

## Deployed Airmen Ride for WAP

The Sahel, considered the most inhospitable place on the planet, and believe it or not hundreds of Airmen are deployed to this harsh environment to support and build an airfield. Through the heat, the winds, the dusts storms, they push on. With limited resources they push on...and they peddle on. That's right! The Airmen deployed to Nigerian AB-201 also took it upon themselves to promote wounded Airmen by riding for the Wounded Airman Program from 1 May through Memorial Day.

With an initial goal of riding 2,500 miles and to raise \$5,000, they acquired and built 10 mountain bikes, ten helmets, and an air pump. They began fundraising as early as April 1<sup>st</sup> and their fundraising still continues. Unfortunately, due mostly to the environment, they quickly lost half of their bikes. With no supplies to repair flat tires, faulty chains, brakes, etc. five of their bikes broke in the first eight days,... but they peddled on.

SrA Isis Arroyo, (home station, 60<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron) put in 100 miles during her off-duty time. When asked what motivated her, she commented, "I haven't really ridden a bike since middle school, but to be able to do something that perhaps others cannot, made me want to get out there. They gave me that reason." Numerous flights and teams were motivated to support. SSgt Dana Powell (home station, 60<sup>th</sup> Operations Support Squadron) led the day one setup team, TSgt Andre Davis (home station, 86<sup>th</sup> Security Forces Squadron) led the bike setup team, SrA Anthony Tepen (home station, 86<sup>th</sup> Vehicle Readiness Squadron) led the maintenance team, and TSgt Kory Meda, (home station, 60<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron) led the final day ride, to name just a few. "I have always been an active member of AFA and WAP, and I felt this was a great opportunity for our Airmen at Nigerian AB-201 to constructively pass time and support a great agenda; to do something that had outside effect and made a positive impact." said MSgt Dustin Lawrence, First Sergeant at Nigerian AB-201 (home station, 435<sup>th</sup> Security Forces Squadron).

Every Airman still had a job to do, they worked long, grueling days, in the hot Sahel sun, and yet (for our wounded Airmen) they still found the motivation to either ride early in the morning or at night before the sun went down. Those five bikes got a lot of miles put on them. Though they knew that with only 5 bikes remaining they would most likely not make their mark, they peddled on. Flights and professional organizations rode too. The local Fire Dept. put in miles, the First 4, 5/6, Top III, the medical flight, etc., all made it a point to saddle up and put in time.

On Memorial Day, the installation held the first ever air base bike ride. Riding a maximum route of 9.5 miles they played music, stayed hydrated, and gathered teams of four and five airmen on each bike riding from sun up to sun down. By sundown on 29 May, the final laps were ridden by the Top III, the First Sergeant, the 724<sup>th</sup> Commander and their hard charging A1C Arroyo; over one hundred Airmen had put in over 400 hours riding and had reached over 1,200 miles.

Currently, they have raised \$2.4K of their \$5K goal. With difficulties of sharing their effort, given their location, and remaining OPSEC minded, donation support has been hard, but their spirits were never hindered. The Airmen at Nigerian AB-201, peddled relentlessly, they raised awareness, and made awesome sacrifices for our wounded Airmen.

The 724 EABS motto "Together...We Build! Hoah!" shows not only through their mission, but their impact made on the Air Force Association and the Wounded Airman Program.

Feel free to go to their fundraising page and show your support (<https://fundly.com/users/1513423>). They will be leaving the fundraising open until the end of July in hopes to reach \$5,000. 100% of the money donated will go directly back to the Wounded Airman Program. Show your support, by supporting them.