Voksmarchers “Go the Distance” at 3rd Annual Oktoberfest

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Daniel Griego

100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

Revived in Germany as an official sport in the 1960s, the centuries-old tradition of the volksmarch celebrates the new harvest and champions community fitness. Translated as "the people's walk," the volksmarch welcomed all groups of people to come together and celebrate health and life together as a unified population. The neighboring towns of Bastrop, Elgin and Smithville could, in turn, think of no better way to collectively celebrate their Oktoberfest than with this iconic tradition.

The flagship event of Camp Swift's annual Oktoberfest, the volksmarch offers participants the opportunity to enjoy nature, new neighbors and fitness together with routes that tour the training areas of the military installation.

"There are three routes," said Chief Warrant Officer James W. Hampton, Oktoberfest project officer. "We have a one mile route for the kids, a 5K and a 10K."

The trails opened up directly following the opening ceremony of this year's third annual festival. Texas Adjutant General Jose S. Mayorga kicked off the event by receiving the ceremonial walking stick from the preceding Airborne/Air Assault demonstration. With staff in hand, he marched directly to the start point of the trail and began his trek around the camp, with more than a hundred walkers following behind him.

"The volksmarch itself has been something that the entire Texas Military Forces has put on," said Mr. Hampton. "It's not competitive, it's just for fitness."

Participants enjoyed the sharper routes of this year's march after Camp Swift's recent renovations.

"This is her second time," Army Sgt Angela L. Descant said of her daughter after completing the kid's trail. "It's better than it was when she came the first time."

"Last year they came out here and actually cut all these trails," said Mr. Hampton of the new hiking routes at the camp.

Many walkers enjoyed the exercise, despite some lagging in pace. "There were a lot more people walking in front of us," said Jose M. Hernandez, 6.

This year's march also featured the "Tag My Kid" program, wherein children wear pins identifying them as Oktoberfest attendees with their parent's phone number written on the back side in the event they become separated.

"It's good, especially when you have one who wants to run around in the woods or crawl in holes," said Sergeant Descant.

For fitness or for community, the tradition of the volksmarch calls to mind the rich history of fall festivals and our German heritage.

"There's a big German community in Texas and in the military," said Mr. Hampton. "We're using this event to draw together the local areas of Bastrop, Elgin and Smithville and bring them out here to Camp Swift and help offer a better relationship."

Texas Adjutant General Jose S. Mayorga leads the Volksmarch during the third annual Oktoberfest at Camp Swift, near Bastrop, Texas.

Texas Adjutant General Jose S. Mayorga discusses the Volksmarch route prior to departing for the non-competitive walk during the third annual Bastrop Oktoberfest.