

Making a run to Sage in honor of the veterans – 11/12/08

Because some many different organizations have been coordinating honor runs on motorcycles to honor veterans, I decided three years ago to coordinate a true run for the veterans.

In 2006, I made my first attempt at running to Sagebrush, on the outskirts of the Navajo Reservation to honor warriors for Veterans Day. The 11.5-mile course is a rough one, with three particularly challenging hills to overcome.

My first attempt resulted in 8.5 miles completed before the highway defeated me along with drizzling rain. My second attempt resulted in a 10.25-mile completion rate before exhaustion washed over my body.

For 2008, I'm happy to report I completed the entire run to honor our veterans past and present, who served in the U.S. Armed Forces. As a veteran of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, it's important for me to honor these warriors who served our country.

A lot of people asked me why I would run to such a seemingly negative establishment to honor these vets. It started out tongue-in-cheek, to actually "make a run" for Veterans Day.

Because I choose not to imbibe, making this annual run for the veterans is my celebration for this most important day. I've also attempted during Memorial Day to run to the same location, but never succeeded. I guess the fifth time was the charm.

Like many other Navajo families, I have brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles who proudly served in the military. Taking the time to recognize the efforts of these great men and women is of great interest to me and I am happy to have reached my goal this year.

Perhaps for next year, the distance will be longer, possibly to Ya Ta Hey. And the distance should incrementally increase until the 26.2-mile distance of a marathon is achieved.

Running solo all these years has presented another challenge I was able to overcome this year with the participation of my girlfriend, Ettie Anderson. Together we completed the run with a time of two hours, five minutes and nine seconds.

I attended the Veterans Day gourd dance at Nakai Hall before the run and to see the friends and family of veterans gather to honor their warriors was enough motivation to get the goal accomplished.

To see the blessing of American flags belonging to deceased warriors was particularly heartwrenching.

In spite of all we have overcome as a people from the U.S. Government and America in general, Navajos have always stepped up to the plate when it came to military service. That's because we're warriors at heart, protecting home, family and land.

So the next time you hear somebody talking about an honor run to recognize our veterans, tell them to get off their bikes and make it count by stepping out on foot. I'm sure our vets will appreciate the pain and sweat of such a gesture.

Thank you to all veterans of the military. Freedom isn't free and I just wanted you all to know that I haven't forgotten. I salute you!

You can count on me making a run in your honor again next year.

Rick Abasta
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