

NEWS FROM AROUND THE REGION



RANTAMARATON JOIN SWAP

On the same weekend as the Berlin Marathon—the year's largest volunteer swap—a much smaller marathon was also taking place on the Finnish coast. Joining the Finnish Johanniitat for the 13th Espoo Rantamaraton were three Die Johanniter volunteers from Germany and myself, representing St John Ambulance.

I landed in Helsinki on the Friday afternoon. As seems to be a tradition for me every time I use Manchester Airport, my bag had been lost. Not ideal, considering all of my SJA uniform was in it, but I reported it missing and went out to meet Antti of Johanniitat. Now running late, we decided to grab a drink and wait for Janina and Eike's flight to arrive from Germany. Staying at the airport turned out to be a good move though, as I received a text saying my bag had been found a couple hours later.

It turns out JOIN is a small world – Antti had just been on his own volunteer swap to Germany along with a SJA volunteer whose report on CONNECT had actually inspired me to apply for the scheme, and when the Germans arrived it turned out I had previously spoken to Eike over email about a first aid competition in Berlin.

We all headed over to Pekka's—the head of Johanniitat—house where we also met his wife Marja and Regina, who had arrived from Germany a few days earlier. I was surprised to find out just how small Johanniitat was; with around 20 members across all of Finland, the Germans & I represented about a fifth of the organisation's strength during the few days we were there. After some much-needed food, Antti took the girls to their cottage and I was shown to my accommodation. I'd been told I was sleeping in 'the sauna', which to my relief turned out to mean a little guest cabin *with* a sauna, rather than *in* one.

It was an early start on the Saturday. We met up with the rest of the team and spent some time setting up our tents and getting to know the site. Over the two days we saw a steady trickle of casualties, from cramps and bloody noses to breathing problems and that perennial marathon classic: bleeding nipples. Throughout each day we rotated positions, getting a change of scenery on ambulance patrols or comparing techniques in shared practice scenarios. The highlight of the event was almost certainly the under-5s race, which was *adorable*.

After we finished on the Sunday, we stopped at the Johanniitat station to see some of their kit and to help clear up. There was a bit more of a military edge to some of the kit, which makes sense in a country with mandatory military service, and whilst the building itself needs a bit of work before it is fully functional the Johanniitat team have big plans for it (and, of course, offers of help from me and the Germans). We toured a bit of Helsinki and then headed onto Pekka & Marja's for a BBQ where we all exchanged gifts. I gave the Finns a pair of my epaulettes to pin up in their station, the Finns gave us all some Johanniitat clothing and the Germans had some brilliant Johanniter Playmobil figures for everyone.

No-one was flying out until late on the Monday, so we took the time for a more comprehensive (and better-lit) tour of Helsinki. This included a visit to the Ritarihuone, or House of Knights, for a guided tour of the Finnish nobility. Another thing I had noticed through talking to the Finns was that Order membership there, which in the UK is open enough to stick in an email signature, is much more secretive, like a Masonic order or something. Regardless, the building was very impressive

We finished up walking along the Finnish coast and eating at the famous seaside Café Ursula, looking out towards Estonia. We headed to the airport and said our goodbyes. I am sure I made a good choice for my swap – with all due respect to Berlin, it would be hard to beat the Finnish coast as a backdrop for an event, and the chance to learn from an organisation equal parts similar (being full of keen volunteers) and dissimilar (being about the size of a single SJA Unit) to my own was very valuable.

Thanks again to Pekka, Marja, Antti and all the rest of Johanniitat (and of course Tony from SJA and Joachim from Die Johanniter who helped to organise it) for a fantastic trip, and hopefully I'll be running into everyone again before long.



Ben Goldsworthy
Unit Training Lead, Lancaster Event Services Unit



EDLINGTON ATTEND REMEMBRANCE PARADE

Edlington Unit attended the Edlington Remembrance Parade and Service with 42 volunteers (badger, cadet and adults) making St John the largest contingency on parade.

The unit was inspected by the ex-services members for the march pass and the Deputy Lieutenant at the end of the parade.

This year the unit was awarded the "Best dressed on Parade" for the second year and also the "Best March Pass".

Julie Slyde, Unit Manager, Edlington