

## A BUCK FOR A HERO

We all appreciate the men and women in our military for their commitment and sacrifice that enables us in this great country to enjoy the rights and freedoms that we all too often take for granted. This is a short story about one of these brave young men.

I first contacted the Veteran's Administration in Washington D.C. back in May of this year. I told them I wanted to personally thank a deserving veteran who came back from the Iraq war after having been rendered permanently disabled. My intention was to seek out a soldier with a serious disability who liked to hunt, and offer him a trip to Wisconsin to enjoy a whitetail hunt on our hunting ranch. While this sounded simple it was not. It is easy to understand why these brave young men and women's privacy is so well protected. It took over a month and numerous calls just to get a name and phone number.

I finally made contact with Sgt. Mike Meinen (retired) in Security, Colorado. When I reached him by phone he at first was quite skeptical about what I was offering him. He kept asking why I was doing this. I simply told him that what he and all the rest of our military people do for us every day, allows all of us here at home to do the things we do and live the lives we live in a free country and I as one American very much appreciated his service. I was just saying thank you. His next question was "Why me?" I told him he was picked by the Veteran's Administration and as far as I was concerned he represented all of those who have served, fought, were wounded, and have died in defense of our freedoms. I finally was able to convince Mike to accept our offer.

In September Mike was offered a job with the Veteran's Administration in Washington D.C. He felt obligated to take the position to support his wife and two young daughters at home in Colorado. We sent Mike an airline ticket to arrive in Minneapolis on October 20<sup>th</sup> and we also sent his wife a ticket to fly in from Colorado to be with Mike for a few days. When I first met this young couple in the airport I knew right away we did the right thing.

Over the next few days while we were sitting in hunting blinds on the ranch we talked a lot about Iraq and the war. Mike very much believes in our mission and the justification for being there. He frequently mentioned the Iraqi children and a tear formed in his eyes at times when he talked about them. It was clear that he was troubled when he recalled their faces.

In August of 2003 as part of a three vehicle convoy to secure a stretch of road near Fallujah they came under attack from a large number of insurgents. Mike recalls the day as the most intense fire fight he had experienced thus far. There were six soldiers in each of the three armored personnel carriers. Mike knew they were seriously outnumbered but he still felt that they had the advantage. Suddenly amidst all the explosions and firing Mike said he felt a strange tugging at his right leg. He continued firing at the enemy until someone grabbed him and told him to lie down because he had been seriously wounded. He first noticed two of his buddies lying on the floor of the armored personnel carrier. He quickly realized that both men had lost a leg and were in serious trouble and then became aware that he too had lost his right leg at the knee.

Three men, three amputations all in the same vehicle at the same time and they were still under heavy fire. A rocket propelled penetrating device had slammed into the rear of the APC with a five foot long titanium rod striking Mike and his buddies and passing through the APC lodging in the engine block. With assistance the APC was able

to retreat and stayed running without oil for over an hour while the wounded soldiers were rushed to aid. Miraculously all three survived. Mike has a prosthetic leg now and is learning to get along quite well. At 26 years old this is a young man who has left a big impression on all of us.

Now about the hunt.

We passed on a few nice bucks the first couple days and then things kind of went from not too good to worse as far as seeing the kind of deer I wanted to find for Mike. On Sunday morning the last full day of the hunt we left the blind about 10 a.m. and traveled by atv to the bottom of a brushy draw where I knew some nice bucks were likely to be bedded. One nice buck busted out but another stayed put. I could see the left antler in the brush and it was huge. The problem was the right side had only a long main beam with no points coming off of it. Mike glassed the huge deer and I could tell he was excited. I told him he could take the deer if he liked it. The shot was perfect. The deer went 30 yards and dropped. When we approached it we found it was even bigger than we thought. Seven perfect heavy tines on the left side but the right beam with no points showed a large area where something had broken off at the base. We knew that a large portion of antler was missing from this massive whitetail. The buck had a dressed weight of 240 lbs and the left antler grossed an amazing 98 5/8”.

Mike had to return to Washington on Monday and he left his deer with us where we will mount the trophy and have the meat processed and return both to him when completed. My nephew Jon and I returned to the ranch to search for the part of Mike’s rack that had broken off. After 3 days of searching we found the missing antler. It was a second main beam sporting 5 typical points and 3 drop tines. It wrapped around the outside of the unusual main beam and when put in place the entire rack scored over 230”. I couldn’t think of a better person to take this tremendous whitetail. An additional “Thank you” to the Rock Creek Disabled Hunters Association for their contribution towards the incidental expenses of this hunt.

All of us here at Buck Hollow appreciate our men and women in uniform who serve our country.

Bill Vyvyan  
Buck Hollow Ranch



The rack with the missing piece in place.



Bill and Mike October 23, 2005