

# Pedaling On A Mission

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Chief Petty Officer Sean P. Coleman rides by with Lance Armstrong during a training ride. Coleman, who is a member of the Armed Force Cycling Team and an aviation electronics technician at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater, Fla., cycles nearly 500 miles a week. (Photo courtesy of Sean Coleman)

His weeks are a busy blend of mornings preparing his son for school, and long nights of helicopter maintenance routines and nightly training missions. However, within the same hectic week, Chief Petty Officer Sean P. Coleman, an aviation electronics technician at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater, Fla., also manages to cycle nearly 500 miles.

Coleman was 12 years old before he first began riding a bicycle. Raised as a skier in North Hampton, N.H., he was one of the last in his neighborhood to learn how to ride a bike. Now with 14 years of cycling under his belt, he has not taken a break since starting.

In 2001, Coleman met Garrett Wonders, then a member of the Armed Forces Cycling Team (AFCT). The AFCT is the official cycling team representing the U.S. Armed Forces at national and international cycling competitions.

“Garrett and I raced quite a few races together and whenever I went to Charleston, S.C., on deployment to the Air Facility located there, we would ride together,” said Coleman.

Sponsored by the Department of Defense, members of the AFCT participate in one training event as well as the International Military Championship each year. Currently, Coleman is one of eight active duty military members on the team. The seven men and one woman who comprise the team race on top-of-the-

line road bikes in races scheduled in every corner of the country. Sadly, Wonders was struck by a truck and killed while training for the U.S. Olympic trials in 2001. The impact on Coleman was seismic.

“I then decided I wanted to try and make the team and spent several years getting my upgrades,” said Coleman.

Wonders had shared training tidbits, mentoring Coleman about how to make the team. Knowing it would be a challenge, Coleman began earning an array of cycling licenses and working to meet eligibility criteria for USA Cycling, the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) and the International Military Sports Council (CISM).

Coleman also had to remain in good standing with a slew of agencies and governing bodies, including the U.S. Olympic Committee and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. Coleman’s request to be part of the AFCT had to be approved by his chain of command and the Coast Guard Sports Director, before he could actually join the team.

In April 2007, Coleman received the call saying he had made the team. A sense of accomplishment filled Coleman, and although grateful for the assistance and support our small service offers, Coleman notes that the Air Force, Marine Corps and Army, offer special programs allowing members opportunities to train and ride full time. Due to the size and funding limitations facing the Coast Guard, such programs are not available.

“I’m very happy to have the opportunity to ride on the AFCT alongside full-time riders and still achieve the same results,” said Coleman, whose nightly shift ends around midnight at Air Station Clearwater. His duties include performing critical maintenance on the unit’s nine MH-60 Jayhawk rescue helicopters. He is also responsible for the preparation of “mission ready” helicopters used in nightly training exercises and search and rescue launches.

While balancing his demanding work schedule and parenting duties, Coleman continues to train every day of the week, cycling up to 30 hours. He augments his rigorous training schedule by lifting weights and doing core strengthening exercises at the gym. He trains with Simon Kessler, a two-time South African Professional Road Race Champion and often trains with Joel and Daniel Chavez, former members of the Cuban National Team.

“Training plays an important part in both my job and the team because without it (the training) I would not be able to do my job or be able to perform well at the races,” Coleman said.

“Sean has been a true inspiration to everyone he works with,” said Chief Petty Officer Christopher T. Bottini, an aviation electronic technician at Air Station Clearwater, and 20-year friend of Coleman. “His hard work and dedication to his sport motivates the crew.”

In spite of an often unpredictable work schedule and a demanding training regimen, Coleman gathers inspiration from his son, who has cerebral palsy. Taylor Coleman, has had his own rigorous regimen of physical, occupational and speech therapy, since birth.

“I watch the obstacles Taylor has had to overcome and it makes cycling seem easy, even when pushing myself to the limits,” Coleman said. “He’s my motivation.”

That’s exactly why when he races, one could say he’s on a mission of his own.

