

# DAILY NEWS

## Hamill: 2 tours, 7 years and 12 interviews later — an Iraq War veteran is helping other vets find housing

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Debbie Egan-Chin/New York Daily News

**Former Marine Daniel Ward, 27, came home after two tours in Iraq, enrolled in college on the G.I. Bill, and earned a history degree only to find he couldn't get a job. He sent out 75 applications, had 12 interviews and got no offers. He was even turned down to be a municipal tree trimmer. He eventually came to NYC and landed a job counseling other vets who are homeless or facing the streets.**

His mission continues.

Daniel Ward did two tours as a Marine in Iraq, came home, earned a bachelor's degree on the G.I. Bill and struggled to find work until he landed a job helping homeless fellow veterans find housing.

"It's not exactly the same as being an infantry door-kicker in Fallujah," says Ward, 26. "But helping to get homeless veterans through the door to a permanent home is like continuing my service."

Ward was born in Peoria, Ill., and his struggling family later moved to Arizona and then Tennessee.

"My mom made me promise to wait six months after graduating high school before I joined the United States Marines, which I did in 2005 at age 19 for a four-year commitment," says Ward. "I grew up reading history, idolizing these guys who fought our wars. More than anything, I wanted to go fight."

After boot camp in Parris Island, S.C., Ward deployed with the 3rd

Battalion of the 6th Marine Regiment to Iraq in 2007 for a seven-month tour of Fallujah, Ramadi, Habbaniyah. "It was the middle of the surge," he says. "The bloodiest year of the Iraq War.

There was pretty crazy fighting going on. We lost some great men."

Ward then headed to Camp Lejeune, N.C. and retrained for a second seven-month tour of Iraq.

After four years in the Marine Corps, Ward attended Middle Tennessee State University, earning a B.A. in history.

He graduated with a 3.9 GPA and then started searching for work.

"I applied for 75 jobs in Tennessee and New York," he says. "My girlfriend, Haley Rice from Tennessee, was studying at the New York Film Academy."

He had 12 job interviews, but

he was denied work everywhere he looked. "I was told I was underqualified to be a tree trimmer for the city of Franklin, Tenn.," he says.

Daniel Ward could risk his life for his country but was unfit to prune a tulip poplar.

Welcome home.

"So I traveled to New York on July 28, 2012, and moved in with Haley on 140th St. in Harlem," he says. "A bit of a culture shock. I like country quiet.

Not big on crowds. But for honest work, I'll adapt to anything."

The next day, Ward went to Workforce1, a veterans' advocacy program that in the last year has placed 800 veterans and their spouses in jobs and served some 4,500 vets in various other ways at seven career centers across the city.

He got immediate temporary jobs doing data entry at local banks. "It paid the bills, but wasn't where my

passion was," he says.

On March 16, Workforce1 helped Ward land a permanent job with Supportive Services for Veteran Families, a nonprofit outfit funded by the Veterans Administration.

"My job title is Rapid Re-Housing Case Manager," Ward says. "Finding veterans safe and affordable housing where they have the ability to pay through earned benefits or employment. It takes lots of advocacy, calling Social Security, the VA, HRA (the city's Human Resources Administration). It's not combat, but I feel a sense of mission, of service, fighting for fellow veterans."

When he decided he wanted to go to college, Daniel Ward never dreamed the road from Iraq would lead him to an office in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

"Every Tuesday, I go into the shelters to search for veterans who served bravely," he says. "And then I approach local landlords and brokers, appealing to their patriotism to accept them in their apartments. Sometimes that works. Most times the bottom line is the almighty buck."

He says he encounters vets from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. "My brother Brandon is in Afghanistan right now, which reminds me of their dangerous service," he says. "Most of my clients, though, are from the Vietnam era. Since March, I have placed nine veterans in permanent homes. Good feeling. I have 12 more on my case load, including a woman Iraq War vet with 3-year-old twins who is running out of couches to surf and will soon land in a homeless shelter with her babies unless I find her a home."

Lucky for her that some knucklehead bureaucrat in Franklin, Tenn. turned down a courageous U.S. Marine for that tree-trimming job so that he could come to New York to continue his service, this time fighting to put homeless veterans into permanent housing.

Welcome home.



Daniel Ward on patrol in Iraq.