



WOUNDED WARRIOR

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Send your comments, feedback

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## Wounded warrior pay cell dedicated to top-notch service

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas – As the numbers of combat-injured Airmen have grown during the past few years, Air Force Wounded Warrior Program officials have built a support infrastructure they rely on to help handle the many complex non-medical issues wounded warriors face.

When Airmen are injured, every aspect of their life is impacted. Things they would normally take for granted now require expert hands-on involvement to make sure

nothing goes awry. The Air Force Wounded Warrior Program staff here – assigned to the Air Force Personnel Center – serves as the hub for the many agencies involved in caring for wounded warrior special needs.

One of the agencies care managers and wounded warriors call on regularly for guidance and assistance is the wounded warrior pay cell at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Indianapolis.

The pay cell, led by Todd

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(Left to right) Virginia Hofer, Todd Hansen, Tonya Caplinger, Brian Robinson, Lori Masters and Leslie Carlock are part of the special wounded warrior pay cell at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Indianapolis. The pay cell tracks a wounded warrior's pay account from the time he or she is medically evacuated from the combat zone until his or her full return to duty or transition to civilian life. (DFAS Corporate Communications photo/Jeff Jones)

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# ‘I’m still here’

## Airman establishes mentorship program to help others recover, plan ahead toward their future

By Tech. Sgt. Chris Powell  
Defense Media Agency

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas -- Inside his office here, Senior Airman Mike Malarsie types away on his computer. A few feet away, his seeing-eye dog, Xxon, gnaws contentedly on a chew toy. Malarsie is busy creating a program that he believes will help wounded, ill and injured Airmen in ways only those who have shared similar experiences can.

Malarsie, a tactical air control party specialist, was blinded by a roadside bomb explosion while he, another TACP Airman and 11 Soldiers were on a foot patrol outside a small village near Kandahar, Afghanistan, Jan. 3, 2010. In the blast, Malarsie sustained a shattered jaw, a broken nose, multiple lacerations to his face and neck, and the eventual loss of his eyesight.

Despite those setbacks, however, Malarsie is fighting to stay on active duty. If he has his way, he'll test for promotion alongside his fellow Airmen, taking his physical training test, as well.

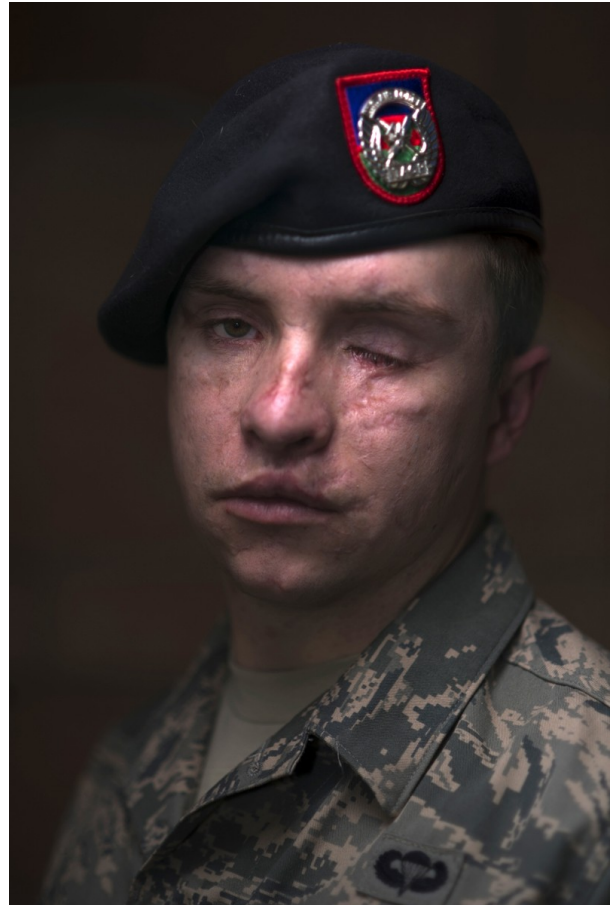
"Yeah, I'm blind, but I'm still here. I'm not going to let this wound hold me back," he said. "I don't want to take off the uniform. It's always been a dream of mine to be in the military, and I want to be competitive."

Stephen Page, the Air Force Recovery Care for Wounded, Ill and Injured program manager said that mentality is why Malarsie was chosen to establish the Recovering Airman Mentorship Program.

"Mike Malarsie doesn't only want to survive, he wants to make a difference," Page said. "That's the difference here. He's not only in the survival mode where he's trying to learn [and adjust to] his daily living, he wants to make a difference in other people's lives."

Malarsie said the mentorship program takes wounded, ill and injured Airmen who have been through recovery and rehabilitation, teaches them mentoring tools and then pairs them up with other Airmen who have experienced similar situations.

"The idea is that nobody can help these recovering service members get back on their feet



Senior Airman Michael Malarsie, a tactical control party specialist, is currently assigned to the Recovering Airmen Mentoring Program at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. While deployed to Afghanistan in 2010 as a TACP, Malarsie was severely injured when an improvised explosive device hit his vehicle. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. Erik Cardenas)

better than someone who has been there and done it, someone who really understands the difficulties in dealing with what that they're going through."

Malarsie said this program would have helped him tremendously had it been around when he went through his rehabilitation process.

"I remember people coming in my room who had been injured and talking to me. Those people had the biggest impact. They really put my anxieties at ease. The amount of comfort from someone who has been there and experienced it, and can now share that with someone who is lying in a hospital bed makes a huge difference."

Malarsie is now taking his experiences and the lessons he learned through his recovery and rehabilitation process and applying it to the mentorship program.

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# Athletes can apply for Warrior Games 2012

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. -- The U.S. Olympic Committee announced that the Warrior Games, presented by Deloitte, will return to Colorado Springs, Colo., in 2012.

The competition takes place April 30 through May 5. "We are excited to welcome our service members and veterans back to Colorado Springs for the third annual competition," said Scott Blackmun, USOC CEO. "These games truly exemplify the fighting spirit within each and every one of these athletes, all who have sacrificed for our great country."

Warrior Games was created in 2010 as an introduction to paralympic sports for injured service members and veterans. The competition has become a springboard for many service members and veterans to continue participating in sports



programs in their communities after the event.

More than 200 wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans are expected to compete in seven sports: archery, cycling, shooting, sitting volleyball, swimming, track & field and wheelchair basketball. All eligible male and female athletes will be drawn proportionately from the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and special operations based on their disability.

In 2011, the Marine Corps

defended its title as the Chairman's Cup winner for the second consecutive year for the service branch that won the most medals.

People interested in applying should do so immediately by contacting their recovery care coordinator or care manager. For an application, visit the AFW2 Program home page at [www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/](http://www.woundedwarrior.af.mil/).

All athlete applications, a biography and a qualification experience information sheet must be submitted to the Air Force Services Agency by Feb. 13. Send documents to [AFSVA.fitness.distro@us.af.mil](mailto:AFSVA.fitness.distro@us.af.mil).

The games are hosted by the USOC, and supported by the Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, USO, Fisher House Foundation and the Bob Woodruff Foundation.

## AFW2 program helps make for smooth transition

by Tech. Sgt. Chris Powell  
Defense Media Activity

FORT MEADE, Md. -- For wounded warriors who are being medically retired, the fear of leaving the service can be a frightening reality. Unfortunately, there are many more hurdles they must face during their transition.

While the Air Force has many programs in place to help these Airmen, the Wounded Warrior Program nonmedical care managers at Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, are there to assist them through every aspect of their transition and long after.

"For (Airmen) leaving the Air Force, it's all new to them, it's kind of daunting and they don't know what's at the end of the road," said Scott Hand, the benefits and entitlements representative for the Wounded Warrior Program. "We lead them through the process and make sure they know it's going to be OK."

According to Hand, nonmedical care managers offer emotional support, medical and financial advice, and ensure the service members receive the full benefits and entitlements they

deserve.

"Most of our wounded members are probably going to be meeting a board and probably be medically retired from the military," said Fred Zeithammel, one of the 24 nonmedical care managers. "So you have to look at transition, jobs and things like that. But also there's the blow to the ego for some people. They're not working, their standard of living might go down, so you have those things to deal with."

The nonmedical care managers work with the Airmen to complete a needs assessment to determine what kind of assistance they require.

"If they tell us they don't have any money, we'll go out to some of the local charities that provide that kind of assistance to them and we take care of that for them," said Zeithammel, who is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel. "We're always working with them to make sure they're financially stable, that they have their medication and, if they're suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, that they're going through their treatments."

Currently, there are more than

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## Services and Resources

If you need assistance with paying your rent, help may be available. The [Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) has various programs to assist low-income tenants and those people with disabilities.

[National CareerFairs](#) has a comprehensive listings of career fairs throughout the country. The website also offers advice on a how to get the most out of attending a career fair.



The [Making Home Affordable program](#) may be able to help you lower your payments or rates, exit a mortgage gracefully, or get help if you lost your job or your home has lost value. If you are struggling with your monthly mortgage payments or have already missed a payment, now is the time to take action. Start today by learning more about the options available to you through MHA.

Troubled troops, veterans and family members have a round-the-clock, free resource for locating the help they need to deal with psychological health problems and traumatic brain injury. [The 24/7 Outreach Center](#) is part of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, or DCoE. The center is always staffed with trained, professional health-resource consultants. Call 866-966-1020.

Wounded warriors must keep Air Force Wounded Warrior Program officials informed when they move or change their home or cell phone numbers. It is very important that care managers are able to contact warriors at all times. Important issues may arise that need immediate attention, or there may be items that need to be sent through the mail. Delays in contact can impact pay and benefits. Call 800-581-9437 or send email to [wounded.warrior@us.af.mil](mailto:wounded.warrior@us.af.mil) when there is a change. A list of other agencies to contact are listed on the bottom of Page 5.



## Wounded warrior selected for military baseball team

Retired Senior Airman Jason Larzelere has been selected for the Heroes of the Diamond program. He will play second-base for the team.

In 1990, President George H. Bush requested that a military baseball program be re-established to boost morale abroad and at home. Lieutenant Commander Terry Allvord was appointed to take charge of this idea. Every year tryouts are held to choose the most talented people for the annual "Red, White and Blue Tour."

The team is now known as "Heroes of the Diamond," and can include not only armed forces players, reserves and veterans, but also a limited number of former major leaguers, current professional, and summer collegiate players. These members support the mission and pay their own expenses while off-duty to compete in the Red, White and Blue Tour.

Heroes of the Diamond play 100 games annually and conduct more than 350 appearances



including international Friendship Tours in a nine-month season, according to the program's website. The team also provides "welcome home"

pre-game ceremonies honoring local wounded warriors if they are playing in the area, said Allvord.

Since the program's beginning, more than 50 players have been offered professional contracts and scholarships.

Larzelere played all-star baseball in high school, and played college ball while attending Friends University in Wichita, Kan. He coaches and gives

lessons in San Antonio where he currently lives.

"Baseball is the one thing that always drove me to recover," said Larzelere, who was injured on active-duty in 2010.

"We're very interested in getting more wounded warriors for this program," said Allvord.

For more information, visit <http://www.usmilitaryallstars.us/>.

## Upcoming events

The [National Sports Center for the Disabled](#) offers a ski and snowboard program in Denver for individuals of any age who have served in the U.S. military and now have a disability and want to learn to ski or snowboard, or improve existing skills. Session I is set for: Jan. 8, 22, 29, and Feb 5 and 12. Session II is set for Feb. 26, and March 4, 11, 18 and 25.



Rates are: \$205 per person for the five-week alpine ski or snowboard session; \$164 per person for the five-week Nordic ski and snowboard lesson, or partial-day cross-country ski and snowshoe lesson, lift ticket, equipment and transportation. Also in Denver, join forces with military men and women with disabilities who have served the nation. A two-day event is facilitated by a staff that includes U.S. military veterans. Both women and men are welcome. Evening activities are also planned. Session 1 takes place 1 p.m. Jan 31 through noon Feb 1.

Transportation to and from Denver International Airport or metro-area sites, activity fees, instruction and equipment, lodging and meals are included for free. Call 970-726-1540 for more information. Registration deadline is Jan 10.

[Soldiers to the Summit](#), or S2S, is seeking wounded warriors for a summit climb of Cotopaxi, a spectacular 19,347-foot mountain in Ecuador, in early December 2012. The commitment begins next year with at least two training trips in Colorado during the spring and fall. If selected, all group travel expenses and equipment will be provided; however, this is not just a free adventure. Commitment is essential, and the S2S program requires wounded warriors to make significant contributions. You will be required to attend several training sessions, you may be asked to travel and speak to sponsor organizations, lead workshops at rehab hospitals, schools or disability programs, and become a mentor for future participants. This is a physically demanding program and although no prior climbing experience is required, good fitness is essential. Application deadline is Feb. 17. For more information and to apply, contact program director Charley Mace by email at [cm@soldierstothesummit.org](mailto:cm@soldierstothesummit.org). Learn more at the S2S website or visit [www.facebook.com/SoldierstotheSummit](http://www.facebook.com/SoldierstotheSummit).



## Do you need to update your contact information?

**NOTE - Updates should be provided to: AFW2 Program Office, AFPC Disabilities Branch, DEERS, DFAS, and the VA.**

AFW2 Program Office – Call **800-581-9437** or via email: [wounded.warrior@us.af.mil](mailto:wounded.warrior@us.af.mil)

AFPC Disabilities Branch for people on the Temporary Disability Retired List – Email [disability@us.af.mil](mailto:disability@us.af.mil)

DEERS – Updating info in DEERS is accomplished in one of three ways:

Call **800-538-9552**

Visit a military base ID card issuance facility

Visit the website at: <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/bwe/indexAction.do>

DFAS – Online at “myPay” website: <https://mypay.dfas.mil>



VA – Call **800-827-1000** or visit their website at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for the nearest VA office