

**ROYAL MARINE AND TRIPLE AMPUTEE  
MARK ORMROD  
SETS HIMSELF A MEGA-MARATHON CHALLENGE IN AID OF FELLOW SERVICEMEN**

real life SPY



Life looked bleak for Mark when he lost his legs and right arm in a landmine explosion in Afghanistan in 2007. But he has come back from the brink to marry girlfriend Becky last year (near left), with support from Prince William (below, with Mark). In September he plans to be part of a five-man team running from New York to Los Angeles to raise money for injured servicemen (above, with team-mate Damian Todd)

To commit to being part of a team hoping to run the equivalent of 139 marathons in 63 days would be a daunting prospect for anyone, but for triple amputee Royal Marine Mark Ormrod, it will be unimaginably demanding – a real endurance test. But it's one he's looking forward to.

The Gumpathon, as it's called, will see Mark and four other team members recreate Forrest Gump's epic journey across America. From New York to Los Angeles, in hopes of raising £1 million for wounded and ill members of the armed forces and their families. The money will be split between UK charity Help For Heroes and the Injured Marine Semper Parvum Fund in the US.

This particular challenge is something Mark could never have imagined happening on Christmas Eve 2007, when he was injured by a landmine laid by the Taliban while serving with 40 Commando in Afghanistan, losing his legs and his right arm. But with the help of prosthetic running legs, a fierce determination and a lot of hard graft, this born survivor is sure he won't let his teammates down.

"When I'm out there and doing it, I will just have to keep pushing myself all the time, every day, just to get through it," Mark, 26, exclusively tells HELLO!

In this awe-inspiring challenge, the teammates will run in relay formation over 3,630 miles, collectively completing up to 88 miles per day. Mark has pledged to run a minimum of one mile a day, which will not come easy. "One mile for me is really, really draining," he explains. "As it's so hard to run on these legs without any knees."

During the journey, the team will cross three deserts, four time zones and ten snow-capped mountain ranges. When not running, they will rest in accompanying mobile homes.

The team will set off from New York City on 10 September with a gun salute from the deck of HMS Intrepid, to coincide with the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre.

Mark's determination to complete the challenge is all the more amazing when you consider the relatively short time that has elapsed since he sustained his horrific injuries. As soon as he realised what had happened to him on that

fateful day, he asked a fellow marine to shoot him, to put him out of his misery.

Mark was flown to hospital and operated on, and then flown back to the UK, where he promptly proposed to his girlfriend Becky, with whom he has daughter Kezia, three at the time. The wedding provided him with something positive to focus on, and Mark spent 15 months at Headley Court rehabilitation centre in Surrey building up his strength, determined that he'd walk down the aisle with his bride.

"There were low and high points," he says. "I got told by one doctor that I would never walk again, but the next day a guy who had been blown up in Iraq walked in on similar legs to the ones I've got now, and that was a real high."

**ROYAL SUPPORT**

Mark also had several chats with Princes William and Harry while at Headley Court. He was particularly encouraged by Harry, whom he'd first met while training for Afghanistan. "His encouragement meant a lot," says Mark. "He's been there, he's done it, he knows what it's like."

As if preparing for his wedding and learning to walk again weren't enough, Mark spent his spare time writing a book about his experiences, *Man Down*, which was published last year.

And then, last May, just 17 months after being injured, Mark not only managed to walk down the aisle on his new £40,000 legs, but he also managed the first dance with his bride. "There are times when you think stuff like that won't be possible, so it was very emotional," he says.

It was around this time that he decided to do the Gumpathon. "I knew it would be a lot of hard work, but as long as you put the effort in, you'll get results," says Mark.

He hopes that the Gumpathon and any future challenges he takes on will prove that there's life after injuries. "I want to show other amputees that you don't have to be restricted to a wheelchair at the age of 21."

INTERVIEW: KATE MIKHAIL

For more information about the Gumpathon and how to donate, visit [thegumpathon.com](http://thegumpathon.com).

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