

### Private Jaco Van Gass

Private Van Gass was serving in The Parachute Regiment in Afghanistan in 2009 when he was directly hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. The bone in his left arm triggered the warhead. It blew off the arm, a third of his thigh and caused various other shrapnel wounds, but his reaction in turning his side on to the missile saved his life. It took him a while to adjust to the realities of life with his injuries.

"I wanted to do the Arctic Expedition because I wanted to know what I was capable of doing, mentally and physically. Just because you've lost an arm, or whatever other injuries you might have, it doesn't put you out of the equation of doing absolutely anything you want. It's been a lifelong dream and I couldn't think of a bigger challenge than going to the North Pole with the various injuries I have.

"It can be really hard to actually make peace with your injuries. Although I began the process of my recovery very quickly, a lot of the boys who have been injured might struggle with it. That's also one of the main reasons that I volunteered to do this North Pole expedition – to raise the profile of the wounded, so others can see what we've done. But a challenge doesn't have to be something as massive or as great as going to the North Pole. It might be something very common or very easy that you're really struggling with, or you find yourself unable to do any more. We want to inspire them – to get on their legs, or walk to the shop, or whatever the next step is in their recovery phase."



PHOTO BY BRYAN ADAMS

### Corporal Simon Brown

On his second tour of Iraq in December 2006 Corporal Simon Brown was shot through the head by insurgents. As he got into his vehicle, a bullet hit his left cheek, went through his nose and came out of his right cheek. He held his palate up with his thumb to breathe and tried to bandage his own face. When he was told the extent of his injuries by doctors at Selly Oak - blind in his left eye, with 20 percent sight in the right, and needing massive facial reconstructive surgery – he began to have suicidal thoughts, and considered taking an overdose. But news of friends who had died started to turn him around, and he started to look at how he might live in the future. As of May 2013 Corporal Brown had had 14 operations with more to come.

There were many huge steps: making a cup of tea himself, going for a few pints with old rugby teammates, moving into accommodation on his own, getting a cat to take care of, gaining a college qualification and volunteering to work with disadvantaged children.

"Then this opportunity came along with the organization that I work for now, Blind Veterans UK. They wanted me to go and speak to people to try and convince them that it was a good idea to get some rehab off my organization. I found I was quite good at that, as I've rebuilt my life in under six years. And if I can do it, anyone can do it.

"I feel that every time I get up and go to work, I am doing something good again with my life. It's a funny thing because I lost my career in the Army and I thought everything was over. But I look back at the last six and a half years and I think I'm probably a better person now than I was before I got injured, because of the opportunities I've had, the things I've done, the people I've helped and what I'm actually doing with my life now."



PHOTO BY BRYAN ADAMS

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### Sergeant Rick Clement

In 2010, On his first tour in Afghanistan Rick lost both legs in an IED explosion, one up to the hip, the other amputated high up. Clement, now 30, needed massive reconstructive surgery to his arm, genitals and intestines.

"At Headley Court, things changed massively. My goals all related to independence, learning how to drive again and cook. I probably do more now than any of my mates who aren't in wheelchairs. I've just got a hand cycle so I'm going to start training on that. Day-to-day I've adapted well. I clean my house, I've got three dogs

to look after, I cook, I can chuck the wheelchair in the car myself. I've started my own charity, to give back to charities that helped me out."

"Now that my health is back, the most important thing is to sort out my sexual function. My genitals are still being reconstructed, and I was originally told I definitely couldn't have kids. But developments have happened recently, and the doctors think maybe there's a chance I could have them. It's not that important to me right now, but in the future it could become the most important thing in the world."