

Let me start by saying both of us thank you for getting behind the United Hero's League Outdoors. This event rivaled an IT Cadre Maria coordinated effort. You would have been impressed with the operations. It was an awesome day, and a worthy cause.

The organization through gracious donations such as IT Cadre provide Veterans and their family a free of charge opportunity to enjoy the sport of fishing. Their mission is simple:

***“Keeping military kids healthy and active through sports”***

United Heroes League actively works to ensure that children of military service members can afforded every opportunity to participate in sports. We have provided over \$10 MILLION worth of free sports equipment, game tickets, cash grants, sports camps and special experiences to military families across the US & Canada.

I've actually fished the Occoquan River twice in the last 2 weeks so I was very comfortable with the surroundings and current shad run occurring up at the damn. I arrived early so I could go upstream and check out the water flow as a result of the rain from Friday evening. To put this into perspective, you normally cannot see the water on the other side of the rocks. It was ripping.

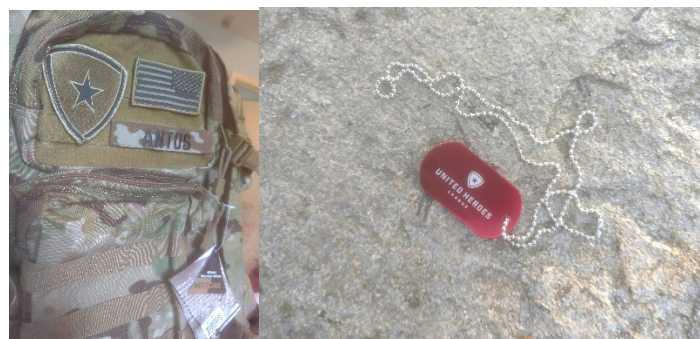


You add in the full moon, debris in the water, and 15-20 mph wind and most folks would not fish. This organization however is not your ordinary group of volunteers. The intent was to get the kids out on the water, and have some fun regardless of the conditions. There was no negative talk, and no one was backing out of fishing.

I knew I was in for some fun when I was lucky enough to get in on this opportunity, but the site upon arrival was impressive. Maybe it didn't mean as much to everyone else, but I was pumped up when I saw the boats lined up and ready to go. I've teamed up with 4 boats fishing before, but we had 10 boats. Nothing is better than fishing with a tight group of buddies together. That alone is worth the price of admission when you can be part of it.



We gathered promptly at 10:30 for instructions from our host Steve Payne. Not only did UHL hand out a box lunch, drinks, but gave everyone a high quality Dri-Duck shirt, Nike hat, and dog tags. As a sponsor I was the recipient of a top of the line personalized military backpack. Each of kids received a St. Croix fishing rod as well. (St. Croix is arguably in the top 3 of fishing rods for everyone regardless of their affinity to a specific brand.)





It was crazy watching all of the captain's launch. The water was so high that they closed the right side pier because of the conditions. A few days ago my buddy had to step on my leg to pull himself out of the boat to reach the pier. Not the best conditions to say the least. That didn't stop anyone. All of the boats departed down river. My captain Frank Poirier went up river. This guy has competed in over 100 FLW (Fishing League Worldwide) tournaments and knows his stuff like the other captains. Did I fail to mention that the UHL not only showered us with awesome gifts, but lined up some top of the line professional bass guys? These folks all drove a few hours to participate and support the cause.

Frank wanted to check for Crappie around the Route 123 Bridge. We rode up stream to the footbridge as he watched his side scan fish finder. We didn't mark any fish, but I loved the idea of trying something different to gain the edge. The day was all about fishing with the kids, but this was also a competition to see who could catch the most fish.

We headed downstream past some boats from our group that had stopped to fish some points and kept going. The captain was in search of some grass beds holding the target species of largemouth bass. As we got out of the no wake zone the captain cranked it up and we were flying. Our military child was Carter and you could see the look on his face as we jumped the waves. That was the fastest Carter has ever gone in a boat. Sure we got some spray in the face, but that is all part of the experience.

We headed towards Kanes Creek because it had some shelter from the wind and waves. However, due to our late start time the locals were lined up along the shoreline. It was packed with folks so the captain made a bold decision and turned us out of the creek. We instead went up to a smaller creek.....so small I don't even see it named on the map. It was the kind of creek you can only fish due to the high water conditions.

It was past 11:30 and we started to fish. Cater and his dad Josh had no fishing experience so Captain Frank provided a demonstration. Each did a few casts and game on. As we drifted into the entrance Captain Frank pointed to the shoreline vegetation and practically called his shot saying there should be bass in that spatterdock. Sure enough he caught the first fish exactly where he pointed. Cater was next up and put a nice cast into the area and pulled out a nice fat 16 inch bass. Wow....he was pumped up. His first bass and it was a nice one.



We caught few more as made it further down into the creek tucked away from the 30 mph gusts that had built up. We now had white caps at the entrance so we decided to stay put. Captain Frank sent several group text messages to let folks know that we found bass in really shallow water setting beds for spawning since the water temps were up in the 70's. Will and the other boats all scattered throughout all of the area. In fact one of the text messages back was to let folks know several boats were lined up along the southern shoreline out of the wind on fish.





We remained back in our secret cove catching a few more bass here and there as the Captain directed us. He knew where they were hiding. I was happy as hell when I landed a nice 18 inch bass, but you never know what you are going to catch when you are fishing. Ask Will because he pulled a monster Blue Catfish out as well.



We had several exciting moments still on our boat. Our Veteran Josh hooked into something really big. The fish was peeling line off the reel making that wonderful sound that we all live for when on the water. Unfortunately like in Wicked Tuna he pulled the hook before we could see it. However, it was Cater to the rescue to really complete our trip. We all took turns casting from various positions on the boat throughout the day. Capt. Frank was on the bow with Josh, and I was also forward with Carter in the stern of the boat. We were all focused forward when Cater screams that he is on a fish!

Not only was he on, but Carter landed a mid-20 inch Snakehead. We didn't have a net so the Capt. had to reach in and grab the toothy SH to get him in the boat. The fish went flopping around until we got in into the live well that he popped up a few times trying to escape. That was an impressive catch. One of my goals that day was to catch a SH, but seeing Carter on his own new St. Croix rod catch one was enough.

It was a little after 2:00 and time for us to start our run back to the launch. The wind died down some, but it was still plenty rough out. We went over to the group of our boats clustered on the southern shoreline. Everyone was having a great time.





As you may have noticed from the earlier picture Will was fishing with the Washington Capitals Secretary of Defense Rod Langway. All of the volunteers were great folks. We all gathered post fishing at 3:00 for the Mission Barbeque catered award presentation.



The UHL leadership thanked everyone and IT Cadre was recognized as a sponsor for the event.



The UHL is a first class organization that puts on a terrific event for a worthy cause. We were proud to have IT Cadre connected as a sponsor and several of the participants thanked us for our part. Thank you Mark and Maria for giving us this opportunity. Thanks, Dave & Will