

# Blood donations save lives

September 15, 2006

***Those who donate blood to the Armed Services Blood Program save the lives of those dedicated to serving their country. Blood is needed every hour of the day. Lori Smith did not know it yet, but her husband's hour had come.***

ALEXANDRIA, Va.— Lori Smith answered the phone at her desk at Fort McPherson, Ga., to learn that her husband, Howard, serving at Moody Air Force Base, Valdosta, Ga., was on his way to the Emergency Room (ER). Howard was vomiting and was tired. He had been tired for days now; more tired than he ever remembered being before. Lori immediately hurried to her car and began the four-hour drive to Valdosta certain that her husband was in trouble. “Howard never throws up. Never,” Lori thought as she drove to be by his side. When Lori reached Howard, she was shocked.



Armed Services Blood Program blood donor Lori Smith is grateful for blood donors who saved her husband's life.

“Howard is half Italian so his skin is darker than mine, and I'm really fair skinned. Howard was far paler than me,” she said.

The ER Physician Dr. T. Conrad Williams explained to the Smiths that Howard was likely suffering from a bleeding ulcer. Williams called in a gastroenterologist and several diagnostic tests were performed, including an endoscopy and a blood volume test.

The Gastroenterologist Dr. Edward J. Fricker confirmed William's diagnosis, and introduced himself to the Smiths, by telling Howard that he had lost 70 percent of the blood in his body.

Fricker described how Howard not only suffered from a bleeding ulcer, but one located in the duodenum, the part of the stomach containing a major artery.

The endoscopy had clearly shown the artery pumping blood into Howard's stomach. Fortunately for Howard, his active lifestyle meant that his resting heart rate was only 50 beats per minute. Considering the severity of the bleeding, Fricker was surprised that Howard was even conscious.

“When I heard Dr. Fricker tell Howard that he would not have made it through the night, had he stayed home, I had a meltdown,” Lori said, “I don't remember Howard responding much, he was simply too tired at that point.

In the early hours of the morning Howard Smith received two units of emergency blood and then underwent surgery where he received four additional units of blood. Lori left the hospital after the surgery to get some rest.

“I knew Howard was in good hands, and I was so thankful that the blood he needed was there when he needed it most,” Lori said.

When Lori returned to the hospital she discovered that Howard was in the intensive care unit. The staff explained that this was necessary due to the blood loss he experienced, and to enable the nursing staff to continuously monitor his progress. “Once I understood why he was there, I felt better, but I wanted to see for myself that Howard was okay,” Lori said. “When I walked in and Howard demanded real food instead of chicken broth, I knew he was going to be fine.”

Lori has been a blood donor since she turned 17. Despite her many donations she recalls, “This was the first time I personally saw the benefit of that kind of giving. (But) I never knew there was an Armed Services Blood Program until I went to the Fort Knox Blood Donor Center to donate. (It is) ... different from hospital blood programs or other kinds of blood agencies.”

"My husband has spent a total of 14 years active duty and, as a civilian, I've worked for the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), the Defense Financing and Accounting Service (DFAS), the Army, and the Air Force," Lori said. "I believe my job is to take care of the men and women who serve this country."

"Giving blood is another way I can do that," she said. "I just imagine what if one of our guys is deployed and his (child) needs blood? (By donating) I can relieve that family of one more worry, when they've given so much to our country."

Today, Lori and Howard both work for the Armor Center, Department of the Army, steps away from the Fort Knox Blood Donor Center where Lori regularly donates.

"Blood saved Howard's life," Lori said smiling. "My blood donation goes directly to our military men and women and their families. I feel so good about that."

*To learn more about donating blood through the Armed Services Blood Program or to find the nearest donor center, please visit our [donor information section](#).*