

PAG Members Participate in Tom's Run 2011

During the Spring and Summer months, you will find people running and biking along the C&O Canal route. However, every year, around the first weekend in June, you will meet people running and biking for one reason: to foster teamwork in honor of a man most of them never knew.

Chief Warrant Officer Four Tom Brooks enjoyed helping people get in, and stay in, shape. In 1999, he died of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (otherwise known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease). In his honor, his friends started "Tom's Run." For 13 years, the Coast Guard has hosted a 200-mile relay starting in Cumberland, Maryland and following the C&O Canal into Georgetown, Virginia, and onto various streets to finish near Mount Vernon. The epitome of teamwork, there must be a runner and biker on the trail at all times, while the rest of the team navigates 32 checkpoints to rendezvous with them with the goal of finishing at 1100 on Saturday.

This year, our third in a row, 27 individuals from PLS (past and present) completed the team building fitness event in 34 hours, 30 minutes. Learning from our past, we decided to have more participants per leg: four bikers and one runner per leg, varying from 20 to 28 miles each.

What better place to start with highlights than the C Flight's Avionics shop who tackled the most challenging, start at 0001, longest at 28 miles, "we've been up since 0500", leg. It took 18 miles for the leg to show its teeth, but show them it did as MSgt Huhmann's legs locked up and the woods around Spring Gap became filled with noises of agony. Just as his legs began to lock up, MSgt Phillips' McDonald's dinner wasn't sitting very well. As MSgt Huhmann laid on the ground screaming in pain that his legs hurt, MSgt Phillips headed to the woods for an "emergency drop-off." The scene resembled a cliff on one side and a stagnant water filled canal on the other. Not far away from MSgt Huhmann, MSgt Phillips said, "Don't be looking over here." In the middle of it all, another group of runners was approaching fast, as MSgt Huhmann tried to crawl off the trail. After the group passed, MSgt Huhmann tried to massage the softball-sized knot out of his leg. When MSgt Phillips finished, he walked over to MSgt Huhmann to make sure he was okay. MSgt Huhmann said, "Feel how tight this muscle is." MSgt Phillips then took two fingers and pressed lightly into his leg, causing even more pain and screams. However, MSgt Huhmann was able to push through it and finished the last 10.4 miles.

At their transition point, the smell of hot summer death was the last thing we expected at 0100, but it was quickly isolated to TSgt Cattrell's Jeep. Was it the dead bear we passed on I-68 on the way up? Perhaps!

MSgt Beckman thought Tom's Run was a Pub Run ... he realized he was wrong after his first 25-mile leg when his body started shaking. The most-caring-spouse award went to MSgt Fox. After Julie took a spill on her bike, he was compelled to make her feel better by taking an even worse one to show his love. We could always count on MSgt Merriman to keep us awake at various points of the relay. From his failed attempt to inflate his bike tire, ending in what sounded like gun fire at 0200, to his "looks like used motor oil" coffee, he kept us on our toes. Realizing food is the key to extended physical activity, SMSgt Simmons came back from Italy to showcase his recently acquired Italian cooking skills, and CMSgt Robinson and his wife coordinated a Kentucky Fried Chicken checkpoint for the entire group to partake.

Dr. Baron, an Air Force Academy cycling coach, showed up with clips for his pedals and no intention of running, but eight miles into his leg, he asked if anyone wore a size 11 running shoe. SMSgt Simmons had a close enough match, so they swapped shoes. The "not so much of a runner" Dr. Baron held an eight minute mile pace for five miles.

One thing about Tom's Run is the way our bodies react to sleep deprivation. MSgt Mason probably won the award for being the most scared as he thought he heard things in the woods yelling "HUP HYAH, GET OUT OF HERE!" He also randomly threw a judo chop and ninja kick to thin air. He had the crack in his voice, the one that says... I MIGHT DIE. MSgt Merriman was very worried, so he rode up to check on him and asked if everything was okay. MSgt Mason asked if he heard the noises in the woods. MSgt Merriman knew his bike was making a noise, so he asked him, "Is this the noise?" Of course, it was, and everyone laughed.

After 24 hours, everyone is thankful for fresh legs and MSgt Rochelo was the first to step in. After working six consecutive days of 12-hour shifts, he met us and started running at 0530 Saturday morning. He completed the last 32 miles with us as Jeremy Keck showed up for the last 19 miles. Jeremy, a native of D.C, took his bikers on a little detour through Georgetown waterfront (no bikes allowed) and numerous sets of stairs. Ultimately, the best highlight was when 13 members of the team rallied together to complete the last five miles of the relay up the Mount Vernon trail to Ft Hunt.

Next year, Tom's Run will be May 31-June 2, 2012 and if anyone is looking for a great overall mental and physical challenge, give it a try! Unless you're afraid of having fun!

-MSgt Elizabeth Olson