

Fernandina Beach's Hupp Huppmann is well known on the island as an affable musician who never turns down a good live gig. But, "the minor fall and the major lift" have taken on a whole new meaning for this unassuming guitarist who's about to hop in a rowboat and cross the Atlantic Ocean with three other guys.

"They say the only smaller community on Earth is people that have been in space. And then the next community is people that have rowed an ocean," Huppmann muses.

Today, Huppmann sets sails – figuratively speaking – on the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, an endurance race that stretches 3,000 miles from the Canary Islands to Antigua. The challenge typically takes 40-50 days. The retired Navy chief will be joined by three other military veterans – Paul Lore, Billy Cimino, and Cameron Hansen – who, like Huppmann, are completely devoid of any prior rowing experience.

Suddenly, battling the elements seems secondary to the true task at hand for Huppmann and his compatriots, who have taken to calling their collective Foar From Home.

They needed to become a near-professional rower in the open seas.

"We had heard of another team that was doing this back in 2018. They were racing the Talisker Whisky Challenge, and when we found out about them, we decided to raise some money to support their team going across. One of their team members came to the island, and we presented them with a \$14,000 check for their cause," Lore explained.

"Paul and I grabbed – or asked, I won't say we grabbed – Hupp and Cam if they would be interested in doing something like this. They agreed and the four of us decided we can do this locally and raise money for a great cause," Cimino added.

Foar From Home's main objective is to bring awareness to veteran post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide. Each day, it's estimated that 22 veterans commit suicide. With this rowing journey, the team is raising money to open its own kennel with Canines For Warriors, an initiative that provides trained service dogs to military veterans struggling with PTSD. They also want to raise \$500,000, so Foar From Home can make impactful donations to several veteran organizations.

The guys urge anyone who wants to help to sponsor a mile, which can still be done on the Foar From Home website.

"The number is staggering. That '22 a day' gets thrown around as a statistic, but when you think about it, that's 6,000 suicides a year just from the veteran community," Huppmann said.

Two years ago, the team settled on their mission and headed to Jacksonville University to get acquainted with their crew and learn the basics of rowing. However, before they could thoroughly explore the intricacies of this water sport, the Foar From Home team members had to get their minds and bodies in ocean-crossing shape. Each veteran joined a CrossFit program and took five classes as mandated by the event organizers on sea survival, ocean rowing, first aid, navigation and radio communications.

"We've spent over 350 hours out on the water working the boat and the procedures and the processes," Huppmann said. "There's just the unknowns, but we'll take them in small chunks and push through when we get to them."

Foar From Home will embark on this transatlantic campaign in a boat aptly named Courageous, which they purchased from a reality show based in the United Kingdom. Courageous has small cabins for the guys to sleep in and catch a break from the sun and sea. Each rower needs to consume at least 5,000 calories per day, so they'll be bringing more than 900 pounds of dehydrated meals onboard to account for individual body mass and physical activity.

"It's kind of part-rowboat and part-lifeboat with the way it's designed," Huppmann said. "If it rolls over with the door shut, it'll come right back up within six seconds. We wear mountaineering harnesses around our waist like if you were climbing El Capitan. You're locked into the boat with a lifeline that hooks into two places on the boat because going overboard is not a good option. You're always strapped to the boat when you're not in the cabin. As soon as you come out the door, you click in, and you're latched to the boat."

With training completed and food at the ready, the guys have another monumental task – figuring out how they're going to keep themselves entertained on a row boat for well over a month.

"I have an MP3 player with 3,000-plus songs of every genre," Hansen said. "Paul pointed out that we could lose electronics. We can't charge anything. So, I'm bringing two books, and I just bought a GoPro with a one terabyte memory chip. That's my big toy that I'm bringing with me."

Along with MP3 players and books, Hansen – the team's designated medic – has fully loaded his phone with brain games and Tetris to distract himself from the everlasting solitude of the sea.

"When you're halfway through the race, you're 1,500 miles from where you started. The closest humans to you on the planet are in the space station," Huppmann said.

Once they reach the finish line in Antigua, the guys plan to eat like kings over a lobster and cheeseburger feast while contemplating their next steps.

The mission is far from over. Veteran PTSD and suicide can't be solved with just one race, but Foar From Home is committed to the ongoing battle. In conjunction with the Atlantic Challenge, Lore and Cimino launched a nonprofit foundation called Cross The Line to partner with other veteran organizations.

Until that next mission begins, Cimino humorously concluded, "I'm going to stick to land for a little bit."