

Mission

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Patrol calls the West Desert Corridor. In sight of Rogers' post, there are no fences — no clear line of distinction where an uninformed onlooker would note the definitive border. He points out a darker green section in the brush and indicates the "line."

"Not what I pictured at all, before I got here," he said as he and the other Soldiers watched "dust devils" moving across the horizon. "You have to watch (dust clouds)," one of his team members said. "Some just stand still; the ones that move could be a car, or people. Then, we have to call in to BP."

The border in the Tucson Sector area of responsibility spans 262 miles of the 376-mile Arizona-Mexico border. Covering more than 89,000 square miles and most of the state, the Tucson Sector sees the majority of illegal migrant activity for the entire Southwest.

"We had over 392,000 apprehensions this past fiscal year, and seized over 616,000 pounds of marijuana — that's about 600 tons," said Rob Daniels, spokesman for Tucson Sector. According to Border Patrol statistics, one in 10 of those apprehensions are individuals with a felony record in the United States, and many are from countries other than Mexico, such as Columbia, China and Venezuela.

Daniels added that in the year he started with the Border Patrol, 1994, there were about 139,000 apprehensions but with notably fewer agents,



U.S. ARMY PHOTO

Indiana National Guard Sgt. Brian Clevenger follows a "dust devil" that might be a vehicle through his binoculars while assisting Tucson Sector Border Patrol Agents at an observation post in southern Arizona.

"In 1994, we had 287 agents; currently, we have roughly 2,500."

Even with the increase in manpower, agents must cover a lot of ground. Assistance from the Guard, they say, makes that job easier.

"Those 44 Soldiers let us put 44 badges on the border," said Gustavo Soto, border patrol agent and public information officer. "With the Guard's help, we are narrowing the gap, so that nearly all known entries are quickly becoming known apprehensions."

Having Guard Soldiers as eyes and ears helps the Border Patrol allocate its agents more efficiently.

"They listen, watch and allow us to put an agent back where he needs to be," said Soto.

Fighting the expansive terrain and sheer numbers is just the beginning,

according to Guard members and Border Patrol agents.

"Smugglers use a systematic approach, he explained, including scouts who watch the movements of Border Patrol agents, then relay the information to guides who are leading groups of migrants, sometimes as far as 80 miles across the desert, to vehicles intended to take the group deeper into the United States.

Near one remote observation point, Spc. Jeremy Hedger, an MP with the 939th Military Police Detachment, points out spots in the hills where scouts have been known to hide and watch for weeks at a time, in constant radio contact with smugglers and guides.

"Pretty much everything we are doing for the Border Patrol, the scouts

do for the smugglers," said Hedger.

Well, maybe not everything. One look into the temporary storage facility at the Ajo, Ariz., Border Patrol station shows that bringing migrants across the border is not the only business the smugglers are in.

"It's a the battle for the agents," said Sgt. 1st Class Chris Trivett, non-commissioned officer in charge of Hedger's group, pointing out the metal containers that house large quantities of recently confiscated marijuana. "There it is right there. This is the drug corridor, where we're standing. That's the fight."

Combating the drug threat may be the biggest challenge, according to Trivett, "People just don't know how much is coming across," he said. "The Border Patrol is doing such a good job, but they need us just to keep up with the smugglers."

According to Soto, Guard members on the Southwest border act as a force multiplier. Not in direct contact with migrants, or in any law enforcement capacity, Guard members relay information to Border Patrol agents in the area of operation. Agents then track or apprehend individuals as needed.

"I'm happy to do whatever they need," said Pvt. Timothy Hill, of Logansport, Ind., standing just 50 yards from the spot where seven migrants were apprehended the night before. "If my radio call stops a pound of dope from getting across, that's a pound that's not getting back home."

(Army Sgt. Tommi Meyer is assigned to Indiana National Guard Public Affairs.)

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