

WARRIORS ON THE WAVES

AUTHOR ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL

PHOTOGRAPHER DAVE RE

DESIGNER NAVEEN HATTIS

OPERATION SURF takes wounded members of the military into the ocean as part of its mission to rehabilitate with recreation.



It was Sept. 25, 2008. Sgt. 1st Class Charlie C. McCall, a U.S. Military Police officer, was asleep beneath a tent surrounded by buildings in Kandahar, Afghanistan. One of his soldiers slept nearby. The rocket hit right between them.

In the aftermath, McCall found himself standing in a crater.

“I saw it happen, but I don’t remember it happening.”

McCall has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), his cognitive processes are off, and he has a hard time remembering things. His left leg is almost always in pain—“crazy pain.” Doctors might eventually amputate it.

“My brain cuts out sometimes because I have to take a lot of meds.”

He says “all kinds of stuff” is wrong with him.

“I’ve just been falling apart.”

But today things are good. McCall has spent five days in the Pacific Ocean learning how to surf.

A program run by California-based nonprofit Amazing Surf Adventures, Operation Surf teaches wounded active-duty and veteran members of the military how to surf. Instructors—many of them world-class surfers—are paired with a military member or veteran. Some are managing PTSD; others are becoming accustomed to life without one to four limbs. The goal is to give the wounded warriors “the confidence to move forward in a positive direction,” according to the [Operation Surf website](#).

CrossFit Inc. sponsored Operation Surf Santa Cruz, held April 2 to 8. The day the group arrived, the Patriot Guard Riders—along with local police agencies—escorted the men from Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport to the beach town. Along Highway 17, law enforcement and first responders stood atop overpasses, saluting the vehicles as they motored through. When they finally made their way to the coast, about a dozen men took to the waters in the city that was home to CrossFit Founder and CEO Greg Glassman’s original CrossFit gym.

For McCall, surfing is good.

“It’s actually kind of peaceful,” he says.

“I could probably do this once a month. Or once a week.”

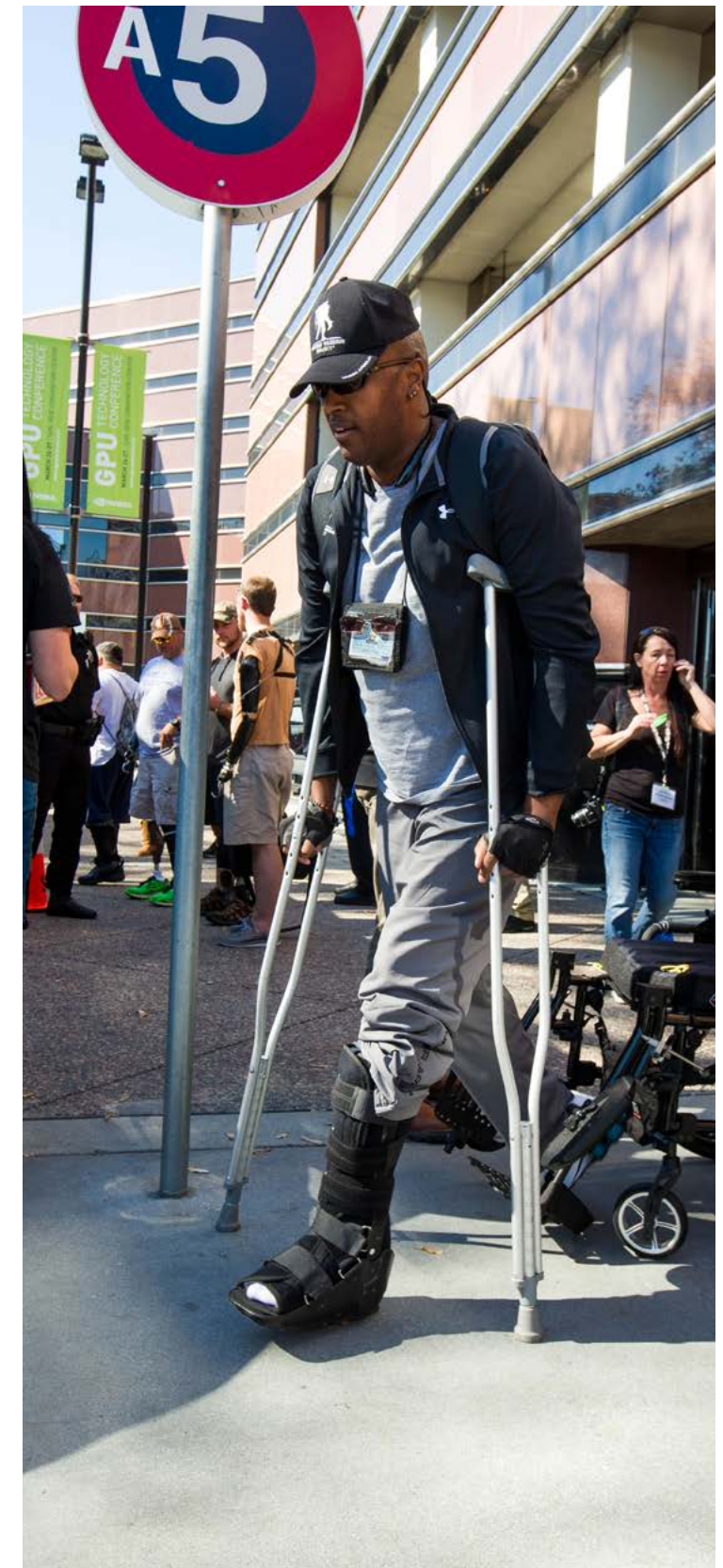
After being injured, McCall was assigned to Bravo Company, Warrior in Transition Battalion from August 2010 to 2012. He retired from the Army in 2012.

The 44-year-old’s been trying to get out more, heeding the advice of his physical therapist: adapt and overcome, just like the military taught him during 22 years of service.

“It’s been fun ... I’ll never forget this.”



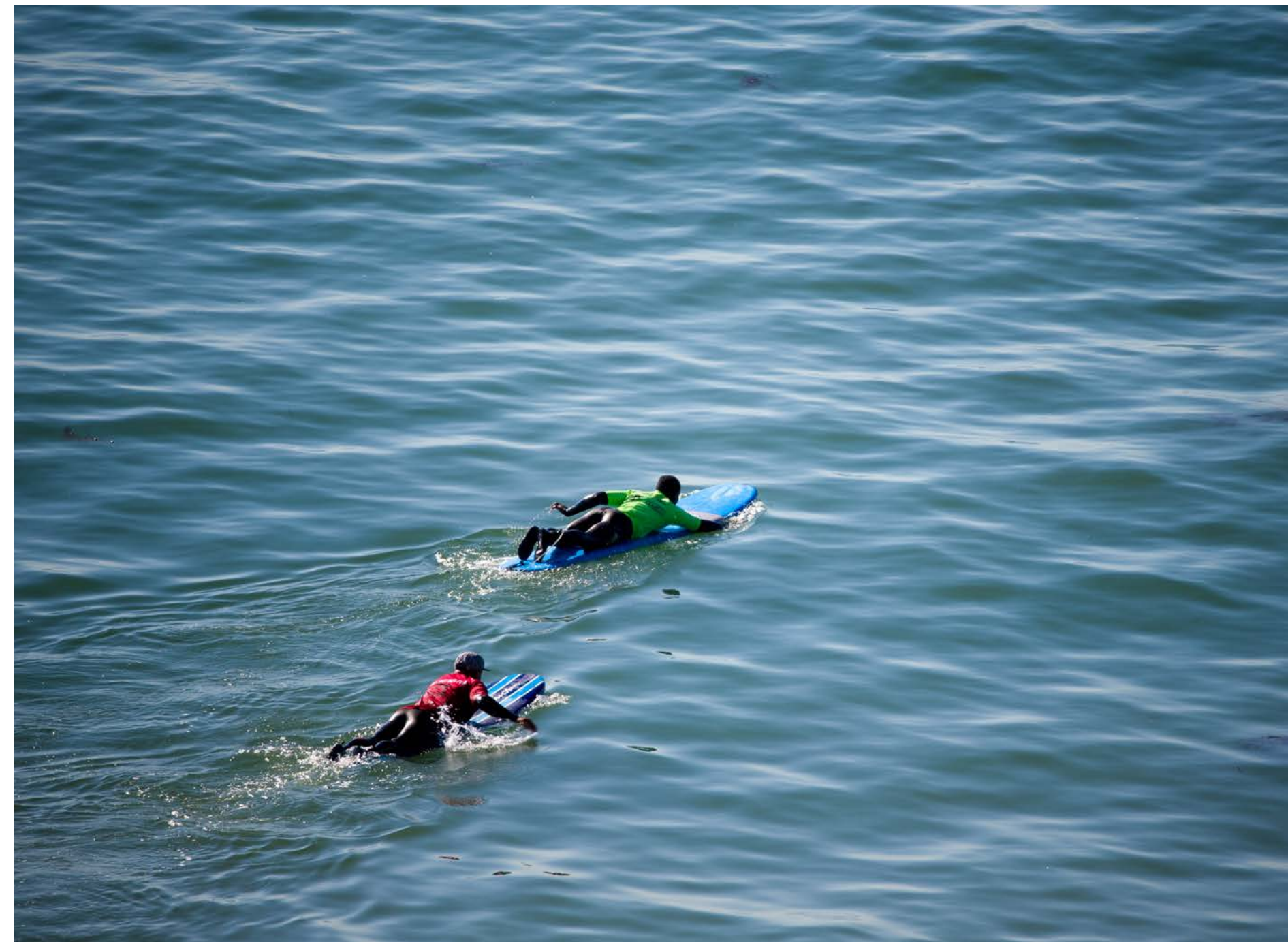
CrossFit Media photographer Dave Re spent six days with the warriors to document their experience.













**“IT WAS LIKE
FINDING ME. I
WAS TRYING TO
FIND OUT WHO I
WAS, WHAT I WAS
DOING. IT GAVE ME
A REASON TO KEEP
GOING WITH THE
PROSTHETICS.”**

—Martin Pollock, British Army, triple amputee



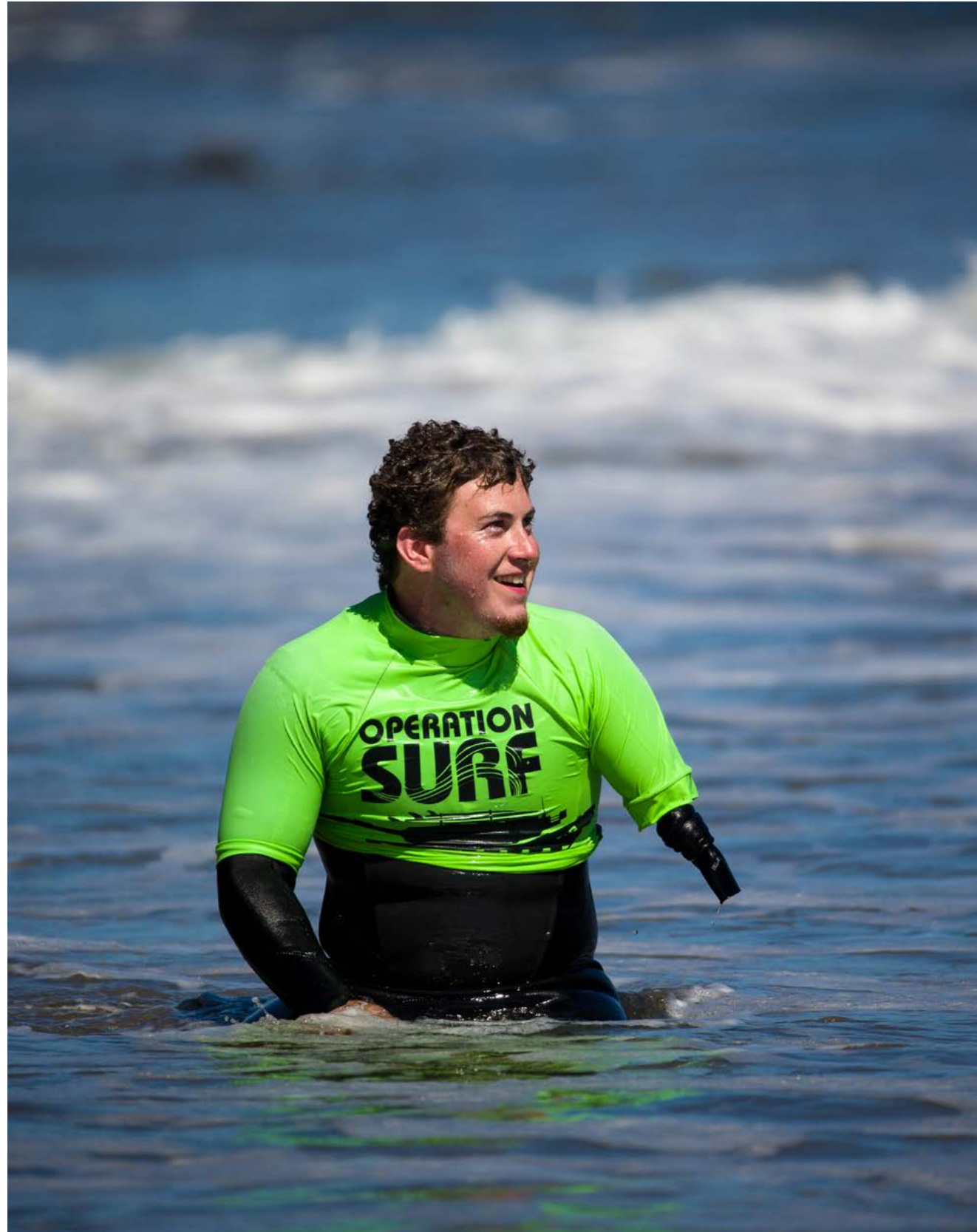


**“WE’RE JUST SURFERS TAKIN’
A BUNCH OF GUYS OUT AND
HAVIN’ A GOOD TIME.”**

—Brent Edwards, Santa Cruz event director, Operation Surf











**“WHEN I HIT THE
WATER, I DON’T
FEEL DISABLED.
IT REALLY HELPS
KNOWING WE
CAN ACCOMPLISH
THINGS.”**

—**Rodney Roller**, champion amputee surfer and
co-founder of Amazing Surf Adventures



