

Operation Denali

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carotid artery (causing a mini stroke) and left him with soft tissue injuries to the torso and arms and burns on his arms and hands. Shebib spent five days in a coma and two weeks at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the intensive care unit. He subsequently endured two years of intensive therapy to deal with the brain injuries caused by the intensity of the IED blast.

Despite their shattering injuries, on June 1, 2009 (Day 1: Base Camp) these four wounded warriors, having spent a year of intensive training, completing a 12 day mountaineering course with the Alaskan Mountaineering School and resourcing their gear and funding from such exceptional sponsors as The American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Tee it up for the Troops, the Wounded Warrior Project and Mountain Hardwear, Operation Denali was ready.

The warriors met up with the rest of the team — Colorado Springs firefighter/ medic and retired U S Army Infantry Sergeant First Class Robert Haines, Hoffmeister's wife Gayle, also an Army Veteran, lead guide Kirby Senden and assistant guides Todd Tumolo and Matt Montavon. After sorting gear and food and loading the plane, the team was eager to start the daunting ascent that lay ahead.

June 2, 2009 (Day 2). For even the seasoned veteran climber with absolutely no prior extensive injuries, facing the hazards of snow-covered crevasses, winds, the effects of altitude on orientation, intense UV radiation, heavy snowfall and navigating one's way in a complete whiteout would be most formidable obstacles.

Operation Denali had to work very closely and adapt quickly. The members had to adopt a pace that was suitable to all team members and distribute the load of gear properly among all members. Matt's prosthetic leg gave him some difficulty early on, so the team compensated by crosslevelling gear to keep his load a bit lighter; Hoffmeister carried Nyman's extra leg.

The weather for the first part of the trek was more than cooperative, with an average temperature of 40 degrees Fahrenheit and the sun not too intense. The team was in good spirits and all very excited about the expedition.

By Day 3, the team began to face the reality of over preparing and had to carefully choose to cache extra equipment in order to reduce weight, realizing that each item dropped brought increased risk up ahead. The team continued the climb, fortunate to still have cooperative weather, continuing to meet their target elevations and on Day 6, the team took a rest day.

The members discussed some strategies and took time to call in to the Alaska Purple Heart Trail Dedication which was then taking place at Delta Junction, Alaska. Over a satellite phone, the team spoke with Captain Juan Guerrero, who broadcast the team's voices over the PA system to the reception. **Continued Page 10**


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taking on the task of training, advising, enabling and partnering with Iraqi forces.

"I believe that's really what we're doing today. We are not doing any independent operations any more," he said at the Army and Navy Club here last month. "We are doing counterterrorism operations, but we're really not even doing those independently. All our highest-end counterterrorism operations are done in complete coordination with Iraqi security forces, and with Iraqi security forces."

Asked today if a reduced combat role of American troops was tantamount to a reduction in overall productivity in Iraq, Wolff sought to dispel such impressions.

"There are aggressive operations every day and every evening to deal with terrorists and extremists that try to have an impact on the Iraqi people," he said. "So it's not as if we're all sitting on our operating bases and doing nothing."

"There's this belief at times that no one's doing anything; that 96,000 Soldiers are just kind of waiting for something to happen," he continued. "We are not in the observe-and-write-about-it mode. We are effectively out there doing things every single day." 

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