



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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By Anna Eisenberg
Warrior Transition Command

U.S. Army Warrior Trials athlete uses sports to adapt, recover

West Point, New York — “Hang keys up” and “empty pockets in the bowl” printed on index cards hang on the wall next to the front door of retired Cpt. Michael Phillips’ house in Georgia. “Feed Tiger” is taped by the coffee pot in the kitchen, a reminder to give his dog breakfast and dinner. Phillips has had trouble keeping track of things like that since sustaining multiple injuries on different deployments, ultimately culminating in a diagnosis of traumatic brain injury (TBI) and severe damage to his spinal cord and nerves.

Phillips was a runner—his daily 10 miles took him to a place near euphoria. Unable to exercise and participate in all the activities he did before, Phillips struggled with his recovery and transition at the Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) in Fort Benning, Georgia. As part of the U.S. Army Wounded Warrior Program (AW2) at the WTB, Phillips worked closely with a large support team. A few years into his recovery, his occupational therapist connected him with a nonprofit that organizes cycling trips for wounded warriors.

“I knew I needed to find a way to get better so I could be an example for others,” said Phillips. “I survived the war physically, but there are a lot of Families who have buried their loved ones. I have a responsibility to those who gave their lives in these conflicts to continue carrying on.”

Phillips uses this motivation to adapt, and his cycling experience helps him learn what he calls his “new normal.” Using a recumbent bicycle shifted his hips to a 120 degree angle, alleviating all of the pain stemming from his spinal cord, and realized he could still be active and athletic. Phillips, who struggles with memory due to TBI, taught himself how to swim. Fully understanding his new normal, he perfected his stroke by watching YouTube videos repeatedly, writing down a plan of action and bringing it with him to the pool to practice. He continues to cycle and practices yoga in order to stay in tune with what his body needs. He engages in other adaptive reconditioning activities as well, like gardening and hunting. “These are ways to continue to show myself that I can do what I need to do to survive. It helps me to realize that life is still going on,” said Phillips.

Adaptive reconditioning activities like sports helped Phillips recover, and he was able to compete in the 2013 Warrior Games. This year he is competing in the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials, West Point, New York and hopes to make the Army team for September’s Warrior Games.

More than 100 wounded, ill and injured service members and Veterans from across the United States joined together at West Point to train and compete in the Army Warrior Trials, June 15-20. The event is hosted by Warrior Transition Command, and the Army Warrior Trials include athletes from the Army, Marines and Air Force who will face 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.

The Warrior Games, a joint effort between the Department of Defense and the U.S. Olympic Committee is a DoD-wide event for wounded, ill and injured Soldiers and Veterans.

“It feels good to be back with some of the people I competed with last year,” said Phillips. “The best part about Warrior Trials is being around other people who have chosen a new normal over an excuse and just realizing that all of us are dealing with the same thing.”



When thinking about long-term goals, Phillips wants to work with Veterans who live in his community. He plans to work with a local nonprofit to bring adaptive sports equipment—which can cost into the thousands of dollars—closer to those who may not be able to otherwise access or afford it.

“I will not be defined by my injuries,” said Phillips. “I will not be defined by limitations that are put on me by other people. I am defined by what I can do.”

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CUTLINE: Retired Cpt. Mihael Phillips at shooting practice for the 2014 U.S. Army Warrior Trials at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY. More than 100 wounded, ill and injured service members and Veterans from across the United States joined together at West Point to train and compete in the Army Warrior Trials, June 15-20. The event is hosted by Warrior Transition Command, and the Army Warrior Trials include athletes from the Army, Marines and Air Force who will face 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 Sgt. Evangelina Griggis)

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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>.

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