



Heroes Afield

“What is important to me is that these soldiers’ stories be told, that they be honored, and that our little Wounded Warrior Day gets some press so as to possibly inspire someone else to start a program for these young folks, the best of America’s sons and daughters.”

—Stephen Meyers

This past November we held our second Wounded Warrior

The best part of the day...was when I told him ...that many of the top shooters in our sport shoot with one eye. His injury... did not preclude him in competing at the top levels of our great sport.

Day at Prince George’s County shooting facility just outside of Washington DC. On a brisk fall day we hosted a number of members of our Armed Services whose most recent and temporary address was Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Senior Master Sgt. Michael Giese, USAF was the brain-child of this event. He organized the first skeet shooting day for Wounded Warriors at “PG” in 2007. However, due to current obligations of service for SMSgt. Giese, Army surgeon, Col. G.

Scott Rose, chief of the gynecologic division at WRAMC, has taken the reins of the event.

Col. Rose, captain of the Army’s skeet shooting team, has since formed a non-profit organization to allow for more donations for the event. Scott noted the generous donations that made the day a success. Several volunteers, including the instructors, lent helping hands, the PG Skeet and Trap Center also allowed the group to use its facility at no cost. Winchester Ammunition and White Flyer made donations as well as



Todd Bender instructs one of nation’s heroes.

many private individuals.

The following will hopefully give you a small taste of what transpired during one of the best days that I have ever spent on a skeet field.

One of my soldiers was a young Naval Officer from Southern California. He was in my group last year and I was happy to see that he was getting around much better than the previous year.... and also shocked to see that he was still at Walter Reed almost a year later. Never-

theless, he had made extraordinary progress. I was glad to see my friend again because it was this particular soldier who made a tremendous impression on me the year before. I choke up every time I think about it.

During my work with all of my Wounded Warriors over the years, out of respect for them I never brought up their injuries—unless they did. But in this case last year, I needed to know his condition to help him break more targets. He walked with a cane and had a severe limp. The trauma to his left leg caused him much pain, difficulty in walking and difficulty in shooting. When I inquired about the extent of his injury, he responded, “Shattered femur, sir... but I will do whatever you ask me to do, sir.”

I was speechless to his response.

Three of my five soldiers this year had lost an eye. Pentagon statistics suggest that most injuries, nearly 70 percent from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, are eye related because of IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). Two of the soldiers in my group that day had lost their right eye...and were right handed.

One of those was John, an Army Corporal,

a great kid who had a heart and disposition of gold. So on that Monday, I had two right-handed soldiers learn to be left-handed shooters. Judging by their progress that day on a skeet field, I suggested that they do everything else left-handed as well. Why? Because they were awesome! They had debilitating and disfiguring injuries, but with courage rarely seen, they executed what was asked of them. They did it without question. Like champions.

I had two Josh's in my group that day. I asked them and the rest of the group if they had any experience with shotguns and or clay target shooting before this day. Josh Number One answered that he had hunted grouse and ptarmigan before entering the service. Sounded like one of my new friends was from Alaska. Immediately I wondered how long it might be before Josh shot grouse or ptarmigan, if ever again.

I was right on both accounts; Josh was from Alaska, and chasing grouse and ptarmigan was not in his near future. He was confined to a wheelchair. He lost his left leg in Iraq and had limited use of his right leg, but he had the attitude of "I can do anything," and did just that.

Regardless of his condition, Josh, like all of these wounded warriors, were good to go. Stephen Meyers recalled offering to help Josh in the wheelchair over the rough ter-

rain between the fields and the parking lot and Josh, without attitude, just said "No, I got it." They echoed the feeling and dedication from my friend from L.A., the young Naval officer whose words I will remember the rest of my life, "I will do whatever you ask me to do, sir."

Josh Number Two, showed up late. He had pre-existing rehabilitation appointments with the staff at Walter Reed. Upon meeting him, it was immediately apparent to me, that these appointments were a daily occurrence in the life of Josh. While talking with him, I found out that Josh is from Conway, Ark. For those of you that know that area, you would know that Conway is a stone's throw from Lonoke, home of the Remington Ammunition Plant, right off of I-40 outside of Little Rock. Small world. Four of Josh's uncles work at that plant to this day.

Josh lost his right eye in Iraq, but that seemed to be the least of his problems. The left side of face looked like it was put back together like a jigsaw puzzle. He had no teeth in his left upper or lower jaw. I hesitated for a second when I first shook his hand. I had never seen an injury like his before. Whatever Josh ran into, it was bad.

But in talking to Josh, you



John Shima offers instruction on the field.

would have never known that there was anything wrong in his world. Josh was wounded during his fourth tour in Iraq. For the rest of my life, I will remember Josh, his heroism, his ability to cope, his ability to accept life as it is and move on.

I spent some time at the end of day with Josh. His right arm was covered in a tattoo that looked as if an American Flag was draped and wrapped around it. Below a blue field scattered with stars on his shoulder, were the red and white stripes that wound down his arm. In these stripes there were images that were randomly placed within the swirls of red and white. One was a Longhorn, the logo of the University of Texas, and one, a Purple Heart medal, another, a symbol of the POW-MIAs.

I asked the significance of these images that were sporadically placed within the American flag that shown proudly on his arm. Josh told me that they were in honor of the best friends he had lost in Iraq. Josh, along with all of these young men had lived and dealt with experiences that I couldn't imagine, and never would because of their service, duty and heroism.

Joe was a Special Forces soldier from Ft Bragg, NC. He was older than the rest of the group and was a veteran of military service. He was lucky, at least as shooting skeet goes.

A good sized group enjoyed the day of fun and instruction.



He was right-handed, and lost his left eye in combat, along with any movement on that side of his face. Joe served in five combat theatres. He lost his left eye taking an AK-47 round right into his nose and across the left side of his face. The entire left side of his face was made of titanium. He said that he would go into training others. Since he didn't have full vision, he felt he would be a hazard to the men he would lead in actual combat.

Joe shot great, in fact so well that he inquired as to whether he could compete in skeet shooting in events such as the Para-Olympics. He had done some research about such an event. The best part of the day for me was when I told him not to worry about the Para-Olympics, that many of the top shooters in our sport shoot with one eye. His injury and abilities did not preclude him or his chances in competing at the top levels of our great sport.

It was a special day...a day that I will always remember. I look forward to our future days with these great men and women. John Shima and I have already committed to two Wounded Warrior Days in 2009, during both of our trips to the Washington DC area. I would like to thank my buddy, Richard Haas, who made a sizeable and generous donation to our cause, and I want to thank all of those who donated time and resources to make this event special for some very special men and women.

A former Marine drove 70 miles just to buy us two cases of shells for the Wounded Warrior Day. Ed Shifflett just wanted to do something for the boys. Shifflett, of Libertytown, Md., served in the Marine Corps and now works in Gaithersburg. He said he understands what the service members are going through and wanted to help with the event.

"It's just great what they are doing here today," Shifflett said.

This day was about welcoming these soldiers back into the mainstream of life. One of my good friends is Col. Tom "T.W." Williams, US Army Retired, and a West Point graduate. T.W. summed it up saying, "It is a battle for these soldiers each and every day as they are challenged to walk, talk, eat and be social. You and John (*Shima*) give our soldiers hope that they can live and enjoy life, no matter what they look like or what they feel like."

Hence the objective of this event. These heroes' lives are changed but not over—far from it. We are just helping them know that they are appreciated and can do anything they want to do. If the rest of us had the drive and fortitude as do these true heroes, these champions of life, we could also accomplish anything. And if they, the protectors of our freedoms, did not, well then our lives would be much different. We owe them everything.



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