

FROM GUN BATTLES TO ARCH LIGHTS, VETERANS FIND JOBS IN FILMS



For Sgt. Amy Feltzin and Spc. Jayme Roth of the Oregon National Guard's 1249 Engineer Company the thought and possibility of working a Hollywood film set, was as farfetched and as distant as America itself. The mine-filled terrain of Afghanistan where they were deployed, where death lurked behind every corner, where every shadow was perceived with suspicion and doubt and every new day a gift from God, was hardly the environment to entertain thoughts of pursuing a job in the glamour industry. Amazingly, 6 months later, these two veterans, following their deployment and back in the country are finding themselves doing just that. They owe their good fortune to a program designed to find veterans jobs in the film industry. The program titled "Operation Hollywood," is the innovation of producer Suzanne DeLaurentiis and the Oregon National Guard's Joint Transition Assistance Program, commenced with the aim of providing soldiers opportunities to work in the film industry. Amy Feltzin is working with actress Erica Christensen, in DeLaurentiis new film, "How Sweet It Is." Christensen, her co-star who has earlier worked in films like "Traffic" and "Swimfan" and the popular television series, "Parenthood," expressed her happiness at working with the war veteran. She said, "I think it is really cool that they feel special being here," Christensen said. "But we feel special having them here; it is an honor both ways." Actor Joe Piscopo, former "Saturday Night Live" star said that he was impressed with the veterans on the set and added that his father had served in the Second World War with the US Army Air Corps. Feltzin observably is delirious at the amazing break that has befallen her and said that she was having an incredible experience and enjoying every minute of it. "The whole experience of being on the film set — and the demands there — is so parallel with what the military asks of us time-wise and energy-wise," Feltzin said. "Getting to work with these guys is just awesome." DeLaurentiis expressed her happiness over providing employment to the veterans and said that they were courageous and wonderful people and even better employees. "The great thing about hiring veterans is they're always on time, they know how to multi-task and they're very accustomed to taking direction," she said. DeLaurentiis, inspired and moved by a documentary "This is War: Memories of Iraq" at one of her film festivals, contributes a lot of her time and effort in support of veterans and often visits wounded veterans. The film, "This is War: Memories of Iraq" was produced by independent Oregon filmmaker Gary Mortensen and it tells the story of many Oregon Army National Guard soldiers during their 2004 deployment to Iraq. One of the soldiers is Master Sgt. Vinnie Jacques, a Millersburg resident, of the Oregon National Guard. Jacques helped launch the Oregon National Guard Joint Transition Assistance Program. The program helps veterans and their families with finding employment, getting health care and education for their children. It was here that DeLaurentiis met the Oregon Guard members during a visit to a career and benefits fair put on by them. "Suzanne has given an incredible opportunity to our troops to come down here and work on a film set," Jacques said. When DeLaurentiis met Jacques, both bonded well as they shared similar sentiments and desires to collaborate together to help the veterans. DeLaurentiis' efforts and exceptional welfare activities for the veterans have not gone unnoticed and the Oregon National Guard has shown its appreciation by bestowing numerous awards on her. She is one of the very few civilians to receive the Oregon Commendation Medal. She has also received a written letter of appreciation from Oregon's adjutant general, and an engraved plaque of recognition from the Oregon National Guard. "Operation Hollywood," is the latest in her efforts to assist the veterans. She has more on her mind and is due to visit Oregon to seek other opportunities for veterans to get jobs on film sets out of the state. Larry Litton, assistant director for "How Sweet It Is," said that the veterans were quick learners and picking up their jobs fast. Roth is doing transportation, mechanical and medical work on the set. Litton says that their military training is an additional benefit that makes them adapt to their new jobs with ease. "How Sweet It Is" stars Piscopo, Christensen, Paul Sorvino, Michael Pare and Eddie Griffin. It is scheduled to be released in the fall of 2012. One presumes that the veterans luck will rub on to it and it will see box-office success.