

Administrator note: I respect and salute this lady. God Bless America.

‘Mama’ ready to deploy like her children

By Sgt. Eliamar Trapp



Pfc. Cindra Smith of C Company clears her weapon before entering the barracks after physical training. She joined the Army to become an EOD specialist after her daughter was injured in Iraq during an IED attack.

Sgt. Eliamar Trapp

REDSTONE ARSENAL, Ala. (Army News Service, July 10, 2006) – Having volunteered with the Red Cross, Cindra Smith knew there was something wrong when she arrived home from work late one night and had a Red Cross message on her machine.

“When I called them back I was told to wait by the phone and expect a call,” she said. “When I got the phone call they said my daughter had been shot in the back during an IED attack in Iraq.”

Pvt. Tracy Branton, Smith’s oldest daughter, was a heavy wheel mechanic on a convoy in Iraq when it was hit by IEDs. When Branton and her fellow Soldiers got out of the vehicles to inspect the area, she was shot in the back. Now 21, Branton is 70 percent disabled and has a slight paralysis because of the injuries caused by the shooting.

“I remember being angry,” Smith said. “As parents, we always try and look for someone to blame. But knowing that she was doing something she believed in and wanted to do helped me get over that.”

After Branton was injured, Smith’s 20-year-old son, James Pritchard, decided to join the Army to become an infantryman. He attended basic and advanced individual training at Fort Benning, Ga., and is serving in Iraq with the 1st Infantry Division.

When the Army raised its acceptance age from 35 to 40 and then to 42, Smith made a life-changing move. Two weeks away from her 40th birthday, she is now known as Pfc. Cindra Smith, a Soldier in C Company, 832nd Ordnance Battalion, 59th Ordnance Brigade, where she is attending AIT to become an explosive ordnance disposal specialist.

“If I can save another parent from getting the same phone call I did, then I would have done everything I came in to do,” Smith said.

Smith said joining the Army has given her a better understanding of what her children have been through. Her journey through initial entry training, however, was harder than it is for most. While attempting to rappel off Victory Tower, a 65-foot obstacle, Smith fell and fractured her hip in five places.

“I only missed one training event after I fell,” she said. “I completed all the road marches and ran with my company for PT. I might not have been the first one in, but I finished all the company runs.”

But the biggest obstacle Smith faced was an emotional one – after fighting cancer for more than two years, Smith’s mother died.

“I had been taking care of my mother for more than two years before I came into the Army,” Smith said. “When the time came for me to join, my mother and I had a long conversation and she supported my decision. We made the agreement that I would not be called if she passed away while I was in basic so my training would not be interrupted.”

Smith learned about her mother’s death during a call home a week and a half afterward.

“You aren’t guaranteed anything in life,” she said. “So if you have the opportunity to do something you like and believe in it, then go for it.”

As the oldest Soldier at C Co., Smith has received the nickname “Mama” from her fellow Soldiers. Smith said she doesn’t mind after having been called “Grandma” at basic training.

“She is a mother to everyone around here,” said Pfc. Kim Schoonover, C Co. “She gives us advice when we need it and she scolds us when we’re doing something wrong. If we’re messing around in formation she’ll tell us to straighten out, and everyone listens to her because she’s older and because we know she’s right.”

Smith’s determination to succeed in the military in the midst of all that has happened in her life and the lives of her children has drawn respect and inspiration from many who have met her. She has also motivated many of the Soldiers in her company to volunteer with the Habitat for Humanities organization in Huntsville.

“We are fighting a war overseas to help the oppressed so why not do the same outside our gates?” Smith said. “If I can help others then my life will be complete. I’ve always been the Girl Scout and the Brownie troop leader – I’ll do anything to enhance the lives of others. It’s why we’re here.”

“I am as proud of her as I have been of any of my other Soldiers over the course of two years,” Staff Sgt. Lee M. Hallman, Smith’s drill sergeant, said. “She had firsthand knowledge of what she was getting into and she chose to come in anyhow. She is a highly motivated Soldier and she sets a great example for all of our Soldiers.”

As far as Smith is concerned, her story isn’t a big deal and the prospect of deploying only further motivates her to succeed.

“I’m looking forward to (deploying),” Smith said. “I believe it will give me a better understanding of what my children have experienced. Also, there are so many new IEDs being found out there everyday. I commend those Soldiers who have been putting their lives on the line each day for our country. It would be an honor for me to dismantle IEDs with them. I could be saving the life of someone’s father, daughter or mother.”

With the support of her husband, a retired firefighter, and her three children, Smith hopes to complete phase one of EOD training in August, then PCS to Eglin Air Force Base to complete phase two of her training and graduate as an EOD specialist.

(Editor’s note: Sgt. Eliamar Trapp writes for the Redstone Rocket at Redstone Arsenal, Ala.)

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