



PRESS RELEASE

BLANCHFIELD ARMY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL



Public Affairs Office
650 Joel Drive
Ft. Campbell, KY 42223

www.campbell.amedd.army.mil

laura.boyd@amedd.army.mil

270-798-8865

stacy.rzepka@amedd.army.mil

270-956-0459



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PR1313

Feb. 27, 2013

Artistic expression captures attention of Warrior Transition Battalion Soldiers

FT. CAMPBELL, Ky. – Warrior Transition Battalion Soldiers enjoyed an evening of entertainment Tuesday, Feb. 26, as JP Williams, a Nashville soulful-singing artist and songwriter, performed a song he and six Fort Campbell Warrior Transition Battalion Soldiers wrote together.

Williams is on the Nashville Major Bob Music label staff writer lineup, alongside Garth Brooks. As a performer who has been blind since age 10, Williams was also a featured artist at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The Kennedy Center is home to the VSA, an international organization on arts and disability. Lori Kissinger of the Tennessee Chapter of VSA, which stands for Vision, Strength and Artistic expression, introduced Williams to the wounded, injured and ill Soldiers gathered at the Fort Campbell Soldier and Family Assistance Center Tuesday night.

Opening for Williams was the band Just For Today, a group of three teen musicians from Sumner County, Tenn. who all have family members with a disability. April Pasch, a 17-year-old musician who was born without a left hand, rocked the event performing two songs with hip-hop and rap stylings while accompanying herself on the guitar.

The featured song Williams performed was inspired by the stories and experiences the Soldiers lived while serving in combat. Pvt. Taylor Odom, Sgt. Jeremy Smith, Staff Sgt. Malik Chambers, Spc. Derek Leach, Spc. Paul Detray and Staff Sgt. Clint Norwood were not shy about expressing the reality of combat. Although their combat experience has ultimately landed them in the Warrior Transition Battalion to recover from their injuries, not a single Soldier said they would take back their experiences serving alongside their battle buddies.

Sgt. Jeremy Smith

During a writing session two weeks earlier, Smith brought his personal guitar and played a song he wrote during one of his combat tours to Iraq. Smith said he was inspired to write the song after an anti-war group protested military funerals.

Williams was so inspired by Smith's talent and passion for music that incorporated the Soldier into Tuesday night's performance. Smith accompanied Williams' acoustical sound with his electric guitar as they performed all but the final song together. The published songwriter deferred honors to Smith to perform the last song of the evening, his beloved song written while in Iraq.

After Sgt. Jeremy Smith was injured in Afghanistan in 2010 when his convoy was ambushed by the enemy, he and three of his Soldiers in the vehicle were wounded. Although Smith almost lost his right leg below the knee which resulted in reduced function in his limb, he said, "It was my pleasure, I would do it all again. It was an honor."

Coming together creatively

As Williams spent more than two hours Feb. 12 listening to each Soldier's personal expression of what combat was like for them, they collectively hashed out, line-by-line, the details of witnessing their battle buddies sustain injuries or, even more painful, making the ultimate sacrifice.

During the writing session, Williams began expressing his emotions of the moment through an impromptu melody for the five of the Soldiers. His wife, Irene, read some lyrics written by Staff Sgt. Malik Chambers that helped provide the hook that gave Williams and the Soldiers something to launch and build upon to craft their song.

"It kind of hit me as sort of a thought that he had, the brave ones come home early, the lucky ones come home last. It just jumped off the page," said Williams.

The melody and lyrics came together in the song "Green," which speaks about "the brave ones come home early," indicating that they were either killed in action or injured in combat, but "the lucky ones come home last."

Spc. Paul Detray

Detray joined the Army because he was determined to serve his country. After serving nearly three years, his injuries may keep him from continuing in the military. Detray said that he plans to continue to support other Veterans because of the support he has received since he was injured in Afghanistan. Detray, like Smith, almost lost part of his leg following an improvised explosive device (IED) blast, which peppered him with shrapnel from head to toe. The blast killed the Soldier behind him and an Afghan police officer during the attack.

Detray said that having JP Williams come to Fort Campbell and collaborate with Soldiers to write a song about their experiences was a perfect situation.

"A lot of songs are written with someone who has not actually been through it. It's motivating but at the same time, you're just kind of a little detached from the song because it's not real. But this is going to be a situation where I feel that the truth is going to be told," said Detray.

Lasting Connections

“It’s obvious to see we all had our own experience but left better by the military,” Smith said.

He explained that although each Soldier has his own ideas of what combat meant to them, “I think everyone here was very grateful that someone would take the time to approach a project like this and want to hear our side of things,” said Smith, “there’s not a big enough thank you that you can say to that.”

Their collective experiences overcoming hardships united the war fighters and the Nashville musician, building a lasting connection through the song “Green.”

“I think it would be wrong for me to pretend to know what they’ve been through on the battlegrounds. In my own world, I’ve experienced my own loss, so I do know what it feels like to lose something,” said Williams. “Maybe I have a small touch of empathy; that’s the only way I can even begin to relate to what the Soldiers have been through. That’s why it’s been such an honor for me to meet these men and hear some of their stories...that’s a sacrifice that I’ve never paid.”

The event was a way to show Soldiers that no matter what challenges they face today, they can incorporate music, as well as other passions, into their lives to build happiness.

###