



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

Date: January 17, 2008

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Guardsman injured in Iraq getting back to duty through Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital's mild and traumatic brain injury program

Lincoln, NE – Jeromy Dillman prides himself on his eagle-eye vision. The specialist with the U.S. Army National Guard spotted the roadside bomb from atop his gunner's perch in the lead scout vehicle of a convoy near Balad, Iraq, on Feb. 21, 2007. He yelled to alert his crew and they swerved to dodge the bomb, but it hit the wheels on the driver's side and detonated. Shrapnel tore through his left leg and pelvis. He suffered a closed-head blast injury that resulted in a major concussion and a traumatic brain injury (TBI).



Specialist Jeromy Dillman goes over his daily schedule with Gail Finsand, Madonna speech language pathologist. *(photo 1)*

Dillman was stabilized at a Balad hospital, lifeflighted to Germany and sent to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., where he spent the next three months. "I didn't have a rosy prognosis when I was admitted," Dillman shared. "The doctors said I'd probably never move my foot again, or at best, rely on a cane."

Nebraska State Adjutant General Roger Lempke, along with Senators Ben Nelson and Chuck Hagel, were instrumental in cutting through government red tape and getting Dillman transferred to Madonna for rehabilitation. "I've been very fortunate to have concerned politicians and military personnel supporting my cause," Dillman stated.

Gen. Lempke initially told Dillman about Madonna's rehabilitation program. He explained that Dillman qualified for the Community-Based Health Care Initiative Program, which helps soldiers transition back into civilian life. They are referred to a hospital within 50 miles of their home station, which in Dillman's case, was Lincoln, Neb. The reservists complete light duty at their home station between medical appointments. This gives the soldiers time with their families and the stable order of a familiar military environment.

"I've seen soldiers with TBIs who didn't get treatment for up to a year post-injury, which compromises your recovery. I'm so thankful not to be in that category," Dillman emphasized. He was admitted as part of Madonna's outpatient rehabilitation program in June 2007.

One of his primary goals was to get movement back in his left leg and foot, despite the grim diagnosis he'd previously received. Another scan on his foot held more positive results and his therapists set up a program to address movement issues. Working aggressively in therapy sessions five times a week, Dillman can now walk unassisted.

Dillman also worked hard in rebuilding both his speech and vision. "When I began therapy, it was an effort to even hold a conversation. Karen (Kenyon) and Gail (Finsand) taught me strategies to reduce the excess dialogue going on in my head," Dillman said. He noted that in the past few months, his speech has become more focused and he's less apt to head off on a tangent. "Jeromy is making great strides in organization, planning, and time management. He is strongly motivated and is working hard to balance personal, community and work responsibilities," said Gail Finsand, speech language pathologist, CCC.



Specialist Dillman works the Dynavision 2000, a computerized board used in therapy to improve peripheral vision, reaction time and arm coordination.
(photo 2)

Dillman's vision concerns were addressed by his therapy team with exercises using prisms and the Dynavision 2000. Dillman proudly pointed to a patch on his military uniform that identifies him as a Squad Designated Marksman. "You can't obtain that level without precise accuracy," Dillman explained. His vision has dramatically improved during his rehabilitation. Dillman plans to return to Army marksmanship school in Little Rock, Ark., and eventually become an instructor.

Madonna ProActive, a medically based health and fitness center, was a catalyst in Dillman's recovery. Soldiers injured in the line of duty and completing therapy at Madonna are eligible to continue independent rehabilitation at ProActive. Dillman was the first soldier to elect this option. Amber Herrington, outpatient therapist, outlined a regimen of exercises and accompanied Dillman on his initial visit. "ProActive is a beautiful facility and working out in that environment was so beneficial for me," Dillman said.

Nearing the end of his program at Madonna, Dillman's therapy sessions have been pared down to twice a week. He's working part-time at his military unit in Lincoln and his children Hope, 11, and Nathaniel, 8, are happy their father is back spending time with them. Dillman has set up long term goals to finish his bachelor's degree, possibly teach junior high history one day, and finally, to achieve running two miles in 15 minutes.

Dillman frequently shares his positive experience at Madonna with other injured soldiers. "At every opportunity, I try to get the word out about the wonderful program here at Madonna," he said.

This year, Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital celebrates 50 years of providing hope and healing to thousands of people whose lives had been interrupted by traumatic events or illness. Madonna's approach to rehabilitation is much more than just therapy, it's rebuilding lives and families; and putting hopes and dreams back together. Through highly specialized programs and services, Madonna offers individualized rehabilitation treatment to help every patient heal in mind, body and spirit – and ultimately live life to the fullest. Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital is located at 5401 South Street in Lincoln, Nebraska, 68506; 402-489-7102; www.Madonna.org