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# New program gives wounded Afghan vets a leg up

BY MARIANNE WHITE, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE    OCTOBER 16, 2009    [BE THE FIRST TO POST A COMMENT](#)

STORY

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Sgt. Etienne Aube speaks to the media in Quebec October 15, 2009.

Photograph by: Global TV, Canwest News Service

QUEBEC -- When Sgt. Etienne Aube stepped on a landmine while patrolling outside Kandahar last July 17, he knew he had lost part of his right leg.

"I was conscious after the explosion and quickly assessed the extent of my injuries," said the 28-year old Quebec soldier, whose leg had to be amputated above the knee.

"At first it was hard to accept, but then it sunk in that I was lucky to be alive because it was a close call. And that's really the greatest joy you can have," said the father of two young children.

Aube, who is getting ready to receive a new prosthetic leg, is training every day with physical therapists in the hope of getting back in uniform.

About 150 soldiers across the country have been seriously injured since the beginning of the Afghan mission in 2002. Aube is one of a handful of soldiers who benefited from a military rehabilitation program launched in September 2008.

The program is offered in seven one-stop centres in Esquimalt, B.C., Edmonton, Shilo-Winnipeg, Man., Petawawa, Ont., Valcartier, Que., Gaagetown, N.B., and Halifax.

Lt.-Col. Markus Besemann, chief of rehabilitation for the Canadian Forces Health Services, said the program was launched to prevent soldiers from feeling alienated from the military during their long road to recovery.

"When soldiers are nursed in a civilian environment, the standards, discipline and culture of the military tend to fall apart," he said.

"The feeling that their unit, their commander is still by their side is very important for the

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wounded soldiers. We need to tell them that they are good soldiers and that they didn't let anyone down. If anything they deserve all the honour and pride."

Aube said the program meant a lot to him. Hearing every day from his unit and the colleagues he left behind in Afghanistan gave him the will to fight back, he said.

"My buddies are my motivation. I want to get back in shape to be able to go back to my old job," he said. He didn't rule out going back to Afghanistan if his condition permits, but surely not in combat zone.

In Quebec City, the military collaborates with a local re-education centre for physically handicapped people. Civilian and military health-care specialists work together to help soldiers. The facility also creates custom-made prosthesis.

Physiotherapist Andree Tremblay said soldiers are the most motivated patients she has ever seen.

"I think it has to do with their peer-support network. This is an essential ingredient to a successful rehab," she said.

The most common severe injuries for soldiers are multiple fractures, head traumas and amputations.

Besemann noted that although the military encourages soldiers to remain members of the Forces despite their injuries a very small number of them can actually return to their former positions.

"We would love for all of them to remain in uniform but there are rules and regulations that make it such they have to meet certain standards," he said.

According to U.S. statistics, only three per cent of amputees go back to active duty while another 12 per cent have remained in uniforms but were not deployed again.

Sgt. Patrick Bedard, who suffered multiple fractures last April in Afghanistan, is not letting statistics get to him.

"I am more positive than I have ever been. I just started moving my toes a few days ago and today I've made my first steps. I know I'll walk again soon," he said.

The 36-year-old said he's determined to get back to his old job, one step at a time.

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