

2014 HONOR RIDE

RIDE 2 RECOVERY

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JUAN CARLOS HERNANDEZ ARMY

“When I ride my bike, I feel relaxed. Free. It’s as if nothing else in the world mattered,” says Juan Carlos Hernandez, a retired E-4/Specialist, Chinook Gunner Crewman, U.S. Army. “It helps keep my mind clear and focused. Riding my bicycle has dramatically helped me with my walking and my quick recovery; it has not only helped me physically but also mentally.”

Juan Carlos, who regularly sports shorts with his patriotic prosthetic leg, has gone from never riding more than 20 miles to riding more than 400 miles in a week. Since he began cycling in April 2010 — only six months after his injury — he has participated in more than 12 Ride 2 Recovery Challenges.

In 2006, Juan Carlos joined the Army and was deployed to Afghanistan in Dec. 2008 with Task Force Palehorse 7/17th Cavalry. He was injured on Oct. 13, 2009 while conducting nighttime aerial missions in the valleys of Afghanistan. The aircraft was hit with an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) with shrapnel penetrating directly below Juan Carlos, injuring his right leg so badly that it required a below-the-knee amputation on-site of the accident.

Transferred to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Juan Carlos did his recovery and rehabilitation at Brook Army Medical Center and the Center for the Intrepid (CFI). He moved quickly; released from the hospital in mid-November 2009, he was walking with his new prosthesis a few days before Christmas. By mid-February, he was pedaling with his prosthetic leg on an upright bicycle with no issues — well, only a few minor accidents while learning to balance on his new leg.

While at the CFI, he heard about Ride 2 Recovery and joined his first ride within six months of his injury.

“Although long and exhausting, I had an amazing time meeting new friends, riding through cities that I never imagined visiting and making amazing memories. Ride 2 Recovery means a lot to me, helping me physically and also mentally. One thing I’ve learned from being part of Ride 2 Recovery is that everyone quickly becomes part of a family that keeps expanding.”

The R2R family is one of the main reasons Juan Carlos is still part of the program. “I love the program. I love what it has done for me and my fellow veterans who are recovering. I believe cycling does so many things that medicine cannot. I love the peer-to-peer mentoring we have with one another on the rides.

Because of the connections I’ve made with so many wounded warriors, I joined R2R as a staff member. I know there are many things that I can offer that others cannot, simply because I have been in their shoes and we can relate to one another. My goal is to help and mentor as many wounded warriors as I can, I know that I may not be able to help them all, but I will try to do my best to accomplish that goal and do it to my best ability”.



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JEN GOODBODY ARMY

I was introduced to cycling while I was at the Menlo Park Women's Trauma Recovery Program. Cycling became one part of my treatment plan. Though my time to ride was limited, I did try to ride as much as possible.

The staff at the Women's Trauma Recovery Program recognizes how important cycling is — physically, mentally and emotionally. The treatment that I received at Menlo was top notch, but when you factor in the cycling, it was an amazing combination that really helped my healing. I had finally found the right path to my recovery. When you are in that “dark place”, it feels hopeless. Cycling illuminated the way to start living and thriving and not just surviving.

In October 2011, I embarked on this new cycling journey with Ride 2 Recovery on the annual California Challenge — 450 miles of cycling along the coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles. The seven-day event pushed me (and the other 200 cyclists) to our limits and then some. It was one of the hardest things I've done, but also one of my proudest.

One of the difficulties in dealing with PTSD and TBI is that my injuries are literally in my head. Its super easy to tell myself, “I'll go on a ride later.” Most of the time, later never came around. Now, that's just not an option for me. Not only do I want to ride because I want to get better at it, I have to ride for my mental health. Even knowing how much

it benefits me, I still have this internal fight trying to keep me from riding. The hardest part is the first three minutes of a ride. Once I'm on the bike, everything changes.

When I am riding, I am focused. I am grounded. I pay attention to things that keep me in the present. All the chatter that I have going on in my head stops. I feel a sense of freedom, being outside, with the wind in my face. It satisfies this “small” adrenaline addiction that I have in a relatively safe way.

I am by no means a speed demon down a hill, but its fast enough for me to be totally thrilled by the time I make it to the bottom. No matter what my mood is before a descent; by the time I reach the bottom I always have a huge smile on my face.

I ride everyday. Period. Whether I am on the road or on my trainer.



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DELVIN MCMILLIAN AIR FORCE

Delvin McMillian had one question for the Ride 2 Recovery team, “how can I join the ride?”

UnitedHealthcare employee, Walter Chwalik, told Delvin about Ride 2 Recovery and showed pictures from his ride in Florida. Our question at R2R was “how can we make a bike that will allow Delvin to ride independently?”

Since 2008, Ride 2 Recovery has been providing grants for the bikes that are given to the injured veterans - but they had never had a quad amputee apply. That didn't stop anyone. It was just another challenge to create a bicycle that would allow Delvin to participate in what is a life-changing experience for the riders.

Delvin McMillian and his fighting spirit was not squashed when he contacted the Hantavirus in 2001 in his dorm room at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho. The disease attacked his circulatory system and caused his lungs to collapse and his kidneys to fail. Both of his legs were amputated, below the knee, and one hand and a part of the other hand were amputated.

“Life doesn't stop at the point of your injury,” he said. “In the big picture of life, it is just a minor setback. There is more to life than feeling sorry for yourself and you still have a lot you can offer the world.”

The Ride 2 Recovery program was founded on the principle that anyone, anywhere, anytime could ride some kind of bicycle and that R2R could make the necessary adaptations. The R2R team was up for the challenge of creating a bike for Delvin.

Only a small handful of quad amputees had ever even attempted to cycle and none of those had ever ridden a road bike of any sort. After months of research, brainstorming and hard work, the Ride 2 Recovery Stealth “Mad Max” was born. The bike had to steer, brake, shift,



and ride easily and smoothly for someone who had no legs or hands to steer, brake or shift.

Delvin has now ridden Mad Max in Virginia, Texas, Florida and now has the opportunity, as a quad amputee, to do something that any able body person can do, which is to ride a bike. Many people told him and the R2R team that this was not possible. Delvin proved them all wrong.