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(SPECIAL SECTION)

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From left: Michael J. Juraszek, Adam Krielenki, Ryan Schward, Dariusz Velle, Aaron Paves, Tim Botta and Justin Levens. Michael Cicala is Captain of the "Mystic" submarine.



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(CHALLENGE)

Wounded Warriors Soar Underwater

A new program helps disabled veterans learn to scuba dive.

When six veterans who lost limbs in Iraq earned their open water certifications late last year, diving opened more than a new world for them. It also opened a new frontier for organizations that help soldiers overcome disabilities.

"I envision having scuba programs all over the country and then sending people to warm sites for their tests," says Al Giordano, deputy executive director of the Wounded Warrior Project. The organization partnered with Disabled Sports USA and the Handicapped Scuba Association to establish the prototype program to help veterans through scuba training.

The program got its start when DEMA offered swimming lessons at the annual Adaptive Water Sports Weekend on Long Island. Talk quickly turned to trying scuba, and those who did were hooked, leading to further training and certification at Captain Don's Habitat resort on Bonaire.

Field medical advances are saving more casualties who might have died in earlier wars. That means thousands of soldiers are coming home with severe injuries that they'll live with for the rest of their lives. The weightless sensation of scuba is a powerful relief for the disabled, many of whom can fly through the water as readily as their healthy peers.

The organizations are actively seeking to help the disabled. Veterans should contact the Wounded Warrior Project at www.woundedwarriorproject.org. Those with disabilities unrelated to military service should contact the Handicapped Scuba Association at www.hsscuba.com or Disabled Sports USA at www.dsusa.org. —BOB STERNER