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September 21, 2012

Anthony's Story Involves War, Learning To Walk Again and Riding with the Wind

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner-Webb University employee Mark Anthony's remarkable story involves the dark reality of war that would take him on a journey, as a soldier, where he would have to learn to walk again. Today, Anthony not only walks, but also has become a successful champion cyclist, who could be described as a master on a bicycle.

A native of Boiling Springs, N.C., Anthony serves as a member of the GWU operations and housekeeping crew. It was right after graduating from high school that he decided to enter the United States Army, where he became a loyal and dedicated soldier. Stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., and later in Germany, Anthony spent 21 years in the Army, which took him around the world 13 times with five tours in combat that included Desert Storm, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

When it comes to war, unknown risks are a possibility. In 1992 while on duty in Saudi Arabia, an unknown event would affect the life of Anthony and make it a day that would change his life. "Another soldier and I were standing in a building when it was hit by a scud missile," said Anthony. "The blast tossed us both through a wall. He was killed, while I somehow survived."

From that point, Anthony was rushed to a medical facility and eventually to a hospital where he laid in traction for 17 days and was briefly in a coma. The major part of the damage from the explosion was to his legs. Once Anthony improved enough, it was time for several operations. This consisted of two artificial knees, a steel rod in his right leg, a plate in his hip and numerous pins and screws in his legs. Anthony then had to learn to walk all over again. His hard work and dedication paid off through intense physical therapy, as he walked again eight months later. "I was blessed to be alive. The good Lord had another plan for me," said Anthony.

After this ordeal, Anthony came home to Boiling Springs for a brief time and then actually returned to the Army before retiring from service in 2005. In another part to Anthony's story, he would find out during a doctor's visit that he had high blood pressure. Since he had always enjoyed riding bikes, he decided to become serious about this form of exercise as a way to help him control his blood pressure. "It [cycling] looked like fun to me," Anthony said.

So with artificial knees, the rod, and all those screws, Anthony pushed himself and those reconstructed legs in professional cyclist style. He got a true road bike, built up his endurance, turned a few miles into dozens of miles, and soon entered events and

competitions. Anthony went across the nation in a cross-country run from the North Carolina coast to California, finished a race from the Tennessee mountains to the North Carolina coast, and participated in a 50-mile ultra-marathon at Myrtle Beach, S.C. He has captured numerous titles, with his most recent victory coming (in his age category) at Charlotte's (N.C.) popular "24 Hours of Booty" race. By the way, Anthony was once clocked going as fast as 55 mph on his bike.

Anthony's journey is a true testament to the benefits of perseverance. As he reflected on his experiences and how they led to his current accomplishments, he keeps it pretty simple: "I had faith. I didn't give up."