

Run a mile in my shoes

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Southernmost Flyer

Motivation, camaraderie and teamwork; those three things are what Air Force Master Sgt. Aaron Dent of Joint Interagency Task Force South said helped him complete

this year's Keys 100 ultra-marathon May 19. The Keys 100 consists of three races: a 100-mile team relay, an individual 50-mile run and a grueling individual 100-mile ultra-marathon, beginning in Key Largo, Fla. and ending at Higgs Beach in Key West. Dent was not part of the relay

or the 50-miler. He ran the entire 100 miles. Alone.

Heat, rain and concrete are just some of the elements that Dent faced on his 29-hour endeavor to raise awareness for the Special Operations Warrior

see **KEYS 100** page 4

June 1, 2012 • Southernmost Flyer • 4

Keys 100

continued from page 1

Project. Dent asked family and friends for donations to this cause in return for his running of the race.

"The reason I picked that particular program is because not a lot of people know of the project...working where we work and being in the military for a while I've met a lot of special operators and it's a cause that intrigued me and the people I work with."

The Special Warrior Project provides support for families of fallen special operations warriors. Dent said he chose this charity because of his close ties to special operations personnel during his career.

huge motivator for Dent to complete the 100-mile run. When his command involved themselves by acting as Dent's support crew supplying him with water, running with him and giving encouragement, he knew they would back him the entire 100 miles.

"I would say trying to raise money was the ultimate goal, but second was camaraderie," said Dent. "We call it 'wingmanship.' Looking out for each other and that's what I saw out there."

And "wingmanship" was proven a valuable asset during the run. From the senior chain of command down to the junior enlisted, people came to support Dent during his 29-hour trek, including JIATF South Chief of Staff Col. Jen Fullmer and JIATF South Joint Operation Center Officer in Charge Cmdr. Ed Kaiser.

"I would say I ran it, but it was definitely a team effort," says Dent.

During the last hour of his run, Dent had several members of JIATF South meet him near Smathers Beach, where they began to run in formation with him singing cadence to help him through the last push to the finish line.

"It was a great sense of accomplishment," said Dent. "I couldn't have done it without my JIATFS team, friends and family."

In addition to Dent, JIATF South also had two teams that participated in the relay event. The Coast Guard supplied 13 teams and the Chief Petty Officers Association had one team that ran to promote physical fitness for junior enlisted.

"Not only was it a challenge that we wanted to take on, it also gives us an opportunity to show our Sailors that we, the chief's community, view physical fitness as an important part of mission readiness," said MAC Eric Hancock. "By the way, if a group of 'seasoned' chiefs can do it so can all of our junior Sailors."



Capt. Jesus Raymond-Ventura, right, running with Master Sgt. Aaron Dent during the Keys 100 ultra-marathon.

In order to get the word out, Dent created a web page and sent a link to as many people as he could think of. He said he was overwhelmed by the high volume of feedback he received, along with motivating emails and comments.

In order to prepare for the 100-mile task ahead of him, Dent began training in February. His training consisted of 20- to 35-mile runs and preparing his body and mind. Just three days before registering for the Keys 100 he participated in the Everglades Ultras 50-mile race.

"Once you get past the first 30 miles, the extra 20 [miles] are all mental," Dent said.

The support he received was a



ABHC Jason Garcia receives the relay band from ETCM William Lumsden.



A Coast Guardsman carries the flag during her section of the race.



This year's JIATF South Keys 100 team.



Naval Air Station Key West's Chief Petty Officers Association team carries their banner during the run.