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**TROOPS TACKLE VALENTINE MARATHON**

BIG-hearted British troops in Iraq have battled through a desert sandstorm to complete a Valentine half-marathon for charity.

420 soldiers, sailors and airmen struggled against 40 mph winds to finish the gruelling 13-mile event on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February. The troops raised over \$4,200 for MacMillan Cancer Relief and three deprived schools in the Basrah area.

Lance-Corporal Nick Westhorpe, who had the idea for the run, said he was “gob-smacked” by the turn-out. He struggled through the course even though he was suffering from tonsillitis.

“It was a pride thing, really,” he said afterwards. “I couldn’t have organised it and then not run it myself.

“I really didn’t think we would get so many people. To raise this amount of money is just amazing.”

The event was organised by L/Cpl Westhorpe, RAF Flight Lieutenant John Crewe and Sergeant Ben Hardy, an RAF physical training instructor.

Flight Lieutenant Crewe said conditions were like “running through a brick wall”.

“We have been working on this for a month and a half,” he said. “A lot of people have helped make it happen, and it has gone really, really well.”

The event was won by Staff Sergeant Rob Goldsmith of 16 Signals Regiment, who completed the course in one hour, 22 minutes.

“When I walked out this morning and saw the wind, I knew it was going to be rough,” he said. “It was like running through a force ten gale, with everyone caked in mud.

“The whole thing was quite a struggle.”

Lieutenant Tara Kane (26), also from 16 Signals Regiment, was the first female to cross the finishing line with a time of one hour, 48 minutes and 45 seconds.

“The wind was in our faces for the first bit, and everybody was struggling with it,” she said. “I’ve got contact lenses, so I couldn’t even see for half of it!”

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