

Prince Harry Returns WCAP NCO's Gold Medal to British Hospital That Saved Her Life

By Pablo Villa - NCO Journal

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A Soldier-athlete's unprecedented request has been fulfilled.

Sgt. Elizabeth Marks, a combat medic and member of the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program based at Fort Carson, Colorado, asked Prince Harry to deliver one of the gold medals she won at last month's Invictus Games in Orlando, Florida, to the staff of the British hospital that saved her life.

Today, the British royal made good on that promise, presenting Marks' gold medal from the 100-meter freestyle event to doctors and nurses from Cambridge's Papworth Hospital during a ceremony at Kensington Palace in London.

Marks won four gold medals in the swimming competition of the 2016 Invictus Games. Her final medal was presented by Prince Harry, who created the competition, an international Paralympic-style, multi-sport event, which allows wounded, injured or sick armed services personnel and veterans to compete. After he placed the medal around Marks' neck, the 25-year-old gave the award back, a grand gesture that made international headlines.

Marks wanted Prince Harry to give the medal to Papworth Hospital in Cambridge, England, where she spent the duration of the inaugural Invictus Games in 2014. Marks traveled to London in the fall of that year to compete in the Games when she collapsed with respiratory distress syndrome. Her condition worsened and she was eventually hospitalized and placed on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or ECMO, life support to help her breathe. She missed the Games, but Marks said she was fortunate to come back alive. She said donating one of her medals was the only way she could think of to repay the hospital staff.

The BBC reports that the prince told those assembled Wednesday how Marks had described Papworth as "undoubtedly the best place for someone having this condition."

"From all of us, it's just a huge, huge thank you to all of you," Prince Harry said.

A Papworth spokesman told the BBC they were hoping to launch an Elizabeth Marks Fund to help finance the development of equipment and support patients treated at the hospital's critical care unit where the medal will go on display.

Two months after leaving the British hospital, Marks broke an American record in the SB9, a disability swimming classification, 200-meter breaststroke. Earlier this year she set a new world record in the 50-meter breaststroke in the SB7 division during the first day of the Jimi Flowers

Classic in Colorado Springs, Colorado, serving notice to the world that she will be a force at this year's Summer Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She is currently ranked No. 1 in the world in the 100-meter breaststroke.

Marks joined the Army at age 17 in July 2008 in Prescott Valley, Arizona. Her goal was to care for injured Soldiers as a combat medic, a role she carried out until she was injured.