

# COMMITTED TO SERVE

Story by Nikki Brochetti  
Photos courtesy of the Smiley family and the U.S. Army

## SOLDIER LOSES SIGHT BUT NOT FAITH.

It was an overwhelming moment for Scott Smiley, a First Lieutenant Army Ranger, when he realized he would never see again.

Listening to sniffles from around the hospital room as the Purple Heart was pinned to his chest, it hit him: He was wounded; he was blind. For his friends and family, sharing the honor with him was a bittersweet moment. For him, it was just bitter.

Scott's family, friends, fellow soldiers, generals, and former classmates from West Point squeezed into the room and overflowed into the hallway. Scott's wife of three years, Tiffany, stood near his bed in silence as Scott's oldest brother Neal, an Army captain, read the citation: "The President of the United States of America has awarded the Purple Heart ...." Neal paused for several seconds, holding back tears.

"I heard my brother's voice cracking and immediately began to cry. I couldn't stop for at least an hour," Scott recalled. "I really didn't even want the medal at that point. It was humanistic pride. I didn't want people to know I was injured." Over the next year,



Before losing his sight, Scott holds a baby in Mosul, Iraq.

God would turn Scott's bitterness to joy.

Raised in CC Boise, ID, Scott had gone on his first deployment to Iraq nearly five months earlier. His faith held him and his men together overseas: "Each day I would conduct a prayer with my platoon; and after a while, if I'd forget when I got busy, they'd remind me," recalled Scott.

It was their prayers that he would soon need.

On April 6, 2005, Scott led his 43-man platoon into Mosul on a sunny, 95-degree afternoon to look for a suicide car bomber. Around 1 p.m., he saw a small car with a weighed-down back seat on the side of the road. Standing up in his armored vehicle to address the driver, Scott was protected only from the waist down. Scott asked the man to get out of the car. With wide eyes and arms raised towards the sky, the insurgent slowly began to let go of the brake, and the car inched forward.

"At that point, I shot one round in front of his vehicle. He stopped, raised his hands up again, and just stared at me. He started pulling forward again, so I shot another round and then—boom! Everything went black." A week and a half later, he woke up in Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. The blast had killed the suicide bomber and wounded Scott alone.

Tiffany Smiley remembers it all clearly. Half an hour after her husband



Capt. Scott Smiley talks with another wounded soldier about his decision to stay in the Army after losing his eyesight.

was injured, she received the dismal call from Scott's company commander. He explained that shrapnel had entered the left side of Scott's brain and both of his eyes. After examining his CAT scan, the doctors in Balad, Iraq, said Scott would not survive.

"I was shocked; I fell to my knees," she recalled. Hanging up the phone, she started praying. "I realized I needed to call people; people needed to start praying." Within a few hours, she said, people all over America and other parts of the world were praying for Scott's life. "I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep," she recalled. At 3 a.m. the next night, she said, "While I was praying and reading my Bible, the Holy Spirit just came over me and told me it was going to be all right. All of a sudden, I stood up and

told my mom, 'You know what: either he'll die and go to heaven because he loves Jesus Christ, or the Lord will use him for His glory.'" She prayed and waited for the phone to ring. Nearly five days later, she was on a plane to Walter Reed.

*I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* Romans 8:18

Scott had lost his left eye and had shrapnel in his right. Part of his left brain had been damaged, and part of his skull removed for a later procedure. She had been warned that Scott would not know her. When Tiffany walked into Scott's hospital room, she wondered if she would recognize him.

"He looked normal," she recalled. "I said, 'Hi Scotty,' and he said, 'Hi Tiff.' He knew my voice instantly. God gave me little signs like that, that He was working."

Though temporarily paralyzed and permanently blinded, Scott grew stronger each day, encouraged by loved ones and strengthened by the Lord. "Having family right there—a wife that stayed next to me and read the Bible every day, my brothers reading me Scripture—and always listening to Christian music helped me through," he said. "I mean, it took time. But I definitely know that, with Christ, I was able to [recover] so much faster."

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

Jeremiah 29:11

One general reminded Scott that God still had a plan for his life. Soon, doors began to open. Scott was granted permission to stay on active duty through the military's Wounded Warrior Program, recently established to allow seriously injured soldiers to continue serving their country. Scott explained, "I go to different Army training sites and talk to enlisted soldiers and officers, letting them know what they're going to be dealing with on deployments."

And God has given him an even greater mission, he said. While he and Tiffany



Former Olympian Sam Perkins chats with Scott before a NBA game.



Scott and Tiffany Smiley



Scott learns how to surf at Chuns Reef in Hawaii with a special program for the blind.

never solicited an invitation, people nationwide began asking Scott to share his story. He has spoken on television, to NBA and Olympic basketball players, military groups, and churches.

The athletic, respectful young man gives God the glory. "I definitely feel free to speak about Christ and the Lord, to share the testimony of what He's done for me," he said. "I'm speaking for Christ every day."

Last July—nearly a year after Mosul—Scott was promoted to captain. He and Tiffany live in Fort Monroe, VA, where they attend Calvary Chapel Newport News.

They recently shared their story with their home fellowship. "Whatever problems you face, God can heal them and be by your side and use every one of you for His glory and His purpose," he said. "You have to read His Word and stand on His Word every day and know He's going to use you."

Pastor Tony Clark of CC Newport News said, "It's awesome to hear about what the Lord has done, how far He's brought them. To hear them talk about it and see the joy that radiates from them is such a tremen-

dous blessing to us." He added that it's a strong testimony to the power of prayer.

Scott said, "I know the Lord is allowing me to be an example. I tell soldiers that my faith brought me to this peace." He added, "My wife and I can explain to others how we've been able to recover and the awesome opportunities the Lord has given us."

Scott hasn't let blindness stop him from enjoying his second chance at life. Since his injury, he has learned to surf, ski, ride a tandem bicycle, and even sky dive. And now the 26-year-old has another first on the horizon: a chance to be a father. Tiffany and Scott expect their first child in May.

Though some may wonder at his upbeat attitude, Scott keeps it all in perspective: "I just thank Jesus Christ every day that I'm alive." He finds joy in knowing that "the first thing I'm going to see is the face of Jesus Christ." ☞

CC Newport News

www.calvarynn.com  
1-757-886-5012