

Valley Angler Combat Anglers by Bill Thompson

Part of the fun of running a fly shop is the interesting people you meet. We are a lot like those guys who run the pawn shop on the History Channel; “You never know who or what is going to walk through that door”. This past weekend I had the great pleasure of meeting two different individuals who are currently serving in our armed forces. Both were avid fly-fishers and both had served in either Afghanistan or Iraq and both are getting ready to redeploy in the next few weeks.

The first fellow came in with his wife on Thursday. His name is Ceamus MaDermott and is currently serving in the Army as a Green Beret. Ceamus has only recently returned from Afghanistan. It was fascinating talking to this young fellow about his experiences. This young man had spent quite a bit time fighting along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ceamus sent me a picture of him and a couple of other fellows dressed in the native garb of the local tribesmen.

Of course our main topic of conversation was fly fishing and fly tying. While on duty in Afghanistan, Ceamus managed to find the time to tie a few flies. The story behind his flies is as equally as fascinating as his war stories. Needless to say there are not a lot of fly shops in Afghanistan. As tempting as it may be, as a business opportunity, I think I will hold off on opening a branch of the North Country Angler there. I must admit that “North Country Angler, North Conway and Kabul” would look good on the letterhead. Ceamus had to scrounge his materials from what ever was available. One part of his fly “Afghan” fly came from one of the unit’s flags. Along with the picture of him and his fellow soldiers he sent a couple of pictures of his flies. I have posted these pictures on the shops web site should you be interested in taking a look at them.

Due to a wound received in combat Ceamus has spent some time at Walter Reed Hospital recovering. There he became involved in Project Healing Waters. Project Healing Waters is a group of dedicated fly fishermen who sponsor fly fishing trips for wounded veterans. There is a very active chapter in New Hampshire that teaches fly tying at area veteran’s hospitals. The Federation of Fly Fishers is a major sponsor of this group. While attending various FFF events I have met some of guys who volunteer for Project Healing Waters. I can tell you that these are a great bunch guys; both the volunteers and the guys they take fishing.

Ceamus will be redeploying soon back to Afghanistan to rejoin his unit. We certainly wish him all the luck in the world and a safe and speedy trip home. I am hoping that we are able to stay in touch and one day wet a line together.

On Friday evening I got a call at the shop at around 5:30 asking if we were still open. I generally answer that question by saying: "if you are close by, we will wait for you". About twenty minutes later a young couple came through the door with lots of questions about fishing in the "Valley". They were from Colorado and avid fly fishers. In the course of the conversation it came out that she was on leave for a short time before shipping out for Iraqi. This would be her third tour of duty in that country. As bizarre as it sounds each time she has deployed she has carried a fly rod with her. She is a charter member of the Baghdad Anglers Club and Fly Fishing School. Yes they do have a web site, doesn't everybody? Check out their web site at <http://www.baghdadflyfishing.com> , I love their motto, "Combat Zone Fishing - It's a Blast" To answer the question, yes there is some fly fishing available in that part of the world. Back when the war first started in Iraqi there were a few guys that posted on one of the many fly fishing bulletin boards on the Internet. These industrious fellows actually found some fishing in the Euphrates and even more remarkable the time and will to go fishing.

Like an idiot I did not get her name or E mail, however I do know that in a few weeks a young lady will be casting a fly on the Euphrates wearing a North Country Angler T-shirt.

Over the years that Janet and I have owned the shop we have had the pleasure of meeting several young men and women who were serving their country in the Armed Services. Notably two young Marines, who sent us a Christmas card and a couple of pictures they took of us and Summer on the shops front porch last year and a young Chaplin serving in the 10th Mountain Division. Each time we meet with one of these young kids our hearts go out to them. There is no possible way to thank them enough for what they do for us.

See you on the river,