



"CAN YOU BEAR THE CHALLENGE?"

Tom's Run: The Unforgettable Journey of Biking, Running, and . . . Towing?

In Winter of 1998, Reserve Webmaster CW04 Tom Brooks was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. ALS is a disease that occurs once motor nerve cells cease to function and soon after die. Although one's mind is still alert, muscle control is lost. In August 1998 the Coast Guard created Tom's Run as a fundraiser for CW04 Brooks but after his death this annual event is now a memorial run. Every year men and women from all service branches form teams of ten to fifteen, and some even take this brave and strenuous challenge alone. Tom's Run is a 200 mile trail run where runners are accompanied by bikers on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal towpath. The race starts at Cumberland, Maryland ending near downtown Washington D.C. in a town call Bethesda, Maryland.

On June 07, 2007 the United States Coast Guard Academy sent a team of eleven cadets and two USCG officers to participate in the journey through the "C and O Canal". Packed with luggage, plenty of toiletries, LUNA bars, and a month worth of Gatorade the USCGA team headed out in two fifteen passenger vans. The first leg of the relay took place at 0355 Friday, July 08, 2007.

2/c Hennighausen ran the first leg faster than predicted putting the team ahead of schedule. Cadet Hennighausen was accompanied by 2/c Kehrt on the bike. As the morning went on Team USCGA began making their presence known and soon word circulated that they were the only cadet team present. Team USCGA became known to most as "The Cadets".

"The Cadets" developed a schedule that made running the relay more effective. One van would contain the people running the next consecutive three or four legs. This van would make stops at every checkpoint, while the other van drove ahead to their own checkpoint. This allowed the latter van to have more sleep time; the two vans would switch roles throughout the day.

It was clear that all members of "The Cadets", even those with thick gold shoulder boards, were pushing themselves to new limits. Not only was the team making good time the team was able to get ahead of schedule. Speaking from my own experience it was exhilarating to push myself to a level I did not think I could reach. Everyone supported one another and the team was never short of motivation.

As Friday afternoon was coming to an end "The Cadets" were running strong, (but sore) and the attitude could not have been more positive... until the incident... With one van key lost in the Potomac River as the sun was setting, the team had a new obstacle to overcome. While still running the race, "The Cadets" now had to pack all items and most of the luggage into one fifteen passenger van with dim headlights as the only means of light. 2/c Hennighausen and 2/c Persun, who had finished all of their legs, volunteered to go with the keyless van and the tow truck all the way to the nearest Ford dealership.... which was conveniently located in the neighboring STATE!

To say the least this trip was full of laughter and lasting memories. From blisters to lost keys to allergies, "The Cadets" experienced the discomfort of getting lost on deserted railroad tracks as well as the pleasure of interacting with the native homeless at all hours of the night. All in all, this was one of the best experiences I have been a part of since Swearing In at USCGA. I have learned so much about pushing limits, and more importantly, about facing challenges with teammates in a unique and extraordinary event.



From top to bottom and left to right:
Members of 2009

Mike Freeman, Matt Poore, Cristina Nelson, Jen Ferreira, Alyssa Van Delden, Maggie Ward, Xiaobin Tuo, Mike Persun, Emily Kehrt, Chrysy Chantarasopak, and Zach Hennighausen.