

3 NCOs part of Army's Soldier-athlete contingent on U.S. Paralympic team

Meet the Army's Soldier-athletes competing at the Rio Paralympics

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U.S. Army Paralympians have made enduring sacrifices on behalf of the nation they serve. They have also trained at the most elite levels to make it to the biggest stage in sports. Three noncommissioned officers join the U.S. contingent competing at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. (Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program)

U.S. Army Paralympians are a different breed of competitor. They have made enduring sacrifices on behalf of the nation they serve. They have also trained at the most elite levels to make it to the biggest stage in sports. Three Soldiers - who are also noncommissioned officers - join the U.S. contingent competing at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Learn more about this year's Army Paralympians:

Staff Sgt. Michael Lukow, recurve bow: Lukow is an infantryman and a Paralympic archer in the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program who competes in the recurve open event. A native of Alamosa, Colorado, who lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, Lukow, 30, was a member of the 2011 Pan American Team and the Czech Republic Teams of 2014, 2015 and 2016.

He took up archery while rehabilitating from an injury sustained Jan. 30, 2008. An explosively formed penetrator, known as an EFP, in Baghdad, Iraq, forced the removal of his right foot. He learned to walk on prosthetics and braces by retrieving his arrows. The more consistently he hit the targets, the easier the walks became.

Lukow is a recipient of the Iraq Campaign medal, Purple Heart, National Defense Service Medal, among others. He earned his trip to Rio de Janeiro at the final event of a three-phase qualification series in Chula Vista, California, that determined the 2016 U.S. Paralympic Archery Team.

Sgt. Elizabeth Marks, para-swimming: Marks is a combat medic and a Paralympic swimmer in the U.S. Army World Class Athlete Program who won four gold medals at the 2016 Invictus Games at Walt Disney World ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, Florida. She gave one of her gold medals to Invictus Games founder Prince Harry to deliver to members of the Papworth Hospital staff who saved Marks' life after she traveled to London to compete in the inaugural Invictus Games in the fall of 2014.

She sustained bilateral hip injuries in 2010 while serving in Iraq, and nearly died in London in 2014 from the respiratory infection that led to a medically induced coma that lasted nearly one month.

Marks, 25, a native of Prescott Valley, Arizona, who joined the Army at age 17 is now stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado. She punched her ticket to Rio de Janeiro with stellar performances at the 2016 U.S. Paralympic Swimming Team Trials June 30 through July 2 at the Mecklenburg County Aquatic Center in Charlotte, North Carolina. She won the 100-meter breaststroke event there with a personal-best time of 1 minute, 28.54 seconds - only .01 seconds off the world record of 1:28.53 in her classification.

Staff Sgt. John Joss, prone rifle: Part of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Program, Joss competes in the prone rifle event.

Joss was deployed to Iraq in 2007 where he was injured during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Joss quickly adapted to the sport of shooting after joining the Army Marksmanship Unit in 2012. He earned a direct allocation quota after winning a silver medal at the International Paralympic Committee Shooting World Cup in Sydney, Australia. A quota is a qualifying method that secures a spot in the Games for a country. It doesn't necessarily guarantee that the athlete who earned the quota will compete in the event. In this case, Joss has since secured his right to compete in the 2016 Paralympic Games.

