



Brian Doyne • Rock Climbing

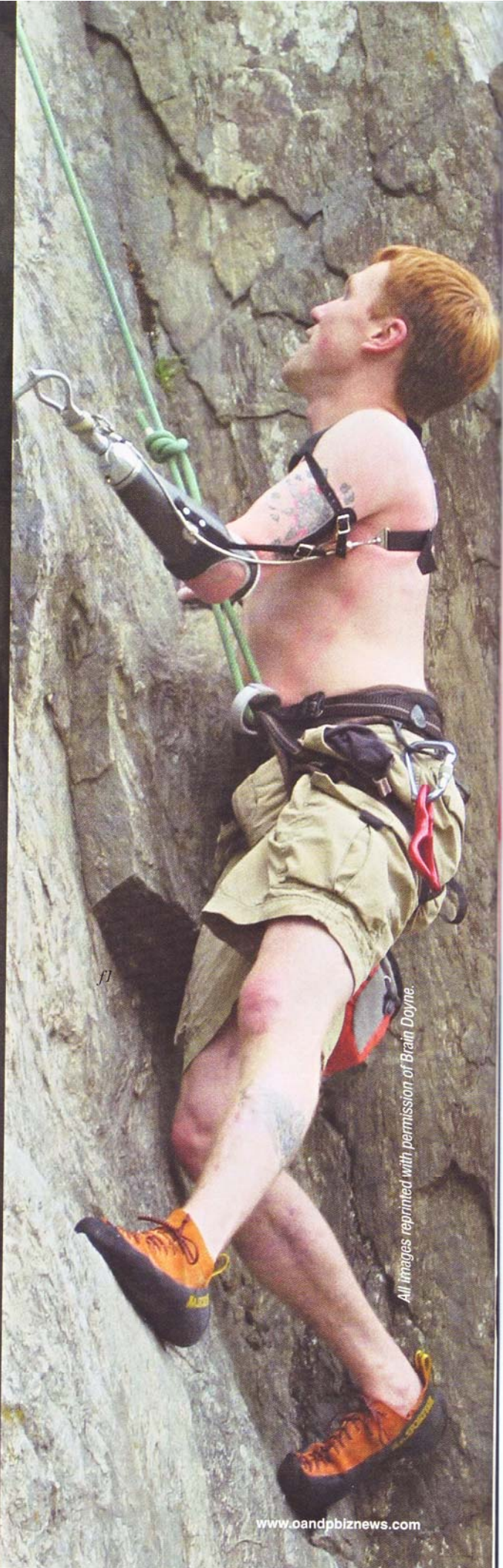
A Life on the Edge

Army bomb squad member Brian Doyne put his life on the line every day in the military. Now he lives life on the edge in a different way.

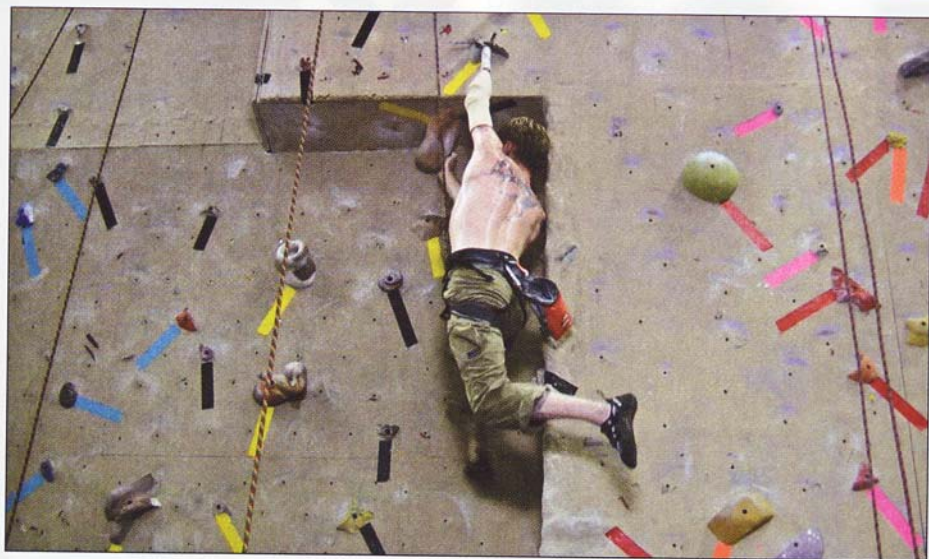
As Brian Doyne runs down the list of injuries that left him clinging to his life, it is impossible to overlook the understated recollection in his voice and the matter-of-fact manner with which he explains the incident that occurred in February of 2005 in Iraq.

Two weeks into his tour of duty, Doyne, a 25-year-old member of the Army bomb squad, was performing a routine but dangerous counter operation investigating an improvised explosive device (IED), an activity that Doyne said he executed up to six times a day.

By Jennifer Hoydicz



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Doayne has 8 years of rock climbing experience, and is nearing professional level climbs.

"I got called out to a post-blast incident for an IED that had already gone off. We were inspecting the forensic scene and trying to figure out what had gone off, how it had gone off and what it was constructed of," Doayne said.

About 15 minutes after the incident, Doayne explained, a second IED detonated approximately 20 feet from his location.

Shattered

"It pretty much shattered my entire body," Doayne told *O&P Business News* about the explosive incident that resulted in a closed fracture of his right ankle, numerous soft penetrating shrapnel wounds on his arms, a 45% muscle loss in his legs, a collapsed left lung, the blowout of both eardrums and lasting numbness in his right hand.

"Both of my legs were severely injured below the knees and thanks to some extensive bone grafts and numerous surgeries they were able to save my legs," he said.

Unfortunately, the same was not true for his left eye and left arm below the elbow. He lost both in the explosion.

Doayne approaches his ongoing recovery and adjustment with a skewed sense of humor and darkly recalled his exact thoughts during the incident. He explained the sixth sense that is known among Army personnel, a kind of warning before a mission that would send shivers down a civilian's spine.

"For some reason, every guy I know who's been killed, knew before he went that it was going to happen," he explained.

"When the blast hit me, I remember the world going away and just thinking to myself, 'no, I refuse to believe I am the next guy to get killed here in Iraq.'"

Getting back

Following the incident, Doayne was in a wheelchair for 6 months learning how to walk and talk again, resolved to forge ahead without feeling sorry for himself.

"From that point on, my attitude has always been — it happened. I can't change it. I need to get on with my life and do what I want to do," he said. "I have some great jokes to tell. I like to tell people I come with attachments now."

All joking aside, Doayne was determined to get back to living despite the challenges that were in his path.

"There are a lot of things I can't do anymore because of the bone grafts," he said. "I can't really run without it hurting and there are other impact sports that I can't do anymore."

One thing he could do, with determination and drive, was return to rock climbing. Now with 8 years of experience, Doayne is nearing professional level climbs, which is an exceptional accomplishment for any climber but especially for one with a left transradial amputation and significantly hindered depth perception due to the loss of his left eye.

"I felt like there was something missing and there was a hole that needed to be filled," Doayne said.

One year after the incident in Iraq, a close friend called to ask him to go climbing. Doayne hesitated, unsure if he was physically

able to endure the activity he once enjoyed. Strapping on a steel body-powered prosthesis, Doayne returned to climbing and quickly filled the hole that once existed.

"It was a lot harder than I was expecting," Doayne said of that first climb. "But I could do it. It felt good. It felt right. It felt like something I needed to do at that point."

Reaching out


Doayne, who still works in the field of antiterrorism trying to determine the long-term effects of explosives that cause traumatic brain injury, first heard about the O&P Extremity Games through fellow climbers while working at an outreach clinic at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Hesitant to get involved due to his competitive nature, he agreed to participate anyway and finished in fourth place at the 2007 games.

"I entered and competed and my worst fears came true," Doayne said. "My competitive side came out and it stopped being a game and it started to become a competition and I ended up beating myself."

He is resolved not to let his competitive nature get the better of him at this year's games, which the Wounded EOD Warrior Foundation has sponsored him to attend, and is looking forward to meeting up and climbing alongside friends made last year.

"It's for a great cause and it gets the awareness of us out there," Doayne said. "If I can reach out to another amputee to help them get better or I can help them move beyond whatever problems they're going through, it doesn't get better than that."

By attending events like the O&P Extremity Games and climbing every chance he gets, he's making the most of life's opportunities.

"When I was in the military I was very much about living to work. Everybody likes to tell me there's a purpose and I'm here for a reason and I honestly question that. What if I was given a second chance so that I could live, truly live for the first time in my life as opposed to playing the game and never taking any chances and never doing anything I truly wanted to do?" Doayne said. "So now I do this thing that I enjoy and I live." 

Jennifer Hoydicz is a staff writer for *O&P Business News*.