



News Release

Contact

ERMC Public Affairs Office

DSN 496-8849

Tel. +49 6302-67-8849

usarmy.sembach.medcom-ermc.list.pao@mail.mil

Release No. 20140505-01

May 5, 2014

WTB-E Soldier named national award finalist

By Ed Drohan

Europe Regional Medical Command Public Affairs

VILSECK, Germany – A squad leader with Warrior Transition Battalion-Europe's Vilseck platoon was recently named a finalist for a national leadership award.

Staff Sgt. Brandon Wooldridge was one of eight people from across the United States selected to compete for the Paul G. Hearne Leadership Award. The award is presented annually by the American Association for People with Disabilities, the nation's largest disability rights organization.

The AAPD Paul G. Hearne Leadership Award advances the work of Paul Hearne, one of the founders of AAPD and a renowned leader in the national disability community. It realizes his goal of cultivating emerging disability rights leaders.

Wooldridge was the only member of the military or veteran community to be named a finalist.

A native of Raleigh, N.C., Wooldridge enlisted in the Army in 2002 as an infantryman. He deployed to Iraq in 2004 where he was injured by shrapnel from a rocket propelled grenade attack that resulted in his leg being amputated below the knee.

After being evacuated first to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, then to Walter Reed Army Medical Center (Now Walter Reed National Military Medical Center), he underwent more than four months of treatment and rehabilitation for his injury, to include learning how to walk and run with a prosthetic leg. His full recovery took about a year, during which he decided he wanted to stay on active duty and return to his job as an infantryman.

"They didn't have the Warrior Transition Battalion back then, but the president had said they weren't going to force out anybody with a severe injury," Wooldridge said. "They sent me back to my unit and apparently I did good. They put me up in the platoon office but I continued to go out in the field and do (physical training) with the platoon."

Wooldridge said he continued to request positions or details that would get him out into the field where he could prove his abilities despite his injury. He continued to advance in his chosen field, receiving promotions to both sergeant and staff sergeant. Not only that, but he continued to deploy as well, twice more to Iraq and once to Afghanistan.

In 2012, Wooldridge applied for special duty as a squad leader with WTB-E, whose mission is to assist wounded, ill and injured Soldiers with the transition either back to active duty or to the civilian community. It was a job he felt he could contribute much to based on his own experiences as a Wounded Warrior, he said.

“Everybody’s case is different but this is where they come to heal,” Wooldridge said, explaining that Soldiers assigned to WTB-E usually need extensive treatment requiring regular medical appointments. “I’m the link between the medical side and the Army. I make sure they get to their appointments, all the paperwork is handled, help take care of their day-to-day needs, and help them find their way through the process.”

According to his commander, Wooldridge is an inspiration to the Soldiers he helps.

“Remember, Warrior Transition Battalions were not created until 2008, so Staff Sgt. Wooldridge went through his rehabilitation without the benefit of dedicated cadre and providers to assist him,” said WTB-E commander Lt. Col. Douglas Galuszka. “As someone who has gone through the healing process, the example he sets shows others that they too can recover and move on to new and better situations.”

Wooldridge said he was proud of being a finalist for the award.

“I’ve been told it’s a pretty big deal,” he said. “It’s nice to be recognized for what you’ve been doing.”

Galuszka took that one step further.

“Becoming a finalist for this national recognition highlights all you have overcome in the last decade following your injury and all that you give back in your role as a WTB-E Squad Leader in Vilseck,” Galuszka said. “We were honored to nominate you and knew you were more than deserving of this award for your years of dedicated service. Please know we are proud of your accomplishment and know you will continue doing great things for our Army and its Soldiers for many years to come.”