

## **Army's Atlantic rowers are halfway home**

Four British Army Commandos who left New York on June 10 have reached the halfway point in their record-breaking attempt to row more than 3,000 miles across the Atlantic Ocean.

Thirty-two days at sea have taken their toll on the crew – countless blisters, strained backs, mental and physical exhaustion from the punishing hour-on, hour-off rowing shifts, plus the experience of battling waves as high as a house in a 29ft boat – but the satisfaction of crossing the halfway point this afternoon (July 13) will be music to their ears, says Adrian Bell, Team Hesco's shore manager.

"1,431 nautical miles behind them is New York. 1,431 miles in front of them is Falmouth," he said. "What a terrific sense of fulfilment and exhilaration they must be feeling.

"Of course, it's a mental milestone more than anything else," he continued, "and while I'm sure they won't have let the moment pass they by, they'll want to ensure the second half of the crossing is covered just as quickly, if not faster than, the miles covered to date.

"They also belong to a very select group of people on the planet – for the last month, they have been able to avoid absolutely everything concerning the World Cup!"

The four men – Major Pete Rowlands, 46, and Captain Mark Waterson, 46, both from East Yorkshire; 2Lt Charlie Martell, 35, from Gloucestershire, and Staff Sgt Ben Fouracre, 36, from North Devon – are undertaking the challenge to raise funds for the Meningitis Trust, in memory of Gareth – Major Rowland's son – who was 16 when he died from the disease three years ago. To date the challenge has raised more than £140,000 for the charity, and the team has also set itself the objective of being the first crew to row unsupported between the US and UK mainlands.

"We really could not have asked for better timing from the crew to make the halfway point," Mr Bell added, "because only yesterday the Government announced that with effect from September, vaccinations against pneumococcal meningitis would be introduced into the childhood immunisation programme.

“It’s a significant step towards reducing the burden of this disease, but a lot of work remains to be done to eradicate the disease – there is still no vaccine for meningococcal group B, the most common bacterial cause of the disease.

“Our fundraising will help the Trust to do what it does best: providing support to victims and families of this terrible disease, raising awareness of the disease and educating people about its symptoms. Being alert to the signs can and does save lives.”

The Atlantic crossing is the second challenge for the team; last year, under the name Commando Joe, they skied 320 miles to the Magnetic North Pole, fending off polar bears, frostbite and snow blindness. Next year, the team plans to complete its odyssey of extreme challenges by crossing – on foot – one of the world’s great deserts.

-ends-

July 13, 2006

For further information and photography, please contact:

Adrian Bell, Team Hesco campaign manager: 07976 866808 or email [adrian@commando-joe.co.uk](mailto:adrian@commando-joe.co.uk)

Or Emi Spinner, Meningitis Trust, on 01453 768006, mobile 07968 480 336 or email [emis@meningitis-trust.org](mailto:emis@meningitis-trust.org)

**Notes to editors:**

1. Team Hesco comprises Major Pete Rowlands, 46, and Captain Mark Waterson, also 46, both of Long Riston, Yorkshire; 2Lt Charlie Martell, 36, of Cirencester, Gloucestershire; and SSgt Ben Fouracre, 36, of Chivenor, Devon.
2. The Shepherd Ocean Fours Atlantic Rowing Race is the second of three ‘extreme’ challenges being undertaken by the team to raise funds for the Meningitis Trust. In 2005, they skied 320 miles to the Magnetic North Pole in a record-breaking nine days, 17 hours and 39 minutes. In 2007, a gruelling race through one of the world’s great deserts is planned.
3. George Harboe and Gabriel Samuelsen were the first people to make the New York-UK crossing in 1896. Since then, just one other person, a Ukrainian called Theodore Rezvoy, has attempted the same journey from New York harbour; he was forced to end his attempt after only eight days.
4. The most recent west-east crossing was made by Englishman Ollie Hicks in 2005. At the age of 21, he became the youngest person to row the Atlantic in a time of 123 days.
5. Successful crossings have been made along Ocean Rowing Society recognised routes from Canada and Newfoundland, although none has reached the UK mainland.
6. The Meningitis Trust is the UK’s leading meningitis charity, raising awareness of the disease through education and training, and offering practical support to those affected by the disease. It relies on donations for 99% of its income.
7. Meningitis is a life-threatening infection that affects the membranes around the brain and spinal cord. Often associated with septicaemia, the disease can affect anyone at any age and can kill within hours. About 3,000 cases are reported each year; this is believed to represent about 50% of the total.