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U.S. Air Force Veteran Harvests Bull Elk

Minnesota Elk Breeders Association (MnEBA), November 10, 2017 – TSgt. Brian Burke, a disabled veteran of the United States Air Force, recently experienced a day he will never forget - the day he harvested a beautiful bull elk at Tony's Trophy Elk Hunt Ranch in Baudette, Minnesota. Even a few days after the hunt, Sergeant Burke was elated. "My elk hunt was the best! I've never done anything better than that.... I don't know if you could ever top that." Sergeant Burke was the recipient of the 11th Annual MnEBA Charitable Elk Hunt which recently took place on October 16-18, 2017.

Sergeant Burke served in the United States Air Force and worked in the ammunition unit and as an emergency room combat medic/nurse over his 20½ years in the military. He served 10 deployments, six of which were combat tours. In 2004, his team was hit with serin nerve gas and just a few months later, his team was hit by an IED on the left side of their hummer. The explosion destroyed Sergeant Burke's entire neck vertebrae. He went through much reconstruction and had a 10% chance of living and a 15% chance of ever walking if he did live. He did live and does now walk, but his entire nervous system was destroyed and he lives in constant pain with reduced stamina and strength. Sergeant Burke had all but given up on the dream to ever go hunting again. Once an avid hunter who hunted for all his own food and taught many others to hunt, it was a major disappointment to give up something he had always loved to do.

But this disappointment was also a great motivator to beat the odds and continue to improve his quality of life. "I have retaught myself to walk, so I said 'hey, why not relearn to shoot a rifle'. Then I taught myself to target shoot my bow. My next task is to try to get strong enough to run, then I want to hike with a backpack." While he has set high goals for himself, he also realizes his limitations. "No matter how much I can re-learn 'or try' hunting a big game animal myself, it will never happen again for me alone. I will always need the help of others."

Not only did Sergeant Burke go home with the thrill and satisfaction of harvesting a majestic bull elk, but this experience has given him the confidence to give hunting another try. "I didn't think I could do it, but this hunt proved I could do it. I'm going hunting this year."

The moment he harvested his bull elk was a magical moment for Sergeant Burke. "We searched all day for the bull and I was getting really sore. I prayed that I would be able to finish." He continued, "The bull came out of the brush just as the sun was going down." After getting himself situated to take the shot, he said "The sun illuminated the bull in the sunset, it was like an elk in a golden sun." After taking his shot, the bull dropped "like a building being demolished. When I went up to it, I was speechless for 15 minutes."

Sergeant Burke was beyond thankful for this experience. "Everyone was phenomenal up there, I had the time of my life. Thank you to Tony and his family, Ron and his family and the whole Minnesota Elk Breeders Association family. I can just never, ever thank you enough." While this hunt was a great experience, he is enjoying the bounty of his hunt as well. Burke is not only having the head mounted and enjoying the meat from the animal, but he's also making a point to utilize the hide and ivories as well.

MnEBA would like to thank everyone who generously supported this year's event including Tony's Trophy Elk Hunt Ranch, Midwest Outdoors Unlimited, Lake Superior Chapter of Safari Club International (SCI), Splendor Ridge Elk Farm and Engebretson Elk Farm.

MnEBA offers our heartfelt thanks, support and gratitude to Sergeant Burke and to all United States military men and women for their service to our country.



TSgt. Brian Burke