

Central Kentucky Wheelman tops 1,000 mile mark in Baghdad

by Maj. John Heil, Task Force 3rd Medical Command public affairs officer

BAGHDAD – Serious cyclists are hard to find in Iraq, but one Soldier stands out among many cyclists in West Baghdad. Lt. Col. Eric Shuping, chief preventive medicine officer with Task Force 3rd Medical Command and member of the Central Kentucky Wheelmen club out of Elizabethtown, Ky., topped the 1,000 mile mark in Baghdad this week.

Shuping started cycling in 1991. His deployment to Iraq has not stopped his drive to continue or love of the sport.

“It [cycling] brings together people who enjoy fitness and cycling,” said Shuping, “The club has a competitive branch that races but most people in the club go out to tour.”

Shuping who moved to Elizabethtown in 2004 said “My neighbor across the street saw my bikes as I was moving in and we started talking. He invited me to go out on a club ride and I have been with them ever since.”

Shuping volunteered to serve with Task Force 3d MEDCOM, which has command and control of more than 30 medical units in Iraq, including six-Army combat support hospitals and an Air Force theater support hospital. The task force, commanded by Maj. Gen. Ronald Silverman, has more than 3,000 Soldiers and Airmen that provide medical care primarily for coalition forces and Iraqi forces when necessary.

Shuping, 42, a former tri-athlete, said “I phased out of competing in triathlons and concentrated more on cycling, which was my favorite part of the triathlon.”

When asked what drives him to compete thousands of miles away, he says, “It’s not really competitive in that we are trying to beat each other – It’s competitive in that it is a way to improve and monitor your fitness.”

“I wanted a way to try and stay in touch [with the club] and do the things that I normally do back at home, as much as possible.”

“I would definitely be riding if I were back at home,” says Shuping, “We have roads and bikes here at Camp Victory. So why not ride here and post my mileage?”

A little later Shuping confessed, “Actually there is one competitive urge in me. There is one rider, Jeff Richardson, who is also a doc, who is a much better rider than me.”

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"The best that I can do is try and keep up with his [Richardson's] annual mileage," says Shuping, "We tend to leapfrog on mileage at least the last two years."

In 2005, Shuping rode more than 3,000 miles. In 2006, Shuping says "I rode just over 1,500 miles, but did less because of going to deployment training and then being deployed."

"Generally, at home I ride much less often but with much more mileage, said Shuping. "My average ride per day at home is normally 25 to 30 miles per day, but here at Camp Victory, I ride about 12 miles per day."

The longest ride Shuping cycled in one day was in 2005. He rode from Terre Haute, In. to Richmond, In., about 162 miles. Another time, Shuping rode 182 miles along the C&O canal in Maryland in two days.

"The difference between riding in Baghdad and Kentucky, Shuping says, "Is the roads are really rough here, so I need a mountain bike." "Back home, I ride on a fairly light road bike. A road bike would get trashed after a few rides here."

None the wearier, Shuping is on his fourth bike in Baghdad. "I keep on breaking parts. I have been lucky to get hand me downs from different people, so I have not spent too much money."

Shuping is married to Heather and has two children, Dietrich, an 8-year old boy and Daniela, a 5-year old girl. "She [Heather] puts up with my addiction," says Shuping, "She is OK with it as long as I may it back home in time for a late breakfast."

His motivation for cycling has led others to join him. "I have gone out with a few others in our task force," says Shuping, "In particular, Lt. Col. William Magdycz, surgical consultant, Lt. Col. Van Sherwood, pest management consultant, and I have done what we call the Tour de BIAP."

"We ride all the way around Victory base camp complex," says Shuping. The roads are not the best in a number of areas on the complex and there is quite a bit of traffic in other areas according to Shuping.

One big difference about biking in Baghdad, "I carry my weapon when I ride because I can," says Shuping [with a grin], "Weapons on bikes are discouraged back home."

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Cycling is a passion with Shuping. "I will never stop cycling, it's something you can do all your life," he says, "Its generally low stress on your bones and joints."

"The weather is much warmer in Baghdad than Kentucky," says Shuping, "It was good here in Jan. thru Apr. while I was riding in 50 degree weather, while they were having snow, rain and cold weather back home."

"Now the heat [100-degrees today] is starting to catch up here," says Shuping, "I will be limited in Baghdad, when they [the club] will be in peak cycling weather."

Shuping's progress can be tracked by viewing the Central Kentucky Wheelmen bicycle club Website at www.ckwheelmen.org.

Shuping looks forward to getting back to home to the family in Kentucky. As for cycling, he says he will pick it right back up. "I am looking forward to this [cycling at home]; I may even get back into triathlons again." "I have been doing a lot of running in Iraq and I even managed a few swims in the Aussie pool."



Lt. Col. Eric Shuping takes time in March 2007 to show off his red cycling jersey that sports the Outdoor Ventures from Radcliff, Ky. Logo. (Photo taken by Lt. Col. Van Sherwood, pest management consultant, Task Force 3rd Medical Command)



Lt. Col. Eric Shuping, Lt. Col. Van Sherwood and Lt. Col William Magdycz of Task Force 3rd Medical Command take time for a photo in front of command logo before riding in May 2007. (Photo taken by Maj. John Heil, Task Force 3rd Medical Command public affairs officer)



Lt. Col. Eric Shuping, Lt. Col. Van Sherwood, and Lt. Col. William Magdycz go for a May 2007 ride in Baghdad. (Photo by Maj. John Heil, Task Force 3rd Medical Command)