



Sun Valley Adaptive Sports

We change lives and make people smile!

HEALING WOUNDED SOLDIERS

SUN VALLEY'S COMMITMENT THEN AND NOW

Veterans Day Editorial: Wood River Journal

by Tom Iselin, executive director, Sun Valley Adaptive Sports

November 7, 2007

Rocket-propelled grenades travel at the speed of three football fields per second. Some have the explosive equivalent of five sticks of dynamite. Sergeant Major Anthony Smith was hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. It lodged in his hip. Then it exploded.

The blast blew off his arm and shattered his femur. Shrapnel ripped open his abdomen like a filet knife gutting a trout, slicing his kidney and mincing his intestines. The heat from the explosion burned his retinas and melted his dog tags to his chest.

Smith somehow managed to stand. Insurgents then shot him. Then they shot again, and again, and then a fourth time. Smith toppled to the ground, his blood oozing into warm desert sand.

By some miracle, Smith survived. But after a new prosthetic arm and dozens of surgeries, the sergeant major found himself in another battle—not for his life, but how to “live!”

In July 1943, during World War II, the Sun Valley Resort closed its doors to tourists and reopened as a commissioned Naval convalescent hospital. In its two and a half years of operation, the hospital treated more than 7,000 military personnel who served on the battlefields of places like Okinawa and Iwo Jima.

At peak occupancy, the Lodge housed 1,603 patients with 1,300 beds and bunks. Physicians treated physical wounds and therapists helped the Anthony Smiths of the war learn life skills by providing occupational therapy and vocational training.

Unique to military hospitals at the time, the Sun Valley hospital also integrated sports and recreational activities as part of its rehabilitation treatment.

Patients had opportunities to ski, swim, bike, and ice skate. There were clinics on how to play tennis, golf, basketball, baseball, football, and volleyball. Game enthusiasts were given the chance to hunt deer, shoot ducks, fly-fish, and practice archery.

Leisure activities included shuffleboard, hayrides, picnics, hiking, ceramics, and woodworking. And to keep the patients in good spirits, Hollywood legends such as Gary Cooper, Clark Gable, and Bing Crosby came to entertain.



Since September 11, 2001, 3,872 service members have died in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 28,000 have been wounded, 650 of which are amputees. Thousands more suffer from traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, severe burns, and blindness.

Sun Valley Adaptive Sports, in collaboration with the Sun Valley Resort and a supportive community, remain committed to the tradition of providing sports and recreational activities as a means of holistic healing and therapy to the recovering wounded.

Winter snowsports camps bring service members to Sun Valley to learn how to ski, snowboard, snowshoe, Nordic ski, and play sled-hockey. Summer adventure camps teach service members kayaking, rock climbing, waterskiing, hiking, horseback riding, and fly-fishing.

Anthony Smith attended one of these adventure camps in the summer of 2006. It changed his life. He learned—and relearned—many physical skills. He renewed his self-confidence.

But the camp provided much more. It inspired Smith to be a better husband. It encouraged him to perform better at work. It motivated him to help others with disabilities. And it energized his spirit to live again!

We have a moral obligation to help the Anthony Smiths. Imagine your son with paralysis, your grandson with no legs, or your daughter with burns to her face. Thousands of family members across America face these striking realities every day.

In the spirit of Sun Valley service and philanthropy, I implore you to do what you can to carry on the legacy of rehabilitation, healing, and therapy for the dozens of Anthony Smiths who visit Sun Valley each year.

We owe them a chance to “live” again, not just to have a life. We owe them a chance to stand up in America—without fear of being shot down.

Let us also remember to thank our local Legionnaires this Veterans Day. They honorably served our country and graciously volunteer their time to help visiting service members.

To learn how you can help, email Sun Valley Adaptive Sports at: info@svasp.org, or call 726-9298.

See photos of Anthony Smith below.

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