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Warriors, from Page 1

ing him - heard about the Wounded Warriors program and thought the Adirondack Canoe Classic would be a good match. He was right.

"It was everything I wanted it to be and more," said Cromie. "I had more fun than any of them."

Cromie has paddled with Shannon, Holler and Profitt, as well as local paddlers Gregg VanSlyke, Saint Gratz, Mark Pepper and Andy Pritchard. The team took second place in the war canoe class. This was Cromie's fifth Canoe Classic and the first time he has placed in the top three.

"This is something these guys train for. Every night when we were done they would say, 'This is what went right, this is what went wrong and this is how we can improve.' The military training now is about solving problems, and communicating. And the local guys, Mark, Andy, Saint, Gregg, they gave their all. When we realized we were coming in third, everybody wanted to win, so when we got to the portages and those guys told us to run as fast as we could and they carried the boat and ran flat out. We gained time on the carries and they did

it for these kids," said Cromie.

Matthew Profitt is one of those "kids." He lost the lower half of his right leg to cancer not long ago, but it hasn't slowed him down much. He has recently participated in an outrigger canoe race in New Zealand and a relay canoe race in Maine. He said he has adapted well to his amputation.

"It throws me off a bit when I paddle. I compensate and paddle more from the hip. But my balance is good. If I go a long time, I feel it in my hip," he said.

He enjoyed the race and would like to come back to the area. And he is up for paddling the 90-mile canoe race again.

"It was a great time, you really look forward to it. I'd do it again," said Profitt. "I'd like to do a relaxing canoe and camping trip."

Shon Holler also enjoyed his stay in the Adirondacks. Holler is a tall, talkative man from Tennessee, with a quick wit and fun sense of humor. He suffered nerve damage in his shoulder and a brain injury in Afghanistan in 2004.

"I was in the way during a gunfight," he said laughing. "Humvees don't give."

One of the men said later that the Humvee had rolled

onto him. Holler is forward-looking, always ready for a challenge, which is why the Canoe Classic appealed to him.

"It was an endurance challenge, tested upper body strength and mental stability. I dug deep and gave it all I had. I wasn't about to give up," said Holler.

And you get the feeling that is how he approaches most everything.

"We are just a rag tag bunch of guys. We only paddled together once on Thursday, but it all just fell together. It was a great team, we bonded well. We realized we were in third place Friday night and said 'Let's go for first!' I was a medic and I always want to be the best at what I do and get everyone there safely. We got tunnel vision for the win and gave it our best," Holler said.

The war canoe came in second and Holler told Cromie that he couldn't retire from the race until he had at least one first place.

"I'll paddle for you anytime, Doc. We can't let you quit until you've got a win," he said.

The warriors were touched by signs of support from the community. When they paddled Utowana Lake there was a sheet hanging from a boat-house that said "We support Wounded Warriors."

"It felt so good, we were all screaming and hollering. It really pumped us up," said Holler.

There was also a man who saluted the group as they went past, and they were touched by the gesture.

Dan Shannon — the last of the Wounded Warriors — was especially happy with the salute.

"We (soldiers) don't do what we do for 'thank you,' but to have someone salute like that, it really makes you feel good," he said.

Shannon was a sniper in Iraq and was in a gun fight in 2004. He was shot in the head and his left eye is gone. The bone around his eye had to be

Please see WARRIORS, page 17

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