



## **MIKE HELGET GETS FORT RILEY ELK**

By: 1SG (retired) David McNeal

I sat across the table at Bob's Diner and felt immediately at ease with Mike Helget. Mike and I had been communicating frequently via the internet since meeting his dad at the Tuttle Creek Wildlife office and offering to assist Mike in locating some elk.

Mike grew up in a large family (seven brothers and sisters) of hunters and fishermen; an avid deer hunter he had always wanted to go after an elk; so when he was lucky enough to be drawn in Fort Riley's once in a lifetime lottery he was ecstatic. Shortly after his dad gave him my card we began communicating and I sent him some coordinates of places I had seen large numbers of elk or their signs.

Mike gave it everything he had. He would be out before daylight come in, go to work, and head for the field at the end of his day, sit until dark then home. The next day he would start all over again.

He walked for miles; once he got turned around and lost. Not familiar with Fort Riley and not wanting to get into a closed area (a very dangerous thing to do) he called the Post Game Warden (Mark Cox) and Mark sent a couple of Conservation Officers to find him. For a while it was touch and go with area after area looking darn promising but producing no elks. Plenty of signs everywhere but no elk and Mike became increasingly anxious that his one chance might come and go without him even getting the opportunity of making a harvest.

He fondly remembers that everyone at the Posts' Conservation Office was pulling for him and would check regularly to see how he was doing. "It was very encouraging and uplifting to know that they wanted me to be successful; they are a great bunch of folks up there."

Finally three days before the close of the season he took a chance and move to an area that had shown some great signs and no I won't tell you what area. Enough to say that he arrived there after work got set up under a large conifer and patiently waited. The field was just a little over the length of a football field wide and there he sat and sat (holding his Savage 30.06) and waited for what seem like forever. The sun got lower and Mike knew that in a little over an hour he would have to call it another day.

Anyone who as ever hunted big game or spring turkeys will tell you that you will sit and stare at an area for a long time and then blink your eyes and your game is standing in front of you as if like some ghostly apparition they just materialize without so much as a sound and that is exactly what happen to Mike one moment nothing and the next a big magnificent cow elk right in front of him. His heart caught in his throat; he caught his breath, blinked a couple times to make sure it wasn't a mirage and then as reality set in he began to assess the situation.

He could see that the large cow was not alone and that there were several others standing just off the field in the tree line. He gauged the range at a little over a hundred yards and took careful aim before squeezing the trigger. His mind went numb from that point and everything seem to move in a sort of slow motion. He could see the impact of the round and the big cow drop immediately to the earth. She never moved; a quick and clean shot. His heart racing, and short of breath, he was sure his blood pressure was up and he felt a little light headed. It was all too surreal.

For several minutes he couldn't move so he just watched and to his amazement the other elks had not moved. They too just stood inside the trees and surveyed the scene. Finally he knew he had to get up and walk to the fallen animal. As he made his way across the field the other elks just stood and watched him approach and he began to wonder what he would do if they came after him but he didn't have to worry; at about forty yards they took flight.

Animated as a kid on his first Christmas, everything (after the reality of what he had accomplished set in) remains kind of a blur. He remembers calling the Game Warden and Mark sending Specialists Gilley (a biologist) and Sinex (himself an avid hunter) out to help transport the animal to a place it could be loaded and finish the required paperwork. Mike couldn't say enough about how helpful these two young men were or how much he appreciated their assistance.

Later the meat locker would tell him that the animal had a live weight of at least five hundred pounds, three hundred twenty-five pounds hanging and that he could expect about a hundred and seventy-five pounds of meat. All Mike could say was "WOW".

**Post Script:** As mentioned Mike's entire family are outdoors people and one of the things which meant a lot to him was that on the eve of his success both his mother and father made the trip to join him in the field and help him load (no small task) the huge animal. His entire family shared in his excitement and in Mike's words, "My phone bill is going to be double this month but well worth it." Why not? Mike after all accomplished something that very few will accomplish in their lifetime. Very few!