



Posted on Sat, Nov. 15, 2008

Vietnam War veteran is hunting for peace of mind

By BRENT FRAZEE
The Kansas City Star

Jim Lenard got a big dose of his favorite type of therapy on Saturday morning.

Lenard, who lives in the Philadelphia area, was ravaged by the terror of the Vietnam War. As a member of the airborne infantry, he was often one of the first ones to go behind enemy lines. And he witnessed things he says he will never get over.

But all of that seemed far away when he climbed into a tree stand in Cass County on opening day of the Missouri firearms season.

He was getting his first real look at the Show-Me State from his favorite vantage point. And he liked what he saw.

“Really, about the only joy I get in life is in the deer woods,” said Lenard, 59. “I can’t be out in crowds.

“About the only peace I get is when I’m out in a place like this. Just waiting for a big buck to walk out, that’s what gets my adrenaline going.”

Lenard came back from 13 months of active duty in Vietnam in 1969 and 1970 a broken man. Not only does he have hepatitis C, he suffers from post traumatic stress disorder.

But he eventually discovered the healing power of deer hunting. He accompanied friends on a trip to the Pocono Mountains and got hooked on the sport.

Eventually, he began traveling to Minnesota, Iowa and other states to hunt deer with gun and bow. And he found success, shooting three bucks big enough to mount and hang in his apartment.

But it was much more than that, he said.

The time he spent in the woods was a lifeline, helping him forget his troubles.

“In Vietnam, we would be air-lifted in by helicopter and dropped off to search for the enemy,” he said. “We were the bait.

“We would run into booby traps, all kinds of things.

“Some of that stuff isn’t easy to forget. But when I’m out in the woods hunting, I’m at peace. It’s just me and the deer.”

Today, Lenard is functional, thanks in part to his strong belief in God and the joy he gets from hunting. He operates well in society and feels in control.

He prides himself in being a safe hunter, and says he never lets his past affect his judgment in the woods.

Why deer? That’s easy, Lenard says.

“The whitetail deer is not dumb,” he said. “He’s always thinking.

“He doesn’t just walk around aimlessly. He has a plan.

“He’s a challenge to hunt. That’s why I like deer hunting so much.”

And that’s what brought Lenard to Missouri. After several bad experiences with hunting guides, he was referred to Iron Duck Guide Service in Missouri.

One of the guides for that group, Steve Liles of Peculiar, offered to put Lenard in prime deer country.

The 40 acres he owns in Cass County are loaded with deer — some of them big bucks — and he was happy to give Lenard access to that land.

“I don’t normally let anybody hunt in there,” Liles said. “It’s almost like a deer refuge.

“But this was a special occasion. I really respect what guys like Jim did for our country.

“I wanted to do everything I could to see that he would get a big buck.”

Liles guided Lenard to a tree stand overlooking a spot with a well-used deer trail, a scrape and a big rub on a sapling, and hoped for the best.

By midday Saturday, it hadn’t happened. Lenard didn’t get a chance to pull the trigger.

But that did little to dampen the enthusiasm of both hunter and guide. Lenard has three more days to hunt, and Liles is confident something good will happen during that time span.

“He is a hard-core hunter,” Liles said of Lenard. “He wants to take his lunch out there with him and just stay all day.

“He goes at it hard. With the deer we have on this land, he should be able to get something by the time he has to leave — hopefully, a big buck.”

Lenard, of course, would like that. But even if it doesn’t happen, he said, he will be satisfied.

“I already like Missouri,” Lenard said. “Back in Pennsylvania, we have a million hunters.

“It sounds like Vietnam when the hunting season opens. And the deer are small.

“That’s why I travel to other states to do my hunting.”

Lenard laughed, then added, “If I take a big buck in Missouri, I just might have to buy a house here.”

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