

https://www.wallowa.com/sports/veterans-honored-with-successful-elk-hunt/article_c47248dc-fc56-11ea-a4df-4bffa4f6e7a8.html

FEATURED

Veterans honored with successful elk hunt

By Bill Bradshaw Wallowa County Chieftain

Sep 23, 2020



Grant Coffey, of Portland, wears remembrances of his son, U.S. Marine Corps Cpl. Keaton Coffey, a K-9 handler, who was killed in Afghanistan in May 2012. The elder Coffey was on hand over the weekend for a Memorial Hunt put on by Divi Camp.

Staff photo by Bill Bradshaw

WALLOWA COUNTY — Once again, Wallowa County's Divide Camp helped a disabled veteran heal — and honored others — this time by helping Anthony Taylor bring down a trophy bull elk on a ranch south of Enterprise.

“This is my first elk. It's amazing,” Taylor said. “There's nothing better I could say about it.”

The 6-by-6-point bull was expected to dress out to about 300 pounds of meat, said Andy Marcum, of Enterprise. Marcum is on the Divide Camp board, serves as its vice president and is the main elk hunting guide. He and Gold Star Dad Jeff Keller joined Taylor on the hunt.

It was with Marcum's .308 that Taylor brought down the massive bull.

“He was a big, old, mature bull,” Marcum said.

But it wasn't shooting fish in a barrel. It took patience. Marcum had been scouting the herd of about 80 animals for a couple of weeks in anticipation of the hunt.

“I think Andy had the most patience because he watched them for a couple weeks and had to not take them when he could've several times,” Taylor said.

The hunt started in earnest the afternoon of Thursday, Sept. 17, on the Rock N J Ranch south of Enterprise below Alder Slope.

“They love helping disabled vets,” Marcum said. “We have a lot of landowners in the county who allow us access to their land and without them, we honestly wouldn't be able to do this.”

“For the next few hours, we tried to get close enough but there really wasn't enough presentation for a good shot,” Taylor said. “The next morning, we came in and were in the timberline for a while just watching them. Then the wind shifted and started going their direction so we moved out so it wouldn't stir them up. We came back in the afternoon and we started working the same spot. The winds were kind of swirling around a bit. Right before 6 p.m., we crawled to try to get closer to them.”

Soon the targeted bull presented himself for the shot at about 230 yards.

“I took one high-shoulder shot and it dropped him in the front,” Taylor said. “Then, I followed up with shots until he stopped. It was a total of five rounds before he was done, all of them right in the same general area.”

On Saturday, after they dropped off the meat at Dollar Stretcher to hang, they took the head to Marcum’s house where he began work to do a European mount — he skinned it, would boil it, pressure wash it and finally, soak it in peroxide to whiten the skull.

Taylor said he planned to mount it in his high-ceilinged shop, since his house’s ceilings aren’t high enough.

But Taylor, Keller and Marcum weren’t the only ones involved in the hunt. In addition to volunteers, Grant Coffey, of Portland, was along. The “Memorial Hunt” was in honor of both Keller’s son, Andrew Keller, who was killed in action in Afghanistan in August 2012 and of Coffey’s son, Keaton, who was KIA in May 2012.

“It was his last mission of his last night of a two-year tour,” Coffey said of his son. “He was due to be married in five weeks. He was training a new team and handling some Afghan commandos on a rooftop and a sniper shot him from about 300 yards and he was killed instantly. It was a Russian sniper rifle.”

A firefighter in Portland for 40 years, he retired when his son was killed. Neither a veteran — he just missed being drafted during the Vietnam era — nor a hunter, Coffey is still heavily involved in supporting veterans. He is now a director of a foundation that honors police, fire and the military.

“Part of our work is with agencies like Divide Camp,” Coffey said. “We put out \$10,000 in scholarships every year for guys to do fishing and hunting. It’s one of the things that keeps me sane.”

He emphasized that losing a son is not something a parent gets over. Marine Cpl. Keaton Coffey was a military policeman and dog handler.

“Since he was killed, I’ve been very close to all his buddies,” Coffey said. “We just got back from Baltimore where they had a big reunion — 50 dog handlers — and we honored them. We do stuff like this and do things in his memory, the Coffey Memorial Hunt. It honors the vets and it also honors my son so it makes me happy.”

Knowing Taylor and his son had served together added to Coffey’s eagerness to take part in the Divide Camp hunt.

“I wanted Anthony, who’s from Pennsylvania, to see all the mountains,” he said. “It’s beautiful. Well, today, not as much (alluding to the smoke-filled skies), but it’s way better than Portland.”

And Taylor was thrilled with the experience.

“Everything about this program is incredible,” Taylor said. “I haven’t had that much of an adrenaline rush and happiness mixed together in a long time.”

Marcum — also a former Marine dog handler — said the experience fulfills one of his goals.

“Going into nature one veteran at a time is kind of our motto,” he said. “It’s amazing for people in the cities. People around here, we’re kind of used to (hunting), but a lot of the guys we bring out live in the city. It’s amazing what just being out in the woods and in nature will do for somebody. You’re sharing God’s creation with them and it’s powerful stuff.”

Bill Bradshaw

reporter