ABAC student Matthew Reid from Eatonton gets ready for another interview on his 2,000-mile 'Carry The Load' journey.

Eatonton Student Helps ‘Carry The Load’ from New York to Dallas
TIFTON—When the woman spoke of her son who died 45 years ago, holding back his own tears was the hard part. But he did. Matthew Reid from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College would not be deterred. It was his responsibility to help “Carry The Load.”

Reid, a junior business major from Eatonton, was one of seven ABAC students selected to participate in the nationwide “Carry The Load” relay which is an effort designed to restore the true meaning to Memorial Day by connecting Americans to the sacrifices of the military, law enforcement, firefighters, and rescue personnel.

Dill Driscoll conceived the idea of a national relay for “Carry The Load” three years ago. He and his wife, Susan, are the deans of the Stafford School of Business at ABAC. Through the help of national sponsors, Driscoll and the other organizers developed a relay from West Point, N.Y., to Dallas, Texas. This year’s event kicked off on April 29 and reached Dallas on May 25. For 2,000 miles, participants carried the American flag and the “Carry The Load” flag 24 hours a day.

“This was far and away our best year,” Driscoll said. “These kids have given me renewed faith in America. All of these ABAC students who were a part of the Relay were in real life situations. This was the real world. We picked these kids and trained them. They were ready.”

Driscoll knows of which he speaks. He and his marketing company were in charge of the 1996 Olympic Torch Relay from Los Angeles to Atlanta. Susan Driscoll, a Coca-Cola marketing executive at the time, met Dill on that trip. The Driscolls have coordinated eight other Olympic Torch relays since 1996.
Driscoll predicts “Carry The Load” will be bigger and better in 2015. He believes the common theme of “who are you carrying?” resonates with the American public. Most Americans have relatives who have served their country either in the military or as first responders.

Besides Reid, the ABAC contingent included Demarcus Bateman, a business major from Ashburn; Rodney Troupe, a business major from Moultrie; John Driscoll, a business major from Osierfield; Jo Leigh Warren, a journalism major from Fitzgerald; Kristoff Cohran, a business major from Thomasville; and Matt Fryman, a business major from Kennesaw.

Dill Driscoll and Lyndsey Walters, the internship and placement coordinator from the Stafford School of Business at ABAC, also made the trek which really started for the ABAC group with a special six-hour walk-off ceremony on the ABAC campus on April 24. It ended when 5,000 people welcomed the “Carry The Load” team to Reverchon Park in Dallas.

Reid served as the media coordinator on the trip. He has worked with the print and video versions of the ABAC newspaper, “The Stallion,” so he was well suited to the task. He and Warren produced over 30 videos and shot hundreds of pictures during the trip.

“It went very well,” Reid said. “We got a lot of response from the web page. We also had over 2,300 followers on Twitter and about 10,000 likes on Facebook. Every post that Jo Leigh and I made reached over 1,000 people with some reaching over 2,000.”

The group traveled 60 to 150 miles a day. All the leg captains walked a couple of two-hour shifts every day. At night, some of the leg captains and Dill Driscoll rode bicycles to cover more ground. All the males slept on the bus. Walters and Warren stayed mostly at La Quinta hotels, one of the national sponsors for “Carry the Load.”
Every ABAC student on the journey spent a lot of time listening to men, women, and children who lost loved ones who were involved in the military or as firemen, policemen, or first responders. Reid captured many of the stories on video.

“One story that really stuck with me was a very emotional piece on Rosa Taylor,” Reid said. “Her son was in the Air Force, and he died in a training accident in Germany in 1969. She had kept his flag wrapped up, and she brought it out to fly on the pole when we passed through Mt. Vernon, Texas. It was obvious that she still had a lot of heartache over her loss.”

On the fourth day of the journey, the group passed through Philadelphia.

“On that day we were escorted by Vietnam veterans on motorcycles,” Reid said. “That was another great experience.”

Reid was trying to shoot video in the rain and wind when the team was crossing the George Washington Bridge into New York City. To add to his difficulty with the story, the sun had yet to come up.

“Seeing the American flag and the ‘Carry The Load’ flag waving in the wind that morning was one of my favorite moments on the whole trip,” Reid said. “Because of the weather, it was a very hectic and surreal experience but that’s one of the times it really hit me as to what Memorial Day is all about.”

Reid made contact with many members of the media during his time on the road. He was always on the lookout to pick up some tips from the professionals.

“It was really cool to see how a big television station like WFAA in Dallas developed its stories,” Reid said. “They shot a prime time special. We made a lot of contacts during the trip.”
Since his direct responsibility was with the media end of the operation, Reid didn’t walk as many miles as the leg captains. But he did hoof it for 200 miles and recorded memories and photos that will last a lifetime.

For this 2011 graduate of Putnam County High School, Memorial Day will never be the same.

###