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Program helps wounded warriors heal through sports

By Michael E. Dukes

Walter Reed Army Medical Center Public Affairs

KENT ISLAND, Md. (Army News Service, Aug. 14, 2006) – About a dozen wounded warriors paddled outrigger canoes with military precision Aug. 13 on the Chesapeake Bay at Kent Island, Md., as a supplement to the ongoing medical care they receive at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.



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The outing was sponsored by the Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Project and the Kent Island Outrigger Canoe Club.

“Outrigger canoeing sets itself apart as a therapeutic sport because it lends itself particularly to those who are physically challenged and it’s easily adaptable,” said Julia Ray, Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Project manager.

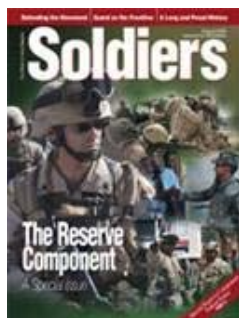
Volunteers from the Kent Island Outrigger Canoe Club coached the paddlers in different techniques.

“I never even heard of outrigger canoeing before becoming involved in this program,” said Lonnie Moore of the Wounded Warrior Project. As a wounded warrior himself, Moore lost his left leg when his Bradley fighting vehicle was struck by a rocket propelled grenade in Iraq.

“One of the benefits for lower extremity amputees is that it doesn’t require a lot of leg use. It’s a very adaptable sport for amputees or people with other injuries,” Moore said. “It’s easy for us to do this and be as good as or better than people without injuries.”

Lonnie Moore, who lost his right leg in Iraq when a rocket propelled grenade hit his Bradley fighting vehicle, paddles a single-seat outrigger canoe on the Chesapeake Bay Aug. 13 as part of the Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Program. About a dozen service members who were injured while serving in the war on terror participated in the event.
Michael E. Dukes

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"It gives us a sense of normalization and accomplishment," he added. "Military members are already a competitive group, so sports are a natural activity during recovery."

Members of the medical center's physical and occupational therapy services normally join the service members for sporting events, some of which have taken them to the snow-packed slopes in Colorado, the warm waters of Florida or the streets of New York City.

"It's great to get them out, but also to let them know life isn't over and there are still things to do," said Debbie Hall, president of the Kent Island Outrigger Canoe Club.

"There's a neat interaction with each other," Hall said of the service members' camaraderie. "I love the expressions on their faces when they get out of the canoes. It's been an amazing experience for us, too."

For more information about the Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Program and Disabled Sports USA visit their website at www.dsusa.org.

Additional Photos:

