



*The U.S. Special Operations Command team march to their seats at the 2015 Department of Defense Warrior Games opening ceremony at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Triangle, Va., June 19. The Warrior Games, founded in 2010, is a paralympic-style competition that features eight adaptive sports for wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans from the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy/Coast Guard, Air Force, Special Operations Command, and the British Armed Forces. This year marked the first time DoD took responsibility for operational planning and coordination of the event, in which approximately 250 athletes competed. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg.*

# Team SOCOM joins 2015 Warrior Games hosted by Marine Corps

*By Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly  
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

The joint U.S. Special Operations Command Warrior Games team joined more than 250 fellow wounded, ill and injured warriors to kick off the 2015 Warrior Games, June 19.

Hosted by the U.S. Marine Corps in Quantico, Virginia, the inaugural Department of Defense Warrior Games highlight the finest athletes from all U.S. military branches, including members of the British Armed Forces.

The athletes were welcomed to Quantico by Maj. Gen. Juan G. Ayala, the base commander and commander of the

Warrior Games Task Force. Ayala said that it was a privilege for the U.S. Marine Corps to be the first to host the games and emphasized that the focus of the next 10 days were the athletes and their families.

Team SOCOM is comprised of 38 Special Operations Forces athletes from across the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps and is led by Team Captain, U.S. Army Ranger, Master Sgt. Joseph Kapaczewski, of Bristol, Connecticut.

After a below-the-knee leg amputation following a combat injury, Kapaczewski re-qualified as a U.S. Army Ranger, regained a squad leader position, and was promoted to a platoon sergeant position. Kapaczewski was the first U.S. Army Ranger to return to combat with a

prosthetic, deploying to Afghanistan as a combat leader six times.

“These games are a testament of strength and personal courage,” said Kapacziewski.

“Team SOCOM prides itself on camaraderie and puts an emphasis on the bonds created through our training and competition. This event is a symbol to all wounded, ill and injured service members and veterans that individuals can recover from serious injury or illness and lead fulfilling, productive and inspiring lives.”

Throughout the competition, athletes will compete in

eight adaptive sports including archery, cycling, track and field, shooting, sitting volleyball, swimming, track, and wheelchair basketball. Athletes from each team will also be invited to participate in a wheelchair rugby exhibition on the final day of the games. Awards and closing ceremonies were held June 28.

The Military Adaptive Sports Program is one of the ways the USSOCOM Care Coalition supports SOF warriors and their families through the process of restoring their life purpose and regaining normalcy and balance after a life-altering injury.



*(Top) Sgt. 1st Class Joseph Kapacziewski leads and wins the gold medal in the 100-meter sprint at Butler Stadium at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., June 23. Photo by Lance Cpl. Terry W. Miller Jr. (Top right) Army Capt. Sean Walsh swims the 50-meter freestyle category at Freedom Aquatic and Fitness Center in Manassas, Va., June 27. He earned a silver medal in the event. Photo by E.J. Hersom. (Above) Army Staff Sgt. Victor Sassoon competes in the archery competition. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg. (Right) Army Lt. Col. Robin Pickel participates in the cycling competition. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg.*



# Family, Care Coalition key to success for SOCOM athletes

*Story and photo by Tech. Sgt. Heather Kelly  
USSOCOM Public Affairs*

As athletes push their physical limits and reach new heights during the 2015 DoD Warrior Games competitions in Quantico, Virginia, their family members cheer and count these victories as their own and rightly so. If it wasn't for their support as care givers, advocates and cheerleaders, these feats would have been nearly impossible.

The parents, spouses, siblings and even children accompanying the members of the U.S. Special Operations Command team share a common experience - they have rallied around a loved one to prevail over great adversity.

It's an experience Christina Kilmartin, wife of retired U.S. Army Maj. Robert Kilmartin, can relate to.

While her husband diligently prepared for his field events in the distance, she recounted her experience after her husband, a civil affairs team leader, sustained injuries related to improvised explosive device blasts while deployed to Afghanistan.

"I knew things wouldn't be the same after he returned, but when he came home, you could tell something was different. The blasts affected him in different ways," she said.

Embracing her husband's challenges as her own, Christina did not hesitate to forego her professional and academic pursuits to take on the role of caregiver.

"The hardest part about becoming a caregiver for me was thinking about the life we had before and what we'd planned. It's very different than what it is today. He was planning on staying beyond 20 years; I was pursuing my master's degree. It's just a different life," she said.

Reflecting on the early days of his recovery, she

offered some lessons learned in becoming a caregiver and advocate.

"In the beginning, I wish I would have known that it was absolutely necessary to rock the boat, and truly be my husband's advocate. That meant seeing different doctors, having hard conversations, saying, 'Let's look at the pros and cons here together.'"

Those conversations also included which therapies to pursue. Among those options, the Care Coalition Military Adaptive Sports Program offered post-rehabilitation support. The program assists athletes in developing and achieving immediate and long-term health goals in support of their total recovery care plan.

"Out of all the different therapies that are out there,

the adaptive sports program was by far the most beneficial," she said. "A lot of special operators are athletes; they are highly-competitive and active. Losing that makes you question your value, what you're worth."

Additionally, MASP affords wounded warriors adaptive sports equipment,

professional level coaching, sport specific training, and the ability to attend various camps and competitions.

"For Robert, it started out with golf. Something he had never tried before, but took to it immediately. It gave him purpose, something positive to focus on. It also brought him alongside other veterans, and he realized he wasn't alone. For someone in that situation, it's not just a golf game."

U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Kelly Ammerman, with the USSOCOM Care Coalition, agreed.

"It is important for family members, for service members, to realize that they don't have to go at it alone. The sooner they contact the Care Coalition, the faster they will get connected with a network of support," said Ammerman. "Events like these are important for active

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— U.S. Army Sgt. Maj. Kelly Ammerman

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duty service members, but especially important for our veterans, who once they leave the service, often return to communities that don't quite understand them.

"To be able to recommune with their brothers and sisters in the Special Ops community is significant. I have seen it change lives."

Ammerman also underscored the broader benefits to the extended wounded warrior community.

"While it's great to see everyone get together and the camaraderie that's built among all the services and SOCOM teams, the positive impact can also be seen among the family members and caregivers," he said.

"Injuries of this magnitude don't just the change the lives of service members, it can change the entire family dynamic. Caregivers have their own host of challenges that they have to deal with. The sense of community and camaraderie is as important to them as it is for the military member they are taking care of," he added.

Recognizing the key role families play in the recovery service members, benevolent organizations like the Fisher House have developed family support programs that address their needs. Most of the family members attending the Warrior Games were sponsored by the Fisher House.

Often people want to offer support, but don't know what to do. Christina offered some simple advice.

"Something as simple as 'I'm here for you,' 'I'm praying for you' or 'I know this is hard for you and I appreciate everything you do' ... just showing kindness and



*Christina Kilmartin stands behind her husband, retired Maj. Robert Kilmartin, as he waits to compete in the field events as part of the U.S. Special Operations Command team participating in the 2015 DOD Warrior Games. More than 270 wounded, ill, and injured service members and veterans from the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, Navy/Coast Guard, Air Force, Special Operations Command, and the British Armed Forces are competing this year.*

genuine care. It's not pity, it's encouragement, and it means so much. It's a small thing to ask for men and women who have served and suffered for our country and their families."

### **Three things you probably got wrong about the SOCOM Care Coalition**

#### **Myth 1 : Care Coalition is a benevolent organization**

The Care Coalition is the USSOCOM organization charged with care of wounded, ill and injured service members. It is recognized by Congress as one of the DOD warrior care programs.

#### **Myth 2 : You need to go to the Care Coalition when you are getting ready for discharge**

The Care Coalition is different from the services' wounded warrior programs because its primary goal is reintegration of SOF members back into their unit. The Care Coalition will assist members to access the best care possible for their specific situation seeking to retain the service member's knowledge and skill set in the SOF enterprise if possible, and to help them navigate a path in transition if they cannot.

#### **Myth 3 : Care Coalition services are only for combat wounded service members**

The Care Coalition provides support to wounded, ill and injured SOF. Whether the condition is a result of a training injury, off-duty accident or chronic illness, the Care Coalition offers advocacy and support across four lines of operation: Recovery, Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Transition.



*Sgt. 1st Class Yancy Taylor competes in the shot put during the Warrior Games at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, June 23. Photo by Roger L. Wollenberg.*

