

**Statement of CPT (ret.) Peter C. Lohman  
Before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States House of Representatives  
On  
Corporate Commitment to Hiring Veterans  
26 April 2006**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today concerning my experiences as a wounded soldier transitioning into civilian life. I hope, through telling my story and sharing some insights, that I am able to improve the way our wounded veterans join the civilian workforce.

To start with, it is important to provide some background on my experiences. I served as a scout platoon leader in North-Central Iraq from February to December 2004 as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 4<sup>th</sup> US Cavalry, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. On 19 December 2004, I was wounded while on patrol; I received a gunshot wound to my right shoulder. I was evacuated back to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and then on to Walter Reed.

Around June of 2005, while undergoing physical and occupational therapy at Walter Reed, I decided I would transition to civilian life. One of the things that concerned me when making this decision was whether I would enjoy the challenges and opportunities in the civilian world. Having graduated from West Point and then spent four-and-a-half years in the Army, I did not have tremendous familiarity with civilian jobs. However, I was lucky enough to meet two or three people that got to know me, understood my interests, and linked me up with employers and others who helped me gain an understanding of opportunities in the civilian world.

My first introduction was to the Department of Defense's Military Severely Injured Center. This Center passed my name on to several different people who all offered both support and contacts as I decided what to do next. One of those people was Bill Offut of the Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service. Bill personally invited me to several events in the area and introduced me to prospective employers. Through Bill and others, I was able to talk to a variety of people and get an idea for different types of jobs as well as listen to people's experiences, which I found incredibly valuable when making my decision.

These contacts were also valuable by providing me with job interviews, which turned into job offers. My range of opportunities increased and I considered things that I would not have thought of without these introductions.

Another help to me were the Veterans' Affairs personnel at Walter Reed. These men and women provided me with information about not only VA benefits, but also job

opportunities in the area, resume advice, career counseling, and the vocational rehabilitation program.

Looking back on my experience, I can certainly make comments for improving the process.

The first comment I would make is concerning outreach. I believe each transitioning wounded veteran should be exposed to the same opportunities I had and at the earliest moment. I was fortunate to have been introduced to people who helped me along the way. I'm not sure all of the wounded service members at Walter Reed are as fortunate. I know outreach has increased since I left and there are now frequent job fairs. The time to teach wounded veterans about opportunities in the civilian world is as they begin their transition. The more time they have to make a decision, the better.

Second, one of the most valuable parts of meeting so many people was gaining the advice they offered and learning from their experiences. In many ways, these people served as my mentors as I transitioned to civilian life. As most of us know, having a mentor can mean the difference between making a good decision and a bad decision. I had people I could call or email to ask questions or raise issues as they came up. They offered me their honest opinions, based on their broad experience. I took advantage of this resource and it served me well throughout the process. I realize this is ambitious, but providing each transitioning wounded soldier with a mentor who is also a veteran, someone with a similar background and experience in areas in which the soldier is interested, would be a great benefit.

Third, there are several programs up and running, both within Walter Reed and with private organizations that allow soldiers to intern or shadow employees in fields that interest them. One such program that I'm aware of is Operation Warfighter where wounded Walter Reed soldiers intern with the federal government here in DC. There are also programs, such as Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines, or REAL Lifelines, that provide wounded soldiers with career counseling and reemployment services. These programs are invaluable. Wounded soldiers have spare time between appointments and medical care, especially as they begin to transition out. This time would best be spent learning about opportunities in the civilian world. I wish I had the opportunity to intern or shadow someone, even for a day, to learn about what life is like at certain jobs, from the inside. These programs also give veterans the opportunity to make contacts and to meet people who can serve as mentors.

To conclude, the key component in my transition process was the two or three people who introduced me to the civilian world. They did this by learning about my interests and experiences and introducing me to people who could help. There are such a large number of Americans who want to help; the key is linking them up with our wounded veterans.

That concludes my statement and I would be happy to take your questions.