



# The Journey

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## The Warrior Games: Spirit and Strength

By Sarah Greer, WTC Stratcom

**T**his May, the Warrior Games was a testament to warrior spirit and strength. Wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers competed to demonstrate how much is possible for wounded warriors.

“I sensed so many emotions from the athletes—pride, perseverance, accomplishment, and increased self-confidence,” said WTC Commander, BG Gary Cheek.

The Warrior Games provided a unique challenge for those who wanted to learn more about adaptive sports and compete at a national level. Competitor injuries included: upper body, lower body, spinal cord, and traumatic brain injuries, as well as post-traumatic stress. Two-hundred athletes competed at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. The Army had 100 competitors, 50 from the Marine Corps, 25 from the Air Force, and 25 from the Navy/Coast Guard.

The events were shooting, swimming, archery, sitting volleyball, cycling, track, wheelchair basketball, discus, and shot put. The Army athletes earned a total of 68 medals—22 gold, 21 silver, and 25 bronze.



Members of the Army volleyball team went up against the Marines during Warrior Games.

“I’m not sure I’ll ever fully digest this experience for quite some time,” said AW2 Soldier SGT David Marklein. “After my wife, children, and grandchildren, this has been the inspiration of my life. We’re surrounded by so many warriors who refuse to quit, and that is what military service is all about.”

The Warrior Games united the thrill of sports with wounded warrior’s recovery efforts, allowing warriors to embrace ability over disability through athletic competition—while at the same time building camaraderie and

raising awareness of Paralympic competition and adaptive sports.

“I encourage all Warriors in Transition to consider training and applying for the 2011 Warrior Games—there is something empowering about setting and achieving challenging goals,” said Cheek.

To read more about the Warrior Games, visit the WTC and AW2 Blogs and search for “Warrior Games” or visit [WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil/warriorgames/](http://WTC.armylive.dodlive.mil/warriorgames/).

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# AW2 2010 Symposium Delegates Impact Change

By Sarah Greer, WTC Stratcom

**S**ixty-five severely wounded Soldiers, Veterans, and their Family members gathered in San Antonio, TX, from June 20-25, 2010, for the sixth AW2 Symposium. For five days, they worked through intensive focus group discussions—sharing their personal experiences and listening to the challenges that others encountered.



(left to right) Delegates James Howard and Jeffrey Pone prioritize issues during focus group discussions.

Delegates broke into five focus groups: Careers, Family, Medical, Soldier Support, and Veterans Affairs (VA), and spent the week prioritizing the issues affecting the group’s subject matter. At the end of the week, each group briefed its top issues and recommended actions to senior Army leaders and VA officials.

“The AW2 Symposium is about listening to those who have been through it and learning first-hand about ways we can continue to improve how we care for our

most severely wounded, ill, and injured Soldiers, Veterans and their Families—then take action,” said then AW2 Director COL Jim

Rice. “These delegates are the voice of the Army’s 7,000 severely wounded Soldiers, and we listen very closely to what they say.”

The Symposium wasn’t an easy experience for delegates. The focus group discussions delved into deep, emotional issues, and many delegates relived the challenges they experienced as they or their Family member received treatment and transitioned to life post-injury.

“I knew it would be hard work,” said AW2 spouse Tabbie Reeder, “but everyone is focused on what we came for. Everyone has a lot of compassion for other people’s issues. The wounded warriors and Families aren’t angry at all—we’re here to make it better for those yet to come.”

This theme resonated with all delegates. They realized they had the opportunity to impact Army warrior care and to improve the experience for wounded warriors who will follow in their footsteps.

AW2 Veteran, Matt Staton, stated, “I can leave this event knowing that my voice, and

the voices of the Soldiers I represent, will be heard. The AW2 Symposium is an excellent process for the Army to listen and to improve warrior care. All the delegates leave with the knowledge that a lot of people in the Army are

striving to improve the care we wounded warriors receive.”



Delegate Scott Stephenson (center) ties lures with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing Inc.



(left to right) Delegates Marybel Mendez, Elena Barthel, and Melissa Smith participate in focus group discussions on medical issues with facilitator Marty Marks.

**AW2 Symposium delegates presented the following top five issues in warrior care to leadership from the Army and Department of Veterans Affairs. Delegates also briefed their recommendations for resolving these issues.**

- 1. Medically retired service member’s eligibility for Concurrent Receipt of Disability Pay (CRDP)**
- 2. Post 9/11 GI Bill transferability to dependents for all medically retired service members**
- 3. Mandatory PTSD/TBI training for VA healthcare staff**
- 4. Transfer option from Temporary Disability Retired List (TDRL) to Permanent Disability Retired (PDR) for wounded warriors**
- 5. Benefits and entitlements information to wounded warrior primary caregivers**

Issues raised at previous Symposiums have resulted in real change for AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and Families. Those that have been resolved include expanded facilities to

treat traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), a stipend for primary caregivers of severely wounded servicemembers, the creation of the AW2 Community Support Network, and a \$10,000 increase in VA housing benefits.

Symposium delegates also had the opportunity to meet with 23 organizations in the AW2 Community Support Exhibit Hall. These organizations offered a wide variety of services, such as counseling services, adaptive sports activities, and service dogs.



AW2 kids enjoy Operation Purple® camp activities during the AW2 Symposium.

of fun—they swam, visited Sea World, and spent an entire day at nearby Camp Flaming Arrow.

“My 15-year-old daughter fought me about coming to camp,” said AW2 caregiver Maria Mendez-Valentin. “After the first day, she was so excited—there were a lot of other kids her age, and they talked about their feelings toward their injured Soldier. It was really helpful in opening up the conversation for our Family.”



Delegate Mirtha Pow and her child are all smiles during Family Night at the San Antonio Missions’ baseball game.

## AW2 Career Expo

For the first time, the AW2 Career Expo was open to wounded warriors from all services in the San Antonio area. Building on the success of last year’s career forum, AW2 hosted a larger Career Expo on Friday and Saturday before the Symposium. Delegates and additional local wounded warriors participated in sessions with the AW2 Career and Education Section and other agencies on topics like résumé writing, interviewing techniques, and starting a small business.

Participants also had the opportunity to meet with recruiters from nearly 50 employers representing the federal government, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses.

## Operation Purple®

While the AW2 Symposium delegates engaged in focus groups, AW2 kids participated in Operation Purple®, an urban adventure camp hosted by the National Military Family Association (NMFA). The kids, ages 6 to 17, spent a significant amount of time bonding with each other, discussing their feelings about their parents’ injuries, and sharing stories about living with a wounded warrior. In addition, they got to have lots



AW2 Symposium delegate Robert Barthel and his child share a laugh at Family Night.

NMFA personnel and YMCA camp counselors focused on the message that “Kids Serve Too.” One key Operation Purple® activity was the Wall of Honor. Each camp participant made a poster with a photo of their wounded warrior and described what he or she meant to the camper personally.

AW2 children at camp, especially the teenagers, understood the purpose of Symposium and their parents’ mission for the week. “The Army is listening to them,” said AW2 kid Jasmine Boone. “The Army is trying to make changes, good changes, so that people that have served our country and got hurt are treated fairly.”

# Wounded Warriors Graduate with Master's Degrees

By Jim Merrill, AW2 Advocate and Tania Meireles, WTC Stratcom

The month of May saw many college graduations and ceremonies across the country. The master's hooding ceremony at the University of Kansas (KU) in Lawrence for the first six graduates of the AW2 Education Initiative was a particularly special one.

The graduates, all wounded warriors, were the first participants selected to take part in a pilot cooperative program between the Department of the Army (DA) and KU. Soldiers that possessed bachelor's degrees could attend KU as either COAD (Continuation on Active Duty) Soldiers or as paid DA civilians, with all fees paid, to obtain their master's degree, and in return become an instructor

at the Command and General Staff College (C&GS) at Fort Leavenworth, or in another capacity with the Army.

"This program is important because it gives wounded Soldiers confidence," said program graduate and AW2 Soldier CPT Gates Brown. "Many are quick to give us their sympathy, help, and respect. This is welcome and needed. This program gives wounded Soldiers the chance to push their limits."

The Soldiers who completed the AW2 Education Initiative Program are (left to right) CPT (Ret) Wes Fine, CW3 Ari Jean-Baptiste, CPT Tim Hornik, and CPT Gates Brown—not pictured are CPT (Ret) Dave Holden and SGT (Ret) Rob Laurent.



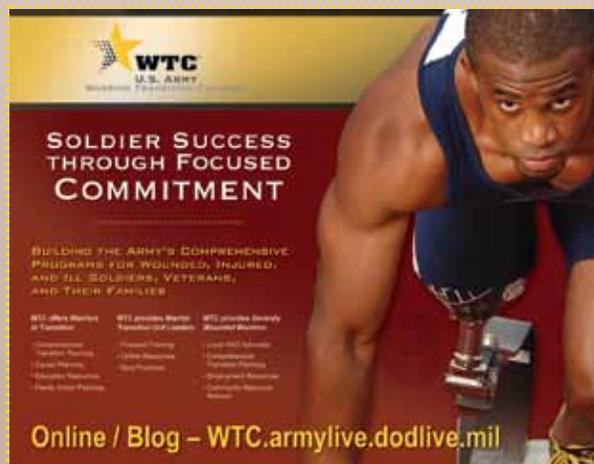
Brown said the program gave them an opportunity to encounter a new challenge, expand their horizons, and work hard enough to realize new goals. "This is a hand up and not a hand out. An important part of challenging yourself is setting a high standard. KU provided such a standard. The program also signifies a new way of thinking about what wounded Soldiers can contribute to the Army. This is an exciting change. Wounded Soldiers still have much to give."

Visit the AW2 Blog at [AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil](http://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil) to read more.

## The Story Behind the Photo

AW2 Veteran Kortney Clemons was an Army medic in Iraq when he was severely wounded while helping to evacuate a wounded Soldier on February 21, 2005. Clemons and several other Soldiers were carrying the wounded Soldier to a helicopter when an improvised explosive device (IED) was remotely detonated, killing three Soldiers and wounding the other three. Clemons lost his right leg above the knee and spent the next 10 months at Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC).

He always had a love of sports and participated in a U.S. Paralympic sports clinic at BAMC in 2005, and then participated in the U.S. Olympic Committee Paralympic Military Sports Camp. By 2007, he was the first Iraq war Veteran to qualify for the U.S. Paralympic Team in both powerlifting and track. He is currently a resident athlete at the Olympic Training Center as part of the Paralympic Resident Track & Field Program in Chula Vista, CA. He hopes to qualify for the 2012 Paralympic Games in London and recently became the national champion in the 100 and 200 meter dashes.



Kortney Clemons is featured on several WTC outreach materials.

# Gone Fishing

By Tania Meireles, WTC Stratcom

**Y**ou may have heard about AW2 Veteran Clayton Carver through articles in the *Fort Hood Sentinel* or on Fishingworld.com where he has been making headlines—about fishing, starting a TV show, and saving lives.

Carver was a specialist in Iraq in 2006 when he was severely injured. His company was posted at an Iraqi police station when insurgents attacked. He had to shoot insurgents that were sneaking into the compound. Another insurgent spotted Carver and shot at him and then launched a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG). Carver was hit in the back by the RPG and sustained shrapnel injuries and a traumatic brain injury.

He recovered at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center and was able to go home to Fort Hood, TX, and receive care from his Family and a physical therapist. When Warrior Transition Units (WTUs) were stood up in 2007, he was assigned to the Fort Hood WTU.

made a huge difference. I have seen my friends rush out of the Army and now they are having a harder time getting into civilian life. And having a good chain of command looking out for you helps a lot.”

Carver has always had a love of fishing and always dreamed of becoming a professional bass fisherman. So it seemed natural for his rear-detachment sergeant major to ask Carver to bring his boat to Fort Hood and take wounded Soldiers out on the water for some fishing.

“Getting those Soldiers out of their rooms for a little while, allowed them to get a better look at their situation. And that is how the idea for a fishing show all started.”

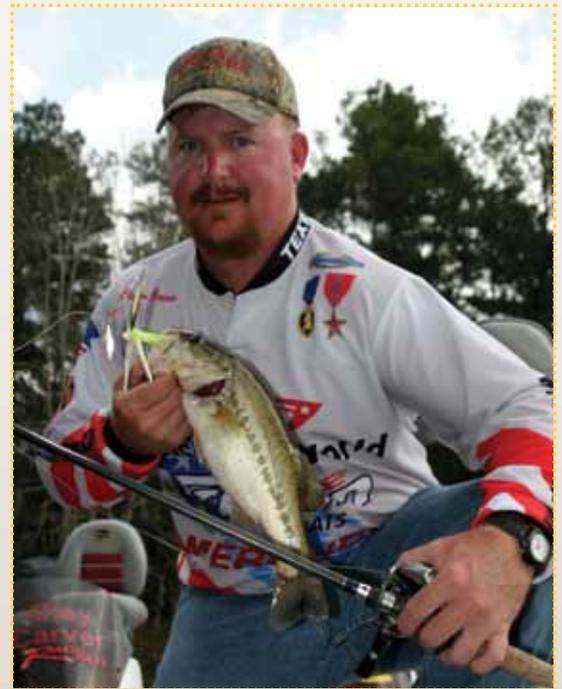
Carver spoke to his AW2 Advocate Carol Livengood about his hopes to take wounded warriors fishing and make it a TV show. Livengood made some phone calls.

“Carol to the rescue,” said Carver. “Carol is unbelievable and there is so much I wouldn’t have if it weren’t for her. She has done so much, I can’t even begin to name it.”

Carver was connected with KNCT—the PBS member station in Belton, TX—and has filmed three episodes (not yet aired) of his show “Purple Heart Bassin.” He hopes to bring warriors with different injury types out on the water to teach them how to adapt

and enjoy fishing. So far, two AW2 Veterans have gone fishing with him.

Carver said that last year, Texas Boat World offered to sponsor him and they “have really helped me along with my fishing.” Carver is



AW2 Veteran Clayton Carver enjoys bass fishing during a fishing tournament (Photo courtesy of Ed Snyder).

active in bass fishing tournaments and even won a bass boat in a recent tournament. He hopes to win a seat in the BASSMasters World Classic—“the super bowl of bass fishing.”

As for saving lives, Carver had just finished fishing at Belton Lake in March when he heard there were some people in trouble. He turned his boat around and found a survivor of a capsized boat accident. Despite his severe injuries, Carver rescued the exhausted, hypothermic man from the water and even carried him off his boat before his own legs collapsed.

Whether he is working towards his goals or helping others, he doesn’t let his injuries slow him down.

If an AW2 Soldier or Veteran would like to participate in “Purple Heart Bassin” or just would like to go fishing, please contact Clayton Carver at (254) 466-3160.

“You don’t have to go on TV to go fishing with me,” said Carver. “Fishing has really helped me with my recovery, and I think it can help others too.”



(left to right) Gary Klein, Carver’s fishing partner, and the Carver Family in front of their fishing tournament first prize winnings—a bass boat.

“The WTU gave me time to transition,” said Carver. “From the high speed of Iraq to slowing down after injury for what I could still do in the civilian world. We were given the opportunity to be with Soldiers with similar conditions and talk and get perspective. It

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## Welcome New AW2 Director: LTC (P) Gregory D. Gadson

**L**TC (P) Greg Gadson became the new AW2 Director on July 13, 2010. As he served in every major conflict in the last two decades, his career focused on serving Soldiers.

“At AW2, I will continue to measure success through Soldiers, as they transition back to active duty or to a productive civilian life,” said LTC Gadson. “I am ready to start putting in the hard work that will ensure AW2 continues to be an umbrella of expertise for all AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and Families.”

During his service in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2007, LTC Gadson was severely wounded by an improvised explosive device (IED), resulting in the amputation of both legs above the knee and severe damage to his right arm. LTC Gadson emphasizes that his injuries are not the important part of his story; instead, he focuses on what he has done since.

To read more about LTC Gadson, visit the AW2 blog at [AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil](http://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil).



*(left) LTC Gadson and his Family.*

*(below) AW2 Director  
LTC (P) Greg Gadson.*

