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and Jessica Wright

In his glory days

Colonel Trumps in a 1984 rugby game before his foot condition was realized.



Back on Solid Footing

Colonel Thomas Trumps, Commandant of Cadets at VMI, is happy to be back in Lexington and in better health



Colonel Trumps in a posterior splint following his surgical reconstruction (about one week after surgery).

Ask any person dedicated to physical activity how much pain he or she will endure to continue on, and most will answer with the following phrase: "an infinite amount".

For more than 15 years, Colonel Thomas Trumps proved truth in that notion as he battled foot pain while playing rugby, engaging in exercise and serving in the U.S. Army. But like anyone else, he too had his breaking point.

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, Colonel Trumps has always been a physically active individual. His love of exercise and playing sports, especially rugby, was evident from a young age. As a cadet at Virginia Military Institute (VMI), he was captain of the VMI Rugby Team during his second and first class years. Upon graduation in 1979, Colonel Trumps was commissioned a Second Lieutenant of Air Defense Artillery (ADA). In January 1980, he was assigned as a Vulcan platoon leader in the 2nd Infantry Division, South Korea; a very physically challenging feat indeed. One year later, he returned stateside and continued his military career as a Redeye platoon leader, an assistant battalion operations officer and a Vulcan/Stinger Battery Commander in the 24th Infantry Division at Fort Stewart, Georgia, where he remained until 1986.

Time spent active took its toll

Years of wearing combat boots, running 10 – 12 miles a week on asphalt and playing rugby (Colonel Trumps played rugby at a national level as a representative of the Armed Forces) and participating in other physical activities, took its toll.

In the late 1980s, Colonel Trumps started having pain in his right foot and realized something had to be done. So he made an appointment with a local doctor in Washington, D.C., where he was stationed.

"The doctor instructed me to walk down the hallway so he could evaluate me in motion," explains Colonel Trumps. "He then asked me how many grandchildren I had because, in his opinion, I walked like a 70 year-old man. But I was only 30 years old!"

Colonel Trumps was fitted with an orthotic (see pull-out box), which helped subside the pain, but only for a short while. During the next ten years, Colonel Trumps sought treatment options for the pain, but was continually told to put ice on his foot and take anti-inflammatories when flare-ups occurred and to refrain from physical activity. Any treatment offered just masked the pain instead of fixing the issue. Beginning in 2000, he had to receive routine cortisone shots to deaden the pain so he could run with soldiers.

What is an orthotic?

An orthotic is a foot-supporting device or insole used to control joint motion and provide accommodation for foot deformities. The device can be bought over-the-counter or be custom made.

Retired from the Army, but not from running

In 2003, Colonel Trumps retired from the Army and began working for a defense firm in Northern Virginia. He continued running for exercise, but the pain continued to be agonizing.

"I tried to run on a treadmill to soften the impact, but the pain was too much," continues Colonel Trumps. "I visited a podiatrist in Northern Virginia, who diagnosed me with arthritis and explained surgical options did not exist for my condition. I was told to just live with it, and if I continued athletics or other physical activity, my foot condition would continue to worsen. It was very disappointing."

A new opportunity with an old condition

Three years ago, Colonel Trumps was summoned back to duty at his alma mater to serve as Commandant of Cadets. In his role, he was to be responsible for training, discipline and overall appearance of the Institute's corps of cadets. Physical activity was also a major aspect of the job, which he knew he shouldn't do.

"The first semester, I ran with the cadets and did other physical training," explains Colonel Trumps. "I tried running on the hilly roads around Lexington, but I was just tearing up my foot. I knew I was in dire need of some resolution if I were ever able to keep up with the cadets."

Eventually, the pain became so excruciating that he could barely walk. One evening during a dinner with alumni and members of VMI's board of visitors, he shared his concerns.

"One of the members of the board recommended I visit a podiatrist in Roanoke named Charles Zelen who specializes in foot and ankle surgery," he recalls. "I was hesitant at first, simply because of the failed attempts by other specialists I visited through the years."

But Colonel Trumps was desperate. Deeply concerned he would not be able to continue in his position at VMI, he decided to heed the advice of the board member and scheduled an appointment with Dr. Zelen in Fall of 2007.

"I had moved my family here for the appointment at VMI, and was told I didn't have to run, but I wanted to; I had my standards, and I was willing to do anything to live up to them."

A final opportunity

"Upon evaluation of Colonel Trumps, I learned he suffered from a bad bunion, an arthritic second toe joint, a painful hammertoe and a nueroma (see pull-out box for more explanation)," explains Dr. Zelen. "Bunions and hammertoes are genetic, but his physical activity, especially his years playing rugby and running, had contributed to the arthritis to his second toe joint and the nueroma. The injuries exacerbated themselves over time because of the continued demands his military experience put on his feet."

What is a bunion, hammertoe and a nueroma?

Bunion: *A bunion is a prominence of the outside of the first metatarsal that occurs along with the big toe turning in toward the second toe joint. The first metatarsal bone is the bone in the body of the foot just behind the big toe.*

Hammertoe: *Hammertoe is a progressive bending of one of the smaller toes in the middle toe joint.*

Nueroma: *A nueroma is a thickening of nerve tissue that occurs up in between the toes, often feeling like a rock or a fullness between the second and third or third and fourth toes.*

Dr. Zelen tried everything short of surgery initially, including more advanced orthotic shoe inserts, anti-inflammatories and even injections. Although the conservative treatment of Colonel Trumps' condition went on for a number of months, it was to no avail as the damage was too severe.

"The non-surgical options helped with the pain, but weren't fixing the problem," says Colonel Trumps. "It only deadened the pain."

After the multiple non-surgical treatment options were depleted, Dr. Zelen determined that the problem could be corrected, but it would require surgery. He discussed the surgical options with Colonel Trumps, who was completely on board with it.

"Finally," Colonel Trumps remembers. "I kept recalling what the doctor in Northern Virginia said about surgery not being an option, and now I was being told something could be done surgically. I had spent so many years in severe pain, and all the while, there was a possibility it could be corrected with surgery. I was ready to get this foot fixed and operational so I could perform my duties without pain!"

The long awaited surgery finally comes

In December 2007, Colonel Trumps went in for his surgery. However, it proved more difficult than expected due to the severe arthritis to the second toe joint. Dr. Zelen expected the recovery to take an extended period of time, but continued to have a positive outlook long term.

"We went into the surgery with a highly detailed plan and a well-rounded, experienced and dedicated surgical team, that included David Neilson, DPM, who was completing his fellowship at the time, James Porter, PAC, Karen Young, LPN, Sharon Meador, RN, and anesthesiologist Robert Dallas, MD," says Dr. Zelen. "We were well prepared to handle the complexities of the reconstruction."

Dr. Zelen says the surgery was a great challenge because of the extent of the damage, as well as because of Colonel Trumps' recovery expectations.

"I wanted to ensure he could return to activity, continues Dr. Zelen. "He had one goal: return to a level of athleticism he was once used to."

During the two and ½ hours long outpatient surgery, Dr. Zelen reconstructed the front of Colonel Trumps' foot, correcting the bunion and fusing a midfoot joint, to stabilize the Colonel's inside column of his foot. He also had to straighten the hammertoe and cut into the second metatarsal joint to shorten and reshape the metatarsal bone, as well as remove a damaged nerve to alleviate the pain. All total, he inserted seven screws into Colonel Trumps' foot (see x-ray photo at right).

Despite the complexity of the surgery, the assistance of a nerve block performed by Dr. Dallas numbed the leg for nearly 24 hours, thus allowing Colonel Trumps to go home that evening after surgery.

The road to recovery after surgery

Colonel Trumps was unable to walk for two weeks after surgery. He spent most of his time keeping his foot elevated with ice applied to reduce swelling and inflammation. After the two-week period, he was fitted for a cast to wear for the next four weeks and used crutches to get around. At the six-week mark, Dr. Zelen transitioned him to a walking boot.

Dr. Zelen in the operating room suite beginning a surgical foot reconstruction.



Dr. Zelen examining the x-rays of Colonel Trumps' foot, which shows all the screws and pins needed for correction of his bunion, hammertoe and second toe joint.

In March 2008, Colonel Trumps says he was back into his Army dress shoes.

"My foot was still swollen, but I thought of this milestone as an opportunity to get back into the swing of things physically," he says. "Nonetheless, I knew I had to take it slow."

Colonel Trumps sought other ways to get back into exercise. After consultation with Dr. Zelen, he eventually pursued biking and ultimately purchased a speed bike. He then progressed to an elliptical trainer.

"I used the elliptical machine and the bike, but it was not what I liked to do," says Colonel Trumps. "But Dr. Zelen insisted that I take it slow, and I wanted to do things the right way and be fully healed before attempting anything rigorous."

It was nearly 18 months after his surgery that Colonel Trumps was able to return to the hard core running he was used to. In summer 2009, he finally felt he was back to his "glory days".

"All of the swelling was down," he says. "My foot felt great."

A return to the 'Glory Days'

These days, Colonel Trumps is running three times a week for his own benefit, as well as running with the VMI cadets. And he couldn't be happier.

He has also reached another milestone.

"I am back to playing rugby," he exclaims.

Part of an old boys rugby team for middle-aged men, Colonel Trumps now travels all over the country to play the game that he has developed so much passion for. He also assists with coaching the VMI rugby team.

"Two years later, I am fully capable of doing what I did in my 30s and 40s, minus the pain," he says. "I am back to a high activity lifestyle. I may be a little bit slower, but that's probably because of my age!"

Although he's regained confidence in his physical ability, Colonel Trumps emphasizes that he tries to not overdo it.

"I think the only way I could hurt my foot is by doing something stupid," he says. "At the same time, it's hard to describe the feeling of not having to worry about pain while being active. I had dealt with the pain for so long that it seems like I am forgetting something when I am active. But that's a good thing."

Looking back on his decision to visit Dr. Zelen, he recalls it as one of the better decisions he has made in his life.

"When I was referred to Dr. Zelen, I hesitated," concludes Colonel Trumps. "Now, I know it was the best coaching advice I have ever received."

Biography of Colonel Thomas Trumps

Colonel Trumps assumed the Commandant of Cadets position at the Virginia Military Institute on March 1, 2007. He was born at Fort Meade, Maryland, on January 7, 1957. He graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1979 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant of Air Defense Artillery (ADA).

While a cadet, Colonel Trumps captained the VMI Rugby Team during his second and first class years. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Public Administration from Shippensburg University and is also a graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College and the United States Army War College.

In January 1980, Colonel Trumps' first troop assignment was as a Vulcan platoon leader in the 2nd Infantry Division, South Korea. In January 1981, he returned stateside and served as a Redeye platoon leader, an assistant battalion operations officer and a Vulcan/Stinger Battery Commander in the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) at Fort Stewart, Georgia. From December 1985 until May 1989, he performed duties as an operations and ceremonies officer in the Directorate of Ceremonies and Special Events, US Army Military District of Washington. Then, from July 1990 until September 1992, he served as the battalion operations officer in both the 8th Infantry and 1st Armored Divisions in Germany. During that period, his ADA battalion deployed and was attached to the 3rd Armored Division from November 1990 to May 1991 for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

In December 1992, Colonel Trumps reported to the Directorate of Operations, the Joint Staff, the Pentagon, as an action officer in the Joint Operations Division. In August 1995, he assumed command of an ADA battalion at Fort Bliss, Texas. In July 1999, after attending War College, he returned to Fort Bliss as the Director of the United States Army Air Defense Artillery School's Training and Doctrine Directorate. In April 2001, he assumed command of the Fort Bliss Garrison and remained in that position until his retirement in August 2003.

Colonel Trumps' awards and decorations include the Legion of Merit with Oak Leaf Cluster (OLC), Bronze Star Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (1 OLC), Army Commendation Medal (2 OLC), Joint Service Achievement Medal, Army Achievement Medal (1 OLC), Southwest Asia Service Medal (3 campaign stars) and the Kuwait Liberation Medal. He is also authorized to wear the parachutist and Joint Staff identification badges.

Prior to returning to VMI, Colonel Trumps spent three-plus years performing business development functions for Raytheon Company in Reston, Virginia.

Colonel Trumps is married to the former Nancy L. Koah of Beaver Falls, PA. They have three children: Shannon (26), Sam (15) and Nell (8).



About Charles Zelen, DPM

Charles Zelen, DPM is president of the Virginia Podiatric Medical Association and Section Chief of Podiatry in the Department of Orthopedics at HCA Lewis Gale Medical Center and Vice Section Chief of Podiatry in the Department of Surgery at Carilion Clinic's Roanoke Memorial Hospital. He is a

board-certified podiatric surgeon in foot surgery, reconstructive rearfoot and ankle surgery by the American Board of Podiatric Surgery, and board-certified in podiatric orthopedics and primary podiatric medicine by the American Board of Podiatric Orthopedics and Primary Podiatric Medicine. He has published numerous

articles and book chapters on the reconstruction of the foot and ankle. Dr. Zelen has practiced in the Roanoke Valley for nearly 11 years. His practice is Foot and Ankle Associates of Southwest Virginia with locations in old Southwest Roanoke and in Salem.

For more information, call 540.344.3668 or visit www.drzelen.com.

