The Final Ride: Ex-Royal Marine in his 80th Year Completes 435-Mile Epic Cycle Challenge through the French Pyrenees for Veteran's Charity

Wednesday 25 September, 2024

In a remarkable feat of endurance and dedication, ex-Royal Marine Jonathan Thomson, in his 80th year, has completed his fifth and final epic cycling challenge for PTSD Resolution, the charity for forces veterans' mental health.

The 'Pyrenees 24' challenge was a gruelling 435 miles (700kms) with an astonishing elevation gain of 35,832 feet - equivalent to cycling from London to Edinburgh and 1.23 times the height of Mount Everest from sea level. It marks the culmination of Jonathan's fundraising efforts, which have raised over £153,000 to date - enough to fund therapy for more than 180 veterans and their families.

On Wednesday 18th September, Jonathan, along with a team of committed cyclists, completed their final fundraising challenge through the French Pyrenees. Costs were covered privately by the team, so all funds raised will go directly to PTSD Resolution, which has 200 therapists offering nationwide support.

Over seven days the intrepid team comprised Jonathan, Jez (former Royal Marine), Jim (former Royal Navy pilot), Matt (former Royal Marine) and Bill (former Royal Marine).

Since 2020, Jonathan and his "fellow pilgrims" have completed five gruelling challenges for PTSD Resolution — collectively cycling an astonishing 4,900 km with 190,325 ft climb - across Scotland, the Orkneys, Shetland, Wales and the Pyrenees. This latest effort saw Jonathan embark on his second Pyrenees adventure - remarkably, in his 80th year.

Jonathan says, "Too many of our veterans of all ages, and some men and women still serving, suffer the evil effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This wrecks their lives and deeply affects those of their families and close friends. It is also a major cause of suicide. PTSD Resolution provides well-developed and well-proven treatment for this condition, which is why we continue to cycle on their behalf."

PTSD Resolution

With over 4,000 referrals to date, registered charity PTSD Resolution is dedicated to assisting UK Veterans, Reservists and family members struggling to reintegrate into everyday life. Founded in 2009, the charity is accredited by the Royal College of Psychiatrists to the Quality Network for Veterans Mental Health Services (QNVMHS). It provides free, prompt and effective therapy, with treatment available online or by phone.

Charles Highett, CEO of PTSD Resolution, commented: "Jonathan's incredible efforts over the years have made a significant impact on our ability to provide crucial mental health support to veterans and their families. The donations raised will potentially transform not just veterans' lives, but those of their families and communities as well. His dedication embodies the spirit of service that continues long after leaving the armed forces."

The Pyrenees Challenge

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The ‘Pyrenees 24’ challenge began on September 11th, 2024, as the riders set off in crisp autumnal weather. They cycled through landscapes rich in history and natural beauty, from ancient châteaux to serene forests and vast mountain vistas. Each day presented its own challenges, yet the team’s spirit never wavered.

Here’s a summary of their seven-day journey:

- Day 1: A gentle 51-kilometre warm-up, climbing 2,900 feet through historic villages.
- Day 2: 96 kilometres covered with 5,587 feet of climbing, battling rain and low clouds through the forests of Ariège.
- Day 3: Another 96-kilometre ride with 5,869 feet of climbing, encountering local wildlife and early autumn chills.
- Day 4: The most challenging day, covering 115 kilometres and ascending 8,697 feet over high mountain passes.
- Day 5: A 102-kilometre descent through Mediterranean oak forests, climbing 4,281 feet.
- Day 6: A gruelling 124-kilometre ride battling strong headwinds across high plateaus, climbing 3,754 feet.
- Day 7: The final 99.7-kilometre stretch, climbing 4,737 feet and following old railway lines.

A Mission Fulfilled

As the journey concluded on September 18th, Jonathan expressed heartfelt gratitude to all those who supported his efforts over the years. “This has been our last expedition, ever,” he announced, reflecting on the extraordinary experiences and the generous support received.

Jonathan is also a deserving Finalist of the 2024 Soldiering On Awards, up for the ‘Inspiration Award’ - “to honour a person that has overcome significant challenges, injury or disability, and whose ongoing or past outstanding achievements are an inspiration to others.”

While ‘Pyrenees 24’ marks the end of Jonathan’s cycling expeditions, the impact of his remarkable efforts will continue to resonate in the lives of the individuals he has helped transform.

The Pyrenees 24 donation page remains open for those wishing to contribute to this worthy cause. To support PTSD Resolution and help more veterans access crucial mental health services.

For more information about PTSD Resolution and their work, visit www.PTSDresolution.org.

Company Contact:

PTSD Resolution

E. patrick.rea@ptsdresolution.org
W. https://www.ptsdresolution.org

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