

Flight Sergeant Tony Benfer



GOLD DIGGERS

YANKS SHOCKED AND AWED

Three soldiers, a Navy clearance diver and an RAAF physical training instructor demonstrated tremendous courage, determination and prowess at the US Marine Corps Paralympic Trials in February. The five, who are part of the Australian Defence Force Paralympic Sports Program, shocked their military counterparts from the United States, Canada and Britain when they took away 12 gold medals, 11 silver and 1 bronze.

In fact, at one point, their opponents were said to have been quite fearful that the Aussies would take out all the gold available for swimming – and they came very close, hauling 10 gold from the pool.

The ADF Paralympic Sports Team was participating in Exercise Wounded Warrior, conducted in the US and Canada from February 6-28, which also included an exchange with the Canadian Forces' Soldier On Program, giving the Aussies an opportunity to learn adaptive snow sports at Mt Washington, Canada.

Private Clint Vardy, a clerk with Army Personnel Agency, Brisbane, topped the

Aussie medal haul with medals in three different sports, including swimming where he bagged four gold medals, as well as one gold and three silver medals on the running track and another gold for shooting.

Able Seaman Paul De Gelder, a clearance diver with the Royal Australian Navy Dive School at HMAS Penguin, also took four gold medals in the pool as well as two silver medals for shooting – piped for gold by Private Vardy in the 30m air rifle.

Flight Sergeant Tony Benfer, a physical

training instructor at RAAF Base Wagga Wagga, won three gold in swimming, as well as a silver medal in wheelchair basketball.

Warrant Officer Class Two Dennis Ramsay, an instructor at the Army Logistics Training Centre, Wodonga, Victoria, won four silver medals in track and field as well as bronze in shot-put and wheelchair basketball.

Private Damien Thomlinson, a commando with 2 Commando Regiment, won one gold and one silver medal in the pool.

In all, the team of five Aussie servicemen



Warrant Officer Class Two Dennis Ramsay



Private Clint Vardy

brought home 24 medals.

Private Vardy, who lost an arm in a motorbike accident, said he was particularly pleased with his gold medal in the 30m air-rifle event because he just pipped former infantryman turned clearance diver Paul De Gelder.

Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, Warren Snowdon, met and congratulated the team shortly after their triumphant return from America.

"[This ADF team] competed against approximately 150 other wounded and severely injured members from the British Royal Marines, the Dutch Royal Marines and the US Marine Corps and have performed at the highest level," Mr Snowdon said.

"For five individuals to come back with 24 medals between them is a tremendous feat.

"I congratulate each of these members on not only overcoming the significant hurdles they have faced individually after significant injury, but also on their successes in the sporting arena.

"You have represented your country to the highest standard and we are all very proud of you."

Defence Chief and Patron of the ADF Paralympic Sports Association Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston also congratulated the ADF members on their participation and success.

"This is an outstanding result. Your dedication and determination are an inspiration to us all," Air Chief Marshal Houston said.

"I look forward to continuing to follow our members' progress as they compete at home and abroad and continue to make us proud."



Able Seaman Paul de Gelder



Clockwise from front: Able Seaman Paul de Gelder, Flight Sergeant Tony Benfer, Private Damien Thomlinson, Defence Science and Personnel Minister Warren Snowdon, Warrant Officer Class Two Dennis Ramsay, Private Clint Vardy

ADF Paralympic Sports Team success in America

Medal haul – 12 Gold, 11 Silver, 1 Bronze = 24 medals

MEMBER	UNIT	MEDAL/SPORT
Private Clint Vardy	Clerk, Army Personnel Agency, Brisbane	5 Gold: 50m freestyle, 100m freestyle, 50m backstroke, 800m run, 30m rifle shoot 2 Silver: 100m run, 200m run Gold: 4 x 200m freestyle relay* Silver: 4 x 100m relay run*
Warrant Officer Class 2 Dennis Ramsay	Instructor, Army Logistics Training Centre, Bonegilla	4 Silvers: 100m track wheelchair, 200m track wheelchair, 800m track wheelchair, discuss Silver: wheelchair basketball* 1 Bronze: shot-put
Able Seaman Paul De Gelder	Clearance Diver, Navy Dive School, HMAS Penguin	3 Gold: 50m freestyle, 100m freestyle, 50m back stroke Gold: 4 x 200m freestyle relay* 2 Silver – 30m rifle shooting
Flight Sergeant Tony Benfer	Physical training instructor, RAAF Base Wagga Wagga	3 Gold: 50m freestyle, 100m freestyle, 50m back-stroke 1 Silver: wheelchair basketball*
Private Damien Thomlinson	Commando, 2 Commando Regiment, Sydney	1 Silver: 50m freestyle Gold: 4 x 200m freestyle relay*

* team-sport medals only count once in the total medal tally