



News Release

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Advisory No. 20120906-1

September 6, 2012

London WTB-E trip not just for fun

By Ed Drohan

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For 17 Warrior Transition Battalion-Europe Soldiers, a trip to London to see the Paralympic Games is a chance to have some fun and see the sights of a major tourist attraction.

For the three staff members accompanying the Warriors on the trip, it was much more than that – it was a chance to offer therapeutic activities in a unique way.

“We want this to continue to inspire and motivate those Soldiers who engage in adaptive reconditioning – adaptive sports,” said Christopher Ebner, WTB-E Occupational Therapist. “The whole community reintegration process is an important aspect of this trip.”

The London trip began Aug. 28 with an early morning departure from Kaiserslautern and returned early the morning of Sept. 1.

Planning for the trip began in June with an offer of tickets to the Paralympics from the U.S. Olympic Committee’s Paralympic Military Program coordinator. Ebner said he’d worked with them in the past as they’d offered adaptive sports training opportunities for WTB-E Soldiers.

The Wounded Warrior Project and the American Red Cross then came together with donations that helped fund the transportation and lodging expenses for the Soldiers.

Some of the Soldiers – who came from WTB-E platoons across Germany – are dealing with anxiety disorders, Ebner said, that makes it difficult to be around groups of people. One treatment for that is to gradually introduce the Soldier to situations in which they’re amongst gradually interacting with increasingly larger groups of people.

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In addition to attending the games at an indoor venue that houses thousands of people, a tour of the city Wednesday included viewing the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, an event that draws huge crowds in a confined area. Ebner said the Soldiers coped well in the situation.

Another therapeutic aspect of the trip is the opportunity to increase socialization, which decreases isolation, said Jason Durr, clinical social worker for the WTB-E's Baumholder platoon.

"A lot of people with physical or mental impairments or injuries turn inward...they shut off from the rest of the world," Durr said. "This is helping them build relationships with their fellow Soldiers who are in the same situation. You can't get this in a clinical setting. We can talk about it, but this gives us the opportunity to do it."

The bus ride from Germany to London took more than 11 hours by bus and ferry, giving the Soldiers a chance to get to know each other. It wasn't long before they were sharing stories ranging from their experiences on deployment to their experiences since arriving at WTB-E.

"That's exactly it," Durr said.

Attending the Paralympics also sends an important message to the WTB-E Soldiers, all of whom are undergoing treatment for their injuries, illnesses or wounds, A-Company Rehabilitation Therapy Technician Ryan Paddock said.

"It helps give the Soldier insight. They see people with disabilities and see what it takes to overcome them," Paddock explained. "Hopefully it sets off a spark in the Soldier's mind and inspires them to overcome their injury and adapt."

An especially poignant reminder of that came when the Soldiers had the chance to meet and talk to members of the U.S. Women's Sitting Volleyball Team, including former Soldier Kari Miller who has signed on to be the Army's Warrior Games sitting volleyball coach next year. Both of Miller's legs were amputated after a car in which she was a passenger was hit by a drunk driver 12 years ago.

For one Soldier, that meeting was difficult.

"I was having flashbacks and a mild panic attack when I saw the amputees," said Sgt. George Peterson, a Warrior from WTB-E's Schweinfurt Platoon. Patterson suffers from Traumatic

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Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress since being wounded and seeing his battle buddy's leg blown off during his third deployment to Iraq.

“Then I forced myself to talk to (Miller). That really helped out. She's a great person and she helped me get through the day,” Peterson said. “All those athletes were very good, but she in particular was helpful because she understood what we go through.”

Since the Soldiers also participate in adaptive sports as part of their rehabilitation regimen, Paddock said, watching the Paralympians performance will help them become ambassadors for adaptive sports, helping spread the word to their peers who might not have a high opinion of the rehabilitative activities.

“Soldiers lead from the front,” Paddock said. “We want them to take the message back that adaptive sports did great things for me, and it will do good things for you.”

Durr said that, as a Veteran himself and the son and grandson of Veterans, this trip has reinforced his belief that the Army wants to do everything to help the ill, injured or wounded Soldiers.

Veterans of other conflicts didn't always get the treatment they needed for the wounds they brought back from war, Durr said. “Now we get to bear witness that the Army is doing the right thing for its Soldiers.”

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Cutlines

WTB-E London 1: Soldiers and staff members from Warrior Transition Battalion-Europe pose outside London's Excel Center Aug. 30, where they had the opportunity to watch several events of the Paralympic Games.

WTB-E London 2: Sgt. Shane Fuller from the Warrior Transition Battalion-Europe's Bamberg Platoon talks with U.S. Women's Sitting Volleyball Team member and former Soldier Kari Miller during a meet and greet with the team at East London University Aug. 30.

WTB-E London 3: Sgt. Larry Watson snaps a photo of Spec. Brad Wireman with Beefeater Mandeville, one of the London Olympics and Paralympics mascots, in front of the Tower Bridge in London Aug 29.

WTB-E London 4: Soldiers and staff members from Warrior Transition battalion-Europe snap photos outside of Buckingham Palace in London while they wait for the changing of the guard Aug. 29.