

# SNIPER

Barrett

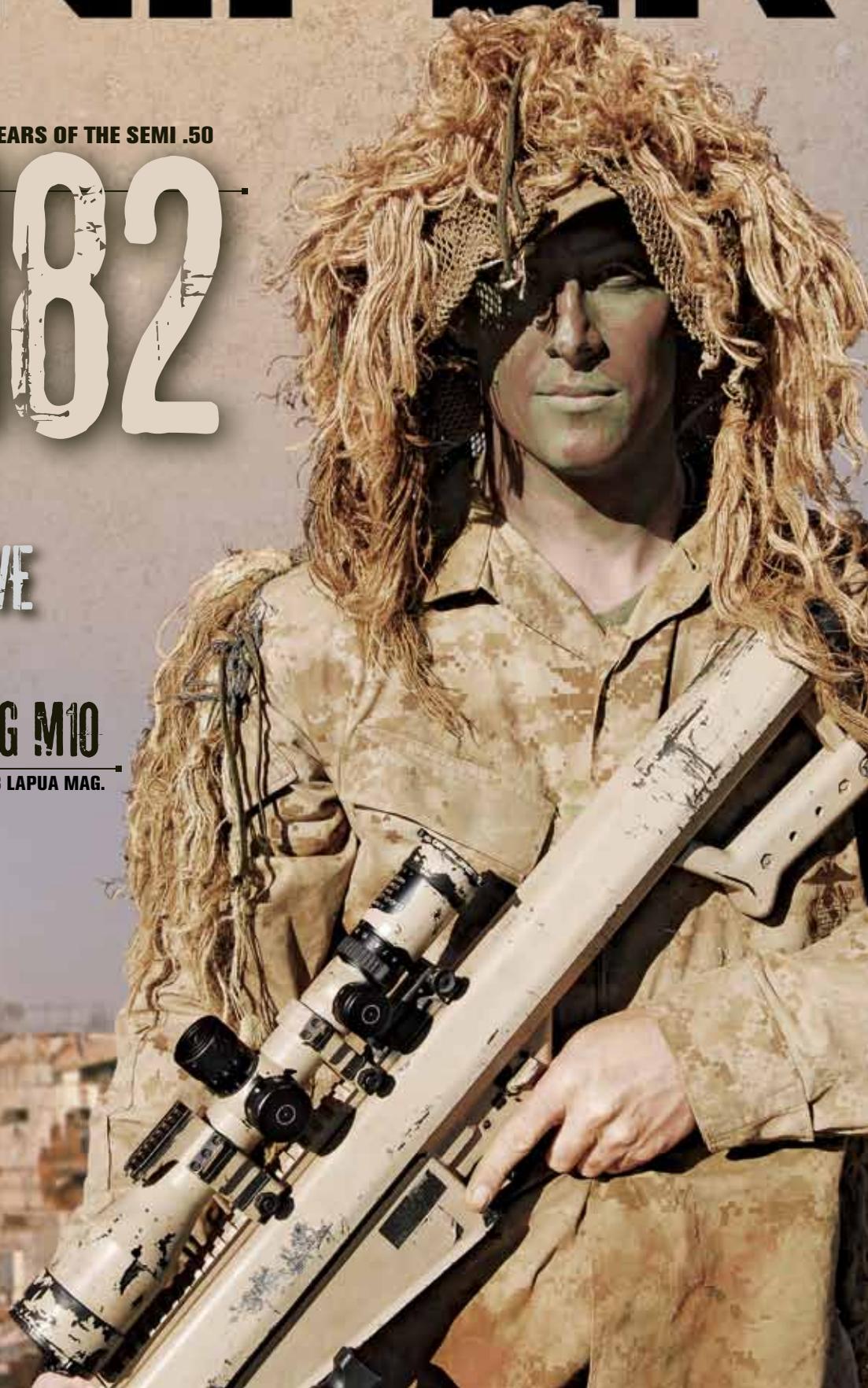
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SNIPER

2012

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WE HAVE ALL BEEN IN SITUATIONS THAT  
MAKE AN IMPACT ON OUR LIVES. I HAVE JUST  
EXPERIENCED ONE OF THOSE FOR MYSELF.

# HUNTING

# WITH HEROES

BY TODD HODNETT // PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR



I had the opportunity to invite a wounded warrior on an elk hunt this year. I chose a young sniper whom I had trained a couple of times in the past. Unfortunately, he recently lost both of his legs while serving his country overseas. I'd been in touch with his Gunny and been watching his progress. When his Gunny told me that he had a great attitude and the Gunny thought we could get it done, I asked Jonathon to go with us. He was very excited. I invited his Gunny along.

I had thought about how we could maneuver around the mountain, as it is not an easy hunt. The main supporter of the hunt had brought a Polaris that really helped in getting us around, but we could not drive it into the hunting area in the morning. We wanted to pick a spot that would allow an opportunity to take long-range shots and cover a lot of country visually. I brought my new Surgeon in .300 Norma up for this hunt and was very excited to see what kind of long-range shots we could get for Jonathon. I certainly knew he could shoot, having trained him twice in the past, so I

thought this approach would yield the best results.

The first morning of the hunt found us creeping up the side of a mountain as far as we dared to go, then when we stopped, I watched with a lump in my throat as Gunny put Jonathon on his back and packed him up the incline. It really puts things into perspective when you get the opportunity to witness moments like this. After we crested the top and dropped off the backside a little way, we set up to glass the country in front of us.

It was a stunning view, and the weather was outstanding, as if we had ordered the perfect conditions for an elk hunt. Spotting a couple of cows on the hillside in front of us, we continued to glass for a legal bull. Jonathon said he thought he saw a mountain lion on the ridge to our right at 1,300 meters away. We all turned and glassed the hillside for a minute, then turned back. I wondered if the 8,500-foot altitude was getting to him.

Before long, he saw it again and talked us onto the spot. I set up the spotting scope on that area and

was stunned to see a full-grown mountain lion stalking a mule deer doe. We all watched in amazement at what we were witnessing. The doe knew something was up and was intently watching in the direction of the big cat's approach. Soon she'd had enough and bounded down the mountain. The cat padded casually across the hillside and into the open, strolling across the terrain long enough for each of us to take our turn watching with the spotting scope. I have hunted for many years and have only seen five of these big cats. Only one other time has the encounter lasted anywhere close to the amount of time this event did. Exhilarated, we turned our focus back to elk hunting.

Not long after, we had eight cows and a young spike bull move across the same area where the cat had been. A short time later, four bulls followed the same path as the cows, then three more bulls ambled down the mountain after them. One of the bulls was a really nice 5x5, and at least two more were legal bulls, so we were excited about our chances. We decided to pack out and return



Jonathon dials in the correct magnification for his shot. The Surgeon-built .300 Norma proved to be an excellent choice for the extended ranges on this hunt.



The author engages in some unconventional wind-calling/estimating techniques. Extended hands (like a bird in flight) and prodigious facial hair seem to aid him in accurate wind estimation.

that afternoon, setting up farther down the mountain, closer to where all the activity was.

One of our hunters was able to connect with a cow that morning, and we all went back in to help get her out. Taking the photos and helping are special parts of the hunt. Sharing the joy with a friend is what it is all about. On the way back out, Jonathon and I decided to stay out and hunt all afternoon. We told the others to let Gunny and Brett know where we were, and soon they arrived to rejoin us. This time we set up farther down the ridgeline, giving us an excellent vantage point.

We built a range card and worked out holds on the Whiz Wheel. About 3:15 that afternoon, Jonathon noticed a bull at one of our points of interest. The bull was just below the opposite crest where Aspen trees were falling off the backside. The front side of the hill was covered in thick oak brush, which made spotting fairly tough.

We had to ensure that it was a legal bull. All I could make out were three points on each side, and we needed four on one side or a brow

point of at least five inches. I was trying to mil the brow tine to get the length confirmed. The range was 430 meters, and I needed the point to mil .3. The bull turned and lay down behind a pile of oak brush.

At that time, we noticed another bull about 30 meters to the left. As we transitioned our focus onto this one, I realized it was a nice 5x5, probably the one we had seen earlier that morning. Things started moving fast, as it was obvious we had a legal bull.

Jonathon got on the gun as I confirmed range and hold. Checking the wind, it was blowing about 12 to 15 mph, but straight in our face. It had changed direction constantly throughout the day, which is common for mountainous environments. I gave Jonathon his 430-meter hold, which was only 1.7 mils on the fast 230-grain Berger bullet carrying a BC of .714 and a velocity of 2,913 loaded by Black Hills. The bull moved down the hill slightly, disappearing from time to time, making for anxious moments. As he moved into an opening that exposed his front shoulder

and about 12 inches of his rib cage behind the shoulder, he stopped and gave us the perfect shot. I told Jonathon to take him, and he placed his shot beautifully. The bullet dropped the bull instantly.

We watched the animal slide down the mountain, and the celebration started. I slapped Gunny on the back, and it was hugs all around. Life is all about taking obstacles we find in our lives and refusing to be limited by others' ideas of what is possible.

Gunny and I climbed up and started the long drag down the mountain. When we reached the bottom it was picture time, as you only kill your first elk once.

The next morning we hiked back in to hopefully get a 1,000-meter shot on a cow for Jonathon or a bull for Gunny. It was another beautiful morning with clear skies and absolutely calm winds. Elk were bugling farther to the north from our position. I grabbed Gunny and told him to get a gun and follow me. As dawn broke, it was just bright enough to see elk on the side of the mountain, but so far we saw only

only cows. We were waiting for a bull to show itself. Gunny and I slipped around the mountain, just below the crest. I was able to pick up a bull near the top of the adjacent hill about 700 meters out. Again this bull was only a 3x3, but it had well over five-inch brow tines. Legal? Yes, but I knew we had a little time to make the decision. As I watched nine cows cross a slide about halfway up the hillside, I picked up a bull easing out of the Aspen. Straining to ensure that it was legal, I could make out at least four points on one side, so we started to focus on getting a range and firing solution.

Still in the Aspen and on the move, I noticed another elk a bit lower. When he turned and looked across in our direction, I could see that his spread was wider and this bull was another nice 5x5. We quickly turned the focus to this animal, and the “talk on” was happening fast. They were already halfway across the hillside now and moving. The range was 628 meters with a hold of 3.2 mils.

Again, the .300 Norma is a nice long-range caliber that shoots extremely flat with a lot of thump coming in tow. When the bull

stopped, we quickly talked through the hold and Gunny took him. The shot broke the morning stillness and another first elk had been taken.

I tell the story of Gunny and his hunt because it was fitting that he connected with his first bull after the effort he put forth to make this all happen for Jonathon. The fact that both these young men are like brothers made sharing such an experience truly a special moment.

The next morning was all about a long-range cow hunt. It didn't take long before we were glassing the hillside across the creek. Gunny spotted a cow walking toward the Aspen, and we started scrambling to get in position.

High weeds interfered with Jonathon's line of sight. Soon Gunny, Brett and I were rolling over the grass to knock it down, then back in position on the spotter and the ballistic solver. The range was right at 1,100 meters, perfect for what we wanted. As the cow moved into the Aspen, two more moved out into the opening. Then a nice bull appeared and soon after that, three more bulls with another cow. All were now moving up the mountain into the

morning sunlight that was glowing directly back at us. Working through the problems, we were about to take a shot when Gunny spotted more elk to our left. Swinging our position to the left relieved the sun issues and gave us a nice 755-meter shot. I gave Jonathon a right two-mph hold with an elevation hold of 4.3 mils.

I designed the TReMoR II with time-of-flight dots for wind, so there is no need for wind formulas. With the Kestrel Horus, these dots are always perfectly calibrated at any density altitude for any weapon system. Jonathon made a perfect shot that was placed beautifully for a quick harvest, the perfect culmination to an unforgettable week.

It was an honor to spend this special week with men whom I had trained for the past several years. Gunny is one of the best men I know, and I think of him as a brother.

Jonathon is an inspiration to everyone he meets, always polite, respectful and someone you would be proud to share an elk camp with. Thanks to all in camp for allowing me to participate in the experience. For me, it was truly one of life's special moments. **SNIPER**

