

## *Monterey Bay Veterans Inc.*

### *Wheelchair Derby Update*

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It all started months back when Dave began looking for volunteers for the 24th Annual Monterey Bay Vets Wheelchair Salmon Derby. I missed out on it last year due to boat issues and scheduling conflicts. As I've gotten older I've discovered that the time I spent serving my country means more to me as an older adult than it did as a young adult. Pride in myself, pride in my country and pride every time I see the Stars and Stripes waving in the wind. I felt that NOT making this trip would have been a huge disservice to those who so selflessly gave without thoughts of fame, fortune, and recognition.

Thankfully, Dave's reminder prodded me to get the boat into the shop for repairs to the autopilot system which was essential for me to get back in the salmon game. That rang out about half my tax return and the other half was spent when I found out my trailer brakes were hosed and all 4 sets needed to be replaced. With boat and trailer both back in action I was solid on the list of volunteer captains to take these guys out to try and put them on some salmon. The members of Outcast Anglers stepped up in a big way, we got busy getting etched mugs made up and we collected enough donations to provide mugs for all the captains. Mike and Bob were running the deck so I could concentrate on running the boat. Months became weeks and then days and as usual I found myself scrambling to get things ready to go at the last minute. I had a few decals show up Friday morning to slap on the back of the car, I filled up with diesel, loaded up the rods and riggers... then it was off to meet Mike at boat storage. We grabbed the boat and set our course for Monterey via Pacheco Pass. We pulled into the Marina VFW hall around 4:30 and found Jerry and Doug at the bar. We joined them after checking in and getting our parking passes. My buddy Dean from high school, who suffered a brain injury from enemy fire in the Middle East in 1990, met us there. He would be one of my guests for the derby on Saturday as well as one other disabled vet. I got Dean checked in and made sure he got something to eat then I went out to get some mugs out of the Truck. I saw two guys with prosthetic legs standing next to the boat and when I went up to talk to them I noticed tags around their necks with my boat's name "All About Me" and I quickly did the math and wondered if I could run for salmon with 3 crew and 3 vets... I'd fished 5 onboard in rough conditions out of Bodega Bay before but that was with experienced crew. I tossed it around with Mike and Bob and we decided that there was no way in hell we were leaving anyone behind! Soon thereafter we figured it was time to go launch the boat so we departed, told the guys we'd see them in the morning, and off to Cannery Row we went! There were already several boats at the ADA dock and we took the last remaining spot.



The rest of the evening was spent socializing with others that were there for the same purpose as us, to take the Vets out for a day of fishing big blue... and to let them know their service and sacrifices are remembered and appreciated. Jerry and Doug hosted us with oyster shooters aboard the Seadog and we all had a great time hanging out, laughing, and carrying on.



As it got later into the evening people started to filter out and get some rest before the derby. My alarm went off at 0445 and I crawled out of the cuddy and woke the guys up. To my surprise someone had already been at the dock for a visit...



“Crunchtime” had been hit as well...





But it didn't seem to affect Khanh much. Maybe the 2nd one was good luck? Nah he's just a hell of a fisherman!



The volunteers were busy setting up breakfast, packing lunches, and making sure all the vets participating were assigned to a boat. I was lucky enough to get some bait from John and then we headed out. Once we got the guys down on the dock I went over my safety briefing and had them come aboard. All my vets were Army and I was one proud American to have them on my boat.

John and Dean.



Travis.



It felt great to be at the helm on the salt again, seems like it had been forever!



It was just like riding a bike though, and we were heading out around Pt. Pinos in no time! Here are a few shots of the guys enjoying the ride.







Big thanks to Mike here, cuz without him on the camera this report would have been near picture-less!



We got setup with 4 rods out and let the auto pilot do the work.

It wasn't as crowded as I thought it would be and the guys got to kick back and relax.

Even I got to spend some time on the bow (TR-1 Gold is worth every penny when the skipper gets to relax on the boat too!).

John's MBV crew had loaded us up with fruit, brownies, and sandwiches and we made the most of it!

Mike opted for a Mountain House lol as he kept watch on the starboard side.



Bob worked the other side for the guys...





We didn't let the guys get off too easy though, here's John bringing a rod in to check bait.



Dean got to experience reeling in a 3# ball from 200' back lol.



We saw some of the other Vet boats throughout the day...



Here's Seadog right before they boated one, giving us hope for some pink.





We saw plenty of life out there, several porpoises and some whale activity...





I was really hoping to put these guys on some fish but we gave it all we had. We tried a multitude of depths, patterns, and colors. We even tried mooching near the bottom in 200-300' of water to no avail. It just wasn't going to happen for us and we wanted to make sure we made it to the awards dinner so we set our course for the harbor just before 1400 and enjoyed a high speed run back, hitting 35 on the way into the bay. The smiles I saw told me all I needed to know as the boat surfed from one wave to the next. These guys didn't care that we didn't catch any salmon. Being out on the water enjoying for a day what I enjoy all year... makes my eyes well up just thinking about it. AGAIN, I can honestly say that this was the most rewarding skunk I've ever had, and while we tried our best to catch a fish I realized that this wasn't about catching fish at all. It was about giving back to soldiers that selflessly gave for their country, giving them opportunities that I enjoy on a regular basis.



Like watching marine life play on the rocks on the way in and out of port.









A salute for our Vets...





Making me wonder if I should have gone Coast Guard...



I made sure to get a group pic of all of us before the guys headed to the awards dinner.



We had a bit of work to do on the boat so we told the guys we'd see them there. Pete had come down from Santa Cruz earlier in the week and had to get back across before it got too rough. Sorry to miss you guys at the dinner, but your trek was mentioned at the awards ceremony.. .testifying to the lengths some of us went to in order to take the Vets out.

You rock Pete!



We stopped on the way cuz Mike and I had built up quite a thirst out there! Don't worry Bob made us wait till we got out of the car in the parking lot before we opened them lol really.



I wasn't sure what to expect when we went in but I found nothing but family. There wasn't a single Vet there that I didn't consider my brother. Jeez, I'm getting choked up again just writing that... wow. After a few beers at the bar the awards were given out. Seeing the room full of smiling faces, men and women that had some part of their lives taken from them while serving their country... it moved me deeply. Hearing them cheer for the winners, everyone happy for the fish that were caught... not caring if they had caught a fish or not. I couldn't buy myself a dry eye if I were Donald Trump. I kept it together well enough until the deckhands and captains were called up front... from the thanks, to the Captain's Plaque we received, to the applause that followed. I was looking down trying to hide the emotions as we were walking back when it was asked how many of us ourselves were veterans, I raised my hand and turned to look behind me and saw several of the others had done the same. I headed straight out the door for a smoke, my sunglass lenses full of tears... we stayed a while longer and I found that I wasn't alone with the way I felt. My life had been affected in a way that I will never forget. The stories of being nearly killed by IED's, losing limbs, learning to walk again... some even returning to duty only to have it happen a second time before being told to go home, and even then trying to stay with their unit. I know what it's like to be in a foreign land, away from you friends and family in a hostile place... those around you becoming your family. I know all that...

But now I get it.

These Colors



Don't Run

Since leaving the dock in Monterey, everyday things that I take for granted take me back to having those guys out there, thinking of how their sacrifices are overlooked by many. Early in my adulthood I looked back at my own experiences in the military with a nonchalant attitude, but as I've grown older I've come to realize that it's every single member of our armed forces that make the difference, not just the troops in the field... its every veteran that signed up for a tour of duty. Those of us that returned home safe need to take any opportunity we can find and do what we can to give back to those who weren't so fortunate. Patriotism in our great nation is a mighty powerful thing, and for my friends who didn't serve to understand the importance of taking these guys out... it truly makes me proud to call them a friend. There will be another Veteran's trip out of Monterey for cod on October 1st and I know that I'll be there with friends both old and new. I won't be taking my boat this time, I'll be working on a party boat to interact with as many of these fine people as possible and I hope some of you will do the same! While this is my first MBV event, you can bet the Red White and Blue that it won't be my last!





Thanks to Mike and Bob for pulling duties on deck. You guys rock and I look forward to making this an annual thing! Next time let's actually make it to a pub eh? lol



Thanks to all the rest of you Outcasters that volunteered your time and hard earned money to make this event great! Jerry, Pete, Steve, Khanh, Larry, Doug, Neo... Brad even (he asked about Outcast when he was leaving and hopefully we'll see him here as well!) Hope to see you all there next year!

I also need to send a big thanks to John Whitacre, the Executive Director from Monterey Bay Vets, Inc. who always found time to help me out and get me what I needed regardless of how busy he was. A very class act.

My biggest thanks of all goes out Dave Doubledee who lit my fire to get involved in this event... it was the most meaningful fishing trip of my 40 years of being on the water. Thank you brother, I will see you at the next one and many more in the years to come!

