

IRON STRONG DAILY

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Kings of the Mountain

**Story by Pfc. Alisha Nye
14th Public Affairs Detachment**

He didn't climb Mount McKinley for the thrilling rush of adrenaline through his veins when there was nothing but a 5,000 foot drop on either side of him, or for the sheer adventure of climbing a 20,320 foot mountain, or even to just to have the ability to say that he did it. Capt. Graham Ward climbed the tallest mountain in North America simply to help his best friend, Capt. Keelan McNulty, fulfill a life-long dream.

"I had no desire to climb it before then," said Ward, the recon platoon leader for 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division. "I was always envious that he, at least, had the desire to climb it. I never knew where he got that desire from."

The whole thing started while the two were driving around in a car one day.

"He was telling me all his friends canned him," Ward said. "Things came up and they wouldn't be able to do it before we deployed."

That was when Ward started thinking about climbing a mountain for the very first time in his life.

"I told him, 'You know what? It sounds like an awesome challenge and, if you want, I'll be your partner,'" Ward said. "He didn't really believe me at first."

To prove that he was 100 percent committed to training and subsequently climbing the mountain, Ward bought all of the equipment necessary make the



Courtesy Photo
Capt. Graham Ward, recon platoon leader, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, flies his battalion colors after reaching the summit of Mount McKinley shortly before deploying to Iraq.

ascent.

After three months of strenuous training, the pair started their 17 day, 16,000 foot climb to the summit, but not before getting special permission from their respective battalion commanders as well as the brigade commander.

"The battalion commander thought it'd be cool, I guess, to tell the brigade commander," Ward said. "Keelan went in and saw him and Colonel Thompson said, 'Hey, best of luck and here's a bag of coins.' He gave us 10 brigade coins and told us to take them to the top."

This was just part of the deal.

"The deal was, I had the battalion flag and Keelan had the coins," Ward said. "We brought them all the way to the summit. One of the things people do is leave something at the top. We got the idea because one our buddy's good friends died so he left a laminated picture of her up at the top. So, we brought the coins all the way to the top and took one out and buried it right next to the elevation marker."

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Runners of the Equinox

**Story by Pfc. Alisha Nye
14th Public Affairs Detachment**

The Equinox Marathon held in Fairbanks, Alaska annually is one of the most difficult marathons in the United States. It is bested only by the Pike's Peak Marathon. This fact still didn't stop Chief Warrant Officer

William "Chip" Steele from making it the first marathon he ever ran. Even at the age of 40. It also didn't stop him from running it again.

"I ran it last year and I had so much fun," said the 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division lethal targeting officer. When he finished, he finagled a promise out of his one of

his buddies to run the next with him.

"It's funny," said 1st Lt. Michael Ward, 1st SBCT, 25th In. Div., assistant brigade fire support officer. "I promised my battle buddy, Chief Steele, that I would run it with him. My wife and I had a trip planned that weekend but we ended up cancelling the trip and we thought we'd be moving out, coming over to Iraq."

All Steele heard was his battle buddy chickening out.

"I think he told me he would run it thinking we wouldn't be there and we'd be deployed," Steele said. "That's my take on it."

So, what do you do when a man goes back on his word? You tell on him.

"Chief Steele wouldn't lay off



Courtesy Photo

Chief Warrant Officer William "Chip" Steele, 1st SBCT, 25th ID lethal targeting officer, runs the Equinox Marathon for the second year in a row. Steele was 40 when he decided to run, for the first time, one of the most difficult marathons on North America.

me about not running it," Ward said. "He called my wife and called me out on it."

"Yeah," said Steele. "I called his wife and told her that he was a Nancy Boy and he's not a real man and stuff like that."

So, Ward caved.

"As reluctant as I was, I just woke up one morning and was like, 'Hey, why not?'"

Steele and ward both agreed once you run one marathon, you'll find yourself wanting to run more marathons.

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Courtesy Photo

1st Lt. Michael Ward, 1st SBCT, 25th ID assistant fire support officer, paces himself while running the Equinox Marathon in Fairbanks, Alaska. The equinox marathon is listed as the second most difficult marathon to run in North America, bested only by the Pike's Peak Marathon.

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Making it to summit is much easier said than done, however.

"I wouldn't say luck has (anything) to do with making the summit," Ward said. "I would say persistence does."

Of about 1,300 people who registered to climb Mount McKinley this year, only about 400 made it to the top.

"It gets pretty mental when you're up there," Ward said. "You have to be really mentally driven."

Of the 400 who did make it, Ward and McNulty were in the top 20 who made it there first.

The numbers aren't important to Ward, however. What is important to him is the mile-marking adventure he

had with a good friend.

"If you're at Fort Wainwright, you know Captain Keelan McNulty," Ward said. "The kid's famous. He's the most energetic, free spirited, happy guy you'll ever meet."

These are personality characteristics McNulty chose to share with other climbers on the mountain through the sweet sound of cowbells.

"It ended up being pretty funny," Ward said. "We were just those guys that, everywhere we went, just had cowbells."

Of the groups mirroring Ward and McNulty as the climbed, it was Ward and McNulty themselves that usually woke up first and made the climb to the next elevation goal.

"As we climbed the mountain, we'd beat everybody else up there and, as they'd come up, we'd be there ringing cowbells and cheering," Ward said.

Despite the fact that some of these climbers were from different countries and didn't speak a word of English, Ward said they all seemed to understand. The cowbells and the cheering got everybody involved with one another and motivating one another.

"From the get-go, as we climbed, we were like a big family," Ward said.

"Always climbing, always pushing each other up. It also helps because when you're that high and it's that cold, screaming doesn't do anything. But you can hear that cowbell."

After sleeping in one day, Ward and McNulty woke to find that they were the only group left to climb to the next elevation goal and it was everyone else waiting with the motivational cheering.

"Now the whole camp was cheering us on, welcoming us in," Ward said. "It was one of the best feelings."

The feeling from the familial atmosphere Ward and McNulty helped to create with a simple cowbell was one topped only by the feeling of finally making it to the top.

"I was speechless," Ward said. "It ended up being an awesome adventure. From start to finish, it was definitely a mile-marker in my life."

Even though climbing Mount McKinley was the first time Ward has ever seriously climbed, he can't wait to have that kind of adventure again.

"That's the thing about mountaineering," Ward said. "It's your own adventure. No two climbs are ever the same. Just like no two days are ever the same."

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"I even tried to plan my leave around on in Memphis," Ward said. "I hope that'll all pan out."

As addicting as marathon running is, it still doesn't come easy. Especially not when you wake up two weeks before a 26.2 mile marathon through mountainous terrain and just decide you want to run it, Ward said.

"About nine or 10 miles into it, it's all straight up-hill," ward said. "It's about a 2,500 to 3,000 foot elevation change. So when you get to the nine or 10 mile mark, you shoot straight up hill."

But, the hills were only part of the challenge to Ward.

"In all honesty, it got pretty depressing around mile 21," he said. "It's like, 'Ah, I only have 5 miles left!' And then around mile six or seven I got stung by bees."

Also difficult to ward was a straight, one mile down-hill drop for about a mile.

To Steele, starting the marathon to begin with was the most difficult part.

"Starting, I think, is the hardest part. You're thinking, 'Am I really about to run 26.2 miles?'"

Despite the challenges of the rough Alaskan terrain, both Steele and Ward agree that it is something they are glad they have done.

"There's a few of us guys who like to run it each year," Steele said. "It's kind of a fun thing, to challenge yourself." "It was a lot of fun," Ward said. "It's definitely something worthwhile."



Capt. Keelan McNulty uses a sap phone to make a Mother's Day phone call back home while in the process of climbing Mount McKinley, North America's tallest mountain, shortly before deploying to Iraq.

Courtesy Photo

ENTERTAINMENT NEWS



(AP) Calling Batman: Cave owner Steve Rush has a deal for you. Rush, 49, is auctioning off the Mystic Caverns in the hills of Ozark Mountains on eBay. The 28-acre property in Arkansas includes a gift shop and three caves, two of which are safe enough for visitors.

The bidding starts at \$899,900, cut from Rush's original asking price of \$1.2 million.

Rush bought the property near Harrison in 1988 and began giving tours in 1992 to the two accessible caves, Mystic cavern and the Crystal Dome cavern. A third cave on his 28-acre property, Not Much Sink cavern, remains too dangerous for tours.

But business has dropped since a nearby amusement park closed in the 1990s. Rush said the Mystic Caverns still get about 15,000 visitors each year.

Rush said he wants to sell the caves to become involved in Christian ministries. He also joked that he tiring of being a tour guide.

"It's always been a struggle for me, because you have to entertain people. ... I'm really tired of trying to entertain people," he said.

Rush acknowledged the tight real estate market but said he hoped to sell the caves to a cave-diving enthusiast with a little spending money.

"It's a tough time in the

marketplace to get a buyer I think for any real estate, and I don't think this business makes enough money" to make mortgage payments, Rush said. "However, if you had some money and you were not afraid of risk ..."

Vickie Martin, a real estate agent for the caves, agreed. "It's a tough sale. You've got to find the right person," she said. "It takes a lot of time and energy and run it. It's not something you can buy and let it run itself. You've got to take an active interest in it."

Rush said he had been quietly shopping the caves around for two years but took the sale public when no takers came forward.

HEALTH NEWS

(Reuters) Young people exposed to violent media are more likely to lash out violently themselves, new research published in Pediatrics shows.

"Our findings add to the growing evidence that violence in the media is related to aggressive behavior, including seriously violent behavior among youths," Dr. Michele L. Ybarra of Internet Solutions for Kids in Santa Ana, California and her colleagues report. "Reduction in youths' exposure to violent media should be viewed as an important aspect of violence prevention."

Many studies have examined exposure to violent media and violent behavior among young people, Ybarra and her team note in their report. In fact, they point out, the American Academy of Pediatrics calls media violence "the single most easily remediable contributing factor" to youth violence.

The researchers examined the relationship between media violence and "seriously violent behavior," defined as shooting or stabbing someone, robbing someone, or committing aggravated assault or sexual assault, in a survey of 1,588 young people 10 to 15 years old. The average age was 13 years old and 48 percent were girls.

Five percent of those surveyed reported having engaged in some type of seriously violent behavior over the past year, while 38 percent said they had visited at least one type of violent website. With each additional type of violent website a study participant reported viewing, the likelihood of

violent behavior increased by 50 percent.

Young people who said that "many, most or all" of the Internet sites they frequented featured "real people fighting, shooting or killing" were five-times more likely than their peers who didn't visit violent websites to engage in seriously violent behavior.

The odds of violent behavior also rose with the number of types of violent media a young person consumed, but the effect of violent TV, movies, music, games or Internet cartoons was much smaller than that of Internet violence depicting real people.

But the current study doesn't answer the question of whether violent media is turning kids violent, whether violence-prone youth are more likely to seek out violence on the Internet, or "more probably," whether a bit of both is going on, the researchers say.

TECHNOLOGY NEWS

(AFP) Apple announced on Tuesday that the employee credited with being the "father of the iPod" is stepping down from his post at the iconic California company.

Apple said iPod division vice president Tony Fadell and his wife, Danielle Lambert, who is vice president of the company's human resources department, are "reducing their roles" to "devote more time to their young family."

While the spotlight routinely shines on Apple's notoriously involved chief executive Steve Jobs, Fadell is said to be the one behind the idea for iPod MP3 players that rocketed to global success and revived the company's fortunes.

"Tony and Dani have each made important contributions to Apple over the past eight years," Jobs said in a release.

"We're sorry to see Dani go, and are looking forward to working with Tony in his new capacity."

Lambert is to leave Apple at the end of the year and Fadell is to become an advisor to Jobs.

IBM executive Mark Papermaster has been hired to replace Fadell. Papermaster's former employer is challenging the move on the grounds Papermaster is contractually restricted from working for a competitor.

FOOTBALL

(AP) Byron Leftwich has already shown the Pittsburgh Steelers he can finish. He may get the chance Sunday to prove he can start. With starter Ben Roethlisberger's status for Sunday's game against the Colts uncertain due to his reinjured right shoulder, the Steelers (6-2) may give Leftwich his first start since last Nov. 18 with Atlanta.

Roethlisberger underwent an MRI exam Tuesday, but the Steelers did not immediately release the results. He reinjured his separated right shoulder on a quarterback sneak near the end of the second quarter Monday night.

Leftwich took over to set up a touchdown with a long completion on his first throw, threw for a score and led another TD drive during a 23-6 win in Washington.

Leftwich's linescore for a short but productive night's work: 7 of 10 for 129 yards, no interceptions and one satisfied locker room as the Steelers preserved their AFC North lead.

"He made a lot of friends in there," coach Mike Tomlin said.

The sore shoulder has

bothered Roethlisberger, though he hasn't said how much, since he was hurt Sept. 7 against Houston.

"I'm sure his shoulder has affected him," Tomlin said. "How much it has affected him, I don't know. It really is kind of irrelevant. We really don't look for or seek excuses. We don't make them, whether we're talking about Ben or anybody else."

Unless Roethlisberger's injury heals in a hurry during a shortened week of preparation, the Steelers may need Leftwich to bail them out again.

"No, it does not surprise me," Tomlin said Tuesday of Leftwich's ability to come off the bench and throw quickly and effectively. "That's one of the characteristics of Byron. That's who he is. He's a quick decision maker. ... That's what makes him who he is."

A former first-round pick and starter in Jacksonville, Leftwich spent last season with the Falcons after being cut by the Jaguars.

"He's an experienced player. He's not new to this," running back Willie Parker said. "Nobody was

surprised by how well he came out and played. Ben went down and Byron seamlessly came in and did what he had to do."

Leftwich's mobility doesn't match Roethlisberger's, but his arm may be as good or better. Surprisingly, Leftwich was out of the league when NFL training camps opened and signed with Pittsburgh only after former backup Charlie Batch broke his collarbone Aug. 8. Batch is out for the season.

"I truly don't know the offense yet," Leftwich said. "I just got here late in the preseason, so that's what makes it tough."

The Steelers felt they were equipped to handle a Roethlisberger injury with Batch around; he was 3-0 as a starter in 2005 and 2006. They feel the same way with Leftwich, who is expected to seek a starting job elsewhere in the league after this season.

"That's the hardest position, backup quarterback," wide receiver Hines Ward said. "To come into the game after really not taking a lot of reps in practice, he did a phenomenal job. Byron gave us fits down in Jacksonville for a long time, so it's great he can come off the bench with the guys trying to rally around him."

Depending on Roethlisberger's status, the Steelers may have to rally around Leftwich again Sunday.

"He practices every week like he is going to help this team win the next game," linebacker James Harrison said. "He did the job we expected him to do."

Tight end Heath Miller (sprained ankle) is doubtful for Indianapolis (4-4), but Tomlin said safety Ryan Clark (shoulder) could return after missing one game. Tomlin offered no update on left tackle Marvel Smith (back), who hasn't played in a month.



MEXICO

(AP) Beneath the tourist gondolas in the remains of a great Aztec lake lives a creature that resembles a monster — and a Muppet — with its slimy tail, plumage-like gills and mouth that curls into an odd smile.

The axolotl, also known as the “water monster” and the “Mexican walking fish,” was a key part of Aztec legend and diet. Against all odds, it survived until now amid Mexico City’s urban sprawl in the polluted canals of Lake Xochimilco, now a Venice-style destination for revelers poled along by Mexican gondoliers, or trajineros, in brightly painted party boats.

But scientists are racing to save the foot-long salamander from extinction, a victim of the draining of its lake habitat and deteriorating water quality. In what may be the final blow, nonnative fish introduced into the canals are eating its lunch — and its babies.

The long-standing International Union for Conservation of Nature includes the axolotl on its annual Red List of threatened species, while researchers say it could disappear in just five years. Some are pushing for a series of axolotl sanctuaries in canals cleared of invasive species, while others are considering repopulating Xochimilco with axolotls bred in captivity.

“If the axolotl disappears, it would not only be a great loss to biodiversity but to Mexican culture, and would reflect the degeneration of a once-great lake system,” says Luis Zambrano, a biologist at the Autonomous University of Mexico, or UNAM.

The number of axolotls (pronounced ACK-suh-LAH-tuhl) in the wild is not known. But the population has dropped from roughly 1,500 per square mile in 1998 to a mere 25 per square mile this year, according to a survey by Zambrano’s scientists using casting nets.

Millions once lived in the giant lakes of Xochimilco and Chalco on which Mexico City was built. Using four stubby legs to drag themselves along lake bottoms or their thick tails to swim like mini-alligators, they hunted plentiful aquatic insects, small fish and crustaceans.

Legend has it that Xolotl —

the dog-headed Aztec god of death, lightning and monstrosities — feared he was about to be banished or killed by other gods and changed into an axolotl to flee into Lake Xochimilco.

The axolotl’s decline began when Spanish conquerors started draining the lakes, which were further emptied over time to slake the thirst of one of the world’s largest and fastest-growing cities. In the 1970s, Lake Chalco was completely drained to prevent flooding. In the 1980s, Mexico City began pumping its wastewater into the few canals and lagoons that remained of Xochimilco.

About 20 years ago, African tilapia were introduced into Xochimilco in a misguided effort to create fisheries. They joined with Asian carp to dominate the ecosystem and eat the axolotl’s eggs and compete with it for food. The axolotl is also threatened by agrochemical runoff from nearby farms and treated wastewater from a Mexico City sewage plant, researchers say.

Local fisherman Roberto Altamira, 32, recalls when he was a boy, and the axolotl was still part of the local diet.

“I used to love axolotl tamales,” he says, rubbing his stomach and laughing.

“The last one I caught was about six months ago,” says Altamira, a wiry gondolier with rope-like muscles from years of poling through Xochimilco’s narrow waterways.

Meanwhile, the axolotl population is burgeoning in laboratories, where scientists study its amazing traits, including the ability to completely re-grow lost limbs. Axolotls have played key roles in research on regeneration, embryology, fertilization and evolution.

The salamander has the rare trait of retaining its larval features throughout its adult life, a phenomenon called neoteny. It lives all its life in the water but can breathe both under water with gills or by taking gulps of air from the surface.

On a 9-foot-wide canal covered by a green carpet of “lentejilla” — an aquatic plant that resembles green lentils — Zambrano’s researchers test water quality and search for axolotls. The air smells of sulfur and sewage.

So far, scientists disagree on how to save the creature. But a pilot sanctuary is expected to open in the

next three to six months in the waters around Island of the Dolls, so-called because the owner hangs dolls he finds in the canals to ward off evil spirits.

Without carp, the water would clear, and plants the axolotl needs to breed could flourish again, said Bob Johnson, the curator of amphibians and reptiles at the Toronto Zoo.

“If you take the insults away, the lake has an amazing latent potential to heal itself,” he said.

Veterinarian Erika Servin, who runs the Mexico City government’s axolotl program at Chapultepec Zoo, is studying the possibility of introducing axolotls from the lab into the canals. But more study is needed to make sure the process doesn’t lead to diseases and genetic problems from inbreeding.

Xochimilco residents could be another source of resistance.

Hundreds of people make a living pulling tilapia from canals or growing flowers, lettuce and vegetables on nearby land. Efforts to remove the fish or shut down polluting farms could face stiff opposition.

But while the debate goes on, time is running out.

Given its role in research alone, Johnson says, “We owe it to the axolotl to help it survive.”

