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Warrior athletes inspirational Says Texas Veteran

West Point, New York —"Inspirational," says Texas native, Retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Charles Armstead, about the military athletes he has met during the 2014 Army Warrior Trials, which are being held this week at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, N.Y.

"I'm still in awe of them," said the 37-year-old former Fort Hood Soldier, who lost his right leg during a gun battle in Iraq May 2009, while assigned to D Company, 112 Calvary. "It's absolutely amazing the things these guys can do with the injuries they have. I may be an inspiration to some of them, but they are all an inspiration to me."

Armstead competed in wheelchair basketball and shot put, hopes 2014 will be a repeat of 2013 when he was one of 50 Army athletes representing Team Army during the Department of Defense's Warrior Games that showcases the resilient spirit and athleticism of wounded, ill, and injured service members who have overcome significant physical and behavioral injuries.

"That's why I come out here," he said. "You get to meet some outstanding people. Even though a lot of the athletes here are disabled, you can see character in their intensity. They don't quit and always find something else to challenge themselves."

Armstead, who was previously assigned to Warrior Transition Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas, competed in several track and field events along with wheelchair basketball during Army Warrior Trials. The sport that motivates him most though is wheelchair basketball, an adrenalin-driven sport he has played for two and a half years.

"It's so much fun, plus it's my rehab," said the former resident of Needville, Texas, a small town about 35 miles southwest of Houston. "Since I can't get out and run, it's the best thing I can do to keep me in shape."

He also is constantly pushing his wheelchair up and down the floor and exercises with hand cycles to strengthen his upper body.

"I do things to get my endurance level up," he said, admitting that when he first started playing wheelchair basketball the hand blisters and pain were killers. "Besides the blisters, my hands and shoulders were always hurting," adding that experience and chair handling are key to blister-free hands.

Armstead, who settled in Killeen, Texas, after his retirement, now plays for the area's community wheelchair basketball team, the Harker Heights Hustlers. The training camp, he said, gives him a new insight into the world of wheelchair basketball, along with learning valuable tips he is anxious to share with his community teammates.

"The coaches here are amazing," he said, praising their paralympic experiences. "They have been a really big help and are bringing valuable insight and techniques that we can use in the games."

Armstead, who played basketball in his youth and competitive ball during his Army career, said the gunshot wound that left him without a leg hasn't really altered his life all that much.

Refusing to accept defeat just because he is minus a leg, Armstead said, "Success is all about attitude."



"It's about adjusting to a new way of doing things," he said. "You just learn to adapt and do things a different way."

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CUTLINE: Retired Sgt. 1st Class Charles Armstead, Fort Hood, Texas, directs a teammate during wheelchair basketball play at the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials. Armstead, who began playing wheelchair basketball while assigned to Warrior Transition Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas, now plays for the Harker Heights Hustlers, a local community ball club. More than 100 wounded, ill and injured service members and Veterans from across the United States congregated at West Point to train and compete in the Army Warrior Trials, June 15-19. The event is hosted by Warrior Command and includes athletes from the Army, Marines and Air Force facing off in archery, basketball, cycling, track and field, swimming, shooting, sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball. Participants in the trials include athletes with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, visual impairment, serious illnesses and amputations. (U.S. Army photo by Gloria Montgomery)

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Warrior Transition Command (WTC) is a major subordinate command under the U.S. Army Medical Command (MEDCOM). WTC's mission is to develop, coordinate and integrate the Army's Warrior Care and Transition Program (WCTP) for wounded, ill and injured soldiers, veterans and their families. For more information on WTC, visit the new WTC website, www.WTC.army.mil, follow on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/armyWTC> or join Facebook at <http://facebook.com/armyWTC>.