

## 10.04.2013 – Wounded Rifleman takes on Devizes to Westminster

### Canoe Race

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— Danny Spender forward Barry Welch aft

C/Sjt Danny Spender, 1 RIFLES, who lost both legs in Afghanistan, has just attempted the gruelling Devizes to Westminster Canoe Race in aid of Care for Casualties. The race starts in Devizes, Wiltshire and finishes just downstream of Westminster Bridge in central London, opposite the Houses of Parliament. The race has been held annually over the Easter Weekend since 1948.



The race is 125 miles long and has 77 portages. The first 52 miles are along the Kennet and Avon Canal to Reading, the next 55 miles are on the River Thames to Teddington. The final 17 mile section is on the tidal portion of the Thames. The race is a severe test of skill and stamina which produces a memorable sense of achievement for those successfully completing it. This is Danny's story of his magnificent achievement in completing 59 of the 77 portages.



- A single portage is a challenge for the able bodied. To complete 55 wearing prosthetics takes huge courage and determination.



Please show your appreciation of his magnificent effort by reading his story and going to his Just Giving page at [www.justgiving.com/Daniel-Spender](http://www.justgiving.com/Daniel-Spender) or donating online at [www.careforcasualties.org.uk](http://www.careforcasualties.org.uk)

## Training

In late November I decided that I wanted to complete one of the hardest endurance races in the world for two reasons firstly to raise money and give something back to Care for Casualties who have helped me and my family since I was injured in August 2011. Secondly to prove to myself that despite losing my legs I can still push as hard as I did before and that this new chapter in my life won't restrict me at all.

I asked Barry Welch if he would like to do the DW with me as he is a keen amateur paddler and has the experience of the basics to get us started safely and has knowledge of the kit and equipment that we were going to need. In early December with money provided from C4C we bought a Sea Kayak to do the event with, although very heavy and not very fast through the water it gave us the stability that we were going to need with me getting in and out at each portage and our training began.



— Capsize drills Chepstow pool

Initially we began training in Chepstow swimming pool and carried out all the capsizing drills and basic safety skills we were going to need then we moved on to the Gloucester to Sharpness canal and Wye river to train. We trained every weekend for almost 4 months



— Training with snow on the banks

Towards the end of the training we moved down to the Kennet and Avon canal itself to practice some of the portages we were going to face during the race. The support crew led by CSjt Pat Goddard also conducted a Recce for the support crew so they understood some of the issues they would face in supporting us.

### **The Race**

We started as planned at 0700 on the Saturday morning and headed along the first 34 miles to Newbury which we had to do in 10 hours. We passed through Newbury 12 minutes over the allotted 10 hrs and hoped that everything was still ok as nothing was said to us but almost 2 hrs later and 12 miles from the 54 mile point at Reading, our support crew received a call from the race director that we were to be disqualified from the race for the 12 minutes.

I was absolutely gutted and I called the race director to see what the options available to us were and in the end after agreeing to have our race number removed he was happy that as a team we could continue to push on along the route but not as part of the DW 2013. I explained that doing the distance and keeping going was more important to me and the money being raised for Care for Casualties was the priority over getting the medal at the



— On the race

We pushed on to Reading getting in at around 0200 into Dreadnought Reach and by now I was struggling to walk with very bruised legs and the temperature didn't help, we stopped for 2 hours to plan the next 54 miles where we planned stop briefly again before we pushed to the finish at Westminster. We than set off again at 0400 and just over 10 miles later a little short of Marlow the 69 mile point after an agonising decision we had to withdraw as the pain whilst walking at each portage was just too much.





— Portage pain

We had been going for just over 24 hours and had completed 59 of the 77 portages along the route, I hadn't realised that at the point that we had to retire over 60 teams had already retired themselves and some 18 hours before us. I was absolutely gutted as was Barry and the absolutely amazing support crew who really dug deep to assist us where they could and keep us going with food and good Army banter but when we looked at how many people had dropped out so much earlier than us it put it into perspective how well we had actually done.



— The support crew

It was an amazing experience across the team from the challenges that the Rifles support crew faced in following our progress and getting to the portages in time especially in the temperatures and darkness at times. For myself and Barry just physically pushing as hard as we could and hearing the support from not just the crowds of spectators along the route but other competitors in the race. I don't think we had fully anticipated the physical impact that all the portages took on my legs but now that I have experienced it I know what to expect for next time.....Im not done with the DW just yet! To date we have raised over £10,600 on the just giving page.

CSjt Danny Spender



Please show your appreciation of this magnificent effort by reading his story and going to his Just Giving page at [www.justgiving.com/Daniel-Spender](http://www.justgiving.com/Daniel-Spender) or donating online at [www.careforcasualties.org.uk](http://www.careforcasualties.org.uk)

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