

Warrior in transition plays role in construction projects for WTB

BY RACHEL PARKS

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At every construction site on Fort Hood, employees from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers play a vital role in verifying that new structures are built to the highest standards and the workers at the construction sites are also maintaining rigid safety standards.

As part of a Department of Defense Operation Warfighter internship program, Sgt. 1st Class Wesley Hamm, a Soldier assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, Warrior Transition Brigade, has been working with Corps of Engineers safety specialists while he prepares to transition out of the Army.

Hamm is not only learning the ins and outs of on-the-job safety, but he's doing it on two worksites that will play crucial roles in the healing of Fort Hood wounded warriors. Hamm's internship allows him to work on the future WTB barracks and the new post hospital.

Hamm is required to work 20

hours a week but often works 40 hours, even while juggling medical appointments. He is supervised by Daniel Juracek, a safety occupational health specialist for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Fort Worth District.

"At this point I'm still kind of shadowing Dan, learning what to look for, whether it is personal safety or job site safety," Hamm said. Part of that learning includes becoming intimately familiar with EM 385-1-1, the 1,050-page manual outlining Corps safety standards and guidelines.

"I listen to him (Juracek) talk to the contractors about things that are safety violations," Hamm said. "While he's doing that, I'm looking it up in the book (EM 385-1-1) to reference it for myself. Eventually down the line, if I'm the one

doing this job, I'll know where to go," he added.

Hamm said he does embrace technology while learning on the job. To make the research into EM 385-1-1 a little easier, he has downloaded an

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Photos by Rachel Parks, Sentinel Staff

Colonel Paul Hossenlopp, WTB commander, and Sgt. 1st Class Wesley Hamm, WTB, walk across an area on the third floor of the barracks while construction crews work in the background. Hamm is taking part in a Corps of Engineers internship program before he transitions out of the Army.

application to his iPhone that allows him to search through the manual.

Hamm has also been attending training sessions and classes to make the most of the opportunities offered through the internship.

"That's the whole point for me and I think that's part of this program. I can have all this stuff done while I'm still in the Army so when I transition out, if the position is there, the Corps could pick me right up. They already know I'm certified," Hamm said.

Juracek, his supervisor, said he is impressed with Hamm's work ethic and drive.

"He's a fast learner. Being by yourself, with the magnitude of jobs going on on-post, the help is greatly appreciated," Juracek said.

He added that the Corps jumped at the chance to be part of the program.

"The Corps is only here for one reason, and that is the Soldier," Juracek said.

To showcase the progress of the construction project and highlight the role of a warrior in transition, Hamm and Juracek accompanied Col. Paul Hossenlopp, WTB commander and his senior-enlisted advisor, Command Sgt. Maj. Renee Myers, on a recent tour of the future WTB barracks.

The frame of three levels of the five-story building has been completed. The barracks will house 320 Soldiers. It should be completed in October and ready for occupants shortly after that.

As Hossenlopp and Myers toured the bustling construction site, Hamm pointed out safety standards he checks for and discussed how to correct a safety violation.

Hossenlopp said he was impressed by the tour and the knowledge Hamm is gaining. "You are what I think our whole program is all about," the commander said to

Hamm at the conclusion of the tour.

He also thanked Juracek and other Corps employees for embracing Operation Warfighter and dedicating themselves to the future of warriors in transition.

"I just really appreciate the Corps taking on these Soldiers," Hossenlopp said. "I can't say enough good things about this program."

Neither can Hamm. He said the internship helped him feel more secure about his future after he learned a back injury would eventually end his military career.

"My medical care has been great, but when the only thing you have to do is sit there and make your medical appointments, it gives you a lot of time to just let the wheels start turning," he said.

"This at least lets me feel a little more secure in knowing that when I get out of the Army I can have a much better chance of having a job," Hamm added. "In the meantime it makes me feel like I'm doing something, like I'm being productive."

Hamm said the added benefit of working on a facility that will one day be the home of WTB Soldiers made the experience even more meaningful.

"These guys need this facility; hands down it's the greatest thing I've ever seen," he said. "To be involved and know what it's about and know it's a good, solid, safe structure, I think it's pretty cool," he added.

Juracek said Hamm will also play a role in the safety checks as work progresses on another Fort Hood site that will help wounded warriors

and others heal and move forward with their lives.

"Eventually he'll be working out on the hospital job site. What better project to incorporate the warrior in transition Soldiers? It's being done because of them," he added.

Juracek said he was certain the Corps will continue to help warriors in transition. "I'm very passionate about the program," he said. "With a good partnership I think we'll be able to place more warrior in transition Soldiers."

Sergeant 1st Class Kevin Burgin, the Fort Hood WTB Vocational Reintegration Program noncommissioned officer-in-charge, said he's hopeful the WTB partnership with the Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies continues to grow and evolve through Operation Warfighter.

"This is the best thing that DoD has ever initiated to help the Soldiers truly transition," Burgin said. "It's a win-win situation for the Corps; they get the additional manpower and the ability to evaluate someone who maybe down the road could possibly be their employee."

Burgin said the benefits of the program are immediately apparent in the Soldiers as well.

"The specialized experience they gain helps them see the light at the end of the tunnel. It also helps relieve a little stress on the family," he said.

For Hamm, the experience has been positive and educational. "I'm doing something that I like and I'm gaining the experience while I'm doing it," he said.



Colonel Paul Hossenlopp, WTB commander, asks Sgt. 1st Class Wesley Hamm, WTB, a question about the WTB barracks construction, while Hamm's supervisor, Daniel Juracek, with the Corps of Engineers, looks on. Hamm is interning with the Corps as part of the Operation Warfighter program.

