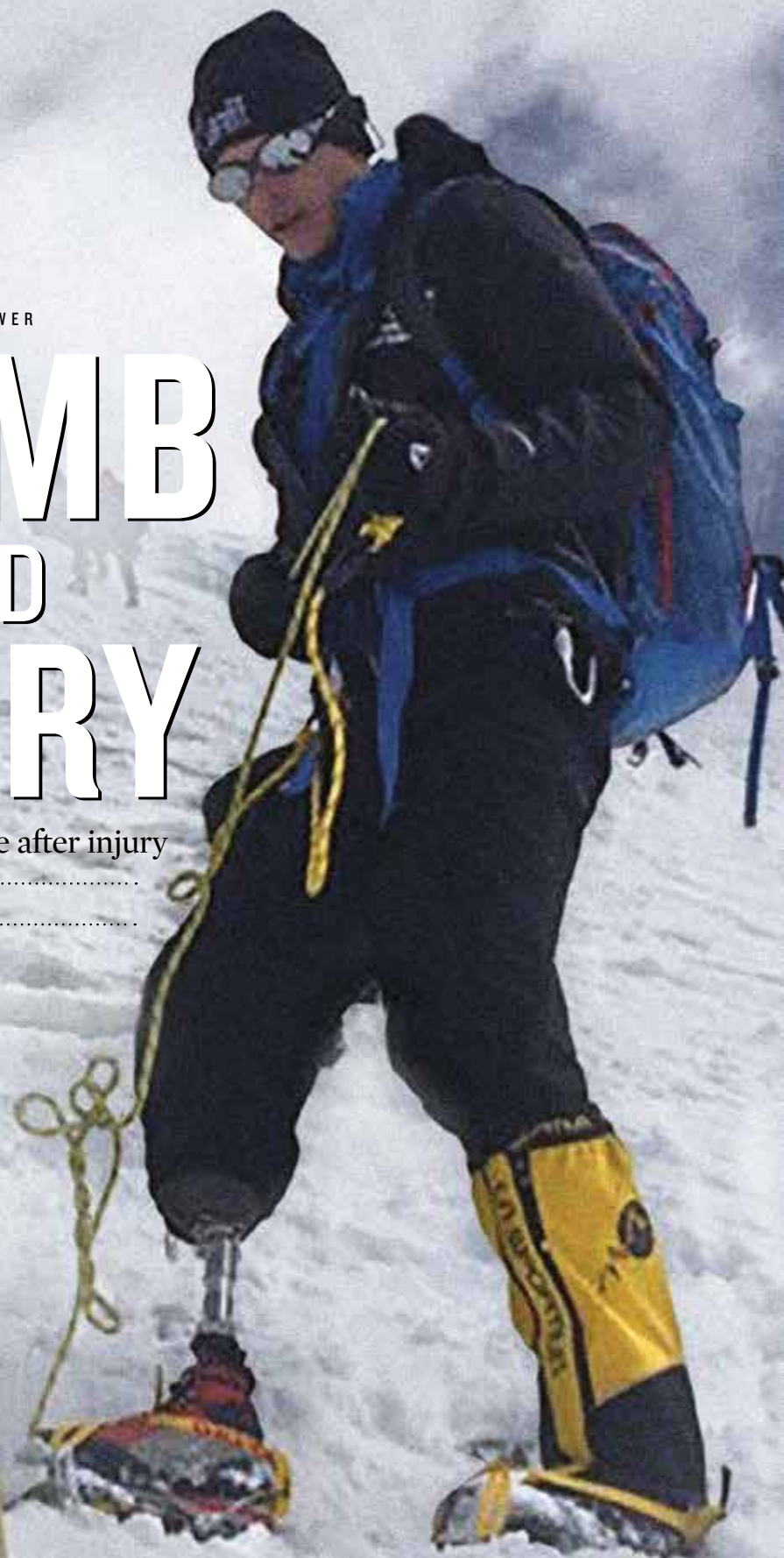


GOD'S TRANSFORMING POWER

# A CLIMB TOWARD VICTORY

Wounded veteran finds new life after injury

by **Richard Greene**



**H**is right leg throbbing and his head pounding, Charlie Linville scanned the horizon from atop Planet Earth.

What a wonderful world God has created, he thought, as he looked out across the rugged ridges of the majestic Himalayan mountains, situated on the border of Nepal and Tibet.

The winds were howling at 60 miles per hour and the wind-chill was hovering at -30 degrees. But this 30-year-old retired Marine staff sergeant had just accomplished what had seemed like an insurmountable feat. He had become the first wounded combat veteran to scale Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain.

Unable to remove their goggles or gloves for fear of frostbite, Charlie and climbing mate Tim Medvetz, founder of The Heroes Project, let the moment wash over them.

They had tried to ascend the 29,029-foot Everest in 2014 from the south side. But when a powerful avalanche rushed down the slope and killed 16 Nepalese guides, the mountain was shut down and they had to put their dream on hold. The two attempted the climb again in 2015—this time on the north side—but they were thwarted once more when a 7.8-magnitude earthquake rocked Nepal and killed nearly 9,000 people. The earthquake also triggered an avalanche on the south side that claimed the lives of 19 climbers and Sherpas at Everest Base Camp. Out of deference for those who had died, Charlie and Tim cut short their mission in order to join Team Rubicon, a veteran's organization, to help distribute relief supplies to disaster survivors in Nepal.

So here they were, finally, this past May 19, fulfilling their longtime aspiration. Television producer Ed Wardle and professional mountain cameraman Kazuya Hiraide joined them on the historic venture.

What a blessed moment for Charlie. Only five years before, he lay in a hospital bed after suffering a severe injury while on duty with a bomb-disposal unit in Afghanistan. A buried explosive device had detonated when Charlie stepped on it, catapulting him 15 feet into the air. He suffered a traumatic brain injury, amputated index and ring fingers on his right hand and a mangled right foot. Fourteen surgeries over an 18-month period—characterized by constant pain and painkillers—couldn't save the foot, so he had his



With God's help, wounded veteran Charlie Linville overcame physical and spiritual hurdles.

leg amputated just below the knee in 2012. He was medically retired in September 2013.

Charlie had met Tim before his surgery and instantly connected with him. The Heroes Project enables wounded combat victims to scale the highest mountains on each of the earth's seven continents. After intense training over a three-year period, Charlie would become the first such

veteran to conquer Everest.

While soaking in his victory at the summit, Charlie reflected: *What a fantastic feeling to be at the top. I'm thankful I was able to push this war-torn body of mine to its max and be successful in the ambitious goal that I had set for myself.*

Charlie had wanted to call his wife, Mandi, and “re-propose” to her, but the adverse weather conditions prevented him. He could barely hear himself think, let alone try to conduct a satellite phone conversation with Mandi, who was back home in Boise, Idaho, with daughters Taylor, 8, and Dyllan, 5.

High school sweethearts, Charlie and Mandi were married Aug. 26, 2006, in San Diego soon after Charlie enlisted as an infantryman in the U.S. Marine Corps. But grueling deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan—sandwiching long, stateside explosives training while Mandi took care of the girls in Okinawa, Japan—cast a dark shadow on their marriage. Then came the injury, which forced Mandi to transition from wife to caretaker, sapping her strength and patience. Charlie was also having a tough time. He wrestled with the “demons created from war,” and even contemplated suicide.

“Charlie had sacrificed so much for his country and for our family,” Mandi told *Decision*. “I, too, had sacrificed so much taking care of him and our girls.”

She further explained: “People would tell us, ‘Oh, you guys are so perfect.’ But privately, things were chaotic all the time and so confusing, so hard. Honestly, we were at each other's throats. We were doing inexcusable things to each other that married couples shouldn't be doing. It was a nightmare.”

Both thought of ending their marriage until a friend and fellow wounded veteran told them about a ministry of Samaritan's Purse called Operation Heal Our Patriots. With >>





**CELEBRATING NEW LIFE:** Charlie and Mandi Linville wade into Lake Clark to be baptized.

» scenic Alaska as its backdrop, OHOP gives wounded veterans and their spouses a weeklong opportunity for spiritual refreshment, physical renewal and marriage enrichment.

Charlie and Mandi had been exposed to the Christian faith while growing up, but they knew little about the Bible and were not following Jesus Christ. They came to Alaska broken and desperate. Along with nine other couples, the Linvilles attended in June 2015.

As Charlie and Mandi sat in on marriage workshops, meeting together and individually with chaplains Dan and Linda Stephens, they heard the Good News of Jesus Christ: “That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, NKJV). Early that week, both prayed to receive Christ as Savior and were baptized in the chilly waters of Lake Clark.

“I’m really thankful to God that my wife and I were able to find Him,

first and foremost,” Charlie said. “I’m grateful that God was working in our lives before we even got there.”

And now their hearts are healing, as is their home.

Someone from OHOP’s Aftercare Program contacts Charlie and Mandi regularly and prays with them to strengthen their relationship with the

Lord and with each other. They’re learning to apply to their marriage and to their family verses such as Colossians 3:13: “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:13, NIV).

So Charlie wanted to propose to Mandi again from atop Everest. But after only about 20 minutes of celebration, Charlie and his three

climbing mates had to retrace their steps to return safely.

“Some people exhaust all their energy to get to the top,” Charlie said soon after his return. “But the top is only halfway. The goal is not only to reach the summit. Your mission is to get back down alive.”

And after being up on the mountain April 17 through May 23, indeed he did!


Now home, Charlie has had time to contemplate his unique achievement. He looks at it from two perspectives. First, he agrees with Mandi’s take: “I believe because Charlie accepted Jesus into his heart and asked Him to work in his life, that truly made the difference in the third attempt at Everest. Now he had God on his side. Charlie welcomed Him in and asked Him to provide and to protect, and He did.”

Second, Charlie trusts his venture will encourage other wounded veterans that there’s life after injury. “I’m hoping to spread the message to this ‘adapted community,’ who may be struggling with whatever issues, that they can get off the couch and get out of the house and no longer live imprisoned,” he explained.

So what’s next? Since his daughters are out of school and Mandi is

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off from her responsibilities as a K-5 special education teacher, Charlie looks forward to spending the summer bonding as a family.

“And I’m looking for a steady job now, going back into a normal life per se,” he said. “I have to figure out how to be normal.”  ©2016 BGEA

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