

## British adventurers within days of setting new record

Four Army Commandos are just days away from setting a new British ocean-going endurance record. Perpetuating the tradition of British maritime excellence, they are counting down the final miles of a punishing 11-week, 3,300 mile voyage rowing across the North Atlantic.

Team Hesco – Charlie Martell, Pete Rowlands, Mark Waterson and Ben Fouracre – are expected to arrive in Falmouth, Cornwall on Thursday in their 29ft boat *Mount Spirit*, having left New York, USA, on June 10. On making landfall, the crew – all novice rowers – will make history by becoming the first ever British team to have rowed between the US and UK mainlands, an achievement which will be validated by Guinness World Records on arrival.

“This voyage is an experience that will remain with these four men for the rest of their lives,” said Adrian Bell, Team Hesco’s campaign manager. “They have now been at sea for 77 days, a period in which they have begun to understand the power of the Atlantic Ocean and all it can throw at them. One can only begin to imagine what it’s like to be in a 29ft boat, with nowhere to hide, when you’re facing winds of 50mph and waves the size of a house.

“As if this were not already challenging enough, the voyage has been made more difficult for them by the failure of their satellite communications system only four weeks into the voyage,” Mr Bell added. “Its loss was a real blow – not only could they no longer receive essential weather information and storm warnings, but they also missed the motivational power of the messages being sent by hundreds of supporters who were watching them via the internet.

“Our only contact with the crew for the past six weeks has been through occasional messages relayed by passing ships – including one from the Queen Mary 2.”

Mr Bell says the sheer enormity of their achievement has still not sunk in – either for the shore support team or, probably, for the crew themselves. “Apart from anything else, none of them has had more than two hours’ sleep for the last 77 days. That would be bad enough, but on top of that they’ve each been rowing for 12 hours a day, every day, to cover the 3,318 mile distance,” he explains.

“It is a huge achievement to row an ocean – in the last 50 years, more than 2,500 people have scaled the heights of Everest; in the last 100 years, there have been fewer than 175 completed ocean rows anywhere in the world. To set a new record at the same time is, truly, a magnificent achievement.”

Team Hesco was competing against two other boats in the Shepherd Ocean Fours Rowing Race. The first boat to cross the finishing line, crewed by an American university rowing team, arrived in Port Pendennis, Falmouth last Sunday, while another boat – also crewed by British Army soldiers – arrived Saturday morning, having taken a tow after crossing the finishing line at the Scilly Isles.

Kenneth F Crutchlow, executive director of the Ocean Rowing Society, said: “It is coincidental that September 3<sup>rd</sup> marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the loss at sea of the ocean rowboat *Puffin*. Its crew, John Hoare and David Johnstone, were the first in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to try to row from the USA to England. There have been many further attempts.

“It now looks almost certain that the brave adventurers of Team Hesco are destined to set a true British maritime record when they row into Port Pendennis, Falmouth, with a total time at sea of about 80 days.”

Sponsorship from military supplier Hesco Bastion has enabled the crew to concentrate on raising funds for their chosen charity, the Meningitis Trust, in memory of Gareth, the 16-year old son of Pete Rowlands, who died from the disease three years ago. The total sum now raised stands at £142,000 – more than seven times the original target.

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August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2006

- Team Hesco is expected to arrive in Port Pendennis, Falmouth on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August. Please call Adrian Bell, campaign manager (07976 866808), for more information and latest updates. Interviews and/or photoshoots can be arranged once they have landed at Falmouth.
- Digital photographs of the crew completing their voyage will be available immediately; photographs taken during the crossing will be made available as soon as possible after the boat arrives in Falmouth.

- More information about Team Hesco, and its members, can be found at [www.teamhesco.com](http://www.teamhesco.com).
- For further information, please contact:  
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#### Editors' notes:

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. Until 2006, just one other person, a Ukrainian called Theodore Rezvoy, had attempted the same journey from New York harbour; he was forced to end his attempt after only eight days.
4. 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.
5. 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.