

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athlete Profile (National)

### George Norton – One Motivated Man!



George Norton is a 62-year-old U.S. Army veteran who never forgot the rewards and value of an active lifestyle, even after he was injured in combat in Vietnam. Norton's trip to Anchorage, Alaska, in July will be his 16<sup>th</sup> year competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. "The Games are a first class event," he says. "Some of the best athletes in the world enter these competitions. Friendships made at the Games, both old and new, can be terrific, meaningful and everlasting."

Norton, a native of Rhode Island and currently living in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, volunteered for the Army in 1966. He became a member of the Army's 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and worked as a demolitions expert in Vietnam. He was injured while working on a Fast Patrol Craft (PCF), also known as a Swift Boat, along the Mae Kong Delta. These teams would work to identify North Vietnamese Army (NVA) clusters that were impeding on the South Vietnamese villages' quest for a democratic society.

"Our job was to protect the villages from the NVA," Norton says. "We would go into areas that had been identified as having large numbers of NVA soldiers. We would draw their fire which would reveal their exact locations. Then, calls for U.S. air support were made so that these obstacles could be removed. In one location along the Mae Kong, on December 30, 1966, my team began taking sniper fire from the North Vietnamese. We retreated back to the boat as quickly as we could, but it was not fast enough. I was sniped and the bullet went right through my ankle. I woke up five days later in a hospital in Saigon without my left leg."

As someone who was always motivated by challenges, and recognizing the therapeutic value of activity and involvement into a team effort, Norton reintegrated sports into his life as soon as possible after his injury. Norton has played many adaptive sports for more than 20 years. Currently, he plays on competitive wheelchair basketball and softball teams and also enjoys tennis and golf. When talking with Norton, it is easy to sense his passion about giving back to his community. "One of the most enjoyable hobbies I have is my involvement in the *What It's Like* program," he says. "Along with several of the paraplegics and amputees I know, we go to local schools to educate and inform the young students about wheelchair sports. The kids get to sit in chairs and navigate a coned (wheelchair slalom) course as well as shoot baskets or hit a tennis ball." The rewards are paid because, as Norton says, "If you feel good about yourself and your accomplishments, then it becomes contagious and others feel good about that too."