

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE VIA TELECONFERENCE WITH PETTY OFFICER FIRST CLASS CASEY TIBBS, U.S. NAVY, THE FIRST ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY PERSON TO COMPETE FOR THE U.S. PARALYMPICS TEAM TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2008

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, August 13th. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call today.

Note to the bloggers on the line: Please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question.

Today our guest is Petty Officer First Class Casey Tibbs. For people who might not know, he is a cryptologic technician interpreter, first class. Please correct me if I'm wrong, Casey. He's also known as CT11. It's his rating or job in the military. CT11 TIBBS: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: He's the first active-duty military person to compete for the U.S. Paralympic Team, at the Paralympic Games in 2004, and he'll be also participating in this year at the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games.

And prior to his departure for Beijing, he will explain his expectations for this year's games, what he'll be participating in. And he's known as a jack of all trades when it comes to track and field in the Paralympic Games.

So with that, I've said enough. I'm going to turn it over to you, Petty Officer First Class Casey Tibbs, for you to go ahead and start with the opening statement.

CT11 TIBBS: Okay. Well, thank you all for giving me the opportunity to come on line and share my story with everybody, and hopefully it gets out to a lot -- the people that it can definitely help.

Like the lieutenant said, I competed in the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens, Greece.

Prior to that I had lost my leg in a motorcycle accident two years -- in two thousand and -- or three years before that, in 2001. I'd been in the Navy for approximately a year and a half and then I lost my leg. The Navy kept me on

full active duty, because I was able to pass the PRT and all the requirements that were needed to stay on active duty.

And I guess the rest is sort of history from there. I stayed on active duty, went to the games in 2004. I won a gold medal and a silver medal -- a gold medal in the 4 x 100 relay and a silver in the men's pentathlon, setting a new American record -- and then went to 2006 World Championships. I got my -- won my first gold medal in the individual pentathlon and now I've qualified for the 2008 games, where I'm going to be competing in the pentathlon, the 200 meters, the long jump and the 400 meters and hopefully the relay again.

So that's where I'm at right now. And I leave in one week, heading to a training camp in Okinawa, Japan, to sort of acclimate and then we will head from Japan about three days before our opening ceremonies, which is September the 6th and then I start competing on the 9th.

LT. CRAGG: Great. I know that our bloggers are going to have a lot of questions for you.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: So Grim, let's go ahead and get started with you, and then Bryant, you'll be next. And if Pam joins us, we'll go with her.

So go ahead, Grim.

Q Yes, this is Grim of blackfive.net.

CTI1 TIBBS: Hey, Grim.

Q Do you find that the military's discipline was helpful to your recovery? I mean, you must be fairly self-disciplined to have mastered cryptography, but I'd like to know whether the military life was beneficial or whether you feel that you would have managed this on your own?

CTI1 TIBBS: That's kind of tough to say, but I definitely think that the things that I've learned since I've joined the Navy right out of high school without a doubt apply to everything I've done, not only in language school for becoming a cryptologist but definitely for everything I do on the track every day.

I mean, when I go to practice and I train, I treat it as I'm not just doing this to make myself better; I'm doing this to represent the Navy. And that's what it's gotten to today. And so I definitely use the tools that I've learned in the Navy.

Q All right, thank you.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: And we'll go back and forth. So Bryant, if you want to continue asking questions, and Grim -- just go back and forth between yourselves, okay?

Q Sure, thanks. It's good to be here.

CTI1 TIBBS: Thank you.

Q Were you an athlete before your accident?

CTI1 TIBBS: Yes, I was, actually. I competed in -- at one point in high school I was on the varsity football team, the varsity basketball team, the varsity track team, the varsity golf team and the varsity soccer team.

And that was all -- I started doing that my junior and senior year, so -- sports have always been key in my life. I mean, everything -- if I don't do something athletic every day, then I'm not really living my life. I love sports. And track and field specific, I was a 110-meter hurdler in high school and I also ran on the 4x400 meter team. And I was a decent -- decent hurdler in the state of Texas. I mean, my times in Texas probably would have been state qualifying times in other states, but just because of the state that I grew up in, our -- not our athletes were better, it's just that we had more athletes competing.

Q Okay, great.

Q This is Grim again.

CTI1 TIBBS: Hey, Grim.

Q How long was the period between the accident and the time in which you were able to begin training to recover some athletic ability and then push on to new goals?

CTI1 TIBBS: That's a good question. I lost my leg March 5th of 2001. I started -- my first day of walking was the very end of May, so that was roughly about two and a half months of sitting around, just doing physical therapy without my prosthesis. And then I could -- my first time to run around a track, I remember, it was in August of that year and it took me probably two and a half minutes to run around 400 meters. And I remember doing it, and it was probably the hardest run I've ever done in my life. But after that day, I was able to progress a lot more. And now I can run 400 meters in 53 seconds.

Q Wow. (Chuckles.) Good.

Okay, Bryant. Thank you.

Q I'm curious as to how much does the artificial leg weigh as compared to the same part of your natural leg. And do you have to learn to compensate for that, or have they been able to make it the same weight so you don't have that kind of --

CTI1 TIBBS: You know, now at this point, being an athlete, I want it to be as light as possible.

Q Yeah. CTI1 TIBBS: I mean, so I -- that's my main goal. I don't try to make it heavy at all. I like my prosthetic -- my prosthesis to be as light as possible. And that's both with my walking leg and my running legs. So, you know, I've heard some prosthetists tell me that losing a leg below the knee is -- can be up to 10 percent of your body weight, which makes a little bit of sense, being that it's a -- with all the -- I guess all the anatomy that's below the knee.

Q Yeah.

CTI1 TIBBS: So I don't know. I guess if you weighed 200 pounds and you lost your leg below the knee, you automatically lose 20 pounds. I don't know if that's true or not, but that's things that I've heard.

Q Okay. So how much does the artificial leg weigh?

CTI1 TIBBS: My artificial leg probably weighs about two pounds, maybe three.

Q (Off mike.)

LT. CRAGG: I'm going to jump in with some questions, and then you guys can -- I'm just curious about some things. Have you been to Beijing before?

CTI1 TIBBS: I've never been to China, no. This will be my first trip.

Q And have you been following the Olympics right now?

CTI1 TIBBS: Oh, yeah! I mean, that's all we watch right now. The Olympic fever is definitely on in my house right now.

LT. CRAGG: With that being said, what is your favorite Olympic sport? I can guess what it is. But what has been your favorite one so far?

CTI1 TIBBS: Oh, well, so far, since track and field hasn't started, I mean, how could you not be glued to the TV watching Michael Phelps do what he's doing right now? I mean, such an inspiration and such an athlete, to go out and just win every race that he's doing and not only win, break a world record. I mean, every time he gets in the pool, all eyes are on him. And it's just amazing.

Track and field, that's my biggest sport. I can't wait for track and field to start.

LT. CRAGG: Sorry, Bryant or Grim. I'll turn it over to you in a second.

But who is your hero when it comes to the Olympics? Do you have a particular person that maybe you idolize, maybe in the Paralympics or the Olympics? Do you have one?

CTI1 TIBBS: You know, I don't know, because the whole Olympic thing for me didn't start, the dream really didn't start, till I was -- after I lost my leg. And I was 22 years old. Or 23 is when I started thinking, hey, I could go to the Paralympic Games. That's really when my dream started.

I mean, in high school, I never even thought about going to the Olympics. I mean, the only thing that I thought about was maybe becoming a professional football player or a soccer player or golf.

That was really all I thought about. But reality struck in. And I figured, well, to do that, you're going to have to be really, really good. And I just didn't put in the amount of time that these guys do. So I joined the Navy, and so my dream for the whole Olympics didn't start till I was 23.

But you know, my coach actually is an Olympian. His name is Joaquim Cruz. He's from Brazil. And he actually holds -- he won the gold medal in 1984 in the 800 meters. And he's the only gold medalist in track and field from Brazil. And I would have to say working with him every day, definitely the things that he brings to the track as a coach, that he used to be an athlete. I mean, he ran 1:41 in the 800 meters and he's one of three people to ever do that in history of all sports, period. And he's definitely an inspiration to me. So he's definitely one of my Olympic heroes.

LT. CRAGG: Gentlemen, I'll turn it over to you. And I have some follow-on questions later on.

Grim or Bryant.

Q This is Grim again. We have a large number of military readers, unfortunately some of whom have been injured in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I'd like to ask you, kind of going back to what you were talking about, that period of early recovery and sort of the hardest runs that you ever did being the ones right after that, do you have any advice for those who are trying to do that and sort of push through and start living the life that they want to live again?

CTI1 TIBBS: Well, I have tons of advice.

You know, I actually -- I don't know if I told you guys this. But I work at the Navy Medical Center here in San Diego. That's where I'm actually attached to for the command.

And we opened up a combat casualty care center here in San Diego. And my job is to sort of -- is to play as a peer mentor for these guys. So I'm actually sitting in the prosthetics lab right now and there's wounded warriors outside of this office I'm sitting in right now.

My entire thing I tell these guys is you've got to take everything one day at a time and don't overdo it in the beginning and just realize that it's going to get better. And that's what I tell them at the beginning, because sometimes they can't really -- they can hear it from a doctor; they can -- they can hear it from their family, but when they hear it from somebody who has actually sat in a hospital bed and gone from a hospital bed to an Olympic podium, it gives them a lot more hope. So -- and that's what I tell these guys.

Q Thank you.

Q Okay. Now, you got your -- (inaudible) -- your injury while on active duty. You were able to stay in the Navy. Under the circumstances then, do you think there's a role for people who have disabilities or injuries sustained while civilians to serve in uniform? I mean, the Israeli army does that and other armies do the same thing as well.

CTI1 TIBBS: I'm sorry. I didn't really understand.

Q Sure, I was just wondering -- I mean, have you -- have you any thoughts on the U.S. military permitting people to join up who already have a limb missing or some kind of disability --

CTI1 TIBBS: Okay.

Q -- because they can do missions, they can do jobs that don't require them carrying a rucksack or a weapon or whatever.

CTI1 TIBBS: You know, that's really good, because I -- like, I'm on the U.S. Paralympic team and most of the guys I compete against are all people that were born the way that -- either missing a limb or with whatever disability they have. And they don't know what it's like to have a leg. And I mean, some of my teammates -- we have a guy on our team, his name is Jeff Skiba, who is missing his leg just like me who's born like that. He high-jumps over 7 feet. I mean, it's -- of course he could serve. And I talk to these guys all the time, and it makes no sense with today's technology that they wouldn't be able to serve just because of their disability.

Q Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: Petty Officer Casey Tibbs, tell me about -- I'm going to ask you two questions. The picture that just is in my mind is the one where you're standing on the track -- the track field, this -- if you will. And you're holding an American flag and you're flanked by two of your -- two of your co-runners who were on your team.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: And you have this -- such a great smile. And you are just so thrilled. Bring me back to that moment and then bring me forward to the 2008, what your expectations are -- you know, what that meant for you to win that and then how you believe this ever could become a dream for you.

CTI1 TIBBS: Well, that picture was taken right after our 4 x 100 meter relay in Greece. And it was kind of a -- I didn't expect to even be in that race because I was an alternate. And then we had two guys, actually, drop out. So we had to get two alternates put in that race. And we had -- in our Paralympic class in the relays, you can have two arm amputees and two leg amputees.

Well, we only had leg amputees. And we had one arm amputee and -- which is -- gives you a huge disadvantage, because arm amputees, their class is a lot more difficult, in that they have both their legs. So they run faster than the leg -- their times are better.

So Australia and France had two extremely fast arm amputees that -- I mean, they were favored to win that race, for us not having our two -- or not having our main guys out there. So when I ran the second leg, and I think I handed off the baton, and we were in third place and -- just to win that race, it was just -- it was incredible. I mean, we hadn't -- we didn't think we were going to even be there, and then it happened, and we won a gold medal. So it was so shocking, and it was so rewarding, and everybody in the stands were going crazy. So that's why that moment was just -- I'll never forget that moment.

And for Beijing, I mean, the one thing that I tell people about all the time is this is my second games. People sort of expect great things out of you now because you did it at the last games. So there's a little bit more pressure. But I'm taking this as I've done all the work, I've done all the training I'm supposed to do. I'm just ready to go there and have fun, and that's what I'm going to do. And I really can't wait to go out there and

represent the United States. I really can't -- and not only the United States, the United States Navy as well, and the whole military.

LT. CRAGG: Gentleman, over to you.

Q This is Grim, again, of Blackfive.net. You said something there that interested me about different classes. I was wondering -- one of the thing that we were talking about the other day because the women's saber team did so well in the Olympics was, we've -- it turns, out of course, we have a lot of saber fans. Can you tell us a bit about how the rules differ in that sport than for the Paralympics, as opposed to the regular Olympics?

CTI1 TIBBS: For saber?

Q Well, fencing generally.

CTI1 TIBBS: You know, I really don't know that much about the fencing in the Paralympics sport. I just know that -- I'm almost positive that they -- it's all in wheelchair, and that's the only thing that's different. Q Oh, I see.

CTI1 TIBBS: I think so. I'm not sure on that.

Q Well, fair enough. It just struck me as interesting.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: And then also, for all our listeners who will be listening to this after the fact, can you tell them how much training you had to do from maybe when you left the Olympics in 2004 until now? What is your regular training regiment (sic) like daily, weekly? Break that down.

CTI1 TIBBS: Well, right now, I'm so extremely fortunate because my command has given me full time to train right now. And I come in to the hospital and I work with patients as patients, you know, come in. So right now I actually -- I train at the Olympic training center here in San Diego, and I get to practice on Monday morning usually at about 8:00 every Monday. I'll have a track workout, which will last all the way until almost about 11:00. That's including long jump, throwing the discus, the shot put, you know, whatever that day entails.

But usually every morning -- Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays -- I get to track about 8:00 and I leave at 11:00.

And then Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays I have weight-room workout in the afternoon, which will last about two hours.

So Mondays and Tuesdays and Thursdays are my heavy days. Wednesday I only have afternoon workout, where I -- it's just really light. And then Friday I just have a morning workout, no weights in the afternoon and same thing with Saturday. So I'm -- I train -- it can last up to, you know, 30, 35 hours a week.

LT. CRAGG: Gentlemen, more questions?

Q Yeah. Bryant Jordan here, military.com again. As somebody who was -- about 30 years before you had your accident, I was in the Army and I was

hit by a car on my motorcycle. And it broke up my leg, but I didn't lose it. I was wondering, what are the circumstances of your accident?

CTI1 TIBBS: Mine was -- I went into a turn going too fast and I hit a guard rail. And it actually severed my leg right there at the impact of the wall. And I didn't know I lost my leg, at first. And then after I got done -- after I finished sliding, I looked down and my leg was gone. And it was -- it was so mangled up, the doctors didn't even try to put it back on.

Q Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I didn't know my mine was busted up either, till I tried to stand up and saw it was taking a left turn midway between the knee and the ankle, you know? (Laughs.)

CTI1 TIBBS: Oof.

Q Well, hell, you've done great for all -- you know, what a hell of a trauma to have. And you've done fantastic.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah, thank you very much. You know, that's the one thing I tell people. I mean, I'm -- the whole reason I'm here, and it's not a good -- it's because of my motorcycle accident. You know, if I didn't lose my leg, then I would just -- I would have been a -- you know, done everything else like I was supposed to, but because I lost my leg and because there was a Paralympic sport then I could still become something great. I mean, I took advantage of things and I train hard and I've worked my butt off to get here and it's all because we have Paralympic sports, you know?

Q At this point, I'm assuming you're staying in the Navy for a career. Right? CTI1 TIBBS: You know what? I don't know. You never know.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: What's going to -- go ahead.

Q Thanks very much.

CTI1 TIBBS: Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off. What's going to happen after you get back from the Olympics?

CTI1 TIBBS: I will come back in to work at the hospital every day and just be around the guys that are -- that are going through physical therapy and taking them out, showing them how to run on their prostheses or doing camps with these guys. We have a huge Paralympic military sports program that we implement here at the hospital. And I help that -- help out with that. And I'll do that until my term is up this coming March. And it all depends on either what the Navy has planned for me or what they don't have planned for me.

LT. CRAGG: And for the listeners that might not know, the ESPY Awards, 2007 --

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: You were chosen out of, what, 10 million, right?

CTI1 TIBBS: Well, no, it's -- I think that's -- there's over 10 million people that voted -- voted for, yeah.

LT. CRAGG: Voted, that's it. That's what -- (inaudible) -- can you explain that? That's a really prestigious honor.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah. I mean, the ESPY -- I mean, I'm sure everyone knows the ESPY Awards you see every year that -- on ESPN.

It's just a prestigious award that's given out to athletes in all sports in general.

And you know, to win the category I won, for Best Male Athlete with a Disability, that's huge because it goes not just -- it's not Best Track Athlete, or it's not Best Golfer. It's not Best Football Player. It's Best Athlete with a Disability. And that goes through athletes all over the world with disabilities in every different sport. And I was chosen.

I wasn't -- I was picked to -- I was nominated. And then the public votes, and I won the award. So it was a huge honor. I mean, it's something I'll never forget.

LT. CRAGG: Gentlemen.

Q I'm all set. Thank you very, very much.

CTI1 TIBBS: Oh, no problem. Thank you, guys.

Q Great luck to you over in Beijing.

CTI1 TIBBS: Thank you.

Q I have one last question. This is Grim again.

CTI1 TIBBS: Okay.

Q For military members who might want to become involved in this and don't necessarily know how, how should they go about getting involved with the Paralympics or the programs that the military has in this regard?

CTI1 TIBBS: Well, that's a very good question.

We have a huge Paralympic military sports program. And you can actually go on the Paralympic website, U.S. Paralympic website. And they have a whole section, that's devoted to military sports program and all the contacts and all the information you need, to get involved with any Paralympic sport that they're interested in. And that goes with sailing, shooting, archery, swimming.

I mean, we have a huge array of categories of sports. And I mean, the whole thing that people should look at it for, it's not about going there and winning a gold medal and being the first-place guy. It's about just getting back to your life and competing in sports and just playing sports.

It's a huge part of rehabilitation. And on the other side, if you are decent at it, you can travel the world and see all kinds of things and get to meet a whole bunch of new people.

Q Do they have an equestrian program? Do you know?

CTI1 TIBBS: Actually they do. Yes, they do.

Q Good for them.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah.

Q Thank you very much.

CTI1 TIBBS: You're welcome.

LT. CRAGG: Casey, I just have one more question.

You said that, you know, you talked about your current job out in California. What has been the response, when you've implemented the Paralympic training, for the people that are going through rehab or rehabilitation? Can you explain kind of what the responses have been and how they've, you know, responded to your story?

CTI1 TIBBS: You know, I can use an example. How about -- I'll use an example of a guy that I met, a patient, that when he first came to the Naval Medical Center, he was an injured Marine. He lost both his legs in Iraq.

When he first got to the hospital, he was not very open. He was -- he really stuck with himself and stayed in his barracks room. And he just was sort of a loner.

And when we started implementing wheelchair basketball every week and other sports, where he could play and participate in, with everyone else, it totally got him out of the room. And he couldn't wait to play every week.

And that was something that was just -- I mean, if somebody started living life again for -- is -- was to play basketball or to go race in wheelchair and -- you know, and is -- I don't know if it turned his -- if that was the thing that helped open his eyes again, but it definitely wasn't a factor that shied him away from things. So it didn't hurt, and it helped more than anything. And that's just one example of many other guys that we have.

LT. CRAGG: Well, thank you so much. And with that, I'm sure both Bryant or Grim basically don't have any other questions.

CTI1 TIBBS: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: But would you like to end with a closing comment or any final thoughts?

CTI1 TIBBS: You know, first of all, I'd just like to say thank you for all the support I've been getting from the military. I mean, it's -- it is part of the reason of why I'm doing what I'm doing. And I just can't wait to get to Beijing and represent everybody in this country and especially our military, very, very strongly over there. And I can't thank you guys enough.

And there's one message that I'd -- I try to leave with anybody I meet in -- about -- who I share my story with. It's that, you know, this all happened because I took advantage of a Paralympic sport after something devastating happened to me. And that might not happen to everybody. It might

not have the same situation or the same -- the -- I don't know -- the same choices that I had, but if something devastating happens to you in life, you can -- there's always something that -- you can always find a way to have a good outcome for it. And that's what -- that's why my life is what it is.

Q Excellent.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks.

And for listeners, also, if you want to follow Petty Officer Casey Tibbs on his journey to Beijing, he's actually going to be doing a blog posting from Beijing.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah.

LT. CRAGG: Can you let everybody know what that is? CTI1 TIBBS: Yeah. Actually, my website just opened up. It's [www.casey -- C-A-S-E-Y - - tibbs -- T-I-B-B-S -- .com](http://www.casey-tibbs.com). And everything should be up, and I'll be -- hopefully I'll be able to -- I know the website has/is? finally launched, but I'm still waiting on the blog thing to completely go set. So I'm not able to blog yet, but I should by the end of this week. So --

LT. CRAGG: And perhaps when you come back, if you're -- I mean, if you're interested, and we'd -- I'm sure the bloggers would be interested in talking to you after your experience in Beijing -- maybe the possibility of booking another one when you've -- on your return.

CTI1 TIBBS: Yes, definitely.

Q And Casey, real quick, I just happened -- I just clicked on to the paralympic.org site. Is that the one you mean?

CTI1 TIBBS: Is it the U.S. Paralympic site?

Q No, this is the IPC.

CTI1 TIBBS: No, that's the International -- you've got to go to the U.S. Paralympic one. And I don't know -- they just changed their website domain name, so I would just Google search "U.S. Paralympics" and it'll take you to their website.

Q And that I'll -- so I'll do that. All right. Thank you again, and good luck.

CTI1 TIBBS: Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: And if anybody -- any of our listeners have any questions after the fact, you're listening to this audio -- at a(n) audio file - -excuse me -- you could submit the questions some -- on DoDLIVE, you can do your comments there, and we can get the questions out to Casey, or go Petty Officer First Class Casey Tibbs' blog posting. I'm sure you can have comments on your posting as well. Correct?

CTI1 TIBBS: Yes.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

So with that, again, thank you, gentlemen, for joining. Today's program will be available online at the bloggers' link on dod.mil. We'll be able to access a story based on today's call, as well as the audio file and the transcript.

And again, I just want to say thank you for joining us and best of luck in Beijing.

CTI1 TIBBS: Well, thank you. Thank you very much. LT. CRAGG:
Okay.

CTI1 TIBBS: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks, gentlemen.

CTI1 TIBBS: All right. Bye-bye.

END.