

Injured Marines, sailors compete in 'People's Marathon'

Team raised funds to help disabled service members

By Dan Lamothe

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Before Cpl. Dan Lasko lost his left leg below the knee after a 2004 blast in Afghanistan, he didn't consider himself a runner. He preferred team sports, he said, and had never pondered running a marathon.

That all changed after Lasko, 25, joined Team Semper Fi, a group of injured Marines and sailors who raise money for the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund.

Lasko completed the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., for the first time Oct. 26, running 26.2 miles on his prosthetic leg in 5 hours, 30 minutes, 43 seconds. The Bethlehem, Pa., native can add it to a post-blast résumé that includes several triathlons, the Army Ten-Miler and the Bataan Memorial Death March, an annual marathon-length march through White Sands Missile Range, N.M.

"My friends think I'm nuts," said Lasko, who was medically retired by the Corps in 2005. "Before I got injured, I was never a runner."

Lasko's perseverance was one of many athletic feats on display at the 33rd "People's Marathon,"

which was won by Andrew Dumm, 23, a Washington, D.C., resident who finished in 2 hours, 22 minutes, 42 seconds. Cate Fenster, 37, of Wooster, Ohio, led the women's field in 2:39:32.

The Navy swept the armed forces division, with Navy Airman Corey Duquette, 26, finishing third overall at 2:24:40 and Lt. Abigail Stiles, 28, finishing in 2:54:47.

Nearly 1,700 current and former Marines ran the marathon, which began in Arlington, Va., and wound through the nation's capital before ending near the Marine Corps War Memorial outside Arlington National Cemetery. The Corps' top finishers were Cpl. Thomas Kunish, 28, who completed the race in 2:30:12, and Capt. Jennifer Ledford, 28, who finished in 3:01:08. Kunish finished 12th overall, while Ledford placed 15th among women.

For many, though, the race was simply about finishing.

Medically retired Staff Sgt. Andy Robinson, 25, completed the marathon's 10K race for the first time by hand-cycle. He was in Iraq when his Humvee was hit by a roadside bomb June 20, 2006, killing three Marines and leaving him a quadriplegic.

"It's really cool to see all the people who come out for this," he said. "Even though these [service members] get jacked up in Iraq or Afghanistan, they're able to get out afterward and have a successful

life."

Navy Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Paul Hurley finished the race on a hand-cycle, coming full circle after the amputation of his lower right leg. He first completed the marathon in seventh grade and was back after surviving an October 2005 car accident in Bahrain that killed another sailor, Master-at-Arms 3rd Class Roger Napper.

"I thought it was appropriate to come back," said Hurley, who is stationed at National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. "Before this, the farthest I had ever gone on one of these [cycles] was five miles."

Retired Gunnery Sgt. Chris Claude, 29, also used a hand-cycle, and said he already was planning to return next year. A former artillery operations officer, he lost his right leg after an explosively formed penetrator explosion in 2006 rocked his Humvee in Iraq.

"It was a blast," Claude said of the marathon. "There were people cheering through the whole course. I'll definitely be back."

Other noteworthy finishers include Sgt. Maj. Carlton Kent, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, who ran his sixth Marine Corps Marathon in 3:56:01, and Team Esprit De Corps, a group of five current and former Marines who turned the marathon into the last leg of a 177.5-mile fundraiser for the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund. The team finished in 6:35:10 after running from Philadelphia to Washington over the previous four days. □

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