

**AIR FORCE WOUNDED WARRIOR RIDES FROM COAST TO COAST** by Maj. Belinda Petersen, Air Force Personnel Center Public Affairs

**July 12, 2010 - Randolph Air Force Base, Texas (AFNS)** -- A combat controller, who last year was laying in a hospital fighting for his life, is now riding his bicycle across America as part of his rehabilitation and to inspire other wounded warriors.

Along with 19 of his teammates, Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito from the 21st Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, N.C, is participating in the Sea to Shining Sea ride. The bike trek across America started at the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, and will end in Virginia Beach, Va., July 24.



*Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito and actor/comedian Robin Williams May 22, 2010, in San Francisco. Sergeant Esposito is from the 21st Special Tactics Squadron at Pope Air Force Base, N.C. (Courtesy photo/Van Brinson)*

"The goal of the ride is to honor the courage of (service members), recognize the strength of the American spirit and challenge perceptions of

how we view athletes," said Melissa McKinley, a public relations specialist for the event.

But before Sergeant Esposito could even get back on his bike, he spent almost a year in hospitals where he underwent several surgeries and extensive rehabilitation.

"In May 2009, I was operating in Afghanistan as a combat controller in support of an Army special operations team," Sergeant Esposito said. "We were going after the bad guys when we hit an (improvised explosive device). 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, had no heartbeat and wasn't breathing," he said. "My legs and back were broken, and a lot of my teeth were smashed. I also suffered a traumatic brain injury."

And now, thanks to the tremendous care and support he received from the medical community and his squadron, Sergeant Esposito is riding his bicycle 4,000 miles through deserts, mountain passes, big cities and small towns.

"It is so inspirational to see Marc and his teammates helping each other all along the way," Ms. McKinley said. "After conquering a hill, Marc will ride back down so he can ride along with someone who needs the encouragement to make it up the hill. That's how Marc is; he always wants to help others."

"I want to help others understand that there is life after an injury or illness," Sergeant Esposito said. "When something traumatic happens, you feel like your life has been turned upside down. Everything is at a standstill. But you have to get back into life by doing what you love and loving what you do."



*Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito assists a teammate going through the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Sergeant Esposito is participating in Sea to Shining Sea, a 4,000-mile bike ride which started at the Golden Gate Bridge and will end July 24, 2010, in Virginia Beach, Va. (Courtesy photo/Austin Smithard)*

That's the message he and his teammates are inspiring in others as they ride across America, meeting people at water stops, restaurants, historical landmarks and military bases.

"They are changing people's lives as they go through small towns," Ms. McKinley said.

When the team reaches Washington, D.C., Sergeant Esposito wants to visit servicemembers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the same place he spent several months enduring painful surgeries and not knowing what his future held.

Sergeant Esposito remembers how wonderful it was to have visitors when he was a patient at WRAMC.

"I want to give back by talking to the young troops and letting them know to never give up," Sergeant Esposito said. "I want to (instill) in them that they can do it as long as they put their minds to it."

"And an inspiration he is," said Senior Airman Brian Petras who is also participating in the Sea to Shining Sea ride. "We met at the Center for the Intrepid while we were both going through rehabilitation, and we have inspired each other."

"By doing the Sea to Shining Sea ride, we want to prove that we are still an asset to our great country, that we are still very capable and can continue to serve," Airman Petras said.

Along with Sergeant Esposito and Airman Petras, other Air Force riders include Christopher Frost, Kevin Sullivan and Scott Bilyeu.



*Staff Sgt. Marc Esposito nears the 1,000-mile mark in Utah during Sea to Shining Sea, a 4,000-mile bike ride which started at the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and will end July 24, 2010. (Courtesy photo/ Austin Smithard)*

The team rides anywhere from 30 miles to 120 miles in one day, averaging 77 miles a day. In two months, team members will only rest 11 days.

**NOTE: This online-only information was added to the CCT history after publication of *The Eye of the Storm – A history of Combat Control Teams*.**