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## Disabled Vets, Troops Compete in First Warrior Games

Army Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Carden | American Forces Press Service

May 11, 2010

Let the games begin.

With the lighting of the ceremonial Olympic cauldron by National Football League hall of famer and U.S. Naval Academy graduate Roger Staubach, the much-anticipated inaugural Warrior Games are under way.

Some 200 wounded warriors and disabled veterans from all five branches of military service marched proudly down Irwin "Ike" Belk Olympic Path at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., on May 10 in the games' opening ceremony.

The ceremony marks the culmination of months of training and an even longer road to recovery for many of the athletes. And although the games are a time for competition and celebration, it may be difficult not to reflect on how the troops earned the title of wounded warrior.

Many had fallen victim to roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan, while others suffer from the psychological toll of long bouts of combat. All served and were willing to sacrifice their lives for their country.

"The cloth of your nation is proud of you today," Air Force Gen. Victor E. Renuart Jr., commander of U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, said at the ceremony. "The flag that you fought to represent is proud of you."

Despite their disabilities, this group of troops has learned to adapt and achieve what many of them may have thought impossible. They marched down the Olympic Path with prosthetic limbs and in wheelchairs with a glow of confidence gleaming from within the formation. The roar of cheers from hundreds of families, friends and supporters may have made it difficult for them to disguise their rough, tough military personas.

But the truth is they should be proud. The troops have come a long way to compete in the Paralympic-style events. More than a few of the participants were restricted at one time to their hospital beds, unable to walk and get around on their own. But this week, they will display their re-learned skills in track and field, cycling, sitting volleyball, wheelchair basketball, archery, swimming and marksmanship events.

Their resolve and desire to improve their lives is an inspiration for the nation, Renuart said, and is in keeping with the military community's goal to build resilience among its members. The games are a testament of the influence of sports and proof of what one can accomplish through determination and will power, the general added, noting that the games are a "significant event" for Defense Department and military leaders.

"They know how important this is," he said, "not just to you, but to our services and what we hope to promote for each and every one of our men and women serving as they go forward in their lives."

Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter hailed the troops as heroes and role models, calling them "the pride of America" for volunteering to serve and for their ability to triumph over adversity.

"You really are the core of who we are as a people," Ritter said. "Your resilience exemplifies the kinds of things that we would all like to believe about ourselves -- that we would like our children to emulate."



Juan M. Garcia III, assistant Navy secretary for manpower and reserve affairs, lauded the troops for their willingness to compete and to never give up on themselves and their nation. He praised their readiness to accept new challenges.

“Who could not be inspired by what’s going on here?” Garcia asked. “Before us are men and women who suffered injuries both physical and mental. [But] they refuse to be defeated, no matter where their battlefields were — Afghanistan, Iraq, rehab centers or even their own minds.

“It’s old cliché saying, ‘Getting here makes you winners, no matter the results of the competition,’” Garcia continued. “But just because it’s cliché doesn’t make it less true.”

The games are a joint venture of the Defense Department, the U.S. Olympic Committee and the USO to promote resilience and the healing power of sports. Officials hope to make the games an annual event and possibly expand participation and future venues.

Competition began May 11, and the closing ceremony is May 14.