

# BACK FROM IRAQ

## THE GAFF GIRLS WEREN'T THE ONLY STARS AT THE BIG BEND SALTWATER CLASSIC

By Michele Clarke



**W**hen a tournament like the Big Bend Saltwater Classic is produced, the organizers can only hope it will be a success. Success comes in many forms including great weather, great fishing and a great turnout. You even hope for a few records to be broken. But the 18th Annual Big Bend Saltwater Classic, held June 16-18, 2006, included a whole new level of success. The tournament was able to give back to two men who have given a lot for this country.

A few weeks before the tournament an e-mail was received. The request was pretty simple.

*"To whom it may concern:*

*Hi, My name is Felix and I couldn't resist the urge to send this email—hopefully I am not stepping out of my boundaries in doing so. I am in the Army stationed at Ft. Stewart, GA as part of the 3rd Infantry Division. Since our return from Iraq, I have been with a buddy of mine trying to hook some nice fish and trying to get him in the groove of knowing what reeling a big fish in feels like. We haven't been too successful so far.*

*I used to fish off the piers in Florida prior to joining the Army, and I miss it like crazy. We recently passed our Georgia*

*state requirements needed for renting and driving boats in the waters of Georgia and tried it a couple weeks ago, but all we caught were small sharks and stingrays. I am not sure you noticed, but I sent this email at 11:00 p.m., because I just saw on one of the Comcast channels the commercial about this year's BBSC and it would be an honor to attend this event—and even better to compete in the same. Wow, what a Father's Day weekend!*

*Would it be possible to give my name and number, with address if needed, to anyone who would need or want someone to accompany them on this great weekend? I will pay my own fees to compete, I just want to have fun and catch BIG ONES. I am sure my buddy would love to do the same."*

When Tournament Chairman Ben Betts read the e-mail, he knew that passing the information around and hoping to find Sergeant First Class Felix N. Quiles space on a boat was not enough. With one phone call to the Freedom Boat Club, a boat, captain and mate were arranged. Recreational registrations for both soldiers were donated by the tournament and Sandy Beach Properties in Carrabelle found a townhouse

big enough for the soldiers and their families to attend the event.

"There was no question in our minds that we could make this happen," explained Betts. "We have great sponsors, so we reached out and hopefully gave them a weekend they won't forget," he continued.

Felix and Pablo Galindo were able to attend the captain's meeting held at the Carrabelle Boat Club in Carrabelle, Florida on Thursday as well as both weigh-in days. The crowds loved the story and the soldiers were greeted each day with applause and "thank-yous." They enjoyed two full days of fishing and brought in several grouper and a couple trout.

"We have had a great time," stated SFC Quiles. "We never expected this when I sent the e-mail. This has been a great experience." Tournament organizers have invited the soldiers back for next year's tournament on June 15-17, 2007. Hopes are high for their return, however there is a possibility that they will be sent back to Iraq. Let's all hope they will enjoy tight lines in Apalachee Bay next June. ———)