

VETERANS: Mission assisted rangers, border patrol

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and continues to recover from a traumatic brain injury.

"While I was in the hospital I had a lot of time, staring at ceiling tiles, and I kept thinking about the kinds of things veterans would want to do," Brett said.

Out of this long and painful healing process, the notion of Warfighter Outfitters (www.warfighteroutfitters.org) was born.

Miller focuses on a single basic idea: the importance of getting wounded, and in many cases desperately struggling, veterans out of their houses and onto the land, hunting, fishing, or participating in "engagement missions." Those missions are conducted in places such as Yellowstone National Park, where recovering veterans with Warfighter Outfitters have helped repair trails and build corrals, or at Organ Pipe.

Last year, Warfighter Outfitters served over 400 veterans, and Brett himself spent 211 days on the water guiding his fellow wounded veterans on rivers throughout the western United States, in

addition to hunting trips and the engagement missions in national parks.

Brett cites the disturbing fact that 22 veterans a day are committing suicide as a driving force behind these missions.

"If I can get them out of their house, and out hunting or fishing, they can find some relevance," Miller said. "Particularly in a place like this, which is a tactical environment, something they understand."

For the engagement missions, Warfighter Outfitters is supported by Arch Ventures, a venture-capital firm based in Chicago that is deeply involved and committed to wounded veteran programs.

"What Brett is doing is incredibly important to these guys," said Stacey Pinsoneault, of Arch Ventures, "and we are here to fully support his efforts."

A member of the Arch support crew, Pinsoneault, who lives in Chicago, was joined by CFO Mark McDonnell, as well as Alice Siebecker, a retired senior national park law enforcement officer, who flew in from Montana.

And they weren't there for window-dressing. In addition to arranging vehicles, meals, and coordinating schedules, all three volunteers joined

Warfighter Outfitters' veterans in the hard work under a blazing Sonoran sun.

The Organ Pipe engagement mission is now in its third year, and is maturing into a working partnership between Warfighter Outfitters and the undermanned government agencies tasked with enforcing the law and preserving the monument's natural and historical sites.

"This is my second year coming," said James Fries, an army veteran who was shot in the face in Somalia. "I really enjoy it. I like being with the guys, and doing something important. It just feels good. You get to see things nobody else does."

This year's trip included dismantling and cleaning up smuggling camps and lay-up hides within yards of the dilapidated pedestrian fences and vehicle barriers on the border. The veterans collected hundreds of pounds of detritus left behind by smugglers. The mission was important not just for the preservation of the lands, but for the overall tactical picture.

A heavily armed Park Service law enforcement officer, who was providing overwatch as the veterans worked, said, "This is really important to us. By getting this cleaned up we can see how the cartels



PHOTO BY CRAIG RULLMAN

Brett Miller takes his turn in the hole as veterans restore a damaged well in the Arizona desert.

are changing their tactics, what new routes they are going to use."

A second project in the National Monument saw the veterans clearing brush from an overgrown corral. A mile-and-a-half hike from the Alamo Canyon Campground site, on the edge of a dry wash in the shadow of the Ajo Range, an old corral and a primitive well are remnants of the Gray Ranch, a desert cattle operation that occupied the area for decades.

Veterans, at the behest of a Park Service archaeologist, cleared brush from the corral, and then set to work re-digging the old well, which had been completely filled in as the result of a 2012 flash flood that tore through the wash.

In addition to these activities, the veterans were given a VIP tour of the Border Patrol's Ajo Station, including a very rare glimpse of the Tactical Operations Center, where agents monitor a highly sophisticated radar and optical network, and coordinate missions on a 24-hour basis.

On their final day in the desert, the veterans were taken out to a remote area by a heavily armed contingent of Park Service officers, spending time at an observation post actively looking for smugglers with high-powered spotting scopes and FLIR technology.

Miller calls these "engagement missions," because wounded veterans are actively

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