



Sgt. 1st Class Greg Robinson, a combat engineer with A Company, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), rappels from a 40-foot tower April 26, 2013, at the Sabalauski Air Assault School at Fort Campbell, Ky. Robinson lost his lower right leg when his unit was ambushed Afghanistan in 2006. (Photo by Sgt. Joe Padula)

## NCO graduates Air Assault School despite amputation

*NCO Journal:*

For almost 12 miles, Sgt. 1st Class Greg Robinson has been carrying about 35-pounds of gear. He sees a clock in the near distance with red digital numerals closing in on the three-hour mark, the time limit for the near half-marathon march. He wants to sprint to the finish line, but his face winces with every right step taken. His breaths are heavy and pain can be heard with each inhale.

His left leg is in full stride, but his right, having been amputated more than six years ago, now pushes forward on a damaged prosthetic; a piston broke a few miles back eliminating fluid motion. He picks up a faster, but still limping pace. Sweat drips into his eyes and his fists are clenched tight as he approaches the finish line with two minutes to spare.

He stops before crossing, pulls out his canteen, pours water on his helmet and face. He takes a giant step with his left foot and says two words, "Air Assault." He

then takes another step with his prosthetic, exhales and accomplishes his mission: He has just completed the Army's Air Assault School on one leg.

Robinson, a 34-year old combat engineer assigned to A Company, 2nd Brigade Special Troops Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), pinned on his Air Assault badge during a graduation ceremony April 29 at the Sabalauski Air Assault School at Fort Campbell, Ky.

According to the school's records, Robinson is the first Soldier with an amputated limb and prosthetic to complete the Air Assault School.

"It's a really good feeling and I just hope this can inspire other amputees and other people with disabilities that they can accomplish things," said Robinson, who lost his lower right leg while deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan, during a firefight Oct. 3, 2006. "My biggest thing today is to let that someone who is laying there



Robinson, who wears a prosthetic right leg, nears the end of a 12-mile road march April 29, 2013. Robinson earned his Air Assault wings upon completion of the march and is the first amputee to do so. (Photo by Sgt. Joe Padula)

wounded in that hospital bed know not to get down on yourself. You can still continue despite missing a limb. A disability is only a disability if you let it hold you down.”

The Army’s Air Assault School is a ten-day course that qualifies Soldiers to conduct air-assault helicopter operations, sling-load missions, fast roping and rappelling. It ends with a fast-paced, heavy load, 12-mile ruck-march and is designed to push a service member’s limits mentally and physically. It has been called the hardest 10 days in the Army.

“That was the toughest part. But it’s over with now,”

said Robinson moments after completing the 12-miler. “I had problems with my leg during the Tough One [event], but fixed it and continued.” One of Robinson’s air valves was knocked off during the obstacle portion of the course.

During the 10-day event, the school’s staff ensured that the professional standard was maintained in regards to their grading of Robinson. There was no bias for or against the amputee Soldier.

“The instructors were a bit nervous when he first started,” said Sgt. 1st Class Matthew Connolly, a senior instructor at the Air Assault School. “But they did their job just as if he were any other student and, on that note, I am very proud of them. They didn’t see him as a disabled Soldier and treated him just like anyone else coming to school to earn the Air Assault wings. We are very proud of him and I think others need to look at him as a mentor and an example of what you can accomplish when you set your mind on something.”

Prior to attending the physically demanding school, Robinson needed a waiver from the unit’s medical staff. Robinson’s accomplishments continue to surprise and inspire those medics.

“Some of these guys never even learn to walk on a prosthesis, let alone go through the Air Assault course,” said Capt. Gregory Gibson, a nurse with the 2nd Brigade Combat Team who has worked with amputee Soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center before coming to the brigade. “He’s had this thing happen to him that most would see as a career ender. He’s a shining example that life can carry on.”

Robinson’s momentum continues as he now looks to attend the school’s Master Rappel Course, which qualifies Air Assault School graduates in the skills and techniques necessary to rappel from moving aircraft. His wounded friends are still in his thoughts.

“When I was at Walter Reed, I looked around and felt sad for myself,” Robinson said. “But the more I looked, the more I realized there were so many who had it harder, who had it worse than me — a triple amputee, a quad-amputee — and watching them work and push so hard inspired me.”

Robinson slowly repeated an earlier phrase.

“A disability is only a disability if you let it hold you down.” ■

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