

In October 2011, and for the second time in the battalion's history, 3 RIFLES sent a team across the pond to compete in the Washington DC Marine Corps Marathon. The team comprised of 2 Officers, 1 Serjeant Major, 3 JNCOs and 8 Riflemen. 3 of the Riflemen competing had been wounded in action during the battalion's last deployment to Afghanistan on Op HERRICK 11 and we are very grateful to Care for Casualties for helping to fund their participation.

The trip got off to a suspiciously successful start when all team members made it onto the flight, in good time and with all the right documents and kit. WO2 Geoff Thomas was heard exclaiming that it was the first time such an event had occurred in his entire army career! Our good fortune continued when the British Airways cabin crew decided our cause was worthy of 4 free bottles of champagne and a spontaneous round of applause from the other passengers. No complaints from the Riflemen thus far...



Our first couple of days in DC mainly revolved around seeing the sights, registering for the marathon and rigidly adhering to Geordie Geoff's Marathon diet plan which predominantly consisted of full cooked breakfasts in the morning, any form of carbohydrate you can get your hands on during the day and a couple of local ales in the evening. However, on a serious note, wandering around the sights in uniform was an experience in itself as the local

goodwill towards us was absolutely incredible. We lost count of the amount of people who wanted to take photos, shake our hands or simply express their thanks for "whatever it is y'all do!".

Race day dawned all too quickly and we woke to freezing temperatures but pleasingly clear skies. Despite arriving with over an hour to spare, we somehow managed to find ourselves 500m from the start line with approximately 15,000 runners in front of us when we heard that the wheelchair and handbike race was starting in 2 minutes! After an unexpected sprint hurtling through hordes of lycra-clad competitors we made it in time for a start line photo just as the gun was fired; more of that unexpected good fortune. The team had made the conscious decision to stick together throughout the race to ensure none was left behind and all could help to give Rfn Parkes a shove on the initial uphill sections of the course. Incredibly the first 13 miles went extremely smoothly and we settled into a nice pace enjoying the fantastic support from the spectators, basking in the now warm mid-morning sun. However, our bubble was firmly burst around the 19 mile mark when one of the Riflemen struck the wall with a sickening thud. Suffice to say the last 7 miles were a test of patience as well as endurance as the team stuck to its initial mission of running together throughout. Whilst the support had been extraordinary all along the route, the last mile was particularly moving as the crowds pressed in and the cheers drowned out throbbing legs. The finish line brought relief but also a feeling of immense achievement for the entire team. 3 Rifles had just successfully completed the 2011 Marine Corps Marathon in just over 4 hours.



The last couple of days brought the inevitable marathon runners' hobble. However it didn't stop the team pushing through the pain to enjoy a well-earned night on the town to celebrate Halloween before returning to Blighty. Our short stay in Washington proved to be an unmitigated success and demonstrates that the relationship between the US and UK armed forces is as strong as ever. Although the battalion is extremely busy with pre-deployment training for another tour of Afghanistan, I believe it is essential that events like this continue to run. The effect on the morale of the Riflemen is astronomical and opportunities such as this should not be squandered. I can fully recommend the Washington DC Marine Corps Marathon as a brilliant event for any potential military or civilian competitors.