

Army Amputee Keeps Innate Optimism



Staff Sgt. Michael Smith lost his arm and nearly his life to a hit and run driver, but that failed to impact his single-minded determination.

“My commitment was to staying in the Army for 20 years,” Smith said.

“There was no way I was going to be short-changed due to someone else’s negligence.”

After two years of intense rehabilitation and training at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC), Smith’s persistence paid off. An above-the-elbow amputee, Smith met every standard and was approved to return to duty as a career soldier.

He arrived at the Center for the Intrepid (CFI), BAMC’s outpatient rehabilitation center.

Smith’s goal was to return to active duty, but he knew he was facing an uphill battle. “I knew I had to prove I could do as much, if not more, than anyone else.”

FOCUSING ON SPORTS... with this goal in mind, the former high-school athlete dove into every sport possible. He mastered shooting firearms. He ran Spartan races, Tough Mudders, and half-marathons. Tough Mudders are 10 to 12 mile obstacle courses designed to test strength, stamina and teamwork skills.

Smith also went rock climbing, skiing, and snowboarding. He swam, cycled, and took part in track and field. He joined soccer, basketball and kickball leagues.

Smith nervously appeared before the Physical Evaluation Board. He felt confident they’d OK his request to remain in the Army. He was thrilled when they declared him fit for active duty.

“I’ve been committed to the Army my entire adult life,” he said. “I feel very blessed that I have the opportunity to continue to serve.” Smith now hopes to resume his prior career in field artillery. “I just want to be a regular soldier, go to combat if needed,” he said. “I honestly feel like there’s nothing I can’t do now, thanks to the support from my family, friends and the staff at the CFI who were with me every step of the way.

Smith is also filling his time with his other passion: sports. He’s slated to represent the Army in track and field and swimming at the Warrior Games and he continues to cycle daily in hopes of making the 2016 Paralympic team.

MOTIVATING OTHERS... Smith said he believes to this day that he lost his arm for a reason. “I would like to inspire and motivate others struggling with mental or physical challenges,” he said. No one should let their injury determine who they are or who they want to be.”