

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY



Run for Freedom

*The ODU community honors
America's fallen heroes*

Run for Freedom evokes emotion, patriotism

BY JENNIFER MULLEN

As I took the flag that quiet Sunday morning, I heard my footfalls striking the pavement with a purpose; the beating of my heart sounding out the cadence of my step; and the sound of the American flag, which I hoisted high and proud, snapping and fluttering above my head in the wind.

Old Dominion's Run for Freedom had just begun the evening before and a long week of media schedules and publicity arrangements was still ahead. But all that would have to wait. For now, I was focusing on Lt. Col. Charles H. Buehring.

Buehring was killed Oct. 26, 2003, in Iraq during a rocket-propelled grenade attack on the Al-Rasheed Hotel in Baghdad. The 40-year-old Fayetteville, N.C., native and 18-year U.S. Army veteran, known for his devotion to his church and lifelong involvement in the Boy Scouts, left behind a wife and two young sons.

This was mile 84 and it was dedicated to the memory of Buehring. As I made my way down Kaufman Mall and continued on my one-mile run around the campus, I thought about his family. I was running as much for them as for his memory. "Your sacrifice will not be forgotten," I whispered.

Although I didn't know Buehring, I do have a deeper understanding than many of the sacrifices our military men and women and their families make. As I ran that morning, my own military husband was nearly 7,000 miles away in Afghanistan in support of America's War on Terror. Over the past two years, he has lost four comrades in the fighting and a number of other friends have been wounded. Even as I ran for Buehring, I knew that fate was the only thing that separated his wife and me.

All of this weighed heavy in my heart as I

turned onto Hampton Boulevard to finish the final half-mile of my tribute to this soldier and the more than 700 others who died.

The normally bustling thoroughfare was quiet, with just a few cars traveling to and from downtown Norfolk. As I caught the drivers' eyes, they nodded their heads in solemn acknowledgement of my mission — one that came into painfully sharp focus later in the week when I met the parents of a soldier killed just one month earlier in Iraq.

Chief Warrant Officer Stephen M. Wells died Feb. 25 when his helicopter crashed in Habbaniyah. His parents, John and Elizabeth Wells, were visiting their daughter, an airman stationed at Langley Air Force Base in nearby Hampton, when they saw ODU's Run for Freedom on the local news. They made their way to the university the final morning of the run and together walked the one-mile route in memory of their son.

It was incredibly humbling for those of us involved. For the grieving Wells family, the notion that so many people — strangers to

them and their son — would come together in memory of him and others was an unexpected and appreciated demonstration of support.

I was now turning back onto Kaufman Mall, my mile almost complete. As I handed the flag to the next runner, emotion overtook me. I wept for all the men and women who have died in service to their country. I wept for their families, who now have a devastating emptiness where their loved ones used to be. I wept, too, for my husband and myself, who are learning the meaning of love, strength, courage and hope in unpredictable times. And I wept for a world where peace can be so elusive.

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PHOTO: KAREN SMALLETS

Jennifer Mullen passes by Hughes Hall as she completes her one-mile lap.



PHOTO: CHUCK THOMAS

Jason Redman

Run raises more than \$27,000 for charities

Hundreds of runners logged more than 700 miles during ODU's six-day, round-the-clock Run for Freedom, which took place April 3-8 on campus to honor military members killed in the War on Terror.

Organized by senior and Navy ROTC Battalion Commander Jason Redman, the run raised more than \$27,000 for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation, Freedom Alliance and Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, all of which provide scholarships and support for the families of the fallen troops.

Navy and Army ROTC midshipmen and cadets, along with other ODU students, faculty and staff, joined community and military members in running the American flag nonstop on a one-mile course around the campus. Each mile, completed by a solo runner, was in honor of a single service man or woman killed in the War on Terror. At the completion of each lap, a small flag bearing the service member's name was placed in a pegboard as a visual memorial to the more than 700 troops who have been killed since September 2001.

The run received local and national media attention. Two families vacationing in Hampton Roads who lost sons in Iraq saw the news coverage, came to the university and completed the run in honor of their sons.

Redman received a phone call from a mother in Alaska thanking him for the event. Her son had perished in Iraq just a few months prior, and she had heard about the run on a national radio program.

At the closing ceremony, Old Dominion President Roseann Runte led nearly 400 Army and Navy ROTC members in a large-formation run across the lawn of Kaufman Mall to complete the final mile.