



USMA welcomes Army's warrior-athletes

Story and photo by Kathy Eastwood
Staff Writer

Fourteen veterans and active duty members of the Army's 2014 Warrior and Invictus Games Team were honored by the U.S. Military Academy Dec. 4 for winning the Chairman's Cup. The Soldiers won the Chairman's Cup for the first time by racking up 71 medals in the Warrior Games Sept. 28-Oct. 4 in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and wresting the cup from the Marines who have claimed the Chairman's Cup for four of the five years since the games began in 2010.

In a partnership between the Department of Defense and the U.S. Olympic Committee Paralympics Military Program, athletes in all branches of service are involved in one of the Army's 25 Warrior Transition Units compete for gold in seven sports.

During their West Point visit, the athletes participated in presentations highlighting USMA's contributions in research with various state-of-the-art devices and equipment, such as lightweight vests that optimize and distribute load and other projects.

Cadets in the Department of Civil and Mechanical Engineering explained projects such as the tendon-assisted rigid exoskeleton, or T-Rex Tendon Exoskeleton, which is a brace worn over the boot that responds to electrical signals and allow contraction. The T-Rex is a cadet innovation, developed and built at West Point.

"It acts like a second set of muscles that allow a Soldier to get to a place faster and better," Class of 2015 Cadet Fred Hill said.



U.S. Military Academy Superintendent Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen Jr. greets 14 active duty and retired members of the Army's 2014 Warrior and Invictus Games Team who traveled to West Point Dec. 4 to participate in a congratulatory event for earning the Chairman's Cup at the Warrior Games in October. The Army team won a total of 71 medals. Caslen spoke with the athletes about Army football and they presented him with a signed 2014 Warrior Games poster.

Biology was also a part of the event with a presentation on muscle and nerve tissue regeneration by Lt. Col. Luis Alvarez, Department of Chemistry and Life Science.

The athletes attended demonstrations in a research lab inside Mahan Hall that included an odd-looking treadmill with two belts that measures the load of the body moving forward, backward and sideways. The treadmill is used to test products.

"We need to ensure a device is working the way it should and doesn't have disastrous effects," Dr. Rebecca Zifchock, associate professor in the CME Department, said.

"The belts can run independently or at the same time and can simulate all gaits."

The athletes took some time out of their busy itinerary to speak with faculty members and cadets about their reasons for competing, facilitated by Dr. Nate Zinsser, Center for Enhanced Performance.

The forum began with Zinsser asking the athletes why they compete.

Maj. Ray O'Donnell, who competed in the swimming category and has recovered from his injuries, spoke about his eight months as an inpatient and a year of outpatient rehabilitation from injuries sustained in Afghanistan. Through rehabilitation, he was able to do everything that an Army officer is supposed to do

including serving on a deployment.

"I remember when the Warrior Games first kicked off in 2010," O'Donnell said. "I thought that was cool for those guys who are going through what I had gone through, but I graduated from that. I kind of looked down on it at first. Fast-forward to 2014 when I was stationed in Hawaii, the Navy and Air Force hosted an event for wounded warriors and I had an opportunity to come to the Army trials at West Point and made the team."

O'Donnell said being with his colleagues and sharing experiences, both in the military and the recovery, is an important part of that recovery process.

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Wreaths Across America returns to West Point Cemetery.

KATHY EASTWOOD/PV
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Cadets in crisis mode at WMD Strategic Gaming Workshop.

MIKE STRASSER/PV
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Class of 2015 Cadet Micah Clark gives a presentation on Terrorism: Causes and Countermeasures, for which he received second place in the international competition while attending the Republic of Korea's annual Hwarangdae Collegiate Forum of National Security in 2013.



Class of 2015 Cadet Meghan Wentz visits the Demilitarized Zone with the other international cadets who attended the conference in November.

Cadets return to Republic of Korea for annual national security conference

By Brigade S-2

Every November, the U.S. Military Academy sends a cadet to represent West Point at the Republic of Korea's annual Hwarangdae Collegiate Forum of National Security.

This year, Class of 2015 Cadet Meghan Wentz attended the conference and presented her paper on "Responsibility to Protect" and interacted with cadets from all over the world including Spain, Italy, Japan, Indonesia, Turkey and Australia.

Class of 2015 Cadet Micah Clark attended the five-day conference the previous year and said the interactions were especially valuable because the cadets he met were from states he rarely had the chance to interact with before. Clark placed second in the international competition after presenting his paper on "Terrorism: Causes and Countermeasures."

Hosted by the Korean Military Academy through the USMA Department of Social Sciences, cadets also experienced daily life at the foreign academy with Korean

cadets, and were afforded the opportunity to travel to the demilitarized zone and historic sites in South Korea.

Cadets from West Point have been participating for more than a dozen years and those who've attended said it offered valuable lessons, not only about other cultures, but about their own role as West Point cadets and future Army officers.

Both Clark and Wentz still remain in touch with their international friends, and said they hope to meet them again as allies in the future.

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"It's the camaraderie that you don't get just anywhere," O'Donnell said. "We were competing as far as we can, but there is that brotherhood and sisterhood. So here I was four years ago thinking I was above it. For me personally, it's about living life to the fullest. We all made it back home and I feel we owe it to honor those who didn't make it home."

First Lt. Kelly Elmlinger, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Warrior Transition Battalion, suffered nerve damage from synovial sarcoma in her left lower leg. Elmlinger has always been involved in athletics by playing organized sports throughout her high school years and competed in running, cycling, swimming and crossfit.

"For me, I found organized sports and being a true member of this team sets up your success in the military," Elmlinger said. "I can rely on myself and they can rely on me. We are now competing in different arenas, but I really feel like all my challenges is practice for me when you have a significant illness.

Elmlinger said competing also allows her a way to give back to those who assisted her throughout her recovery and subsequent achievements along the way.

The athletes presented a framed poster with their signatures to USMA Superintendent Lt. Gen. Robert Caslen Jr. while he spoke informally to the athletes about the Army Football team, the Warrior Ethos and setting an example to cadets by overcoming adversity.

"You have demonstrated the winning culture by setting a tremendous example for us all," Caslen said.

The warrior-athletes concluded their visit with a pep talk to the Army Football team as they prepare to face the Naval Academy in the 115th Army-Navy Game.

A photo set from the visit is available at the USMA Flickr page at https://www.flickr.com/photos/west_point/sets/72157649210971418/. Videos from the 2014 Warrior Games are available, courtesy of DVIDS, at <http://www.dvidshub.net/feature/2014WarriorGames#.VIcA3O8tCmQ>.



The West Point Department of Chemistry and Life Science gave the warrior-athletes an overview of projects including neurological and bone regeneration, and bio-materials research and that are currently funded through the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program. West Point Civil and Mechanical Engineering gave a presentation on their innovative research to help Soldiers operate more efficiently in combat environments.

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