



My name is Derrick James Ford. I was born September 22, 1987 in Long Beach, CA to Maria Free and James Ford. I grew up and was raised in Southern California by my mother, who also raised my 3 little sisters, Natilie, Amber, and Leighanne.

I signed up to join the US Army a few days after turning 17, but since I hadn't finished high school, I was forced to wait. 3 weeks after my high school graduation on July 5th, 2005, I enlisted and swore in to become an infantryman. I took my first airplane flight from LAX to Atlanta for training at Ft Benning, Georgia. I graduated from basic and AIT October 21st, 2005 before being stationed at Ft Drum, NY with the 10th Mountain Division, 4-31st Infantry.

After months of training in the cold of upstate New York, I was deployed to Southern Iraq in August of 2006. What was supposed to be a year-long deployment turned into 15 months South of Baghdad. After a few losses, we returned in October of 2007. The night I returned from overseas is when I met my wife, Michelle, through mutual friends.

Although we were only dating, Michelle felt it necessary to move with me to Ft Lewis, WA in March 2008. I was assigned to 2nd Infantry Division, 1-17th Infantry with their recon platoon. It was a new unit, with a strong future ahead. I married my wife May 4th, 2009 shortly after finding out that Michelle was pregnant.

We deployed to Southern Afghanistan in July 2009. Just a few weeks later, on August 14th, 2009, while on a route reconnaissance mission, the stryker vehicle I was in, rolled over a pressure plate IED. I only recall dust being thrown everywhere and an incredible pain in my feet. After a quick assessment, I crawled out of the top of vehicle and attempted to pull security before eventually being put onto a litter where our medic reached me. My memory fades in and out for the few hours after the blast, before finally I'm in a plane on my way to Germany.

When in Germany, doctors tell me my feet were simply broken which I took as good news. I don't remember much about Germany other than taking some memory tests and telling my family over the phone that I was okay. I was transferred to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC where they told me that they would need to amputate my left leg. I fought with the idea, even after my twins were born on September 9th, 2009. Eventually I agreed to the amputation and on October 9th, 2009, the operation was done. My life changed forever.

I have made it my mission since I have started walking again that I would make the most of my life and do everything I can to prove to myself that I am not disabled, but only wounded. I hope this climb up Mt Rainier will be another step I take of a long line of adventures in my life.