

Sailors, Coast Guardsmen Gather at 2016 Wounded Warrior Pacific Trials

02/24/16

By Shannon Leonard, Special to Navy Installations Command Public Affairs

The 2016 Wounded Warrior Pacific Trials brought together 50 seriously ill and injured Sailors and Coast Guardsmen, from all over the United States, for competitive adaptive sports and recreation, Feb. 20, in Pearl Harbor.

The trials are hosted by Commander, Navy Region Hawaii and Navy Wounded Warrior-Safe Harbor (NWW) - a Navy Installations Command-supported program.

The Honorable Franklin Parker, assistant secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, visited the athletes Feb. 21 for some active interaction.

"I loved every minute of it," said Parker. "I had a good chance to connect with them, and we were really a team. I really appreciated them letting me share that time with them, and really bring down their curve because I was definitely the worst on the team."

Parker participated in wheelchair basketball and sitting volleyball alongside the wounded warrior athletes and also spent time with their families.

"I really appreciate their patience, their team spirit, their heart, their goodwill; they were just amazing and I loved it," said Parker. "I would still be there if I hadn't been dragged off the court."

The wounded warriors are preparing for the formal trials competition, which is set to begin with swimming, Feb. 24.

"This year's trials is our fourth event on the beautiful island of Hawaii and we are excited to be here with our athletes supporting them as they compete for a spot on Team Navy," said NWW Adaptive Sports and Recreation Lead Megan Haydel. "This event helps wounded warriors with their recovery and rehabilitation, and nearly 20 of our athletes are brand new to the adaptive sports program. Watching them try these events for the first time is very exciting and inspirational."

NWW coordinates the non-medical care of seriously wounded, ill and injured Sailors and Coast Guardsmen, and provides resources and support to their families. NWW offers individually-tailored assistance to ensure enrollees' successful recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Adaptive sports -- athletic activities that are modified to meet abilities of injured or ill individuals -- are an essential component of their recovery and rehabilitation plans, according to Haydel. In addition to the



Doug Hill, a retired U.S. Navy Sonar Technician Surface 3rd Class and Wounded Warrior Pacific Trials (WWPT) competitor, competes in the cycling trials of the 2016 Wounded Warrior Pacific Trials at Ford Island, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. Fifty-six athletes competed in team and individual adaptive sports for spots on the Team Navy roster. Those selected will continue on to participate in the DoD Warrior Games this June. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Meranda Keller/Released)

many new faces at the event, this year's competition includes 15 female wounded warrior athletes, which is more than ever before.

"This is my third trial, and it is going great," said retired Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Roel Espino, who suffered a traumatic brain injury during a motorcycle accident, and is currently based in Hawaii. "I started with shooting today and I am trying to move on to the next level, Olympic-style competition shooting. One of the benefits to attending the trials is being around people I can relate to. I find it very therapeutic and rewarding."

The wounded warrior athletes will spend the first few days of the competition practicing their chosen sports, which may include swimming, track and field, wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, shooting, archery, and cycling.

Each athlete is vying for a slot on the Team Navy roster and advancement to the annual joint-service Department of Defense (DoD) Warrior Games. This year's DoD Warrior Games will take place June 14-22 at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, New York.

Hundreds of local spectators are expected to attend the Wounded Warrior Pacific Trials, which are taking place at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam and Iolani School in Honolulu.

"I am hoping to make the team and head to West Point to participate in the Warrior Games," said Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class Michael Dayton, who was injured on deployment in 2007 when he sustained burns while fixing a pump in an engine room. "This is my extended family and it is great to see so many new and young NWW enrollees. This means the word is getting out about the program and all the support they provide to wounded warriors.

"Adaptive sports is great for physical rehabilitation, however it is not just about the sports," he said. "It is also a form of therapy. I find it relaxing to talk about my disability with fellow enrollees who are going through similar situations. I don't feel judged. I feel like people understand me here."

The wounded warrior athletes at the trials are active-duty and retired service members with upper-body, lower-body and spinal-cord injuries; serious illnesses; traumatic brain injuries; visual impairment; and post-traumatic stress.

"This is my first trials competition and I am really enjoying myself," said Retired Navy Fire Controlman 3rd Class Jason Reyes, who suffered serious injuries in a motorcycle accident four years ago. "I feel motivated to try my best. My favorite part about today was seeing everyone come together during the wheelchair basketball practice and just have fun despite their injury or illness."

For the latest news about the trials, follow NWW on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/navywoundedwarrior>), Twitter (@navywounded) and Instagram (Navy Wounded Warrior). Visit <http://www.safeharbor.navylive.dodolive.mil> or call 855-628-9997 to learn more about NWW and the benefits of adaptive sports.

Navy Installations Command is comprised of approximately 52,000 military and civilian personnel

worldwide responsible for the operations, maintenance and quality of life programs to support the Navy's fleet, Sailors and their families.

For more about the Navy's shore enterprise, visit: <http://www.cnic.navy.mil>

For more news from Commander, Navy Installations Command, visit: <http://www.navy.mil/local/cni/>

For more news from Commander, Navy Installations Command, visit <http://www.navy.mil/local/cni/>