

WCAP NCO Shatters Para-Swimming World Record

By Sachel Harris - United States Army Alaska

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Sgt. Elizabeth Marks didn't begin swimming to gain recognition. But during the weekend, she etched her name into the record books.

Marks, a combat medic and member of the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program of Fort Carson, Colorado, set a new world record Saturday in the 50-meter breaststroke in the SB7 division, a disability swimming classification, during the first day of the Jimi Flowers Classic in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Marks won the race with a time of 41.21, breaking the previous world record time of 42.07 set by American swimmer Jessica Long in 2014.



Sgt. Elizabeth Marks

"I was in with a lot of very fast girls who I compete with a lot," Marks told reporters after the race. "They aren't in my classification so I don't always get to race them and that's really enjoyable because it gives me people to pace off of."

Marks, who was recently named to the 2016 U.S. Paralympics Swimming National Team, began swimming in 2012. The water was a means of rehabilitation for the bilateral hip injuries she sustained in 2010 while deployed to Iraq. Marks underwent three surgeries to restructure her hips and regain enough mobility to walk. Swimming was not only a therapeutic endeavor but a challenge that Marks immediately fell in love with. Four months after participating in her first competition she became the first female Paralympic athlete in WCAP.

In September 2014, Marks fell ill while traveling to the Invictus Games in London. Her condition worsened and she was eventually hospitalized and placed on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, or ECMO, life support to help her breathe. She awoke from her medically induced coma crushed but unconquered. Marks immediately went back to work to reclaim her form. Two months after leaving the hospital she broke an American record in the SB9 200-meter breaststroke. Less than two years later, she has served notice to the world that she will be a force at this year's Summer Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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. Despite her altered path in the Army, Marks' continues to help and motivate Soldiers.

"I love the Army. More than the Army, I love Soldiers," Marks said in a 2015 video essay submission to the Triumph Games. "Sharing my story, passion and experience with other injured or ill Soldiers is the most precious gift that my life has been given.

"I met a female Soldier and got to share my story about overcoming injury and illness, competing against men, about the mental, physical and emotional struggle that sports has helped me through. The impact will last with me forever. She presented me with a letter and a Soldier's prayer

saying, 'I hated life. I had given up. No one believed in me. And then I met you.' Because of her words, I will never give up."