



## WTB helps Soldier get a job with FBI

By Jeff Troth MEDDAC PAO

Every Soldier leaves the Army eventually. Whether a Soldier serves four years or 26 years they need a plan for what they are going to do once they hang up their uniform and enter civilian life again.

This life changing event was made easier in 1990 when Congress enacted a law directing the establishment of a program to assist all transitioning military personnel. For the United States Army, the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) was the answer. The program aids individuals and their family by identifying transitioning needs, and providing assistance in meeting those needs.

For wounded, ill and injured Soldiers of Fort Carson's Warrior Transition Battalion, this move can be more complicated due to medical issues. To assist their Soldiers in transition the battalion has a Career and Education Readiness program that provides the skills and knowledge they need to advance toward their career goals.

"With CER our main mission is to help ease that transition from military life to civilian, and set them up for success," said Marianne Campano, Company B's transition coordinator. "We differ from ACAP in that we know that healing is the number one priority here, and transitioning to a career is the number two priority."

"We are more or less the ACAP for the WTB," said Kim Drown, transition coordinator for Company A. "They still have to go through ACAP, but the counselors there are not able to sit down and spend 2 hours with a Soldier. We are here for that extra support and are able to work one on one with a Soldier.

"When a Soldier comes into our offices, we find out what they are interested in," she added. "If they want to do the school track then we help them get signed up for classes, if they want to do an internship we try to place them in a federal agency."

The internship program is where CER differs from ACAP. While ACAP is geared toward setting Soldiers up for success once they are out of the Army, those in the CER program are able to begin working on their next career while still on active duty. While assigned to the WTB, Soldiers are able to apply for internships with more than 200 federal agencies in Colorado.

"We have people at the Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Forest Services, U.S. Customs and Border Protection," said Campano. "Sometimes Soldiers are not sure how to translate their military experience into civilian experience. So these internships are just an amazing way to gain really great skills and see how their skills actually do translate."

The new skills comes in many forms, for one Soldier, who is also an entertainer, his internship is allowing him to get a look at the other end of the entertainment field. He is interning at the Fort

Carson Special Events Center, where he is learning about booking, planning and coordinating events.

Those accepted into the internship program, work part time while on active duty. That is what retired Master Sgt. Frankie Gomez did during his last six months in the Army.

“My life was turned upside down in August 2013 when my medical condition required that I go before the Medical Evaluation Board to consider if I was fit for duty,” said Gomez. “As a master sergeant your goal is to serve 30 years and to make sergeant major. This goal was not going to be met as I was only at 22 years of service.”

When Gomez, who was diagnosed with leukemia in 2009, found out the review board had decided to medically retire him he was not happy. He was even less thrilled with that fact that he was being transferred from the Colorado National Guard’s Medical Management Activity to the WTB to finish his time in the Army.

“The WTB has the unfortunate reputation as a black hole – a place to put broken Soldiers until they are discharged from the military,” Gomez said. “So you can imagine my grief on being sent there. With a positive attitude, I in-processed and waited for whatever was going to be thrown my way.

“My preconceptions of the WTB were quickly shattered. I was amazed at how much the WTB cared for Soldiers and how much care I was given for my issues,” he added. “Not only was I given top class medical care, I was given the opportunity and support to explore career interests.”

Campano was able to secure an internship for Gomez with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, an organization that Gomez had liaised with while serving with the 8<sup>th</sup> Civil Support Team.

“A few weeks after we submitted my application, I received a call from an agent in Washington D.C. saying that they wanted me and that I bring great experience to their agency,” Gomez recalled. “I started my Denver internship in May 2014 and medically retired in Nov 2014 and I have since been hired by the FBI.”

The WTB has also had a Soldier hired by the Colorado Territorial Correctional Facility, in Canon City, after completing an internship with them. And this summer the Rocky Mountain National Park has guaranteed a job to a Soldier doing an internship with them.

“Not all the placements lead to jobs, but it is a good way to network,” said Drown. “It is all about networking and getting federal job experience to put on your resume.”

“When Soldiers are meeting their career goals it helps with their rehabilitative process,” said Campano. “Having that success in something new gives them confidence, and helps with the rehabilitative process, which in turn helps with their reintegration back into civilian life.”



Master Sgt. Frankie Gomez marches onto the gridiron Nov. 23, 2014, as part of his retirement ceremony during halftime of the Denver Broncos versus Miami Dolphin game. Gomez was medically retired last year due to leukemia, but has been hired by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, after completing an internship with them. (Courtesy photo)