

COMBAT CONTROLLER TO COMPETE IN WARRIOR GAMES by 2nd Lt. Cammie Quinn, 43rd Airlift Wing, Public Affairs

May 11, 2010 - Pope Air Force Base, NC -- Less than one year ago, a combat controller deployed from Pope's 21st Special Tactics Squadron was thrown from his vehicle when it hit an improvised explosive device while travelling in a convoy through Afghanistan.

As a result of the collision, Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito suffered several broken bones and traumatic brain injury.



<<<< Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito, 21st Special Tactics Squadron, stands on a plateau in Afghanistan during his 2009 deployment. Sergeant Esposito suffered several broken bones and traumatic brain injury when his convoy hit an improvised explosive device. He has since recovered and is competing in the 2010 Inaugural Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colo. He is one of 20 Airmen to participate in Games. (U.S. Air Force Photo/Courtesy)

"In May 2009 I was operating in Afghanistan as a combat controller in support of an Army Special Operations team," said Sergeant Esposito. "We were going after the bad guys when we hit an IED - everyone in the vehicle was thrown out. I was in the rear of the vehicle, where the concentrated blast came from. I was instantly left unconscious and catapulted from the vehicle.

"When the special operations medical technician found me, he said I was on fire, I had no heart beat and wasn't breathing," said Sergeant Esposito. "I had a tibia and fibula breaks in my left leg, a broken back, hit really hard in the face, and a lot of my teeth were smashed. I also suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury."



<<<< Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito, 21st Special Tactics Squadron, poses with a military working dog during his 2009 deployment to Afghanistan. Sergeant Esposito is competing in the 2010 Inaugural Warrior Games, slated May 10 to 14. (U.S. Air Force Photo/Courtesy)

Following these injuries, most people would have extensive physiological and psychological damage, but Sergeant Esposito isn't most people. Remarkably, he

was able to keep his legs and his memory was not affected, which he credits directly to the support he received throughout his recovery.

"The medic did some great things that day to really affect how everything came out," the combat controller said. "Despite the injuries I had, I have no memory loss and was able to keep my legs. I've been tested so many times it's amazing everything has come back so positively. I was really lucky that day.

"I've been really blessed to have the all support from the 21st STS," said Sergeant Esposito. "They've done an insurmountable number of good things and I can't say enough about them-- I could start, but I'd be talking for hours. I've had 100 percent of the support from my squadron and the Air Force and Army Special Operations Commands."

Sergeant Esposito is using his experience and recovery as motivation to compete during the 2010 Inaugural Warrior Games in Colorado Springs, Colo. He is one of 20 Airmen to participate in Games slated May 10 to 14.

"About this time a year ago, Sergeant Esposito was laid up in a hospital bed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center with broken legs, broken feet, and a broken Back," said Lt. Col Michael Hughes, 21st Special Tactics Squadron Commander. "Yet it was not the severity of his injuries that was most notable, it was his unyielding determination to make a full and speedy recovery.

"This week he is representing the Air Force as a competitor in the Warrior Games, but as Marc will tell you, the Games are simply one more stepping stone on his road back to being a mission-ready combat controller. He serves as an inspiration and example to all of us as Airmen, military professionals and Americans," Colonel Hughes added.

The Warrior Games are open to military members and veterans with bodily injuries as well as mental wounds of war, such as post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. The Department of Defense announced that about 200 disabled service members and veterans are participating.

According to the Warrior Games Web site, "The Warrior Games provide a focal event to empower the incorporation of athletics into military wounded warrior programs, and provide an opportunity to introduce Paralympics sports to injured service members, while at the same time building camaraderie and raising awareness of Paralympics competition and adaptive sports in general."

The games are a joint effort between the Department of Defense and the U.S. Olympic Committee and are part of an effort to inspire recovery, capitalize on physical fitness, and promote new opportunities for growth and achievement, according to the U.S. Olympic Committee Web site. Since 2003, the U.S. Paralympics Committee has worked in partnership with Veterans Affairs, providing adaptive sports therapy to veterans.

Events will include shooting, swimming, archery, track, discus and wheelchair

basketball, among others. Sergeant Esposito is participating in the swimming, cycling and shooting events.

Although he never has been a competitive swimmer, the sergeant loves to swim and does so during his therapy sessions, which doubled as training for the event, he said.

"Initially I was unable to put any impact on my feet and loving the water the way I do, it was just fun to get in the water and swim around," he said. "The cycling I also love. Prior to getting injured, I did triathlons all over the world. The bike rides and swimming are fun, I've never liked the running though, but I'll get back into it.

The competition provides more than just the opportunity to contend for the Wounded Warriors, said the sergeant. They show participants that although they're still limited in some areas, they're still able to get out and do things.

"The games are a proverbial diving board," said Sergeant Esposito. "They prepare you to do bigger and better things, if not physically then mentally. They help service members accept challenges throughout the day.

"Mentally, participants benefit most from knowing they can overcome their obstacles. Physically, they benefit because the games provide them with professional coaching, good equipment and the logistics to strengthen them. It's a form of physical therapy - and competition is the best form of therapy you can ever receive."

Sergeant Esposito said the support he'd received from his squadron, MAJCOM and SOCOM is insurmountable and he hopes to give back to the organizations which helped him into an extraordinary recovery.

"I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing without them - I'd probably still be in a wheelchair," he said. "I had doctors telling me I wouldn't walk right--if I'd even again. I told them I'm going to walk again--with my own legs."

He hopes to continue to go on and help future generations of wounded warriors.

"I'd be happy to give back a fraction of what I've been given," he said. "My goals are to get back in the fight and do whatever I can for the Air Force," he added.

AIR FORCE TAKES GOLD IN PISTOL COMPETITION by Staff Sgt. J. Paul Croxon, Defense Media Activity - San Antonio

May 14, 2010 - Colorado Springs, Colorado (AFNS) -- Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito, a combat controller from the 21st Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., brought home gold May 13 in the pistol-shooting competition at the inaugural Warrior Games here moments after earning bronze in the 20-kilometer upright bike competition.



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Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito takes aim during the Warrior Games pistol competition May 13, 2010, at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo. Sergeant Esposito took gold in the event. (U.S. Air Force photo/Senior Airman Christopher Griffin)

"It's exactly what we're trained to do as U.S. Air Force special operators," he said. "The battlefield is as dynamic as the sports field, and you're going to have to go from one extreme to the other. And, you have to do it quickly, and you have to do it flawlessly, without fault."

Sergeant Esposito is no stranger to shooting. His job as a combat controller often put him at risk in situations where he had to return fire on the enemy. He said he was able to use that experience to his benefit, despite the differences between shooting in combat and shooting competitively.

"It's different in the sense that there are no distractions," he said. "When you're shooting in combat and you're shooting here, you are going to the same spot in your mind."

Sergeant Esposito attributes his ability to transition from the cycling match to the calm of competitive shooting to his training and the special tactics mission.

"It's what's taught in the special tactics career field. You learn to calm yourself. You may have to run twenty miles and then do a swim for 50-meters underwater, but they expect you within a minute to get your heart rate down to a resting heart rate."

Though his calm was apparent in his performance, Sergeant Esposito had distinguished spectators cheering him on.

"Having him on the battlefield, I'm at ease. I'm at rest," said Chief Master Sgt. William Markham, also from 21st STS and Sergeant Esposito's chief. "I know he's going to take care of business. Having him compete here and represent the Air Force and special tactics, I have the same calm."