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## Active Duty Profile: Captain Robert Hillery

Written by Jim Gourley on Sunday, December 26, 2010



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Looking at the numbers, Captain Robert Hillery is an obvious choice as the Marine Corps' male athlete of the year. Since participating in his first triathlon in 2008, he's turned into a 30-race-a-year competitor. He's raised over \$30,000 for the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund through racing, and not only has he raced at the Ironman World Championship, he recently finished tenth overall at Ultraman Canada—earning himself a spot at the world championships for that series. The stats cut the perfect image of an endurance athlete.

But looking at Hillery in person, it's not obvious that he's an endurance athlete. He looks more like a power lifter. In fact, he used to lift, and could have been an amazing one. That's why triathlon is lucky to have him—once Hillery begins discussing his attitude toward training and how he accomplished such an incredible transition, you realize that whether he's tasked with keeping 20,000 Marines at Camp Pendleton, dead-lifting 500 pounds, or moving 140.6 miles, nothing is going to stop him.



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Sunday at 12:14pm



Hillery, the son of a Marine Corps pilot, began his own military career upon entering the US Naval Academy in 1999. He'd been into power lifting in high school, and quickly excelled on the Annapolis team. "I just liked doing it", he said. "There was always a new goal to reach for; to get that next weight."

His passion took him all the way to the national championships in 2003. There were consequences, though. "All that lifting takes a toll on your body. I was pretty much achy 24/7", he said. So after graduating and taking a commission in the Marines as a logistics officer, he gave it up. A fellow classmate and Marine, Captain Mosi Smith, encouraged him to take up running. "I was never into cardio", Hillery said. "I did well enough to pass the 3-mile run for the Marines, but it just wasn't something I was into. Still, he pressed on and soon found himself running half and full marathons. That's when Smith revealed his real plan.

**"I'll never forget seeing Craig Alexander finish the race. I was just getting off the bike!"**

"He said I should do a triathlon, and I was like 'you've got to be kidding,'" Hillery remembers. Soon enough, he bought a bike. That's when things got really challenging, but his lifting experience in mind-over-matter psychology carried him across the miles.

"I knew I had to get in some long workouts, and part of my plan was to bike after swimming. I swam with a buddy and had him drive me out to the pool with my bike. Then I made him leave me there, so I had no way to get home." Hillery used a similar technique to make himself get up early enough to bike into work. "I'd park my truck at work on Monday and bike to the house. It kept me from hitting the snooze button on Tuesday mornings."

Between commanding 175 personnel of the Headquarters Service Company at Camp Pendleton, two combat deployments to Iraq, and travelling to races in between, the desire to hit the snooze button is understandable. Hillery's dual lifestyle hasn't exactly allowed him to stick to a training plan. His first Ironman was none other than Kona—an opportunity that came when he won the lottery the first time he entered. "I had to bump up my training by six weeks," he remembers. Even then, there was a mental wall for him to break through. "I'll never forget seeing Craig Alexander finish the race. I was just getting off the bike!"

For a guy who got out of power lifting to escape the achiness, Hillery picked an odd alternative. Is he just addicted to pain? When asked the question, he laughs. "It's really funny, because that's the name we picked for our team at Ultraman Canada—'Pain Junkies.'"

For Hillery, 500 miles is no different from 500 pounds. "The best part of this sport is that you can always come back to an event and push yourself to go faster or farther. There's always a new level to take things to." Currently attending the USMC's Expeditionary Warfare School in Quantico, Virginia, he hopes to return to Camp Pendleton after graduation and find a spot in the Marine Logistics Group. He's seen Iraq, now he wants to see Afghanistan. In the meantime, he's training hard to run the Ultraman Championships in November, and raising money for the Semper Fi Fund. His team has raised \$6,600 this year, still a bit shy of their their \$1 million goal.

Help Robert Hillery by visiting his [fundraising site](#).

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