

JWOD: Serving Those Who Served

Vietnam Veteran Working at Center Industries

The Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Program and Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) across the nation provide a wide range of opportunities for people with disabilities, including many service disabled veterans. In a recent survey, it was reported that approximately 450 veterans are working on JWOD projects.

In Wichita, Kansas, Bill Eastland is one service disabled veteran whose life has been profoundly affected by JWOD and the support he has received from Center Industries Corporation (CIC).

Bill Eastland served in the United States Army from 1960 through 1971. During his eleven year career in the Army, Bill traveled to Ft. Hood, Texas, Ft. Riley, Kansas, Europe and eventually South Vietnam. In 1965, Bill was part of one of the first infantry brigades to go to Vietnam. During his tours there, Bill was able to successfully fulfill his mission and return safely to the states. However, in 1970 when Bill returned for a third tour of duty, disaster struck. Flying into a landing zone in Vietnam aboard a helicopter, Bill and six other members of his brigade came under hostile fire. The men jumped from the helicopter to take cover in the grounds and landed directly on a land mine. Five of the seven men were killed instantly when the land mine exploded beneath them. Only two men survived. Bill was one of them. However, the blast had caused serious injury to Bill's leg, so much that he would eventually lose the limb.

The two men hid for cover for 45 minutes - one man virtually unscathed, the other in agony from the pain. Eventually, rescue personnel retrieved the

men and flew them out of the landing zone. "I never lost consciousness. The pain was so great but I knew I could not lose consciousness. I had to keep my wits about me if I was going to service."

Bill did survive and was flown to a hospital ship off the coast of Vietnam before being transported to a hospital in Da Nang, Vietnam, eventually the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Hospital in Denver, Colorado. In addition to his physical injuries and the loss of his leg, Bill was also diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder and began the process of healing both his mind and his body.

Bill recalled his time at the hospital. "My biggest problem was myself. Yes, I had lost my leg, but what was more difficult was the way I felt about myself. I felt like half a man. I didn't think I could do anything or be anything to anyone. I had to heal myself - my mind - before I could heal my body."

Bill spent 13 months as an in-patient at the VA hospital before being released and moving back to his home state of Texas. Bill had great difficulty finding a job, but eventually was able to work on a farm where he learned to operate tractors and other farm equipment. The job helped to heal some of the emotional wounds he had and soon Bill started to gain confidence in his abilities. Bill's personal life was improving as well. He married the woman who he had been involved with during the war and together they started a family of their own.

In 1977, Bill lost his job when the farming industry economy took a significant downturn in Texas. Bill again was out of work. With each job rejection, many of the old insecurities and anxieties began to resurface. He moved his family to Wichita, Kansas,



Vietnam Veteran, Bill Eastland supervises 27 people who work on a JWOD project and other assembly operations at CIC.

and sent job application to numerous aircraft manufacturers in the area. Despite his efforts, Bill did not receive one job offer.

Faced with mounting debts, and desperately wanting to support his family, Bill went to the local unemployment office. A staff member at unemployment referred Bill to Center Industries Corporation.

When Bill first started working on a Javits-Wagner-O'Day Project at CIC, he had difficulties dealing with the confined work environment. Noted Bill, "I really felt like the walls were closing in on me."

Unable to effectively cope with the pressures at work, Bill left CIC twice before finally returning a third time. His wife provided a great deal of encouragement to him during this time and staff from CIC continued to provide supports to help in the work transition.

"When I returned the third time, I realized that Center Industries could provide me with the stability and would enable me to support my family. I would have a steady income and it was safe for me. On the one hand, I had to deal with the anxiety of being indoors in that production environment, but on the other hand, I knew that the staff were supportive and would help me," commented Bill.

Bill worked on the JWOD project to manufacture tool checks - which are brass tags that are stamped

from a machine, cleaned and boxed for sale to the government. He also worked in production on a contract to assemble small parts for Boeing airplanes. Eventually,

Bill was promoted to the position of floor supervisor of the tag line.

With the continued support from CIC staff, Bill continued to excel on the job and was eventually promoted to Department Manager. As a result of his promotion, Bill oversees a staff of 27 people in the production department. Their jobs include the assembly and package of Boeing Aircraft parts and the JWOD project for the tool checks.

Additionally, the stability on the job has provided stability for the man and his family. "They (CIC staff) have had a great impact on my life. Because of my job, I have been able to support my family and get my life back. My kids range in age from 16 to 29 and I now have three grandchildren. I don't know where any of us would be today if it hadn't been for the supports I received from Center Industries," reported Bill.

In November, Bill will celebrate his 15th year with Center Industries Corporation. He plans to retire in another four years and would like to buy a home near a fishing pond in either Eastern Oklahoma or Arkansas. For the man who once had to struggle to find his way back home, life has taken on a simple normalcy and peace. His journey is a testament to the will of one man to survive and to the assistance provided to him.