

First Above-The-Elbow Amputee To Return To Active Duty Swims, Cycles To Medals

(NAPSA)—Sergeant First Class Michael D. Smith's severe injuries sustained in a 2011 hit-and-run accident ultimately led to the loss of his right arm, but his optimism never wavered. Recovering at the Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Smith worked toward one goal: remain in the Army for 20 years. Three years later, Smith became the first above-the-elbow amputee to return to active duty.

"It was one of the greatest days of my life. Knowing that it's never been done before—that means a lot to me," said Smith, on hearing the news. "It feels like a huge accomplishment and a great achievement."

Like Smith, many soldiers are soldiers for life. How does someone who serves, protects and is prepared to make that most ultimate of sacrifices recover from a wound, injury or illness? Since 2007, more than 62,000 soldiers have recovered and transitioned back to the force or to civilian status through Warrior Transition Units (WTUs) like Smith's WTB in Texas.

The Warrior Transition Command is the proponent of the Warrior Care and Transition Program (WCTP), which includes these WTUs and the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2), which supports the most severely wounded, ill and injured soldiers and veterans. Recovering soldiers create a personalized Comprehensive Transition Plan (CTP) spanning six domains: physical, emotional, social, family, spiritual and career. Adaptive reconditioning, including sports and activities like cooking, gardening, hunting, yoga and more, connects physical activities to these six domains. Each adaptive reconditioning activity



Dallas, Texas native Sgt. 1st Class Michael D. Smith exemplified resilience in the cycling competition at the U.S. Army Warrior Trials on June 15, 2014, at West Point, N.Y. He finished strong, even after his prosthetic arm broke off in the middle of the track, and took home a bronze medal. (U.S. Army Photo by Sgt. Eric Lieber.)

aids recovery and transition differently: Sports build camaraderie and foster healthy competition; others, such as fishing or music, can be therapeutic and hone skills that will help in post-recovery life.

"I believe that performing in cycling, track, field, swimming and volleyball will help me overcome my injury," said Smith, who used sports as a conduit to recovery. Smith qualified for the 2014 Warrior Games based on his performance at the U.S. Army Warrior Trials, where he won seven medals. Warrior Games, a Department of Defense-wide event, highlights sports and competition as an effective tool to facilitate recovery.

That Smith was hurt makes him human. His resilience, a quality he shares with all wounded, ill and injured soldiers and veterans, is what inspires the nation he chose to defend.