and cadre



(left to right) LTG Eric B. Schoomaker, the Surgeon General/Commander, U.S. Army Medical Command; BG Gary H. Cheek, Commanding General, Warrior Transition Command (WTC) and the Assistant Surgeon General of Warrior Care and Transition; SGM Ly M. Lac, Senior Enlisted Advisor for WTC and the Assistant Surgeon General on Warrior Care and Transition; and AW2 Soldier SFC Jacque Keeslar, former WTC non-commissioned officer, participated in the WTC activation ceremony on May 11, 2009, at the Pentagon courtyard.

2. Develop strong, well informed Families to support their Soldiers and Veterans
3. Return productive Soldiers to duty or transition proud, productive Veterans to civilian life

The Army has come a long way in improving warrior care, but it's not perfect. Every day we strive to make the program better and seek your input.

To our Soldiers, Veterans, and Families, I thank you for your service to our country and for the hard work, courage, perseverance, and strength that you show every day. It is your inspiration that drives us to constantly work to improve the care and support the Army provides to Soldiers, Veterans, and their Families.

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Connecting Wounded Warriors with Local Resources

By Sarah Greer, WTC Stratcom

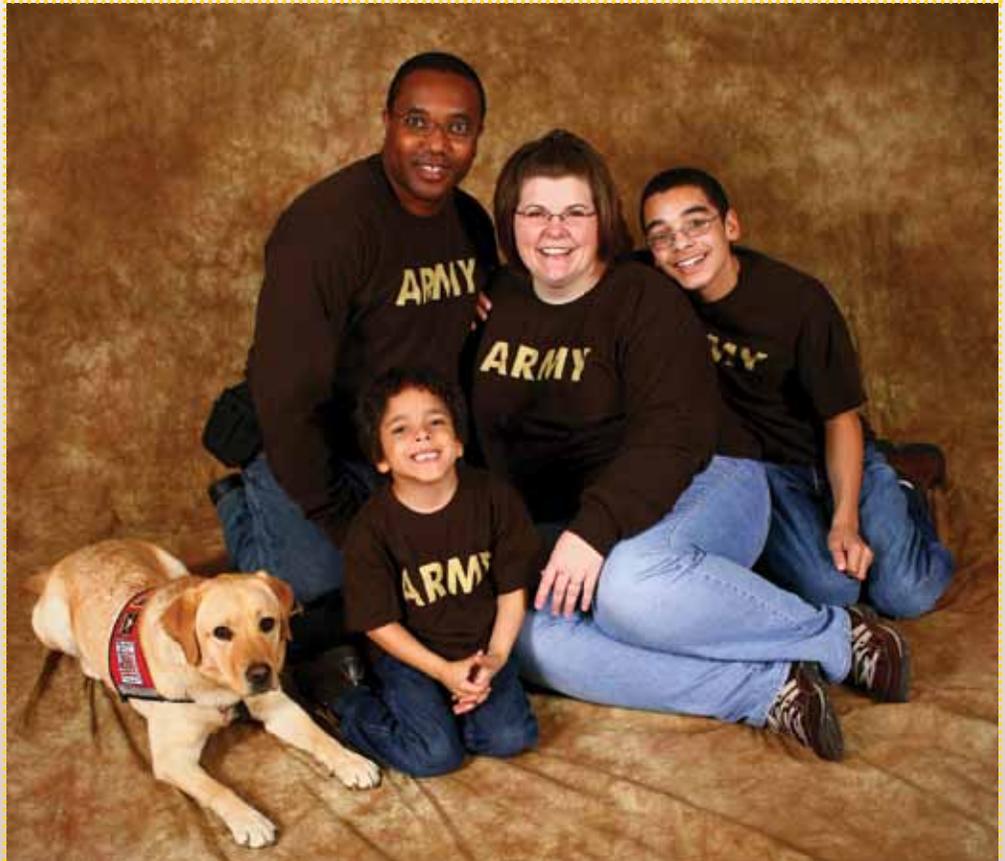
The Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2) launched the AW2 Community Support Network to connect AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and their Families with caring organizations that can help them transition to life post-injury, whether back to active duty or to Veteran status.

In 2008, AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and Family members attending the AW2 Symposium identified “local community support of wounded warriors” as one of the top five issues facing the AW2 population. At the 2009 Army Family Action Plan Worldwide Conference, delegates in the Family issues focus group validated this issue by voting it among the top two challenges facing wounded warriors. In response, AW2 created a network of federal, state and local government, nonprofit, and other programs that serve wounded warriors.

“You have asked us for this and we have listened,” said AW2 Director COL Jim Rice. “We hope to link you with the resources to help you reintegrate into your communities through the AW2 Community Support Network.”

The AW2 Community Support Network, will:

- Provide contact information for relevant organizations to Soldiers and Veterans
- Post links to participating organizations on www.AW2.army.mil so they are easily accessible to AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and Families, as well as other servicemembers and organizations
- Host network conference calls to facilitate a dialogue on the challenges facing wounded warriors



AW2 Family—The Hills (Photo courtesy of Mike Parker).

An example of an AW2 Community Support Network participant that provides a valuable service is Puppies Behind Bars. The organization trains service dogs and gives them to Soldiers and Veterans. AW2 Soldier SGT Allen Hill received a service dog from the organization, and his wife believes this has made a huge difference in Hill’s life.

“The service dogs are placed with Veterans who are struggling with invisible wounds. These dogs are specifically trained to help them manage their PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and TBI [traumatic brain injury] related symptoms,” said Gina Hill, AW2 spouse. “Last February, Allen was

placed with his new partner in life, Frankie. Frankie is a yellow lab, and she has become his best friend. The bond these two have is unbelievable and was almost immediate. She is able to help him through flashbacks, nightmares, and many other difficult situations. With Frankie by his side, Allen has started participating in his life again!”

AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, Family members, and staff members who would like to nominate an organization to join the AW2 Community Support Network should contact AW2 at (703) 325-0397 or AW2communitysupportnetwork@conus.army.mil

Expanded Career and Education Web Pages and Blog Series

By Ryan Alexander, WTC Stratcom

This fall, AW2 launched a redesigned Web site and blog at <http://www.AW2.army.mil> and <http://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil> as part of the program's move to the Warrior Transition Command (WTC). The new Web site and blog provides robust information to support severely wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers, Veterans, and their Families, for as long as it takes.

The AW2 Web site includes an expanded Career and Education Web page to better assist AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and Families in their transition—whether to the civilian workforce or remaining in the Army. The career section features information on job search links, résumé assistance, and interview skills. The education section explains disability rights and financial aid and highlights educational and employment supporters. The COAD/COAR (Continuation on Active Duty/Continuation on Active Reserve) section explains this process and includes answers to frequently asked questions.

The Employers section provides employers with information on why employers should and how they may hire a wounded warrior. The AW2 Career and Education Section works with employers to match qualified Soldiers and Veterans with the skill sets that employers look for in job candidates.

AW2 also launched the wounded warrior employment series on the AW2 Blog. The series featured a number of thought-provoking entries on topics such as:

- How to Start a Career Search
- Top 5 Tips for Interview Success
- Top 5 Tips for Professional Social Networking
- 5 Benefits of a U.S. Government Job
- 5 Things You Need to Know About Private Sector Jobs



The AW2 Employment Series on the AW2 Blog.



AW2 Career and Education Web page.

"During the last month we have had a record number of successful job placements proving that AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and Families have the skills and experiences that federal agencies and the corporate world welcome. Teamwork, leadership, integrity, and discipline are priceless and are desired by every employer. Whether an AW2 Soldier, Veteran, or Family member is interested in entering the job market or expanding his or her education, AW2 is available to help them achieve their personal goals."

Excerpt from the Welcome to the AW2 Employment Series blog

The Story Behind the Photo

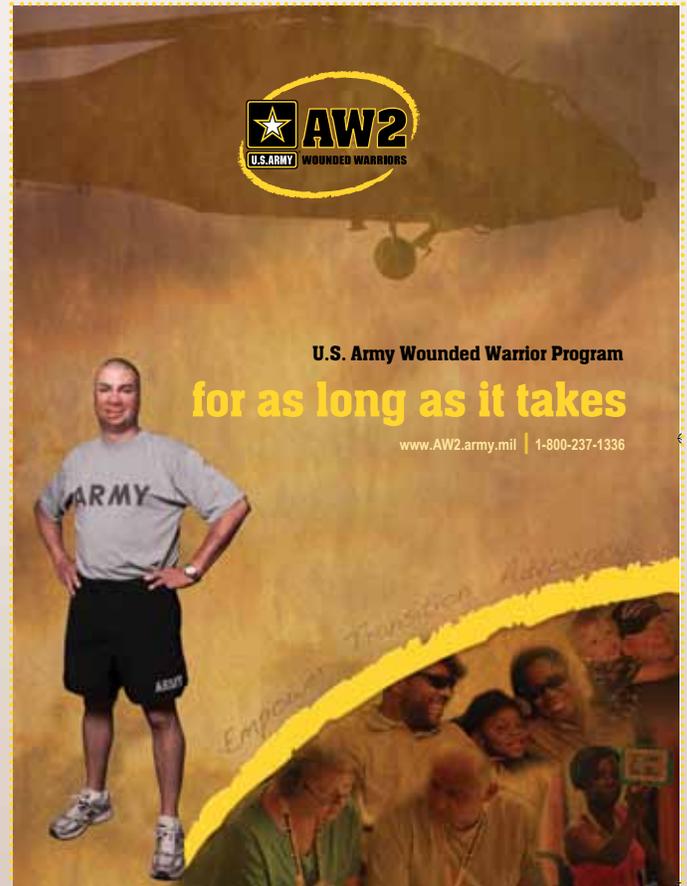
By Lee McMahon, WTC Stratcom

AW2 Soldier SSG Shilo Harris was severely injured February 19, 2007, when the vehicle he was traveling in was struck by an improvised explosive device (IED), killing three Soldiers, wounding the driver, and leaving Harris with third degree burns (full thickness) on 35 percent of his body.

Due to the severity of his burns, SSG Harris is missing his ears, tip of his nose, and three fingers, in addition, he sustained fractures to his left collar bone and the C-7 vertebrae. Following his battlefield evacuation, SSG Harris remained in a coma for 48 days. He spent about two years in recovery at the burn unit of Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio, TX.

SSG Harris calls his wife, Kathreyn, a “rock” who has been his strength throughout his lengthy recovery. SSG Harris is the first in the Army to participate in cutting-edge regenerative stem cell research to attempt the re-growth of his fingers.

He is assigned to the Warrior Transition Brigade at Fort Sam Houston, TX, while he continues to recover and awaits medical retirement. He speaks to groups and serves as a mentor to incoming patients at BAMC. Mrs. Harris now serves as an AW2 Advocate to AW2 Soldiers at BAMC.

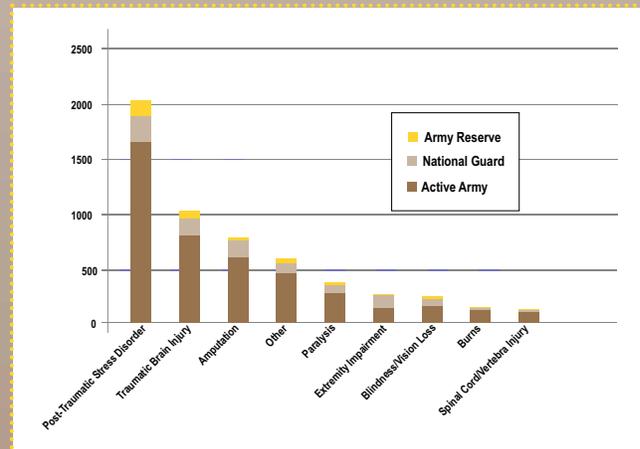


SSG Shilo Harris is featured on several AW2 outreach materials.

AW2 Soldier Population at a Glance

- Between April 1, 2009, and November 1, 2009, the AW2 Soldier and Veteran population grew from 4,329 to 5,572.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) remains the most prevalent injury category among AW2 Soldiers and Veterans.
- During this time, traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) have surpassed amputation as the second most frequent injury category.

Injury Categories by Component
As of November 1, 2009



Data Source(s): Wounded Warrior Accountability System (WWAS); AW2 database

Fighting and Standing Together

By Tania Meireles, WTC Stratcom

L1LT Brian Brennan, a 101st Airborne Ranger, was severely injured while leading a patrol in Afghanistan on May 7, 2008. The improvised explosive device caused the death of three Soldiers, with Brennan and one other Soldier barely able to hang on to their lives. Brennan sustained an acute brain injury, burns, a collapsed lung, internal bleeding, a ruptured spleen, and compound fractures to his left arm. He also suffered the loss of both of his legs.



1LT Brian Brennan, pictured here in uniform, was born pre-maturely but fought to stay alive. His father named him after a Boston College football player with the same last name who he admired for his hard-working approach to the game. The Boston College Brian Brennan reached great success as a Cleveland Browns player and as chance would have it, visited 1LT Brennan and his Family at Walter Reed Army Medical Center while he was fighting to awake from his coma. But it took the Band of Brothers Battalion motto "currahee," spoken by GEN David H. Petraeus, to bring Brennan back to his Family.

He was transported to Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) in Washington, DC, but remained in a coma. Doctors told his Family that there was little chance that he would wake up. As chance would have it, GEN David H. Petraeus, Commander, U.S. Central Command, visited Brennan in May of 2008 and spoke to him. Not until the General spoke Brennan's battalion motto, the Band of Brothers Battalion, did Brennan show any signs of movement. The motto, "currahee," is a Cherokee word meaning "stand alone." The General shouted "currahee" a second time and Brennan began forcefully moving in his bed. To the elation of his Family, he came out of his coma.

Brennan received care at both WRAMC and the James A. Haley Veterans Administration Hospital in Tampa, FL. With the support of his Family and the Army and through his hard work and determination, he was fitted with prosthetics and learned to walk again.

"The Army was there for me and my Family," said Brennan. "My AW2 Advocate was like a buddy I could really talk to about what I needed and what I was going through. He even helped with paperwork."

Brennan's story caught the attention of his community and home state as well. His community banded together to specially adapt his parents' home in New Jersey for his homecoming. Brennan and his Family also started a foundation to help other wounded warriors called the 1LT Brian Brennan Stands Alone Foundation.

"The community really stuck by me—it was awesome," he said. "Now we can give back to other wounded warriors."

The state of New Jersey chose him as the recipient of their first Unsung Hero award. The New Jersey Hall of Fame Web site states that he "is a profile in courage and a role model for all of us in overcoming unthinkable personal challenges." After nearly a year of surgeries and therapy, Brennan walked on stage to be inducted into The New Jersey Hall of Fame by a surprise guest, GEN Petraeus.

"Like all servicemembers, I didn't feel like I deserved the award for doing my job," said Brennan. "So I accepted the award on behalf of all servicemembers from all branches and public servants as well—who don't get recognized as often as they should."

Brennan is currently working on his future career endeavors within the Army. He recently started a position at MacDill Air Force Base in the Special Operations Command in Tampa, FL. He plans to attend the Captain's Career Course in Fort Benning, GA, and then return to his alma mater, The Citadel, to be a Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) instructor.

When asked what advice he would like to give other wounded warriors, he said, "Drive on. Don't stop working at it. You'll get back to the way you were before."



1LT Brian Brennan accepts The New Jersey Hall of Fame's Unsung Hero award from GEN David H. Petraeus on May 3, 2009 (Photo courtesy of Gary Gellman/NJ Hall of Fame).

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AW2 Veteran Climbs to New Heights

AW2 Veteran Keith Deutsch was injured while in a convoy in Iraq in August 2003, when his vehicle was hit by a rocket propelled grenade (RPG). Deutsch's right leg was amputated, and he received multiple shrapnel wounds.

"As you can see in these pictures, Keith has successfully moved on from his injuries and is a real pleasure to have as one of my AW2 Veterans," said AW2 Advocate Eric Mitchell.

Deutsch climbed Mount Elbrus, an inactive volcano located in the western Caucasus mountain range, in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia, Russia, in August. Mount Elbrus (west summit) stands at 5,642 meters (18,510 feet), and it is not only the highest mountain in Europe, it is also the highest point of Russia.

"The climb was great for me!" said Deutsch. "I don't have the words."

Deutsch is also a nationally rated snowboarder and has offered to help AW2 Soldiers and Veterans learn how to "ride snow." AW2 Soldiers and Veterans may contact Deutsch at akadeutsch@gmail.com.

Deutsch was recently involved in several TV interviews and may be featured on Good Morning America and/or 20/20.



Top: AW2 Veteran Keith Deutsch smiles after the 18,510-foot climb.
Bottom: Deutsch and another climber on top of Mount Elbrus.