



LONE COUNTRY ROAD
Several Soldiers with National Guard Cycling proudly wear their jerseys on a group ride.

The Power of The Pedal



NATIONAL GUARD CYCLING BUILDS FAMILY BONDS

By Christian Anderson

CHANCES ARE YOU HAVE SEEN A CYCLIST or two pedaling down the road. Next time you spot a group of riders, look a little bit closer and you might notice red, white and blue jerseys—as more and more Soldiers are joining the ranks of National Guard Cycling.

Between training for cycling events, riding for physical fitness, commuting to and from work, and riding recreationally with family and friends, Guard members are donning the Guard Cycling jerseys in increasing numbers to announce their military affiliation and promote the benefits of cycling.

National Guard Cycling team riders routinely take part in scheduled rides held throughout the country, providing opportunities for Guard members and families to strengthen bonds.

Best of all, these men and women form a moving billboard for the National Guard, reminding Americans that there are heroes in their presence every day.

PUSHING THEIR PASSION

National Guard Cycling was created in April, 2007, by MAJ Thomas Crotty and CPT Mark Burns, with the goal of promoting the sport for

Guard members and their dependents. The two met through biking and hit it off instantly. National Guard Cycling was born less than a month later, following a group ride the two organized for some Guard members and friends at the National Guard Bureau.

Sharing their vision of using cycling to help Guard members become healthier and shake off the stresses of military service, they set out to provide structure and visibility for cycling activities that were already being held.

“We know that many Guard members and their family members are riding throughout the United States. By having National Guard Cycling, we ... give them an opportunity to share the experience” Crotty said.

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—MAJ Thomas Crotty

Initially, members simply had access to an online discussion group and cycling jerseys. But in just two years, National Guard Cycling has made huge leaps in popularity and success. They’ve grown from a couple of Guard members riding together into an internet-based forum where cyclists can get help and advice on everything from finding the right bike and bicycle maintenance, to training and diet.

Members also publicize events, share stories and pictures, offer knowledge and expertise, and post comments about their experiences as they encourage others to ride.

The program has also become a support group that brings Guard families together and strengthens bonds within the military community. And the Guard members’ red, white and blue team jerseys not only distinguish them from other riders, but also allow them to show their pride in being associated with the National Guard.

“We really just want to push cycling as a vehicle to bring awareness to the Guard Family,” Crotty said. “We want to promote health and fitness, and give Guard members and their families the opportunity to enjoy time together in a healthy environment by going out for a simple neighborhood bike ride.”

And according to Crotty and Burns, all you need to do is dust off that old bike in the garage and start pedaling.

“Most folks have access to a bike or know someone that has access,” Crotty stated. “It just takes initiative to get on it.”

BRINGING IT HOME

The mission of National Guard cycling is more than just hanging out and blowing off some steam on the bike. It is about taking care of family—a concept that can easily be ignored with all the military and civilian obligations Guard members must balance. Cycling can also be a great family reintegration activity following deployment.

“It’s about the family—this is about the individual Guard member and his or her family being involved in cycling. If you want to go out and race or do a triathlon, go for it,” Crotty said. “But if you want to go out with your kid and strap on helmets and spend time creating a memory of a lifetime, this is the program.”

While there are several types of races for speed riders or endurance athletes, National Guard Cycling participants want to take their time and make sure everybody they pass sees who they are and what they represent.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATIONAL GUARD CYCLING

“For our group rides, we are not out going fast, and we will not leave anyone behind,” Crotty assured.

“The goal is riding together, not leaving a rider alone” Burns added.

FROM IDEA TO HIGH GEAR

In the future, National Guard Cycling has plans for a cross-country ride. Burns came up with the concept in 2005 while participating in a big cycling event.

“I was expecting everybody there to look like Lance Armstrong,” Burns said. “I was very pleased

to see people of all walks of life and riders of all different shapes and sizes.”

But it wasn’t until the ride started that Burns realized how the Guard could benefit from a cycling program.

“I saw a guy walking by with an Army jersey, and later as we were peddling down the road, there were people cheering us on.” Burns added, “I thought ‘This could become big.’”

One notable military-themed event is The Citizen/Soldier Century Ride, scheduled for September, 2009. Showcasing the National Guard Year of the NCO, the event will take riders from

Arlington, VA to Gettysburg and back, during the 9/11 anniversary. Riders will navigate challenging routes connecting the National Guard Headquarters to the grave sites of many original militiamen. Riders will even be ferried across the Potomac River during the day-long event. Shorter routes will be available for family members to participate in the event.

Additionally, many shorter local rides are planned throughout the cycling season, including the annual ride to see the Cherry Blossom Festival in the Tidal Basin of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. For those traveling, they can search the website for ride information in Guard-friendly locations nation-wide.

THE RIGHT MEN FOR THE JOB

The logistics to set up such enormous rides can be mind-boggling. But Crotty and Burns are logging the necessary experience to manage future events. They recently participated in the Wounded Warrior Unity Ride, held in September, 2008.

Riding 110 miles each day with 100 other military personnel and supporters, the two-day trip took them from Ft. Eustis, VA to Quantico Marine Corps Base, and continued to Walter Reed Army Medical Hospital. The Unity Ride supported service members being treated at the famed military hospital, and both Burns and Crotty agreed the feeling of helping Service members in need was very gratifying.

“The ride brings awareness to Wounded Warriors. And when people see hundreds of bicycles going up a road, they put all the politics aside and everything becomes focused,” Crotty said. “Some people salute, some honk their horns, and others wave and cheer.”

Burns and Crotty know they want to keep participating in events like the Wounded Warrior Unity Ride and help sponsor something for the National Guard and its Soldiers and Airmen. “We are looking forward to a great ride in the Citizen/Soldier Century and the future of National Guard Cycling.”

National Guard Cycling will do more than strengthen the legs, hearts and lungs of participating cyclists and their families. It will change their lives and create memories that will last forever. And what better way to bring awareness to the Guard than by biking around the country representing the Citizen/Soldiers. **GX**



LET'S RIDE

Soldiers, friends, family and supporters of National Guard Cycling take a moment for a photo opportunity after a weekend group ride.



NGCC RIDERS

Soldiers from National Guard Cycling often wear their colors proudly on weekend rides.

For information on National Guard Cycling and the Tour de Guard go to www.NationalGuardCycling.com.