

26.2 Miles for the Men and Women Who Served

For months now, they have had the honor of waking up before sunrise on weekends, logging dozens of miles over the scorching summer pavement, bandaging countless blisters and tackling the mental demons that say it's much easier to hit the snooze button and catch a few more hours of sleep than to get up and train for the 38th Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C.

But for the 36 individuals pounding the pavement in training under the banner of Team DAV, it was honor that kept them moving. They are veterans, some with service-connected disabilities and some not, active-duty service members and civilian supporters who share the belief that taking care of our veterans is a sacred duty.

Each member paid their own way to run for Team DAV and to honor the men and women who served. Most had never covered this distance before, and some had never raced so much as a local 5k before committing to a full marathon in support of DAV's mission.

National Service Director Jim Marszalek is one of the veterans who took up the challenge. "This has been a great opportunity to help bring awareness to what DAV does for veterans," he said. "We work every day to empower the men and women who served, and this is just another way we can show our support and rally the community around the veteran population."

Despite the variety of physical abilities within the team, every time they laced up their shoes and every step they took throughout training, team members were reminded of the reasons a nation must support its injured and ill veterans.

Marine Staff Sgt. Brian Buckwalter, a combat correspondent who

has twice deployed to Afghanistan, explained, "I have seen firsthand both the physical and mental effects war can have on a person. DAV is doing important work on behalf of disabled veterans, and I was proud to represent the organization."

David Brundage, a 14-year Army veteran and DAV member, ran the marathon in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012. "My father, Michael Brundage, is a retired 100-percent disabled veteran who has been my 'support crew' for all of my previous Marine Corps Marathons," said Brundage. "I wanted to run representing DAV for my dad and all of the soldiers I served with and who continue to serve."

For the team members who have not served in the military, ties to the veterans they know have brought a special kind of motivation to train to tackle the marathon. "I was honored to run for Team DAV in the Marine Corps Marathon, as so many veterans have been an influential part of my life," said team coach Brad Byrnes, whose 90-year-old grandfather is a DAV member who served as a combat diver in the Pacific during World War II. "His stories of sacrifice and courage taught me early on that there is no higher honor than to defend the flag of the United States. Those who served deserve the best from our government leaders, and that's what DAV fights for on a daily basis."

One of the first to accept the marathon challenge was Joyce Wise. Her husband is a DAV member and a 100-percent disabled Marine veteran of the Vietnam War. "I will never completely understand all that Frank experienced and endured in his two tours of duty on the (Vietnamese) Demilitarized Zone in the Vietnam War, but I can try to emulate, just a little, the dedication and mental strength he required there by training for and running the marathon," said Wise.

Team DAV's core mission to raise awareness and educate veterans and their families is perhaps best summarized by team member Ed Monroe, a combat veteran of both the Marine Corps

and Army Reserve, a DAV member and a DAV National Service Officer. "If running 26.2 miles through our nation's capital encourages just one veteran to stop trying to go it alone and to seek out assistance from DAV, then all the sweat and effort was well worth it."

Editor's Note: At time of publication, the status of the Marine Corps Marathon was in question, with the government shutdown threatening to limit the resources necessary to hold the event as originally scheduled on Oct. 27. The operating status of the race was to be determined by Congress' ability to end the shutdown on or before Oct. 19.