



OFFduty

ADVENTURE, GEAR, MOVIES & MORE

[NEWTTHISWEEK]

Monsters University

goes back to when Mike and Sully met in the MU Scare Program. Sure to be sold out at Redboxes, so reserve early. List price: \$30 for DVD, \$40 for Blu-ray combo pack

In **Vikings: Season One**, lead conquests and fight betrayal and temptation with Viking chieftain Ragnar. List price: \$50



'COD' GETS NEW HERO

"Call of Duty: Ghosts" is due in November, and a new character named Riley has already become the game's breakout star.

Yup, Riley is a dog, and he's one of the new game's biggest technological leaps.

Executive producer Mark Rubin says the German shepherd originated during a brainstorming session. The developers didn't know anything about military service dogs, just that unleashing one on the franchise was "a cool idea."

But the developers of "Ghosts" set out to create more than another best friend — they wanted a hero.

Riley is outfitted with several gadgets based on real-world technology. His battlefield perspective can be glimpsed through a camera mounted to the back of his tactical suit, and he can receive orders, such as to create distractions or take down enemies.

GEARSCOUT

Garmin just released the **tactix**, a rugged high-sensitivity GPS navigator and ABC watch for the tactical market. The big separator between the tactix and the rest of Garmin's wrist-top navigators is the blacked-out display, jump-

master information, tide tables and mineral glass face with stainless back. And though it's not listed in the specs, Garmin tells us the tactix uses a more sensitive GPS receiver than the one found in the rest of Garmin's watch line. Has an altimeter, barometer and compass, and Garmin claims it will run for 50 hours on a charge. On shelves this fall for \$500.



Trail therapy



ISTOCKPHOTO

Story and photos by Cindy Ross

You can try alcohol or drugs — prescription or otherwise — to quell your feelings and tame your nightmares, or retreat to a dark basement and live like a recluse to cope. A shocking number have taken their lives — 22 veterans a day did in 2012.

"In the military, you learn to flip mental switches. You go from life in a normal society to life on the battlefield, and with every deployment, that switch can begin to short circuit," says former Marine Capt. Sean Gobin.

The Veterans Affairs Department says 20 percent of returning veterans have post-traumatic stress. Instead of throwing medication at the problem, one group of veterans turned to the Appalachian Trail for a decidedly different therapeutic regimen.

After Gobin returned home from his third combat deployment, he went for a walk — a long walk — along the 2,186 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. As he followed the white-painted blazes from Georgia to Maine, he says he was walking the war out of his system and preparing for a new life outside of the military.

The first Appalachian through-hiker, Earl Shaffer, did the same thing in 1948 after returning from World War II.

Gobin completed his own trek, then created the Warrior Hike "Walk Off the War" program, partnering with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy to support combat veterans as they attempt to hike the trail's entire length.

Last March, 14 Warrior Hikers left Springer Mountain, Ga., with

Vets find peace 'walking off war' on epic Appalachian hike



their eyes set on reaching Mount Katahdin in Maine six months later.

They represented all four military branches, women and men ages 26 to 50. They received equipment and supplies needed to complete the hike, plus town support from veterans and hiking organizations along the trail and help with job opportunities upon completion of the hike.

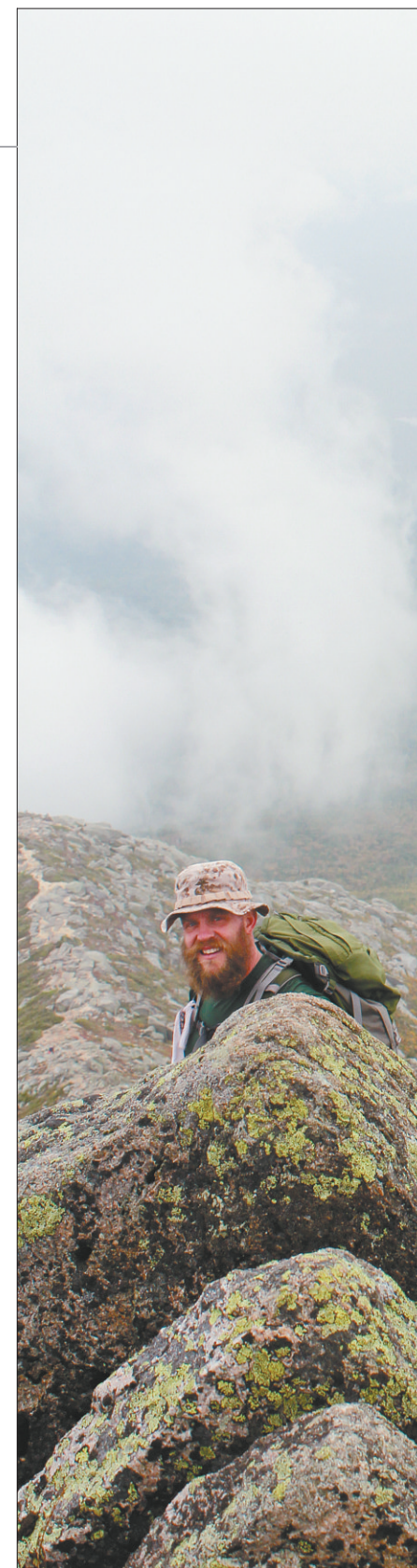
On the trail, the Warrior Hikers

scaled peaks, traversed ridges and forded streams as they hauled their bodies and packs across 14 states. They endured the typical long-distance hiking challenges — sore knees, deep snow in the southern mountains, intense heat waves and long rainy stretches. But they also struggled with appendicitis, kidney stones, sprained ankles and norovirus.

"I think back on many of the

climbs I did in the Marine Corps — 25-mile death marches, walking until I thought my feet would fall off," said retired Marine Staff Sgt. Steve Clendenning. "But I did not do it every day like the trail. This was harder."

Clendenning was deployed to Iraq in 2006 when a roadside bomb exploded, claiming the lives of two of his friends and causing Clendenning's traumatic brain injury and hearing loss. He spent





years going to doctor appointments, attending weekly counseling sessions and having brain scans. He gained weight and tried to kill himself on the anniversary of his injury.

While recovering from the explosion at the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Battalion at Camp Lejeune, N.C., Clendenning first started pondering an Appalachian expedition.

When he began hiking “the AT,” Clendenning says he suffered from a recurring nightmare of being pinned down in an abandoned building and killed in terrible ways. The nightmare haunted him, even as he lay in his nylon tent during the most recent Warrior Hike.

Clendenning walked to get the demons out of his head, heal his post-traumatic stress, wear himself off more than a dozen medi-



Far left: Warrior Hike founder former Marine Capt. Sean Gobin, left, with retired Army Sgt. Maj. Rob Carmel. Center, Marine veteran Steve Clendenning and Air Force veteran Sharon Smith make the ascent at Mount Katahdin, Maine. Left, Warrior Hikers complete the most recent Appalachian trek. Below, Clendenning greets the sign at Mount Katahdin's Baker Peak.



cations and get healthy.

“When I [was] home, I was constantly vigilant. I planned escape routes. I couldn’t go anywhere without thinking, watching. I couldn’t sit in a restaurant with my back to an entrance,” said Clendenning during a welcome break from 100-plus-degree temps in Pennsylvania.

“Out here, I’ve turned all that off,” he told the locals — includ-

ing this writer — who “slack-packed” for the group there, dropping them off on the trail and picking them up at the end of the day so they could hike with only day packs.

“Hiking the Appalachian Trail isn’t necessarily a cure for PTSD, but it does provide veterans a place to process your thoughts and to find serenity in a natural environment,” Gobin says. “The physical process of long-distance

walking does something to your mind — a clearing occurs. It isn’t something you necessarily cognitively decide on; it just happens as you hike.”

As they hiked from Georgia to Maine, group members came to terms with some of the things they had experienced, said Warrior Hiker former Marine Lance Cpl. Tom Gathman, who lost fellow Marines during his deployment in Iraq in 2007. “And we had plenty of time to think about those things.”

Clendenning said the journey made him realize he wanted to live his life for those who didn’t get the chance to live theirs.

“I might have hurt all day long from hiking up a mountain,” Clendenning says, “but when I got to a lookout and could see forever and reflect on what God has created and the people in my life that I have lost, I realized that I really needed this hike.”

Gobin plans to expand the Warrior Hike program, incorporating more outdoor expeditions across the nation, including long-distance treks the lengths of the Appalachian, Pacific Crest and Continental Divide national scenic trails in 2014. Additionally, a cross-country cycling adventure along the TransAmerica Trail and a paddling expedition along the Mississippi River are plotted for 2015, both using adaptive equipment.

Gobin said he hopes state chapters will form to offer shorter excursions. □

Author Cindy Ross’ work includes “A Woman’s Journey on the Appalachian Trail” and “A Hiker’s Companion: 12,000 Miles of Trail-Tested Wisdom.”

