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# TRIATHLON IN BAGHDAD

In addition to multisport helping the wounded, triathlon is used to boost troop morale, even in a 122-degree war zone

In August, Baghdad, Iraq is pretty much the hottest place on earth. The mercury routinely hovers around 110 degrees, and it just so happened that on Aug. 10—the same day eight members of the U.S. military decided to complete a sprint triathlon—the temperature was 122 degrees.

While most triathletes would think that competing under such conditions is torture, Navy Lieutenant Commander Michael Sumrall was thankful for the opportunity to do something out of the ordinary.

“Most of us work 12 hours each day. So we really look forward to training or competing,” Sumrall said. “It’s a chance for us to step away from all the chaos.”

Air Force Captain Jim Druell was the unofficial race director for the event, but he admits he had quite a bit of help. The directors of the Santa Cruz Triathlon pitched in their financial and organizational support, and a number of other triathlons have pledged sponsorship for future events in Iraq.

After Druell received the okay from the State Department (it took a while), the athletes set out on what was one of the most distinct triathlons ever held. The 500-meter swim took place in a pool in one of Saddam Hussein’s former palaces. Due to indirect-fire threat, the 12-mile ride took place on stationary bikes, and then the athletes took off for a 5km run in the desert surrounding their base.

Air Force Major Sergeant Steve McGowman won the event in just over an hour (he crushed the rest of the field on the bike).