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Minnesota National Guard Veteran Harvests Bull Elk

Minnesota Elk Breeders Association (MnEBA), November 7, 2018 – In the past, Staff Sgt. Willy Puckett, a disabled veteran of the Minnesota National Guard could only dream about someday harvesting a majestic bull elk. On October 15, 2018, that dream became a reality for this 15 year military veteran. Staff Sgt. Puckett repeatedly described the experience as “amazing”. Even though he had imagined what the experience would be like, he was still surprised by the strong emotion he felt when first seeing the bull elk. “The first time you see him, that kind of majesty when you see him walking around, it’s amazing!” Staff Sgt. Puckett was the 2018 recipient of the 12th Annual MnEBA Charitable Elk Hunt which recently took place at Tony’s Trophy Elk Hunt Ranch near Baudette, MN.

A native of Litchfield, Minnesota, Staff Sgt. Puckett entered the Minnesota National Guard in 1996 and served for 15 years until he was medically discharged in 2011. While on active duty, he was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 136th Infantry Combined Arms Battalion which consists of soldiers from Hutchinson, Litchfield and Redwood Falls. During his time of service, he was deployed to both Iraq and Kosovo, but it was during his time in Iraq that he and two fellow guard members were injured by a roadside bomb that killed one of his fellow servicemen. Puckett received a deep cut near his left kneecap and punctures on his left arm and face, with glass also removed from his eye. Along with the physical injuries, the mental anguish has also been difficult.

These days Puckett works to restore prairies and fights forest fires around the country. He has most recently been fighting fires in California. Always an avid hunter, Puckett has spent time hunting small game and whitetail deer south of Black Duck over the years, but has always dreamed of someday harvesting elk, grizzly bear and moose.

What made this hunt extra special for Puckett was that he was able to use his dad’s 30-06 to harvest his elk. Puckett’s dad passed away in June of 2016 having never realized his dream of harvesting an elk, but Puckett knows his dad would be happy to know that his son realized that dream for him. Puckett described his experience as he and his fellow guides were looking for the elk, “...out of the blue, way out in the distance, we spotted him. Even though elk are large animals, he was not easy to see.” After Puckett got into position and made the 170 yard shot, he was excited to have accomplished “...something I always wanted to do. It was amazing!”

In the days following the hunt, Puckett had the animal processed and has already shared the meat from half the animal with fellow veterans. Puckett says, “It is important and the right thing to do.”

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

MnEBA offers our heartfelt thanks, support and gratitude to Staff Sgt. Puckett and to all United States military men and women for their dedication and service to our country.



Staff Sgt. Willy Puckett