

Military, JMSDF, Japanese locals compete in triathlon

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TRIATHLON

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – In a battle of wills, approximately 800 people consisting of men, women and children participated in the 25th Annual Friendship Triathlon at Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi.

The triathlon was an open base event that required endurance and determination as participants completed a 500 meter swim, a 5k run, and 2 laps around the flight line by bike.

“It was about Japanese-American friendship as the name implied,” said Logistic Specialist Seaman Bryce Tomecek, a triathlon participant. “Opening the base to the public allowed people to come on and have a friendly competition between the two nations.”

The event kicked off in the early morning at seven with registration. Children as young as 6 began their portion of the competition at 9:30.

The adults consisted of three major groups. U.S. military members and their families, Japan Maritime Self Defense Force, and Japanese nationals.

“Triathlon groups are always a fun group of people,” said Faron Cordrey. “It’s fun racing with the Japanese and SOFA folks. It’s just very high morale.”

As temperatures climbed up to 91 degrees, the safety of the volunteers and participants became a major concern.

Medical tents were placed at different points along the relay route, prepared to act upon any incident.

For one Japanese national, a member of Atsugi’s medical team was there at the right time.

Lt.j.g. William Grisham and his team of corpsmen arrived on the scene after a young man collapsed from heat exhaustion shortly after crossing the finish line.

“He was unresponsive, obviously have a severe reaction to overheating and was in great distress,” said Grisham.

Immediately, measures were taken to cool the young man off. Everything from pouring water on him and fanning him to ice bags and wet sheets was used to keep him from further overheating.

Between the time that Grisham and his team arrived on the scene to the time the man was transported from the base to Japanese hospital was within a total span of 15 minutes.

“This guy was obviously pushing through the race,” said Grisham. “I admire his determination to work through the pain and heat. But take it upon yourself to take yourself out of the event because it’s better to look after your own health than to finish the race.”

For many others, the race was finished safely, morale running high.

Multiple people were able to claim first place in their respective groups.

Despite the heat and those who might have been overheated, the triathlon came to a successful end.

“This was a team effort,” said Grisham. “We’re nothing without everybody. I’ve got to give props to my corpsmans, who did a wonderful job. I was very proud, they did a great job.”