

30th Annual VFW-Sponsored Antelope Hunt

Apr 30, 2013

‘Wanted Them Alive’

Mike Chamberlain didn’t have to wait long to bring down his pronghorn antelope. Before lunch on the first day of Montana’s antelope season last October, Chamberlain, of Post 9536 in Mercer, Wis., had already bagged his limit.

“I was done with my hunt by 10 a.m.,” said the 67-year-old Vietnam War veteran. “The antelope’s horns measured 14 inches, and I think it was the smallest of the group.”

It was all a small token of appreciation from VFW for Chamberlain’s service in the Vietnam War. As a 23-year-old lieutenant with B Co., 2nd Bn., 5th Cav, 1st Cav Div., he was wounded on Jan. 14, 1968, while leading a platoon near An Khe in the Central Highlands.

Chamberlain says his company commander ordered him to find and eliminate two snipers who had been harassing the Americans.

“I remember thinking, ‘No problem,’ ” he said. “The snipers had run into a cave, and we were just going to blow it up. But a colonel overhead in a helicopter said he wanted them alive.”

Chamberlain says the snipers were offered the chance to come out peacefully but had no intention of surrendering.

“We had 30-40 guys surrounding the cave’s opening,” he remembers. “The snipers had to know that if they didn’t give up, they would be dead. But they came running out, throwing grenades and firing wildly. I was told later that both had their heads blown off.”

In the melee, Chamberlain took an AK-47 round in the chest and grenade shrapnel in his legs and back. His military training, he says, helped him endure his recovery process at Great Lakes Naval Hospital in Illinois.

He would go on to earn a degree in business administration from the University of Wisconsin and get married in 1975. Chamberlain says he appreciates recognition offered to

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vets of the Vietnam War, including the annual antelope hunting trip.

“I’d like to thank VFW and the Greenwoods for their generosity,” he said. “These are very nice people. They go out of their way to show their appreciation.”

‘Shot it Afghan-style’

Unlike Chamberlain, Don Davis, of Olympia, Wash., didn’t collect his antelope until the second day of hunting. But Davis, an Iraq War vet, says it was worth the wait.

“I shot it Afghan-style,” said the life member of VFW’s Department of Washington. “I was hiding up on top of a hill behind some rocks. My shot was estimated at 168 yards, right through the shoulder.”

Davis, 48, retired from the Navy in 2008 after 23 years of service. During his second tour in Iraq, on Dec. 19, 2006, the Navy corpsman was in the war-torn city of Ramadi with C Co., 1st Bn., 6th Marines. He was helping to establish an observation post in a downtown building as part of a battalion-sized operation.

“I remember we all commented on how nice the floor looked,” Davis said. “Of course, we didn’t know then that the enemy had just finished placing four to six 155mm shells underneath it.”

Down the street, insurgents waited until a good number of Marines were inside the building and then detonated the bombs.

“An Iraqi policeman standing next to me was killed instantly,” Davis recalled. “One Marine lost his vision and 10-15 were wounded. The insurgents then hit us with mortars, small-arms fire and RPGs.”

Davis would eventually be diagnosed with cervical/spinal wounds and traumatic brain injury, but at the time, he was more concerned with the situation at hand.

“I sucked it up and kept fighting,” he said. “We fought all day and moved to another building. The battle lasted five days altogether.”

Today, Davis, the father of two teenage children, is still recovering, or “putting Humpty Dumpty back together,” as he phrased it.

“Montana was an awesome experience,” he said. “The thrill of the hunt, the beauty of the

land and the Greenwoods' hospitality were highlights. The food was outstanding and the guide service really educated me on the habits of antelope. I thank VFW for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Motorcycle Man

Pat Skelly of Ontario, N.Y., says his experience in Montana also was memorable.

"The Greenwoods have a wonderful place, the scenery alone would make me want to go back," said the member of VFW Post 2883 in Newark, N.Y. "And the food was great. We had an elk roast to die for, and the antelope was excellent."

Skelly took down his own antelope, with horns measuring 14 inches, on the second day of the hunt. He says in his free time, he spoke at length with Davis about hunting and reminisced with Chamberlain about their time with the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam.

Skelly, who served with A Co., 1st Bn., 8th Cav, 1st Cav Div., arrived in Vietnam in February 1969. On April 2 of that year, Pfc. Skelly was patrolling with his unit in Tay Ninh province along the Cambodian border.

"My squad was ordered to take point," said the 65-year-old double amputee. "I was the second man in the formation and got hit with an RPG."

After coming home and recuperating at the old military hospital in Valley Forge, Pa., and the VA hospital in Syracuse, N.Y., Skelly became interested in motorcycles. He invested in a motorcycle-building business in 1970, which lasted until 1975.

These days, Skelly works as the Wayne County service officer for New York's Department of Veterans Affairs in Lyons. He rides a three-wheeled Harley-Davidson Fat Boy that he has converted to be operated with hand controls.

He participates in rides with other VFW bikers, as well as those for the Blue Star Mothers and the Patriot Guard.

Skelly, who has been married to his wife, Janice, for 32 years, has a son, John, who is currently serving in Afghanistan with the 173rd Airborne Brigade.

"I really appreciate what VFW did for us in Montana," he said. "It's obvious the whole crew out there is dedicated to veterans."