



Soldiers in Kuwait 'compete' in West Dennis cancer run

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WEST DENNIS — More than 1,000 people watched yesterday as Dennis firefighter and EMT Phelim Meehan choked back tears while speaking to them from the top of a pickup truck at the starting line of the third annual road race held in his son's honor.

Meehan's son Turlough was 6 months old when he lost his roughly five-month fight with infant acute lymphoblastic leukemia in 2007. Since 2008, Phelim and his wife, Amanda-Clare, have organized a 5K race to honor their son and raise money to fight ALL.

"I'd like you all to bow your heads and say a prayer for all the people who have cancer," Phelim asked the racers assembled at West Dennis Beach.

But the crowd, which was listening quietly, let out a collective "Awww!" when Meehan told them 20 members of the 3rd Battalion of the 126th Aviation Regiment, usually stationed at Otis Air National Guard Base, would also run the 5K with them — at Camp Buehring in Udairi, Kuwait.

"If we were home in the U.S. we would have turned out for the race in person," said Chief Warrant Officer Brian Gannon yesterday in a phone interview from Kuwait.

The race, which attracted several hundred runners in its first year and almost 1,000 yesterday, was expected to raise about \$30,000 for the Turlough Meehan Research Foundation at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute this year, Meehan said. The foundation has already raised about \$70,000 since its inception, organizers said.

Gannon, 33, an old friend of the Meehans, said he ran the race last year and was disappointed he could not do the same this year. When Phelim Meehan suggested the Black Hawk helicopter pilot and his fellow soldiers run the race in Kuwait, Gannon said he knew it would be a popular suggestion.

"Everybody in one way or another is in touch with cancer," Gannon said.

Retired Sgt. George Anthony Morrison, a race spectator who used to serve with the unit, said he expected nothing less of his former colleagues, many of whom are on their second or third overseas deployments.

"If you look up the definition of an American in the dictionary, you're going to see their pictures," Morrison said of Gannon's unit shortly after a Black Hawk helicopter from Otis flew over the West Dennis race course to salute the runners.

Angie DaLuze, 33, said she has run the race for three years and shares Morrison's admiration.

"We have it so easy here, and they're running in Kuwait," DaLuze said.

Meehan, 46, appreciated the efforts of the soldiers, who held their race at 5 p.m. in 115-degree heat so they could compete at the same time as the stateside runners.

"I think it means a lot to them that they're included in something over here," Meehan said.

Gannon, like many other racers, said they ran to support a good cause, not to take bows.

After he watched his 16-month-old son Donnchadh cross the finish line yesterday in a stroller pushed by his grandparents, Meehan said Turlough might have been sent to earth to raise awareness about the illness that cut his life short.

"He was with us for a short time," Meehan said, "but he touched a lot of lives while he was here."

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