

BLIND DATE
BRUIN

30 MILL DOLLAR
LOWER 48 FLY IN BEAR
HUNT

ROLLED
BEAR LOIN

NEW COLUMNIST!
MEET JANA
WALLER

THE LEGACY OF JEREMY
'MINNOW' FISCHER

Bear Hunting

The bear hunt. ity for 23 years

Jan/Feb 2023



OZARK MOUNTAIN HIGH
JOHN O'DELL'S 520 LB BOONER!



PURPLE HEART BEAR CAMP

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by Ryan Off the Grid

@ryanoffthegrid

Valor & Bruins

In 2017, I booked a Wisconsin Black Bear Hunt with Randy Sersch of Clam Lake Guide and Taxidermy. With the aid of trailing hounds, we were able to take the third black bear of my lifetime. Randy and I became good friends and remained in contact.

My life path took me towards a career in the hunting industry and eventually in nonprofit work: taking veterans on outdoor adventures across the country. Randy piqued interest in teaming up for an event on his home turf in Northwest Wisconsin. For the last three years, we have been able to put a total of five Purple Heart Veterans on bear hunts.

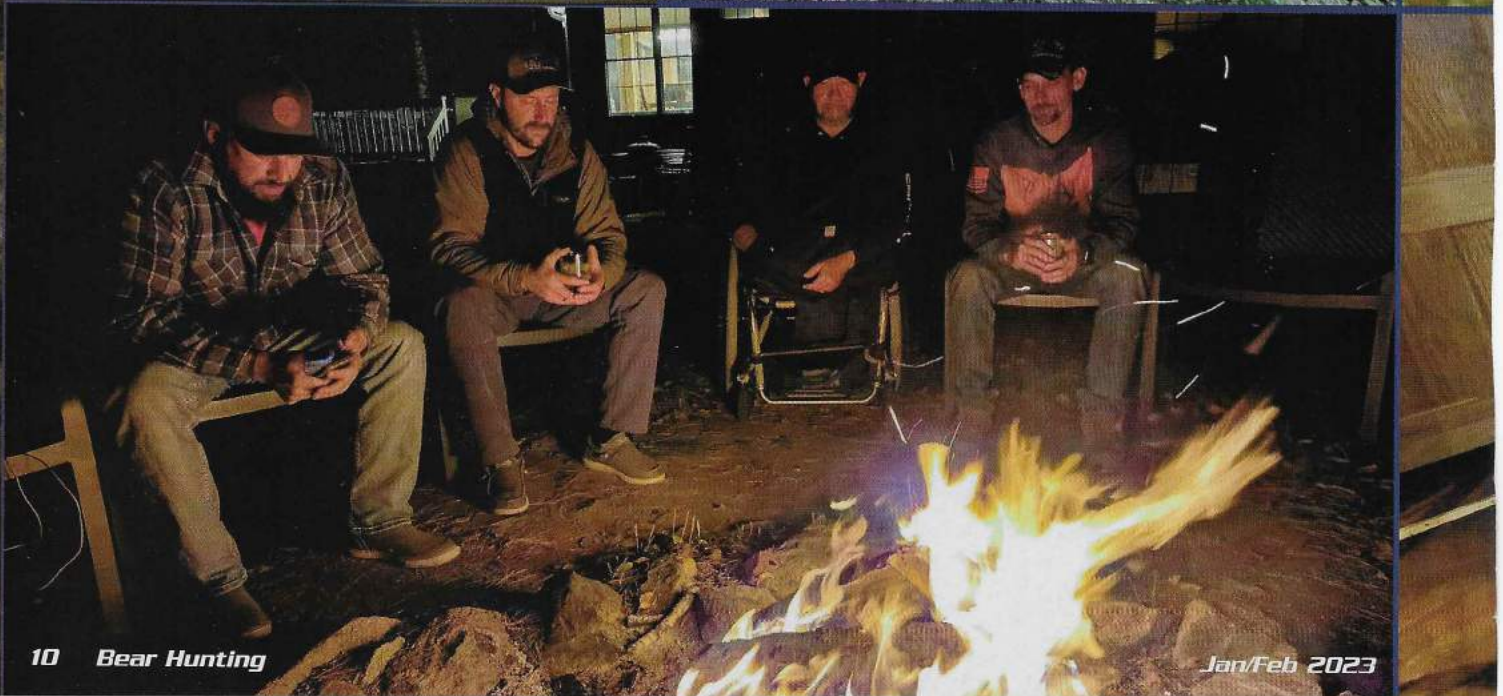
This year's hunt had a different flavor from the beginning. As the camp roster came together, it seemed the story began to write itself.

Prior to the deadline for submitting the applications for the 2022 season, I was contacted by Jake Greetan, a friend of my wife. Jake's father, Dean, was a die hard, lifelong houndsman and bear hunter. Jake saved his preference points for years in the hopes of drawing his own bear tag and hunting with his father. Tragically, his father passed in 2019 before he had been awarded a tag. The devastated son could not bring himself to hunt this tag without his father, but wanted to honor his memory and donate his tag to a veteran for our event. Jake honored my one condition that he attend the hunt too.

Six years ago, I met Vicki Mackey at a veterans' nonprofit event in Pennsylvania. She told me about her husband Ray, a Marine Corps Sergeant Major and a double above-the-knee amputee. Vicki indicated that Ray was interested in hunting



The author's 2017 bear with Clam Lake Guide & Taxidermy.





The author's wife and kids were able to join in for the camp.



Bonds were strengthened day and night, and especially each time they broke bread and shared a table.

black bears. I did not know when, but at some point I knew I would get him on a bear hunt. This year was that year.

The second hunter came through the application process after I posted the available spot on my public social media accounts: Casey Callahan, US Army, a recipient of the Purple Heart from actions in Iraq in 2008. Casey inquired if he could bring his father, Dave Callahan (Purple Heart, US Army, Vietnam), as a guest. The lodge donated by Pine Point Resort had plenty of space, and the more veterans you can get together on these hunts the better the experience.

The last week of September, I picked up Ray from the Green Bay airport and began our four-hour trek to Clam Lake. I was amazed by the gymnastic prowess of this man vaulting himself into the truck, a simple daily task for most of us. We cross referenced names of Marines we both knew in my short stint in the Corps and his 30+ years as we made our way to camp to meet Randy, Jake, Casey, and his father.

The arrival of all parties brought introductions (short bios of where you were in-service) and we discussed the anticipation of the hunt. Over the next several days, the campfire-side chats amplified the nostalgic stories that naturally flowed. Each story shared was compounded by the next person to contribute. The first evening hunt looked promising based on the success rate of Randy's previous clients this season and the appearance of several daylight bears on camera the day prior. The blue jay and red squirrel quarrels are all we had that evening for visitors to cohabitate our baits; the brisk yet enjoyable Wisconsin fall temps to fall back on as our prize. The subsequent days paralleled our first night's experience as the baits ran cold for our camp and most outfits around us. Such is hunting; it did not ruin our spirits. The weekend brought the arrival of my wife and two of our children to camp. It was heartwarming watching Ray and Dave gravitate to them and be grandfather figures—neither child has a grandfather left to take that role. Dave took them fishing almost sunup to sundown. I don't think he left the dock much but to come up and sarcastically call Ray "Son" and hear Ray respond back with "Pops". Having my family there to experience firsthand a veterans' hunting camp was priceless and they soon understood why myself and others do this.

Bonds were strengthened day and night, and especially each time we broke bread and shared a table. This rang true between veterans, but also cameramen, tag donors, guides, and family member attendees. The stories

of brotherhood, injury, and loss were shared. The details will stay in the confines of the vulnerability they were shared amongst; they are sealed in a trust that was built around this hunt and the fires at night. War experiences transcend generations; the warrior ethos and code were built with sticks and stones up to modernity. The technology changes, but the warrior never does. We are at a point where social media and the "industry" has defined a successful hunt only in terms of a punched tag. This year's hunt could not have been more of an antithesis of that mantra. Taking an animal is definitely the ultimate goal of hunting; to provide sustenance for one's self and/or family was vital in our origins. Our contemporary situation allows for many sources of food, therefore the other reasons for partaking in modern hunting are rooted in preserving traditions, conservation, and the camaraderie of the hunting party.

This hunt—from the standpoint of harvesting an animal—did not pan out, but it was not fruitless. I have shared many camps targeting many different species with many different groups of people, but this camp was special. You just felt it. It was organic and natural, and I'll never forget it. We honored our brotherhood and we honored a man and his son who had the same bond to the outdoors. I hope I made him proud in this article, Jake. The outdoors gifted me with a new lease on life. Helping others experience healing and bonding in the wild continues to recharge my soul. Giving back leaves everyone's cup full. 🐾

If you would like to donate a Wisconsin bear tag or a monetary donation to help us put more veterans on outdoor events, please email me at ryanoffthegrid@gmail.com. Ryan is a board member of High Point Adventures, a 501(c)3 compliant nonprofit organization.



US Army Purple Heart recipient Justin Burdett with his 2021 bear taken on a previous Purple Heart hunt with the author.



"Let it be known that he who wears the Military Order of the Purple Heart has given of his blood in the defence of his homeland and shall forever be revered by his fellow countrymen."

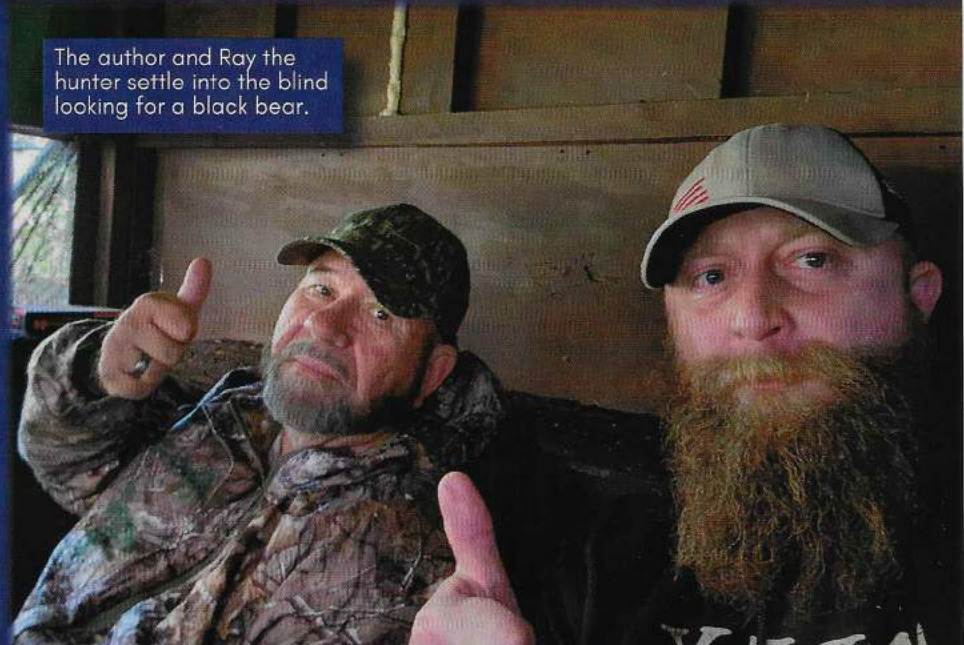
-General George Washington-



The Purple Heart is one of the most recognizable awards in the US Armed Forces. The citation on the medal reads, "For military merit and for wounds received in action."

The Purple Heart began as the Badge of Military Merit, established by George Washington in 1782. Washington presented the Badge of Military Merit which consisted of a cloth purple heart to be worn over the left breast as an awards system of valor defined as heroic actions in combat.

In 1932 US Army Chief of Staff, Douglas MacArthur, renamed it the Purple Heart and added the criterion to include a wound which requires treatment by a medical officer in action against an enemy of the United States.



The author and Ray the hunter settle into the blind looking for a black bear.



The beauty and serenity provided a stillness that was good for the soul.