

# FORTUNE

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## MILITARY VETS FOR HIRE

### Where to Find Good Corporate Soldiers

BY CORA DANIELS ■ There's an episode of *Seinfeld* in which Elaine—during her days as the brassy CEO of J. Peterman—can't manage to fire an incompetent mail clerk. Why? The clerk, a former soldier who sports military fatigues and combat boots, terrifies her. A half-hour of laughs later, the clerk, and his graphically violent chitchat, drive the rest of Elaine's staff to quit.

To military veterans, attempting the transition to corporate life doesn't seem quite so funny. "The day I left the military, I came home and cried," says Patricia Ripoll, who spent 12 years as an air-

traffic controller in the Navy. "I didn't know what I was going to do." Each of the armed forces offers some sort of job-readiness program for retiring soldiers, but the quality of the programs is uneven. A study by the Joint Chiefs of Staff estimates that as many as 80% of all military résumés that go to human resources end up in a company's dead file. HR departments complain that these résumés are often riddled with incomprehensible military jargon.

So Ripoll, like 6,000 other veterans last year, turned instead to the Center for Military and Private Sector Initiatives in New

York. With the center's help, she and dozens of other air-traffic controllers landed jobs as train dispatchers for Union Pacific. "The center helped me get my foot in the door and show the civilian world that my military skills were usable," says Ripoll.

Founded by military retirees and Wesley Brown & Bartle, an executive-recruitment firm that specializes in minority hiring, the center offers free interview coaching, résumé help, and career counseling. CEO Anthony Watson, a retired admiral, also reaches out to corporations that are interested in working with the center. "Every job in the country has a military equivalent," he says. "It's just a matter of finding a match." Chevron, Burger King, TCI, AT&T, and Avis, among others, look to the center for candidates. Bell Atlantic seeks ex-soldiers to serve as technicians for its cellular-phone and Internet-services divisions. "Most of my co-workers are shocked when they find out about my military background," says Robert Bohnes III, a former master sergeant in the Joint Chiefs of Staff who landed a job as a mid-



DAN WHITE

Navy vet Patricia Ripoll now routes Union Pacific trains.

dle manager with Bell Atlantic. "They are surprised that I fit in as well as I do."

Like Bohnes, roughly half of the enlisted troops now leaving the armed forces find jobs outside the defense industry, compared with perhaps 30% before the end of the Cold War. Telecommunications, software, financial services, and retailing are among the key industries looking to this labor pool for new employees with the technical, managerial, and team-oriented skills they need.

"They already have the skills," says Bruce Colligan, who as human resources director for AT&T hired technicians and customer-service reps via the center. (He recently left AT&T for German chemicals giant BASF.) "If you're trained to move armies across war zones, getting a truck of cell phones from point A to point B is pretty simple."

If you're interested in getting in touch with the center, call 212-684-6900, or check out [www.SmartCareers.com](http://www.SmartCareers.com).