

## MISSION FOR DAD

It all started in November, 2005. I was telling stories about elk hunting in northern Idaho. When I had finished with a one particular adventure my dad commented to me that he would like to shoot a bull elk, before running around rugged terrain got to be more than he wanted to do. Not being one to let an additional hunting opportunity slide by I told him to take the opening week of season off the next year and we would get it done.

Now my dad is not what I would consider an avid hunter. Dad has been a “gun guy” all of his life. He was and still is an avid benchrest and varmint shooter. Dad shoots scary little groups from the bench. He is a pretty fair varmint hunter from prone positions. He seldom shoots positions other than bench or prone if any at all. Dad started showing an interest in long range shooting for varmints 5 or 6 years ago and started to develop the skill set needed for long range shooting. It seemed to me that the best way to get dad an elk was to cater to his strongest abilities.

With some planning the hunt boiled down to this, dad would build a suitable long range rifle for the task, I would locate a bull and get us into a suitable firing position that would allow dad to take a shot he was comfortable with and since there is no level ground within 100 miles of where I hunt, I would pack it out. Sounded like a plan.

Dad decided to build a 338 WSM on a Remington 700 short action in a laminated stock, with a Hart fluted barrel, and a Leupold MK4 LRT 6.5-20x. His plan was to develop a load with the Nosler 225 Accubond and practice through the summer. While he was building and working the WSM, I was teaching long range hunting classes and spending a serious amount of time behind my 338 Edge and my packing weight 300 Ultra Mag.

Some time in early September dad called and told me of the multiple forest fires he had worked on. He also said he was getting called for a couple more. While he was sure he would be done in time for our hunting trip, he was not sure he would have the WSM done and properly doped in for the hunt. We decided that he would use my light weight long range rifle and I would tote the 338 Edge around, he would of course have the option of using the Edge if he wanted since we would be hunting together. With the profile of our hunting trip changed I started working the different tasks at hand. I shot the 300 Ultra out to 1150 yards quite often and the 338 Edge out to 2000 yards. I anticipated 500-800 yard shooting but if you practice to 1600 yards, 800 seems pretty short. The 338 Edge had shot some screamer groups at 1276 yards under 5 inches so I worked on reading conditions and making the calls for a first round hit for almost 2 months. I worked the most on knowing when the conditions would require that I be closer for a given shot. Some shooting conditions in canyon country make a 500 yard shot difficult at best. I worked up/downhill shots with a cosine indicator and Exbal program. I shot up about 5 or 6 pounds of H1000 prepping for the hunt. My goal was to be able to call good first round shot dope out to 1000 yards and beyond in anything that resembled fair conditions.

October 9<sup>th</sup> rolled around and dad and I left for the St. Joe national forest in north Idaho. We setup camp (that amounted to unhooking the trailer) and went for a drive so I could show dad the country I had intended to hunt. Our camp site was situated on a ridge that allowed us to climb a very short distance to a knob and glass most of our intended hunting area with a spotting scope. Dad and I were doing just that about an hour before dark when we spotted 2 cow elk and a pretty good 5 point bull. I really hoped that dad would get a crack at the 5 point, but he said he would be happy to harvest any bull. I was very optimistic for opening day success. We went back to camp, I made sure my pocket PC was charged, 338 Edge was ready, pack was loaded and cloths were ready.

Opening day, October 10<sup>th</sup>, dad, my hunting partner Jr. and I went to the spot we had hoped to hunt opening morning only to find someone already parked there. Hunting national forest lands can be trying sometimes and the early bird gets the worm. We set up on a ridge that allowed us to overlook the timber and offside of the ridge that the elk had come from the previous evening. We spotted a few elk, but no bulls. We also saw a number of mule deer with several bucks but nothing like the quality buck you see in mid November so we let them pass. Sometime during the midmorning one of my other hunting buddies shot a mule deer buck not far from the area where we had seen the elk the prior evening. We spent most of the afternoon packing the deer out. On my last trip out I sent dad down the trail toward our ambush position and told him I'd catch up with him in a little while. I got the last trip out and scrambled around camp prepping my gear. I hit the trailhead and caught up with dad in a mile and a half or so. We got to the base of the ridge we had to climb to our position and not a minute too soon. I was starting to worry that we might not be in position in time.



We got to the top of the ridge at the location we had intended only to encounter setback number one, the spot we selected from 1500 yards away did not provide the view we had thought it would. Honestly it did not provide a view or anything that resembled a shooting position. This is a common problem when hunting big mountainous country. We slipped around and located a hole from an old up rooted tree that provided a prone spot for one person and had a fair view of the area we wanted to cover. Dad set about setting up a firing position (it was really more like a nesting operation) and I unpacked the binoculars, rangefinder, drop chart, and video camera. It was at this point I encountered set back number two, in my hurry at camp I had left the tripod for the video behind. Dad was still nesting complaining about little sticks poking him and I was wondering what to do about setback number two when I looked up and spotted an elk coming out of the timber at nearly the exact point we had seen the elk the night before. I said, "dad there is an elk". He said nothing and kept nesting. I grabbed the range finder and lazed him at 563 yards. I also noticed it was a spike, fitting dad's definition of any legal bull. "Hey dad it is a spike", I said. Dad spots the spike and gets fairly serious in a hurry. "How far", he said. "563 yards", I said. "Let me know when your ready", I said. "Ready", he said. "Come up 9.50 moa", I said. "Up 9.5", he said. "Zero wind", I said. Now at this point in the video it is quite obvious that I am juggling a range finder, drop chart, video camera and watching dad. Yes the video sucks. "OK, I'm on him", I said. Just a few seconds later the boom of the 338 Edge echoes through the canyon. I watch as the 300 grain Sierra Matchking launches and drops its' 54 inches of trajectory and strikes the bull squarely in the heart. The bull's reaction is dramatic and immediate. It humps up like most vital chest

cavity shots takes about 3 hops and crashes in the alder brush. We were down to about 20 minutes of light with a hour hike to the bull, so faced with a snowballs chance of locating it in the dark we chose to hike back out to camp and retrieve it in the morning. The stout 2.5 mile hike back to camp in the dark was long but upbeat like only a successful hunt can be. Once back at camp with some hot food and a good fire dad and I reviewed the horrid video footage. The footage was bad but still quite obvious where the bull was impacted and that it did not leave the brush pile it was in. We enjoyed an animated story of the hunt around the camp fire and slipped off to bed for some much needed rest.

The next day dad, Jr, Brandon, Ryan, and I hiked down to the bull where we boned it out. It was at this point I hit setback number 3, the climb out was steep and about 1000 yards uphill. Have I ever mentioned how nice it is to have really good “hunting buddies”, they are few and far between. Once the work was done and squared away, I started to reflect on the hunt for my dad’s first bull. Looking back I can honestly say it was one of the richest hunts of my 25 plus years of hunting. Some hunts I have been on have taken larger animals, loaded our take whole in the truck, or went off without a single setback but most of them were not with my dad. This hunt is and will always be one of my favorite of what I hope are many to come.

