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## Former Operation Mend patient, fellow vets reach the South Pole



[Mark Wise](#), a former infantry platoon leader who was wounded in 2009 by an IED in Afghanistan and underwent reconstructive surgery with UCLA's Operation Mend, has completed his 200-mile trek to the South Pole along with 12 of his fellow veterans from around the world who have also recovered from war wounds.



Despite harsh conditions, including temperatures as low as -50 degrees, teams of formerly wounded warriors participating in the 2013 South Pole Allied Challenge, led by Britain's Prince Harry, arrived at the South Pole at 12:48 p.m. GMT (4:48 a.m. PST) today after traveling for more than three weeks.

In a [blog](#) reported on the expedition's website, Prince Harry noted: "We're here I am about 10 meters away from the Pole. Everyone is sort of scattered now, we've been here for about 20 minutes maybe half an hour. It's an amazing feeling, it really is."

"Every single one of these 12 deserves it. I mean they have dug out blind to get here, Duncan you know, it's just remarkable the fact that someone with no legs has made it here, and to have done it in record-breaking time, no doubt. And Ivan as well, when I look across I see him being guided around you know, totally blind, from America, and absolutely hates the cold, and you know he's not doing it for himself, he's doing it for his buddies back home, and that goes for everybody, every single one here."

Harry noted, "I think we'll be having a few whiskies tonight and then everyone's looking forward to getting home. Mission success."

The grueling challenge was undertaken by sponsors and participants to raise money and awareness for disabled veterans as they make the difficult transition to civilian life.

Envisioned originally as a race among three teams, the organization running the event [announced Dec. 7](#) that, because of the tough conditions they encountered, the teams would stop competing against one another and start camping and traveling together, partly by vehicle, and walk the last 70 miles to the finish line.

On [its website](#), expedition director Ed Parker commented on the teams experiencing "a higher degree of stress" than expected. While the weather remained good, he said, the terrain of ice and snow they were crossing was making the journey "very difficult, far harder than we anticipated."

In the final days of the trek, Wise reported on the journey for [CBSNews.com](#). See his dispatch and those written by others, as well as videos, [here](#).

