



Tavera, 27, served in Iraq from 2007 to 2008. One morning while returning from a mission, Tavera's armored truck was hit by a missile. The explosion killed three men and left Tavera with burns on more than 60 percent of his body. Shrapnel pierced his body, some striking his brain. His right leg below the knee and the fingertips on his right hand were amputated, and he was left blind.

Despite his injuries, Tavera competed Saturday in the third annual Military Heroes Top Shot competition at the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office training facility in Lithia. He was one of 20 wounded or retired veterans to compete in the six-round shootout in which participants hit targets near and far with handguns and assault rifles.

The event was a fundraiser for Black Dagger Military Hunt Club Inc., a nonprofit that coordinates hunting, fishing and shooting outings for veterans, and for HCSO Charities Inc.,

which raises money and contributes to local charities.

Tavera's rifle was fitted with an iPhone that displayed the target downfield. A spotter standing nearby helped make adjustments based on a magnified image of the target on the phone's display. Round after round, Tavera hit his targets.

Shooting is a common activity for veterans once they return home from combat.

"It gives me time to relax and focus on something simple," said Ryan Barlow, 37, of Tampa, who served in the Marines and the Army. Barlow suffered a traumatic brain injury, partial paralysis and hearing loss from an explosion in Afghanistan in 2008, but he still makes it to the shooting range every month.

"It's one of those things he used to do, and one of the things he still can do," said his wife, Nicole.

Romulo Camargo, 39, an Army Ranger, said group shooting events allow veterans time to bond with others who understand the struggles of life after combat. Camargo was shot in the back of the head in 2008 in Afghanistan. He's paralyzed from the shoulders down.

"You come back from Afghanistan and you still want to be part of that community," Camargo said.

"When you're around other people doing the things you guys all like to do, you don't feel wounded or injured."

Camargo competed in the event last year, aiming the gun with a joystick and firing by using a "sip and puff" trigger, basically by sucking on a straw.

He and his wife, Gaby, started the Stay in Step Spinal Cord Injury Recovery Center, which will open in January at the University Center for Business, across from USF. Black Dagger donated \$1,000 from the event to Stay in Step to help offset rehabilitation and physical therapy costs.

Hillsborough County Sheriff David Gee, who was in attendance, said his deputies look forward to the event.

"We have so many members in our agency that are recently detached from the military, so we're a bit of a military family ourselves," Gee said.

Overall, he was impressed with the veterans' shooting. "These guys are amazing."

Eric Anderson, 50, of Webster in Sumter County, is a former marine and competitor on the History Channel show Top Shot, and said the veterans' performance didn't surprise him.

"These guys, they've fired under conditions that make these (conditions) feel like a romp around," he said. "These are combat veterans."

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Watch the 2014 Military Heroes **Top Shot**[®] video [here](#)