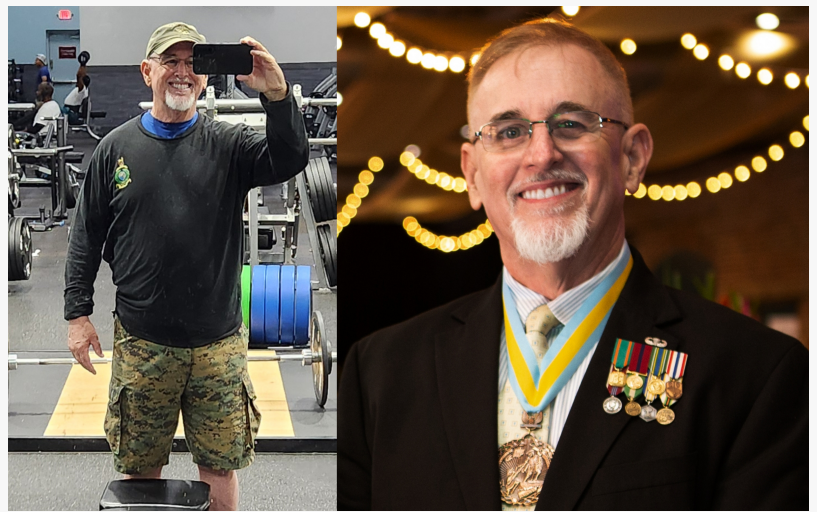


Military Hall of Famer hits “monster bench press” numbers in age category

Marine Infantry leader and 67-year-old stroke survivor bench-presses 315 lbs. after hitting near record numbers in previous sets

COLUMBIA, SC, UNITED STATES, July 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Sixty-seven-year old stroke survivor and formerly deployed U.S. Marine Infantry leader W. Thomas Smith Jr. bench-pressed 315 lbs. for a one-rep max following equally impressive sets of 225, 275, 295, and 305 lbs. while strength-training at One Life Fitness in Columbia, Friday, July 17.



The max-day workout session comes on the heels of Smith’s having earned a berth on the list of “bench-press champions” who successfully bench-pressed 250 lbs. as part of the Richland County Sheriff’s Department’s 250 Bench-Press Challenge commemorating America’s 250th birthday during Independence Week 2026.

Last week, Smith also logged 225 lbs. for 14 repetitions, placing him well within the “elite” category based on all metrics for his age, 67, and weight; 198-200 lbs. at 5’11” and lining him up for this week’s successful attempt and subsequent personal record (PR).

“Last week was exceptional, but today’s 315 workout was nothing short of monstrous,” said Bruce Brutschy, a 10th-degree Black Belt, martial arts tournament champion, and fitness instructor who is setting his own bench records at age 74. “Tom has become a legend in the gym. Most guys his age, especially after having suffered a stroke, become invisible in the eyes of others. Not so with Tom who is held in some sense of awe by powerlifters and strength athletes much younger than he is.”

Sir’Saleem Stokes, a 19-year-old offensive lineman at Fayetteville State University, agrees.

"It's an awesome experience to workout with Tom," said Stokes who has trained with Smith several times since early June. "He pushes me every time we get on the bench he always asks for one more rep. That's just how he is. He's always working to get stronger. Plus, you never see someone his age hitting 315 lbs."

Smith's athletic feat is all the more remarkable considering several major simultaneous strokes he suffered in May 2024. Within days of being released from hospital and with the blessing of his team of physicians, Smith was back in the gym and training to limits. "It was exhausting, I won't pretend otherwise. Still is," he says. "But strength training saved my life in 2024 – that according to all the medical experts – and it's absolutely aiding in my continued recovery in 2026."

Smith's personal record on bench follows several recent strength-and-power milestones, including a 410-lbs. static (isometric) hold on bench and a 738 lbs. leg-press PR set last month. Static holds involve the lifter unracking a loaded bar on the bench press, but instead of lowering the bar to his chest and then pressing it upward, the lifter simply holds the bar – arms outstretched – above his head for between eight and 10 seconds before racking it back.

"Static holds have been a gamechanger for me on bench and almost certainly aided in my hitting 315," Smith says. "The static hold reps not only strengthen my wrists, joints, and tendons, but static holds condition my brain to handle extreme weight, build confidence, and prime my central nervous system."

Brandon Mohtassem, general manager of One Life Fitness-Sandhills, served as 'spotter' for Smith during his 315 max PR, Friday morning.

"Tom is a beast, and now a member of the three-plate club," said Mohtassem.

In an article (published May 11 – <https://whosonthemove.com/military-hall-of-famer-achieves-elite-physical-fitness-milestones/>) world-champion martial artist Keith Vitali, a Hollywood martial arts movie star (who fought Jackie Chan) and who was the #1-ranked U.S. karate champion for three consecutive years, said Smith's perseverance is what has defined him in the gym. "Tom is an excellent example of someone who – despite major health challenges at a later age – has not been deterred from achieving even greater strength training achievements," Vitali said.

In that same article, Vitali's younger brother, retired USMC Col. Steve Vitali, said: "A Marine leader like Tom is the kind of man who will fight his way through hellfire and brick walls to achieve what lesser men only dream of."

In addition to his USMC Infantry background, Smith is a retired S.C. Military Department (SCMD) colonel, founding director of SCMD's first counterterrorism task force; a current special deputy with the Richland County Sheriff's Department; an internationally recognized counterterrorism instructor, a multi-war combat correspondent and a New York Times bestselling editor. His

recent recognition as an amateur strength-athlete stems from decades of physical training which previously included running and remote-wilderness rucking. "We called it 'humping' in the Marines," Smith says.

Smith's 315-lbs. bench-press PR surpasses a 305 bench PR he set in his twenties prior to taking a strength training hiatus for many years. He returned to strength training in 2018 at age 59.

Kwabena 'Kwa' Brenya, a fitness instructor and trainer for NIKE basketball and NBA camps worldwide, who has previously worked with Smith on technique and breathing, says: "There are powerlifting strongmen, then there are older athletes like Thomas Smith defying the odds. What I've seen in this man is consistency. He shows up, pushes like an animal beyond his natural strength limitations, and refuses to quit. Most men don't have that kind of tenacity and resolve. Some do. It's extremely rare."

Faith has also been a key factor in Smith's strength pursuits. "I literally pray out-loud between sets, though whispering so as not to disturb or unsettle others around me," he says. "I pray for those spotting me. I pray for my gym-bros around me and gym staff, their families and my own. And I pray for God's strength in each of my lifts."

It works.

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