



## OPTIMISM: A WAR HERO REBUILDS HIS LIFE

James Ford III, Class of 2014

There aren't many (if any) St. Mary's students with two Purple Hearts. But James Ford III is special, and not just because he's a war hero. More so, he's a shining example of what can be overcome with perseverance and optimism. He's been places and seen things one can hardly imagine, but he doesn't lament his military experience.

"I don't have any regrets," he says. "The military was a profound experience. It makes me and other people thankful for what we have."

Shortly after Sept. 11, 2001, Ford, then a teenager, felt the patriotic tug to enlist in the Army. Several deployments followed, the second of which was to Iraq, where he was shot twice during gunfire following a suicide-bombing incident. During Ford's third deployment—this time to Afghanistan—a roadside improvised explosive device (IED) went off, completely shattering his right leg, which had to be amputated.

Facing a formidable leg injury and battling a traumatic brain injury, and with memories of experiences no one should go through, one might think Ford would be discouraged about his future. But nothing could be further from the truth for this 26 year old.

After Afghanistan, Ford rehabbed at San Antonio's Brooke Army Medical Center, but it was a rough road. When he enlisted, Ford says he learned a great deal at the Army's Sapper School—think Army Ranger training, except more prestigious—but due to his injury,

he lost a lot of that knowledge. "It felt like it completely went away," he says.

Ford began going to the Fort Sam Houston Education Center where instructors helped him in relearning many skills, such as basic algebra and reading concepts. In the process, he was able to "rehabilitate his brain back to a more functional level," enough so that he could land a job.

It didn't take long for Ford to start thinking about college, and St. Mary's seemed like a good match. "It's a small community, and the personal time and attention we students get from our teachers means a lot," he says. According to Ford, his professors go out of their way for him, allowing him to take tests in quieter environments such as the library, or even to take a verbal exam instead of a written one.

Now retired from the Army, Ford traverses the campus easily on his prosthetic leg as he pursues a forensic science degree. He might add a minor in international relations, which he sees as a good combination to satisfy his goal of working for the FBI.

Ford said he is glad that he served in the military before pursuing higher education, noting that he wasn't ready after high school. "[The military] gave me the basic life essentials—the understanding of life. It helped me grow."

— by Becky Jacobs,  
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