



## Against All Odds

Twice a year for more than 20 years, I had prepared for the Army Physical Fitness Test, otherwise referred to as the APFT. Fortunately, I passed, though not always with flying colors. Anyone in the military knows that it is always better to “stay in shape” rather than to GET into shape.

Every once in a while we come across a story that truly inspires us. People defy all conventional wisdom by overcoming seemingly unbelievable odds. Consider the story of Albert Ernest “Cliff” Young, an Australian potato farmer and sheep rancher.

Every year, Australia hosts an 875-kilometer, *ultimate* marathon endurance racing from Sydney to Melbourne—considered to be the world’s longest and toughest ultra-marathon. It totals 542 miles. That is equivalent to running from St. Louis to Minneapolis, Minn. It’s a long, tough race that takes a week and normally is participated in by world-class athletes who train specially for the event. Backed by big names in sports like Nike, these athletes are mostly younger than 30 years old, men and women equipped with the most expensive-sponsored training outfits and shoes.

In 1983, Cliff Young, at 61 years of age, decided he wanted to participate in the Sydney to Melbourne race. Considered to be the world’s toughest race, under ideal conditions, most runners took at least six to seven days to finish. Cliff Young entered the race against 150 world-class athletes. On the day of the race, Cliff showed up in overalls and galoshes over his work boots.

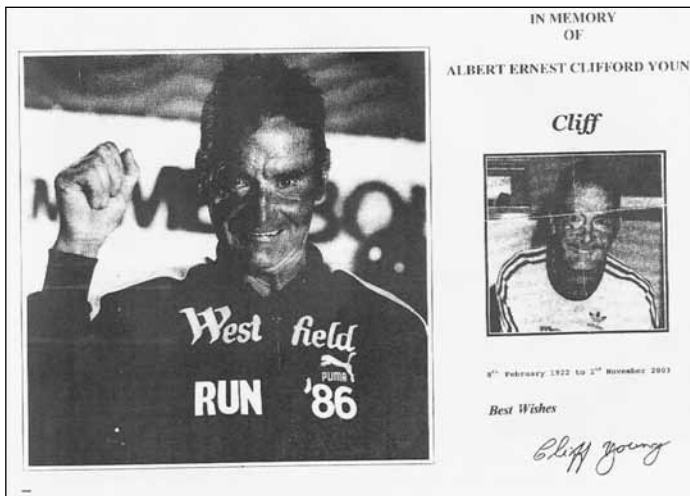
As Cliff walked up to the table to take his number, it became obvious to everybody he was going to run. He was going to join a group of athletes and run! During that time, these runners didn’t even know another surprising fact—his only trainer was his 81-year-old mother. Nearly everybody thought that it was a crazy publicity stunt. But the press was curious, so as he took his number 64 and moved into the pack of runners in their special expensive racing outfits, the camera focused on him, mostly out of curiosity.

When the marathon started, the pros left Cliff behind in his galoshes. The crowds smiled because he didn’t even run correctly. Instead of running, he appeared to run leisurely, shuffling like an amateur.

Now, the 61-year-old potato farmer from Beech Forest with no teeth had started the ultra-tough race with world-class athletes. All over Australia, people who watched the live telecast kept on praying that someone would stop this crazy old man from running because everyone believed he’d die even before even getting halfway across Sydney.

Every professional athlete knew for certain that it took about seven days to finish this race, and that in order to compete, you would need to run 18 hours and sleep six hours. The thing is, old Cliff Young did not know that!

When the morning news of the race was aired, people were in for another big surprise. Cliff was still in the race and had jogged all night down to a city called Mittagong. Apparently, Cliff did not stop after the first day. Although he was still far behind the world-class athletes, he kept on running. He even had the time to wave to spectators who watched the event by the highways.



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# SO HELP ME, GOD

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When he got to a town called Albury, he was asked about his tactics for the rest of the race. He simply said he would run through to the finish, and he did.

He kept running. Every night he got just a little bit closer to the leading pack. By the last night, he passed all the world-class athletes. By the last day, he was way in front of them. Not only did he run the Melbourne to Sydney race at age 61 without dying, he won first place—breaking the race record by nine hours—and became a national hero. The nation fell in love with the 61-year-old potato farmer who came out of nowhere to defeat the world's best long-distance runners in five days, 15 hours, and four minutes.

St. Paul often refers to our Christian living as a race. In 1 Corinthians, he writes,

*“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”*

Running the Christian race can often be tiring and discouraging. It seems the odds are against us. Yet, God gives us His Spirit to empower us. His Word and Sacrament are freely given to strengthen our faith for the long haul. Christ overcame sin and death for you. As you prepare for your physical fitness test, consider the spiritual strength and nurturing that our Savior offers you. Through faith in Christ, we beat the odds!

**Chaplain Eric Erkkinen**

## CUS Schools Offer Free Tuition to Veterans

Beginning last fall, eligible veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces receiving full Chapter 33 benefits can earn a graduate or an undergraduate degree tuition-free from at least seven of the Synod's 10 Concordia University System (CUS) schools nationwide. Housing and other fees still apply, however.

Under the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, veterans and other qualified military personnel are eligible to receive a subsidy for tuition that is equivalent to the highest tuition of any public institution in the state. Under the national program, half of the difference between a CUS school's tuition and the veteran's subsidy is covered by the university, and the other half will come from the federal government through the Yellow Ribbon Program.

The benefit applies only to those qualified veterans who are accepted to and enroll as full-time graduate or undergraduate students.

“Concordia University is proud to partner with the federal government to provide the maximum benefit to our veterans so that they may fulfill their dream of obtaining a bachelor's or a master's degree,” said Dr. Mark Wahlers, provost of Concordia University, Portland, Ore. “Through our numerous faculty members who have served our forces, we have a history of supporting the ambitions of the individuals who serve our country. ... Helping veterans achieve a degree, particularly in these challenging economic times, is the least that Concordia can do to thank our veterans for their service.”

CUS schools participating in the program include Concordia College, Bronxville, N.Y., 800-937-2655, [admission@concordia-ny.edu](mailto:admission@concordia-ny.edu); Concordia University, Portland, Ore., 800-321-9371, [admissions@cu-portland.edu](mailto:admissions@cu-portland.edu); Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill., 800-285-2668, [crfadm@cu-chicago.edu](mailto:crfadm@cu-chicago.edu); Concordia University Nebraska, Seward, 800-535-5494, [admiss@cune.edu](mailto:admiss@cune.edu); Concordia University Wisconsin, Mequon, 888-628-9472, [admissions@cuw.edu](mailto:admissions@cuw.edu); Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn., 800-333-4705, [admissions@csp.edu](mailto:admissions@csp.edu); Concordia University Texas, Austin, 800-865-4282, [admissions@concordia.edu](mailto:admissions@concordia.edu).

“I'm very pleased that many of our CUS schools are participating in the 'Yellow Ribbon' program and I commend our institutions for their generous support of our country's veterans,” said Dr. Kurt Krueger, executive director of the LCMS Board for University Education and president of the Concordia University System.



## Some common deployment questions I have been asked ...

**Q:** Since my spouse returned from deployment, it seems like our family is broken. And it never used to be this way. Why can't we get back to the way things used to be?

**A:** Every significant life event, including deployments, can have long-lasting effects. This applies to spouses and children, too. Someone who has been in intense, life-threatening or dangerous situations often suffers emotional scarring. If that is the case, professional help may be required. To ignore symptoms of stress is not the solution. Healing and recovery are possible but may require expert help. Chaplains are part of the support team and have expertise in relationships.



**Q:** I am concerned about my spouse's commitment to our marriage. I wonder if there has been unfaithfulness. Maybe we don't love each other anymore. What should I do?

**A:** Marriage relationships are very dynamic. Generally, husbands and wives grow closer over the years, providing they do regular maintenance in their marriage. If you review your marriage vows, the wording of the ceremony is full of ACTION words. Promises to "love, honor, cherish, support, take care of, nurture, forsake all others," etc. This reminds us of how much positive and productive work it takes to make a marriage. Nowhere do we find promises to ... "ignore, ridicule, cease communication, take advantage of, cheat on, or tolerate ... as long as we both shall live." Those words are not there. You see, marriage vows are promises one makes to act and behave a certain way that is positive and productive and harmonious. If trust is an issue, seek marital counseling. Don't allow marriage atrophy to rob you of the joy intended for marriage.

**Q:** I can't get my husband in for counseling, or even to work on our issues. What can I do?

**A:** Try logic. Often, there is reluctance to seek help because it is admitting failure or need. Most people, particularly men, do not do this readily. If I had a toothache, I would not try to drill and fill my own tooth. Nor would I ask my buddies to do it, nor my unit 1SG. I would go to the dentist. Why? The dentist is a trained, educated, experienced professional. Chaplains, social workers, and counselors are trained, educated, experienced professionals in relationships.

Friends, coworkers, other family members may be supportive but may not have the expertise. Sound logical?

### **Share with others**

We welcome your articles that encourage Lutheran men and women who serve in the armed forces. E-mail your stories and photos to [eric.erkkinen@lcms.org](mailto:eric.erkkinen@lcms.org).

If you know someone who would like to receive Portals of Prayer and So Help Me, God as part of our LCMS Ministry-by-Mail outreach, contact Administrative Assistant Nancy Rowley at [lcmschaps@lcms.org](mailto:lcmschaps@lcms.org). Other military ministry resources are available at [www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=1224](http://www.lcms.org/pages/internal.asp?NavID=1224).

#### **Contact information:**

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IT DOES NOT TAKE MUCH  
STRENGTH TO DO THINGS,  
BUT IT REQUIRES GREAT  
STRENGTH TO DECIDE

WHAT TO DO.  
—Chow Ching

# SO *HELP* ME, GOD

## Strange Sights

Every once in a while we see things that are “out of the ordinary.” When we visit foreign countries, are deployed, or even drive through an unfamiliar town, we may encounter some strange sights. While deployed to Qatar, I came upon such a sight. Fortunately, I had a camera and captured the unusual sight—a truck loaded with camels. They all sat quietly in the rear of a large Mitsubishi flatbed truck. I reckon it would have been called a “hump truck” or perhaps a “HUMPVEE.” Had this truck been in the middle of downtown St. Louis or driving along a farm road in Iowa, it would truly have been out of place. However, in the Middle East, it is not unusual at all. Camel herders ferry their animals around on trucks.

Often, as Christians, we feel out of place because many around us do not share our values or beliefs. When we are worshiping in church, surrounded by fellow believers in Christ, we do not feel odd. We find comfort and strength in the presence of other Christians. The challenge is when we are among those who show little or no evidence of faith. We may stand out, not physically, but spiritually.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” What Jesus means is that we should stand out



in the world as an example of goodness, purity, and holiness.

Note that Jesus does not call us to be the sugar of the world. Salt and sugar look very much the same: clear crystals. Sugar however is appealing and sweet. Salt is bitter.

In the ancient world, and even today, salt had more value as it has the ability to preserve foods. It allows meat to keep.

As you travel and notice strange sights, remember that we are called to be different, to be the salt of the earth, and to consistently demonstrate the love of Christ in this world.

## **Family quotes**

**DUMBWAITER:** one who asks if the kids would care to order dessert.

**FAMILY PLANNING:** the art of spacing your children the proper distance apart to keep you on the edge of financial disaster.

**FEEDBACK:** the inevitable result when the baby doesn’t appreciate the strained carrots.

**FULL NAME:** what you call your child when you’re angry at him or her.

**GRANDPARENTS:** the people who think your children are wonderful even though they’re sure you’re not raising them right.

**INDEPENDENT:** how we want our children to be as long as they do everything we say.

**OW:** the first word spoken by children with older siblings.

**SHOW OFF:** a child who is more talented than yours.

**STERILIZE:** what you do to your first baby’s pacifier by boiling it and to your last baby’s pacifier by blowing on it.

**TOP BUNK:** where you should never put a child wearing Superman jammies.