

# Gettysburg welcomes CanAm Veterans' Challenge cyclists

**BY LAURA FAY Times Intern | Posted: Wednesday, July 2, 2014 12:09 am**

Camaraderie and pride were evident as a group of veterans arrived in Gettysburg by bicycle Tuesday afternoon after an 85-mile ride from Reading.

The riders are en route from Ottawa to Washington, D.C. with the CanAm Veterans' Challenge, an 18-day event sponsored by World T.E.A.M. Sports. The team included 16 injured veterans from the United States, Canada and Denmark in addition to several able-bodied riders and others who support the athletes. The total journey is 766 miles long and will end in D.C. Friday.

Canadian veteran Mike Cotts, of Fredericton, New Brunswick, completed a "century ride" on Tuesday, adding 15 miles to the trip to complete 100 miles. He did the extra miles for a "sense of accomplishment," he said, noting that he was also celebrating Canada Day.

"It's amazing. I thank everyone I see," he said, especially World T.E.A.M. Sports. "Without them I don't know where I'd be."

Cotts, who has also completed the Face of America ride, said the CanAm Veterans' Challenge is "twenty times better" because participants get to spend more time together. He enjoys being with the other veterans because they share his mindset and face similar challenges.

"It gives me courage moving forward," Cotts said of the camaraderie and the physical challenge.

Other veterans echoed Cotts's feelings.

Christopher Levi, a double amputee veteran from Holbrook, N.Y., said Tuesday's ride was "very hot and very long." He appreciated central Pennsylvania's rolling hills, though, and said his experience thus far has been "amazing."

He also commended his teammates, saying it must be an "incredible" group because no one has had to drop out along the way.

"It's hard to put into words," he said of the friendship he has experienced on the ride. "Being part of a team is one of the best parts of life."

In the organization's name, T.E.A.M. stands for "The Exceptional Athlete Matters," and the actions of both the cyclists and their support staff embody that sentiment.

The support staff rides with the veterans, transports supplies and belongings, organizes rest stops and provides other needed assistance.

Brinson Langley, a University of North Carolina Greensboro student, has been involved with the

organization for several years and said participating in the CanAm Challenge has allowed him to see the organization's motto, "changing lives through sports" in action.

"With the small group, you get to see people change," he said.

The vets gain a "sense of pride and a sense of being able to do the things they want to do" through this and other programs, he said.

Marki Burnett, a recent graduate of the University of Missouri, is also an intern with the organization. She is waiting to be called for active duty with the Marine Corps, and she spoke of the veterans with great admiration.

"The riders and the staff are a great example of the type of person you need to be in the military," she said.

Burnett rode with the veterans for 70 miles and said their "relentless positive attitude" encouraged her the entire way.

The cyclists cheered as their teammates finished at the Wyndham Gettysburg Tuesday, congratulating everyone despite finishing at different times and some riding longer than others.

"There is no winning," said Canadian veteran Michael Fuentespina when someone asked if he was the first to finish.