

# WESTERN Hunter

GEAR • TACTICS • INFORMATION • ADVENTURE



Volume 9 • Issue 2  
\$5.95



U.S. Marine Gunny Blaine Scott

# Purple Heart Bear

— By Ron Raboud —

**A**s we know, most things have both a beginning and an end. Our recent spring bear hunt in southern British Columbia, however, had several beginnings and, hopefully, no end.

Thanks to my late father, I have been an avid outdoorsman my entire life. I can clearly remember as a kid in the late 1960s being fascinated not only by the stories from my dad's fall hunting trips, but also his exciting stories from World War II, a war in which he proudly served the U.S. Army in the European Theatre.

It was during this campaign that he was severely wounded in France, spending more than a year in a hospital. His military service resulted in two purple hearts, the bronze star, and numerous other medals. These decorations and wounds were a constant reminder and source of pride for him, right up until his passing last November.

As a kid playing "army" with my friends, or today as a middle-aged father of two boys, the military has always been a fraternity that has commanded my utmost respect. It is, however, a fraternity in which I will never belong, but always envy.

Unlike World War II, often described as the last "glamorous" war, today's conflicts seem to be more of a media event. At times, given today's high-tech abilities, they even appear more like video games. As a result of this perception, we are not truly aware of the

personal sacrifices our military men and women make for us on a daily basis; sacrifices made to protect our safety as well as our freedom.

My early exposure to the military through my father and his medals, as well as his stories, unknowingly planted the seed for this spring bear hunt. It was a seed that took over 40 years to germinate. I have been hunting the game-rich area of south-central British Columbia for more than 20 years. I never lose my desire to make several trips to the area every year. My trips always include a high county mule deer hunt as well as a spring bear hunt during the first week of May.

Every year I book with Dave Wabnegger, owner of Otter Lake Guide Outfitters in Princeton, British Columbia. Over the years, Dave has proven to be a top-notch outfitter and, along with his entire family, has become one of my closest friends. Our typical spring group includes me and five friends and business clients. About eight years ago, Dave and I began donating one spot in our annual hunt to a "special" hunter. Up until recently, that special hunter had always been a youth with either a life-altering or terminal illness. Our past experiences, although at times emotional and gut-wrenching, have all been very rewarding, not only for the hunter, but for all of us as well.

About three years ago the composition of our annual trip changed, or more accurately, expanded. While returning from a business meeting in Houston to my home in Orlando, FL, things changed forever. With the exception of me and two associates, our entire flight was occupied by wounded veterans and their families traveling from Brooke Army Medical Center to Walt Disney World. To say I was surprised by what I witnessed would be a gross understatement. I was looking at a plane full of veterans with horrific life-altering injuries, including severe burns, head injuries, blindness, and traumatic amputations. These guys were just kids; kids young enough to be one of my own boys, and their lives and those of their families had been forever changed.

The trip home was a revelation. I was mostly disappointed in myself for not recognizing the level of personal sacrifices our young men and women are making for me. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not video games or media conflicts. They're up close and personal with personal and tragic results. The average American has no idea the level of sacrifice these kids are making on our behalf. I knew I had to do something, no matter how small, to show my appreciation to these wounded warriors.

When I got back home I called Dave to get his thoughts about including a wounded vet on our annual bear hunt. As expected, he was all for it. Now all we had to do was find our first hunter. Through life-member services with SCI, I was put in contact with past SCI president Warren Parker. Warren works closely with the

Wounded Warrior program and quickly pointed my efforts in the right direction. I was put in contact with Glenn Chrisman of SCI's San Francisco Bay Area Chapter. Glenn and I discussed the hunt, dates, and requirements of the pending trip. Following our conversation, Glenn and his chapter assumed complete responsibility for finding our hunter. They also arranged to outfit the hunter, provide transportation to British Columbia as well as complimentary taxidermy should the hunt prove successful. This was just another example of the compassion and generosity that exists within our great hunting community.

One of the main attractions of spring bear hunting in British Columbia is also a limiting factor. British Columbia does not allow the hunting of any bears using bait—no exceptions. The allowed methods are either spot and stalk or the use of hounds. Most hunts involve a bit of both; therefore, a certain level of mobility is required from all hunters.

After a long selection process, Glenn selected a U.S. Marine based in Camp Pendleton, CA. Gunny Blaine Scott was injured Aug. 26, 2006 when his light-armored vehicle (LAV) was blown up by an IED. He suffered severe burns and a shattered ankle. In addition to Blaine's injuries, two other Marines in the LAV were killed and yet another was severely injured. The 18 months following the explosion were spent at Brooke undergoing numerous reconstructive surgeries and rehab. But in typical Marine fashion, he said the injuries would not affect his hunt.



In true Marine fashion, Blaine (front) helped out all week, even after taking his first bear.

### Spring in British Columbia

British Columbia was experiencing a late spring with limited snowfall, resulting in tougher-than-normal hunting conditions. Bears were leaving their dens later than usual and were finding little to eat. It appeared it would be a slow, rather than historically busy, week of hunting. At least that is what we expected.

After an exhausting 24-hour drive to camp, Blaine arrived the afternoon prior to our start date. Rather than sitting around the ranch, we had a few hours of light and went looking for bears. Although our first evening was slow, we did see two bears, neither of which was a shooter. With hunting being hunting, we always encourage our special hunter to harvest the first mature boar that we see. The rest of the week they can tag along with the other hunters in camp as they pursue their trophies.

Blaine punched his tag the first morning on the first bear of the year. Early in the morning we crossed a fresh track and the dogs quickly treed the bear. After getting to the tree, Blaine made a good shot and had his bear. He harvested a mature, black, color phase bear in excess of six feet. It was a great start to the week.

Unknown to us, Blaine had spent his youth in Iowa coon hunting with his family's hounds. He enjoyed the hound work as much as the hunt itself. The week was young and Blaine deserted Dave and I to hunt with one of Dave's guides, a genuine Canadian bush cowboy and avid houndsman, Ed Roberson. During the next



Blaine made the most of his chance at a second bear.

five days, Blaine was involved in numerous dog races and stalks resulting in the harvest of four additional bears—so much for a slow week. Never once did Blaine slow down, even though he was in obvious pain. There was no quit in that Marine.

Although in British Columbia each hunter is allowed to harvest two bears, we have always limited our donated hunter to one. They get the first bear of the week and then efforts shift to getting the other clients their bears. This year, again, was not a typical year. Blaine was in on every race, every harvest, and helped with every skinning job. He displayed a tremendous attitude, infectious personality, and tremendous work ethic. As a result, Dave's sister, Debbie Wabnegger, and brother-in-law, Jordie Cook, sponsored a second bear tag for Blaine.

On the last day there were still some tags to fill. Up until that point, the week had been exceptional. Five hunters took six bears with one of record-book quality. Our last day started extremely slow with no one seeing bears. But at five o'clock in the evening it was as if someone flipped a switch. Our group saw 11 bears in the last three hours of daylight. Georgia hunter Steve Stewart harvested a record-book black in the last five minutes of daylight.

Thirty miles away, Blaine and Ed were also covered with bears. They were looking for something special and they found it. While hunting in an area that had tremendous bear signs all week, they found a monster. It was a huge, chocolate phase bear over seven feet in size and a sure thing for the record book. After a great stalk, Blaine made a one-shot kill, dropping the big bear in his tracks.

Due to limited daylight and not wanting to miss the last night's dinner, the race was on to skin and butcher Blaine's bear. They decided to rough skin the bear and complete their job the next morning in better daylight. After a quick skinning job and filling his pack with the hide, skull, and meat, Ed made his biggest mistake of the week. He asked Blaine for some help lifting his heavy pack up to his back. Blaine's response to Ed was quick and to the point, that he must obviously be a cowboy because no Marine would ever ask for help. After some serious cussing by Ed, two things were very clear. Blaine was no longer a wounded vet, but rather just one of the guys subject to the same treatment as the rest of us. And secondly, Ed was on his way to becoming a Marine. He got his job done on his own and will never ask for help again, in true Marine fashion.

What a great end to a great week—five hunters, eight bears, five blacks, three chocolate with three going into the record book. The only thing that would have made the week better was my dad sitting there in his WWII veteran's hat telling Blaine and Ed that if they were really tough they wouldn't be a Marine or a cowboy, they would be in the Army. Fraternity members can get away with that, the rest of us can't. Thanks Dad and Blaine for a great week and for your sacrifices to keep us safe. 🍄

#### Editor's Note:

For more information on Wounded Warrior Outdoors, Inc., please see page 30.



Wounded Warrior Outdoors, Inc. (WWO) is a non-profit corporation formed to provide outdoor hunting and fishing opportunities to United States and Canadian combat-wounded military veterans. They exist totally on corporate sponsorships and personal donations.

Their infrastructure is in place to provide outdoor trips for up to 50 veterans per year, as funding allows. The trips take place at four diverse locations, which include Alaska, British Columbia, Texas, and Florida. Each host facility is of the highest quality available, with each outfitter providing deeply discounted, and yet, first-class adventures. WWO provides its qualified veterans with all aspects of their adventures, from airfare to taxidermy. The selected trips and outfitters can accommodate a minimum of six guests at a time, assuring cost efficiency. The type and locations of the trips were selected to provide a first-class experience for all guests, while providing accessibility for veterans with various types of injuries and limitations of mobility. WWO is working with all branches of the military to select and place qualified individuals on the trips. They are also highly selective in choosing their corporate and conservation-minded sponsors. They want only those that share the goal of WWO—recognizing and rewarding our wounded veterans.

A successful trip will begin with a wounded veteran sharing the adventure as a fellow outdoorsman, and then leaving as a friend. He will be aware that his fellow citizens recognize the unselfish, personal sacrifices that he has made, and know we appreciate all he has done to preserve our freedoms and safety. Through generous support and donations, WWO strives to ease some of veterans' struggles for at least one week of their

lives. They recognize that we all owe a huge debt to our wounded veterans, and they're doing something to show it. For more information, log on to [www.woundedwarrioroutdoors.com](http://www.woundedwarrioroutdoors.com).

