

Stephen Ministry in Action:

ON THE FRONT LINES *of Care*



“I’ve given enough,” U.S. Army Captain David Rozelle told his wife, Kim, from the hospital in Iraq. Overcome by grief and pain, he thought his ability and desire to serve were gone for good. But God still had other plans.

It was on June 21, 2003, that David’s life had changed forever. Commander of Troop K in the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, he was riding in a Humvee near Fallujah when a landmine exploded, badly damaging the vehicle and severely injuring his right foot. In spite of extreme pain and shock, David immediately thought of the safety of the 140 soldiers under his command—issuing orders to secure the site and evacuate casualties.

Hours later, doctors at the combat support hospital amputated David’s lower right ankle and foot. After the surgery, David was flown to Qatar, then to Germany, and finally, on the eve of Independence Day 2003, to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., where he joined the amputees on Ward 57.

A Hero’s Joy and Sorrow

Weeks later, David returned home to Fort Carson, Colorado, arriving in time to be with Kim for the birth of their son, Forrest. In addition to becoming a father, David was also a hero, receiving the Bronze Star with Valor, the Purple Heart,



the Army Commendation Medal (four awards), and the Army Achievement Medal (three awards). But any joy was short-lived; he spent day after day lying on the living room couch in a haze of depression. “I realized how worthless I was becoming, but I felt like I deserved it,” David said.

Kim’s love and patience and his joy in Forrest gave David the strength to move forward. A meeting with President Bush—and the President’s invitation to join him someday for a run—encouraged him even more. He resolved to overcome his fears and pain by strengthening his body.

Making Physical Progress

Eight surgeries and three months after the explosion, David received his prosthesis. He resumed rigorous physical activity and was soon fully functional, “jumping, walking steps, doing push-ups, and sprinting up small inclines.”

Before long, he was on the Colorado slopes learning to ski again with the help of Disabled Sports USA. More sports followed—running, swimming, snowshoeing, and eventually marathons and triathlons. He encouraged others with disabilities to return to the sports they loved too.

A New Mission

Physical activity provided a temporary emotional respite, but around six months after the

explosion in Iraq, a new reality struck. “I was lying on the couch, icing my leg, and it hit me, *‘I’m going to be like this forever;’*” he said. “It finally sank in all at once. It was good that I was alone because I really got to cry it out. I was slowly realizing that I was going to have to adapt my lifestyle. My heart broke. It was after that day that my mind started to heal.”

David now focused on two goals: his determination to return to the Army and his concern for the needs of others with injuries like his own. The first challenge—to be found fit for duty—was straightforward. Pushing himself beyond the expectations of doctors, therapists, and even

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himself, he got into better physical shape than he had been before leaving

for Iraq.

The second challenge was more difficult. “I had left Walter Reed unarmed with what I needed to heal,” he said. “There was no established support system to take care of me.” Doctors provided physical care, but David knew firsthand the tremendous emotional and spiritual needs of amputees.

Because he wanted to help other amputees, the Army sent him on a visit to Walter Reed Hospital. He went directly to Ward 57, where he sat, talked,



and prayed with the amputees. Although they deeply appreciated his gift of time, David found their grief difficult to handle and knew he needed to be a better listener. He returned home, wondering, *Where can I learn these skills?*

Called to Stephen Ministry

In May 2004, David's church, First Presbyterian Church in Colorado Springs—a Stephen Ministry congregation since 1981—was preparing to train another class of Stephen Ministers. David attended an information session and applied to serve as a Stephen Minister. In the application interview, "David described how he felt called to minister to other amputees," said Stephen Leader Arlene Bosma. "His dedication to his family, God, and his country was obvious and very inspiring."

Soon David was part of the congregation's eighth training class of Stephen Ministers. "He has an incredible faith," said Fred Paul, another trainee. "What I admire most in David is how he remains so focused on other people. Despite what happened to him, he always puts others' needs ahead of his own. Whenever he enters a room he introduces himself to anyone he doesn't know. At each training session, he made an effort to speak with everyone there. He really cared about them and how they were doing."

Arlene recalled, "During our training class on grief, David talked about the grief that people experience after losing a part of their body. He

shared how there can be a delay before the loss sinks in. For him it was six months before it hit him really hard that his life had changed. But it was also obvious that he had worked through it well because he was so open to talking about it."

"David relies on his faith in Jesus Christ to sustain him in all situations," said Rev. JoAnn Brechbill, Minister of Congregational Care and a Stephen Leader. "He took Stephen Ministry training because he wanted to be better prepared to help those who have challenges like his."

A Stephen Minister on the Battlefield

During Stephen Ministry training, David received notice that the Army considered him "fit for duty." He wondered where he'd want to serve. Working

with amputees at Walter Reed? Behind a desk at Fort Carson? A new command?

He discovered the answer when he welcomed his troop back from Iraq. As he celebrated their homecoming, he realized how much he loved being an Army captain and cavalryman. On June 17, 2004, he resumed command, just four days before the first anniversary of his injury. "I was ready to command again, but as a stronger and more mature leader," David said.

Two weeks later—just a few sessions before he completed his Stephen Ministry training—David returned to Iraq, the first soldier in history to become an amputee and then resume his command on the same battlefield.

Back in Iraq, he frequently found himself using his Stephen Minister caregiving skills. "There are never enough chaplains to cover the needs



of our soldiers,” he said. “Lay ministers are essential to our force.”

Looking to the Future

David had two goals for when he returned from Iraq: to become program director of a new amputee center at Walter Reed and to finish the last few sessions of his Stephen Minister training. “I want to give soldiers someone to talk to who has made it through what they’re facing, let them ask questions, and have them see me walking,” David said. Now, back from his tour of duty in Iraq,

David is working toward achieving those goals. He is ministering to those at Walter Reed and working to establish an amputee center there.

God continues to use David’s personal experiences, caregiving skills, and unwavering commitment to serving his country and his fellow soldiers. “David has dedicated his life to the Lord,” Arlene said. “He believes he is doing what the Lord wants him to do. He’s a man of faith, strength, and courage, doing what’s right.” ■

Quotes and photos are from David’s book, *Back in Action: The Inspiring True Story of the First Amputee to Return to Active Command in Iraq*, published by Regnery Publishing. Used by permission.



David Rozelle’s achievements have drawn much media attention. He has appeared on “The Today Show,” CNN, and several other popular television and radio programs. He has been featured in *People Magazine* and *US News and World Report*. His book, *Back in Action: The Inspiring True Story of the First Amputee to Return to Active Command in Iraq*, was published in 2005 by Regnery Publishing.

Despite the attention, David remains steadfastly focused on doing his duty: looking after his troops and ministering to those in need.



For more information about Stephen Ministry, please contact:

Stephen Ministries

2045 Innerbelt Business Center Drive
St. Louis, Missouri 63114-5765
(314) 428-2600
www.stephenministries.org