



Point of Contact:

Warrior Games Joint Task Force DoDWGPublicAffairs@mail.mil

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Warrior Games leaves a lasting impression on athletes

WEST POINT, N.Y. – In June, 250 wounded, injured and ill service members and veterans competed in the 2016 Department of Defense (DoD) Warrior Games. The competition was comprised of eight sporting events with teams representing the Army, Marine Corps, Navy/Coast Guard, Air Force, U.S. Special Operations Command and the United Kingdom Armed Forces. For these athletes, this time meant recreation and competition, restoration and rehabilitation, empowerment and affirmation.



Navy Veteran Lt. Joan Hill from Annapolis, Maryland, practices her turns in the water for swimming competitions at Arvin Gym on West Point campus on June 6, 2016. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Dakota Price)

“It’s been very humbling, to be around these athletes this summer,” said Army Veteran Staff Sgt. Matthew Lammers. “It’s been a blessing to be able to rebuild camaraderie and feel like I’m part of a team again.”

Lammers, 34, a native of Tuscon, Arizona, competed in the shotput, discus and swimming competitions as a triple amputee. His goal has always been to use the Warrior Games as a stepping stone toward trying out for the U.S. Paralympic team.

“I was never a swimmer before I was injured,” he explained. “It [the Warrior Games] helped me reach my personal goal of swimming three miles a day – next step is the Paralympics.”

For some of the athletes, the games were more than just a competition. For Navy Veteran Lt. Joan Hill, 31, from Annapolis, Maryland, it was nothing short of a godsend.



“At first, it wasn’t about the athletics. It was a reintroduction to being around people through the adaptive sports program within the wounded warrior community,” Hill said. “It goes beyond the athletics into making social interaction, which is hard for some of us.”

Hill belongs to one of the wounded warrior-centric programs essential for these service member’s recovery. They include the Navy Wounded Warrior - Safe Harbor program, the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment, the Air Force Wounded Warrior Program, the Army Warrior Transition Command and the U.S. Special Operations Command Care Coalition. Any way you look at it, the Warrior Games has helped wounded warriors like Hill to push themselves in a way that aids in their recovery, both physically and mentally.

“It’s been a culmination of a lot of dedication and hard work, setting goals and working with coaches to figure out where and when to push myself,” Hill added. “Working in teams with other people again is nice. Plus, having commonalities, being supportive of each other was awesome.”

For many of the athletes suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, their performance in the games require a clearer state of mind, something that’s not easy for some.

“A lot of my events are a mental drive, you have to be in the right place mentally, like archery,” said Air Force Veteran Master Sgt. Kyle Burnett of Eagle River, Alaska. “Being able to have my service dog, Moe, with me at this forum, this level of competition, helps me keep my anxiety down so I can focus on my performance.”

“We don’t say ‘can’t’ in our [wounded warrior] family. It’s a word we just don’t say,” Lammers concluded. “Anything is possible once you put your mind to it. “