



National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic

Faoa “AP” Apineru – Seeking the Positive

Originally, from American Samoa, 31-year-old Faoa “AP” Apineru joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1996 because it had been his father’s wish. Upon arriving in California, he sought out a military recruiter, signed up and was eventually stationed at Camp Pendleton. Despite having limited knowledge of the English language, Apineru excelled at the infantry training program in which he was enrolled. From Camp Pendleton, Apineru went on to study at the communication school at 29 Palms as a field radio operator.

During his tour of duty, Apineru was stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Okinawa and Quantico. In 2000, while stationed at Quantico, he became a training officer in the communication field as well as a marshal arts expert earning a black belt in karate. In 2004, he was promoted to staff sergeant and was anxious to go to Iraq.

Eventually, Apineru joined with the 310 Artillery Unit and was stationed at Camp Korean Village. There, he worked as a communication chief for both the cities of Al-Walid and Trebil. On May 15, 2005 as he and his fellow soldiers were clearing a road for a supply delivery, an improvised explosive device exploded three feet away from his driver. “I felt like I had been electrocuted,” said Apineru. “It all happened so fast. I felt an enormous pain in my head and everything went blank. I just closed my eyes and prayed because I didn’t want to die.”

Apineru was flown to Bagdad and eventually arrived at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. After eight days of being unconscious, he finally regained consciousness. “When I woke up, I had no idea where I was and the only people I recognized were the uniformed soldiers. I didn’t even recognize my own family.” Apineru was diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury and was forced to learn how to eat and how to talk again. In June 2005, he was sent to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility in Palo Alto, where he continued therapy in the rehabilitation center.

While there, Apineru met fellow Marine Corps veteran Jason Poole. Through Poole, Apineru learned about the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, an annual rehabilitation event for military veterans co-sponsored by the VA and the Disabled American Veterans each year in Colorado. “Jason had been to the Clinic and he just kept on encouraging me to go,” Apineru said. “I think it’s important to share something positive and social with other veterans.” In April, Apineru will join Poole and more than 350 other veterans they tackle the slopes of the Rocky Mountains. “I’ve never snowboarded before but it’s going to be fun,” he said. “Hearing stories from the other patients really makes a difference.”

Although Apineru has never attended the Clinic before, he already knows some of the important reasons that bring so many veterans back to the event each year. “The reason the Clinic is important starts with the camaraderie. Events like this boost morale and give us an idea that there truly are people out there who care for us.”

Miracles on a Mountainside!



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