

# Wounded warrior makes history as first-ever amputee to complete Army warrant officer school

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By C. Todd Lopez



Photo credit Carlton Wallace

Warrant Officer Johnathan Holsey, the first Army amputee to attend warrant officer school, has his new rank pinned by his sons at his graduation ceremony. Holsey, an Army human resources technician, made Army history as the first Army amputee to attend Warrant Officer School and to pin on warrant officer bars. He was injured in Iraq in 2004 by an improvised explosive device, and had his left leg amputated below the knee.

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, June 11, 2009) -- Since sustaining an injury in Iraq nearly five years ago, a lot has changed for then Staff Sgt. Johnathan W. Holsey. He lost his left leg below the knee and got a prosthetic, he's gone snowboarding for the first time, run a marathon, and he's made Army history as the first Army amputee to pin on warrant officer bars.

Now Warrant Officer Holsey, a human resources technician, said upon entering the Warrant Officer School at Fort Rucker, Ala., that he tried not to think about the historical significance of being the first amputee to go to through the school and to focus instead on the training.

"I just went into it as any other candidate going through school," he said. "But I was pretty excited, and going through the program I was kind of nervous."

*Holley was injured in Iraq in November 2004 while deployed with the 1-503 Infantry Regiment, part of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team. During a convoy, an improvised explosive device injured him and other vehicle occupants. Holsey lost his left leg below the knee and spent a year and a half at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.*

*After leaving Walter Reed and later attending the Basic Noncommissioned Officer Course, Holsey and a friend decided together to try to become warrant officers.*

*"We did it together, as a team and hoped we'd get picked up together," he said. Although his friend wasn't selected to attend Warrant Officer school, Holsey said she remained supportive of him throughout. "She always encourages me to this day to look forward, and she said she will try again."*

*Going through Warrant Officer School with a prosthetic proved a challenge for Holsey, but he said the school made almost no accommodations for him -- no changes to the curriculum, for instance -- and required him to go through the same difficult training as the others attending -- something Holsey said he appreciated.*

*"They made no exceptions -- my profile was like everybody else's profile. I had to do physical training with my classmates," he said, though he said he walked during the PT instead of ran. "Other than that, they made no exceptions and they treated me like everybody else. And that's one of the best things about it -- even though I'm an injured Soldier, I'm still a Soldier -- that was the most important about the whole situation. Even though we're injured, we are Soldiers."*

*But while the school didn't lighten the load to help him make it through, other Soldiers lent a hand where they thought it would help -- something he said he also appreciated. During the first week of classes at the school, as the students were running, one Soldier offered assistance Holsey said he was initially reluctant to take.*

*"I had my running leg on and I had my prosthetic in my hand and a Soldier came up behind me and tapped me on the back saying I can carry that for you," Holsey said, saying he initially declined. But later, as they were going towards a hill, the Soldier offered again. "Anytime we ran from one place to another, they would carry my prosthetic for me. They told me first week, if you need help, don't hesitate to ask. Stuff like that is empowering."*

*Holley's presence at the school, and the knowledge ahead of time that he, as an amputee, would be attending, was not unknown amongst Soldiers who were eligible to apply for the warrant officer rank. Holsey said he met two such people in school with him who told him they were inspired by his story. One Soldier even told him she had put in her package for the school after having read his story.*

*"Somebody I've never seen," he said. She told him "if you can do it I can do it." He also learned the girlfriend of another Soldier had clipped an article about him and given it to him, "He said he took that article to work and that was inspiration to him to get off the couch, start running and going to the gym. He actually completed warrant officer school with me."*

*With a Warrant Officer One bar on his Army Combat Uniform, Holsey said he's ready to head off to his next assignment as part of the Criminal Investigation Command at Fort Gillam, Ga., and to fulfill his obligations as an officer. He said he hopes that as an amputee and as a warrant officer, he can inspire other Soldiers. He also hopes he continues to be seen as an active, contributing part of the Army -- not just a symbol of the war or of the Army's commitment to Soldiers.*

*"We don't want to just sit behind a desk," he says, speaking for all amputees. "We don't want you to just give us jobs where we're just here, to be a symbol of the war. We still want to get out there. We still want to fight. We still want to be a part of the Army."*

*And the privileges of what he earned are also not lost on Holsey -- something he recognized when he received his first salute as a newly minted warrant officer.*

*"I went to work Monday and it was the first time I was actually saluted," he said. "He stood up and saluted me. At that point it was real this was happening -- it's a good feeling, and it comes with a lot of responsibilities. I'm here to serve a purpose and to inspire others too. One of the things they taught us in school: it's entirely different being an officer. There's a lot of things that'll be new to me, but I'll figure those things out as it goes."*