



## *A Wounded Veteran Receives LSRM Scholarship*

by Carol Carpenter

Sergeant Chris Gschwendtner is actually the second recipient of the Able Flight Career Training Scholarship. On November 4, 2011, Chris completed his training at Rainbow Aviation in California for certification as a light-sport repairman with a maintenance rating and was offered a full time position just two days later.

The Able Flight Career Training Scholarships are one of four types of scholarships available for those with a physical disability that significantly impairs function. The organization is incorporated as a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization and was created by pilots who believe that it is a life-changing experience to offer people with disabilities a unique way to challenge themselves and

to gain greater self-confidence and self-reliance. And that goal has certainly been realized for Chris.

The following excerpt from Chris' bio on Able Flight's website provides his background story:

*Sergeant Chris Gschwendtner felt fortunate that he had suffered "only a concussion" after an explosion destroyed his vehicle on the infamous "IED Alley," the highway from Baghdad to the city's international airport. It was Valentine's Day of 2008, and the young infantry man had escaped with body and spirit intact. But, not for long.*

*Less than five weeks later, Chris was in the shower room at his base when insurgents fired a rocket into the compound, and when he came to, covered in glass and building de-*

bris, Chris wasn't able to respond to the questions of his rescuers.

After being airlifted to a hospital, he learned that he had sustained a second Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), the common but hidden injury so prevalent in modern war. Because he wanted to return home with his unit, after his time in the hospital he convinced his superiors to allow him to remain in Iraq a few more weeks. But returning to the States didn't end his service, now Chris is a member of the U.S. Army Reserves.

Though the Army was still happy to allow the young man to remain in service, because of his injuries they continually denied his request for a transfer to an Army flight training program. So, on his own, and at his own expense, Chris earned a Sport Pilot Certificate by training at Chesapeake Sport Aviation at the Bay Bridge Airport near Washington, DC. From January to March of 2011 he trained with instructor Helen Woods, and though studying no longer comes as easily as it did when he earned a business degree from Penn State, Chris re-doubled his efforts and excelled in his training.

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**Learning to fly fulfilled a childhood dream for Chris, and created another: that of becoming an aviation mechanic.**

another: that of becoming an aviation mechanic. With his selection as the second recipient of an Able Flight Career Training Scholarship, he'll soon begin training at Rainbow Aviation in California for certification as a Light Sport Repairmen with a Maintenance Rating.

With a pilot's license already earned, and a career in aviation ahead of him, Chris plans to use his accomplishments to encourage other wounded veterans to explore aviation as a way to chal-

lenge themselves. In his application essay he wrote, "I feel like if I win this scholarship I can inspire people not to give up. Especially since TBI has become one of the most common injuries resulting from the war on terrorism. I have learned if there is something in life that you want, you have to have the drive to make it happen no matter what. You can make your dreams a reality; no one else is able to do it for you. After having my hopes and dreams crushed I did not accept defeat or give up. I just knew I had to pick myself up and try harder."

After reading his application and interviewing Chris, Able Flight presented him with a full scholarship to the Repairman Maintenance



Course. Chris arrived on the first day of the course ready to make the most out of the opportunity presented to him. He signed up for the additional and optional training courses which were offered on the weekends. He left on November 4 with his FAA Light Sport Repairman Maintenance Rating in both Airplane and Weight Shift, as well as his Rotax Service and Maintenance certificates. Chris is now working at a Flight School in his hometown as an aviation technician.

For more information regarding Able Flight or to make a donation visit: <http://ableflight.org>

The benefits of donating to Able Flight go far beyond providing donors with a tax deduction. Donors to Able Flight help participants gain greater self-confidence and self-reliance.

For more information on the Light Sport Repairman Courses visit:

[www.rainbowaviation.com](http://www.rainbowaviation.com)

