

Newsline The military

High-tech meets hope at new amputee center

By Kelly Kennedy

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In a military overwhelmed by the sheer number of service members needing medical care, Walter Reed Army Medical Center has pulled a fast one.

In just under a year, the Military Advanced Training Center for Soldier Amputees rose from the ground of a campus slated to be moved to Bethesda, Md., because the Army Medical Command deemed the need to be immediate.

And it is. Before, soldiers practiced walking on their new prosthetic limbs in hallways and on stairways because the prosthetic lab wasn't big enough for the technicians, let alone the new devices. There was no place for family members.

Another lab designed to make sure soldiers could move properly

with their new limbs could handle only the walkers, not those who, like Maj. David Rozelle, suddenly realized they wanted to run marathons — or who hoped to return to work in the military.

Rozelle advised the new building's architects, Ellerbe Becket, and it's the little things that stuck out as the center's staff prepared for opening day Sept. 13.

Yes, the technology is amazing at the new outpatient center: a climbing wall that rotates to create new challenges, a firearms simulator with mechanical hands to properly grip the trigger, a ground simulator that moves as a service member "walks" through a 3-D forest, and a gait lab that lets scientists gather images from 23 cameras to determine which movement or de-

vice works best for each patient.

As the troops make their ways through the building, there is no raised aluminum trim between tile and carpet to trip them up. There's a family lounge complete with a kitchen and lockers. And there are one-way mirrors in counselors' offices that look out on an indoor running track — to provide inspiration.

Of 607 service members with amputations, according to Defense Department numbers, 465 have gone through the paces at Walter Reed, and the new center will help them move from their first tentative steps to a life that will be a little less difficult than before.

"They start with basics, and then they move to leisure," said Col. Stephanie Daughtery, chief of occupational therapy.

Then she grinned. "And they like it." □



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Spc. Alex Leonard positions himself onto a weight machine Sept. 12 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington. The equipment is part of the new Military Advanced Training Center for Soldier Amputees.

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