

## 2011 Air Force Marathon

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I have heard nice things about the Air Force Marathon for years and the medal has been on the top 25 list at *Marathon & Beyond* for the past couple of years. With Shirley's quest to do a dozen half marathons this year, it seemed like a good fit to finally do it. It definitely lived up to expectations, possibly due in part to space aliens, but I guess I'm getting ahead of myself.

We drove to Dayton on Friday afternoon. The expo had some unusual exhibitors including Northrop Grumman (anyone need a Global Hawk?), USAA, and Boeing. There were also the usual assortment of marathon race representative and vendors selling clothing and food. They even had a flight simulator for a Wright Brothers airplane. I think the expo highlight, however, was Marshall Ulrich. We talked with him prior to his lecture and then again afterwards. His lecture was on his many adventures including climbing the highest mountain on each continent, doing a quad crossing of Death Valley on foot, and a crossing of Death Valley totally self supported. He also ran across America in 52 days.

We had dinner at a very crowded Olive Garden. After eating too many breadsticks and salad, I ended up taking half my dinner back to the motel to be part of my race morning breakfast. On the way back to the motel we drove by the Air Force base to figure out where all of the gates were. We had heard several stories about how congested the traffic has been in the past. A volunteer told us that in prior years it has taken 45 minutes to get into the grounds and reinforced the recommendation to arrive 1-1/2 to 2 hours early.



The wakeup call came right at 4:30 as requested. The motel opened their breakfast early for the racers. For some reason it always seems to take us an hour to get ready. We couldn't get a late checkout, so we checked out and were on our way by 5:35 and arrived about ten minutes later. We breezed right in without any traffic issues and got to park right next to flag 21. They added lights and numbered flags to help people find their cars. In the past people had problems remembering where they parked. We relaxed in the car and watched the traffic build up and lines grow at the distant port-o-lets. We started the long walk to the start line about 6:15. (We later measured it to be about 2 miles!) We got in line at the port-o-lets and as we got close to the front, we also gagged because of the smell. Then the smell went away. Then it came back. Then we made the connection to the opening of a particular port-o-let. "Oh please don't let that be the one I have to use." The lady ahead

of me got it. We all finished up and she was still in there. I hope that she still isn't there – we thought about checking after the race.

We followed the signs to the start. It was a long trek around the museum. I stopped at the restroom building for my last stop and then went through security. Racers got to walk in while spectators had to be wanded and their bags checked. I was looking forward to finish since the last section of the course ran under the wings of some large display aircrafts. We took the usual start line photos including some

## 2011 Air Force Marathon

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of the color guard and wheelchair participants. The opening ceremony was very nice with recognition of VIP runners including retired generals, congressmen, and the governor's wife. The national anthem was very well done. The fly over was spectacular, with a B1B bomber coming over low and loud. You could see the glow of the engines against the clouds as it flew away.



Once again I decided to try using a pacer. This time I started with Pacer Traci who was leading the 3:50 group. I decided based on my training and all my usual complaints, that it would be an appropriate pace. This would be Traci's 50<sup>th</sup> marathon and 9<sup>th</sup> as a pacer. She had been closest to goal time twice and has a PR of 3:07. She promised dirty jokes later in the race. She explained her even pace method and how we would do water stops.



Finally it was race time – we started nice and easy just as the sun was breaking through the clouds. The Air Force Museum glowed in the sunlight. The course is flat with an occasional rise. The first one was just after one mile and was not a problem. The group was running close together with some bumping and one guy almost tripped someone else. The 10K people were with us until 3 miles so water stops were packed.

The time went quickly and it felt like a training run. I asked Traci about favorite marathons. Her favorite large ones are New York, Marine Corp, and Disney. She said to take your camera to Disney and don't worry about pace. All the characters are there and it was good time to get their pictures. It was also

## 2011 Air Force Marathon

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her coldest marathon. It was 20 degrees one time and there was ice in the water cups and people were slipping on the ice on the ground. Her favorite small races include Yakima Valley, Flying Monkey, Lost Dutchman, and Grand Island Marathon.

A little before 8 miles we passed through a beautiful neighborhood with big brick houses and a park with a pond. At first glance it looked like there was a coyote by the pond, but it was really just a fake dog to scare the geese away or something like that. (Sometimes stories get a little confused when you are running.) The aid station was handing out GUs so I took my first one of the race. I was starting to get hungry so it was good timing. I only had my leftover pasta, chicken breast, peanut butter sandwich, juice, and cereal for breakfast.

The half marathon started an hour after the full. So while we had been running, the girls found the line of port-o-lets in the finish area that we somehow missed earlier. They also found their corral, which took in a big range of finish times. I saw a pair of fighter jets fly over on their way to the start of the half marathon. I guess we got a bonus flyover.



We continued on to Fairborn and were greeted by an alien invasion. There were flying saucers, aliens, and men in black. Signs were posted, "Caution Ray Gun in Use" and "Alien Parking Only". They went to a lot of effort to set up their Welcome. I like the small town setting. A marching band that wasn't marching (but was playing) and people lined the streets cheering. The residential section had streamers in the trees and model aircraft on posts. One lady didn't have a cow bell, but used a big cooking pot and metal spoon to make noise. The diner had tables along the curb and people were having breakfast and watching the runners. One lady was yelling "Legs. Look at all them legs." Another lady had a sign, "Worse Parade Ever". The route looped through the town so we got to pass the accordion band that was playing the songs of the various branches of the military twice.

It was in the town of Fairborn where I had to make my decision. I really enjoyed running with the pacer and looked forward to her stories, but the weather was great and I was feeling good and thought I could go a little faster. Traci was going to send some people ahead around 16 miles, but the longer I waited the faster I would have to go. I decided to pick up the pace a little for a longer distance, rather than counting on going much faster for a shorter distance. I made my decision and slowly pulled away from

## 2011 Air Force Marathon

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the group. The slight change got me out of the closed in feeling of the group. I also lost the support of a pacer who could take my mind off the late-in-the race aches that I normally get.



I felt good and took another GU around 11 miles. This was my first sighting of a reproduction of an old Wright flyer. I think the pilot was having a good time since he buzzed the course several times. Between about 12 and 14 miles, you could see across the end of the airstrip and see runners ahead and behind you. We also passed the airport fuel farm.

I like races where you get to do things that you couldn't do on your own. In this case we got to enter the "Restricted Area" gate and run down a runway. I liked to see all of the colorful shirts of the runners ahead of me. We had nice blue sky with some clouds. It was mostly sunny but cool. I imagine this open area could have been unbearable if we had a warmer day. I got another GU around 16 miles. We had some nice shade and while there were always runners around, it was not crowded. To pass the time I would pick someone wearing a distinctive outfit and try to catch up with them. First was the camouflage running skirt, then the sky blue skirt, next was the white sports top with sagging shorts, and finally the baby blue shorts. One water stop in this area had a couple of "cup toss targets" set up. They were bull's eye targets with trash cans set up under them.

We started seeing signs directing half marathoners to one side and full marathoners to the other. This was a good sign since the routes run together with the same finish line. I could see the half marathoners on their return route coming from the left. Initially they were on a separate road that ran parallel to our road. The first mileage sign for the half marathon that I saw was their 8 mile marker. Shortly after that we started up a long overpass. I could see many people starting to walk. It felt good on the downhill side, but you had to be careful to avoid the rumble strips. It was starting to get crowded again and it was nice to see so many racers again.

I was still feeling good through 24 miles and was looking forward to finishing a marathon without walking. There was a definite excitement in the air. The last half mile or so was very cool with American flags lining the road. There was a real sense of patriotism in this race between the flags and all of the military presence as participants and volunteers. I was able to make a good push towards the end as I ran the final stretch. I liked having my name on my bib. It was motivating to hear the crowds cheering my name and having the announcer announce my name. Except for Fairborn and the finish area, the crowd support was limited to the water stop volunteers.

## 2011 Air Force Marathon

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The water stops were themed and included pirates, clowns, rock and roll (with Elvis), and nerds. Several had motivational signs. One teenager was cheering very loudly (more of a shrill scream).



I was pleased with how I felt at the end. I only briefly felt some calf tightness and knee ache. This race had a nice selection of food at the end including bananas, Gatorade, chips, cheese pizza, and cookies. Unlike most races I actually felt like eating at the end of this one. This was my 20<sup>th</sup> marathon or longer race and the first with negative splits. Maybe there is something to all of that advice we've heard over the years.



## 2011 Air Force Marathon

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With some difficulty, I met up with Steve and watched as Shirley and Julie came down the final stretch under the airplane wing to the finish line. After they got their food, we stood around and enjoyed the great weather and then headed to our car. Steve and Shirley needed to get on the road to visit our aunt in Northeast Ohio. Julie and I took in an IMAX movie and toured the museum before heading home. Once again, it was a great weekend. The race had a lot to offer with a unique course, entertaining expo speakers, nice tech shirt and hat, classy medal and patch.



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## Bonus Pictures

(From Museum)

