



## Athlete Profile (National)

### Harry Klein: Former POW in Vietnam Takes On A Whole New Challenge

When Harry “Dusty” Klein was hospitalized at the Lake City, Fla., Veterans Affairs Medical Center last October, he had simple directions for his doctors. “Take it off, let me get healed up, give me my other leg and get out of the way,” the 58-year-old Vietnam veteran told them. By then, Klein already had lost his left leg and some right toes to a staph infection, and was faced with losing the right for the same reason. Despite the subsequent loss of both legs, Klein walked onstage as the keynote speaker at a Memorial Day program seven months later. In July, he will compete in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Anchorage, Alaska, competing in the bowling, air guns and table tennis events.

Many athletes set their sights on the gold medal, but not Klein. He has grown accustomed to yielding to what’s in store for him. His Army service in Vietnam – where he was a supply escort, infantryman and reconnaissance scout behind enemy lines – taught him that. “I was a POW for 18 months, and I was at what they nicknamed the Hanoi Hilton,” says Klein, who served with the 101st Airborne Division. “I had been there for some time and saw that some of the guys didn’t make it. I just sat down one day and said to God, ‘If you get me home one more time, I will do whatever you want.’ I was one of the first POWs released.”

Back in the states, Klein attended Purdue University, graduating with a degree in engineering and architecture. After starting his own business, he worked with CBS for 17 years as a dancer and choreographer, ultimately owning 13 dance studios throughout the U.S. In 1997, he became an ordained minister. Now, he works with two youth groups and volunteers at the VA medical center chaplain’s office. Two years ago, he realized a lifelong dream of owning a thoroughbred horse farm, where he keeps 13 horses. His goal is to teach riding to children with disabilities and special needs.

Klein, who lives in Live Oak, Florida, says the more he shares his blessings with others, the more he is blessed. When he lost his right leg, he visited 20 patients a day at the VA medical center, rolling the halls of the hospital in his wheelchair. By the time he left the hospital eight months later, he was able to walk from room to room. “Because of great therapy and determination, I am actually walking,” he says. “I am now walking with the use of a cane, and by July 4, I will walk with nothing except myself and the grace of God.” Although Klein can walk using his prostheses, he still requires a wheelchair to compete in many sports, a requirement for competition at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. A first-time competitor at the event, Klein is already looking forward to the 2007 competition. “I’m already in training for next year, and I’ll be in the 100-meter, 200-meter, 300-meter, and 3,000-meter endurance run in wheelchair track, and I’ll also be competing in two swimming events. My heart isn’t strong enough yet to compete in those this year,” he says.

Just as he had simple directions for his doctors, Dusty Klein has simple advice for those with disabilities: “Don’t listen to any people who have negativity. Do what you feel is right, and never give up because anything is possible. Believe me, I know.”