



CC-Air Ramstein

Allied Air Component Command Headquarters Ramstein

Public Information Office



Press Release

These boots are made for walking...

CC-AIR Ramstein completes 2008 Nijmegen Marches



On 19 July at 2:30 pm, 11 members of CC-Air Ramstein's Marching Team, commanded by Maj Thomas Belka, proudly entered Camp Charlemagne, officially completing the gruelling 4-day, 160+ kilometre International Four Day Marches-Nijmegen (*Vierdaagse*). "In prior years, a few members from CC-Air completed the Nijmegen Marches individually," stated Lt Col Wayne Goulet, "however, this was the first year CC-Air Ramstein entered a team to represent the headquarters." In addition to Maj Belka (DEU) and Lt Col Goulet (USA), the multi-national team members included OTL Michael Kammerer (DEU), OFw Lukas Pschyklenk (DEU), SU Jan Schroeder (DEU), CPT Darius

Porebski (POL), WO Pavel Rybka (CZE), WO Josef Belka (CZE), 1SGT Steve Schatteman (BEL), SQL Jamie Cox (GBR), and SGT Rab Shepherd (GBR). Team support was provided by SM Harry Weeber (NLD), 1CPL Philip Ongenae (BEL), and Mr Rob Riga (NLD). An often overlooked arm of each military team, this function played a critical role by ensuring water, food, and medical support was continually available.

The International Four Day Marches-Nijmegen is the largest marching event in the world. Depending on age group and category, participants walk 30, 40, or 50 kilometres daily and receive the royally-approved medal (*Vierdaagsekruis*) upon completion. This year, on Day One, 34,395 civilian and 4,037 military participants began the march. At the end of Day Four, 31,473 civilian (92%) and 3,489 military (86%) marchers crossed the finish line. For the military, the 4-day Nijmegen Marches is primarily a team event to develop core military values such as leadership, teamwork, and endurance. Each contingent must begin and end each day's march with a minimum 11-man team. Military participants march 40+ kilometres per day and must carry at least 10 kilograms (22 pounds) of dead weight.

"Marching on Day One started pretty early at 3:00 am," according to Major Belka. "Before sunrise", he added, "the main street inside the camp was crowded with formations of thousands of soldiers from various nations proudly carrying flags and unit banners. Military bands began to play and led the troops out for their first 40 kilometre march". To spur the marchers on, thousands of people lined the marching routes, cheering and celebrating not only the soldiers but the civilian walkers as well - some of the revellers had been waiting along the route since 5:00 am. On Day Two, the weather took a turn for the worse. The temperature dropped and rain accompanied the walkers for several hours. Approximately 10 km into the march, the CC-Air Ramstein team lost one member due to leg pains and blisters. Day Three was the most difficult day because of the hilly course - exacerbated by a persistent rain. Before the march began, another member of the CC-Air Ramstein team fell out of the formation due to painful foot blisters caused by the prior days' marches. This meant the team was down to 11 marchers, the minimum required for the Nijmegen Military Team Award.



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The final day started – to the surprise of the team – at 2:00 a.m. However, morale was high and the team marched astonishingly well. As the team marched the final kilometres to the finish line at Camp Charlemagne, the adoring crowds along the route expressed their admiration for the marchers by presenting them with traditional gladiola flowers. At Camp Charlemagne, team members received their richly deserved *Vierdaagsekruis*. Proudly displaying their medals, the team participated in the Victory March down Via Gladiola into downtown Nijmegen. As the team passed the VIP reviewing stand they noticed a proud, familiar onlooker, former CC-Air Ramstein Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Jac Jansen, who gave them an extra big and deserved hand of applause. “No matter how hard and painful these four days were, we fought the challenge and survived,” stated Maj Belka. “When we finished the marches, the CC-Air Ramstein Marching Team had developed an unbreakable bond, forged by the common hardship experienced by each member.”