

Glimpses of Brillion

25 October 2018

By CAPT R. Claude "Frenchy" Corbeille, USN RET



An early morning departure from Brillion on the U. S. Navy's birthday, 13 October for you landlubbers, had three of us hunters halfway across South Dakota at nightfall. We experienced an early introduction to winter with sub-freezing temperatures and a wind-driven snowfall that left a one-inch deposit on the highway for our departure from that point. Progress from Murdo, SD to Buffalo, WY was considerably slower than it had been from Brillion to Murdo, but we had only a little over 360 miles left to reach our rendezvous junction in Buffalo and, with the transition to mountain time, a 25-hour day in which to do it. We had lunch with the fourth member of our hunting group, a younger gentleman from Kansas who was celebrating his 50th birthday; the elk hunt was his birthday present to himself. After lunch, we met our rancher host and his guide and made the forty-mile trek westward into the Big Horn Mountains, where the snow was deeper and the roads were slicker. After about 20 miles on U.S. Highway 16, we turned onto a gravel county road, and after some ten miles on that, turned onto a rutted two track. The trailer I towed threatened to pass the truck on a couple of the steeper downgrades. However, it was without incident that we reached camp and settled in for the duration.

We had gained considerable elevation from the Fox River Valley of Wisconsin and were now operating with about 75 percent of the oxygen to which we have grown accustomed, way up there at the 8,500-foot level. I personally experienced no debilitating effects but I did find myself stopping for more air intake after climbing any hills. I have heard and read accounts of altitude sickness but no one in our group complained of that malady. Wyoming is seemingly never without wind and our hunting area was no exception. On a windy Monday morning it seemed the bottom had fallen out of the thermometer; after a careful search for the temperature indicator I found it way down there near the zero mark. We used binoculars and eyeballs for a few hours in an attempt to locate elk but found none. In late morning the rancher and his guide stationed us hunters a few hundred yards distant from the outer perimeter of a copse of lodge pole pines while they marched through to dislocate any elk that might be lodged therein. The plan worked to perfection and a really handsome bull elk exited the tree line right into the rifle barrel of the Kansan. I quipped that we now had one less shooter and one more beater.

The remainder of the day was without incident, as was the early part of Tuesday, but late morning found us once more surrounding the stand of lodge pole pines, three of us now, while three others marched through. The man on my left, the middle man, was about 200 yards distant and the next man over was about 300

yards beyond him. It was not a really long time before four elk exited the timber between me and the man on my left – a cow, a yearling heifer, and two calves. They passed between us at quite a brisk pace. Not long afterward two bull elk came out of the forest at about the same spot, marching on the same course, both some 280 yards away but drawing nearer. In order to avoid shooting toward one another, we would have to take our shots when the elk were well away. The larger of the two was in front and at about 230 yards I fired and missed. I heard a rifle shot from off on my left but there was no apparent effect from it either. I quickly chambered another cartridge, reminded myself that this was something I could do as long as I kept my cool, which I did, and when my crosshair intercepted the leading edge of the bull's shoulder, I pressed the trigger. The bull lurched to his right, broke his stride, and then started a gradual slowdown. I recognized the sign of a mortally wounded animal and did not bother to chamber another cartridge, knowing one would not be needed. A few more steps and the bull went down, never to get up again.

What I did not know, and could not know, was that the man on my left fired at precisely the same moment as did I, and he saw the same influence of a bullet strike on an animal. Each of us was thinking it was his bullet that caused the demise of the magnificent animal. The bull fell onto his left side and no entry wounds were readily apparent on the exposed right side, although my partner insisted that he had hit it. I suggested that if we turned the animal over, we would see a hole in its left shoulder, the side at which I was shooting. We did, and we did, but my partner still believed his bullet was responsible for the kill. I agreed that upon evisceration, if another wound were disclosed, we could flip a coin to see who claims the beast. No additional lethal wounds were found, although a flesh wound in the neck and a broken lower right rear leg showed that a couple bullets, neither of which would have proved fatal, had hit the elk. It was with a good deal of reluctance that my partner agreed that it was my elk. I could feel a budding friendship slipping away and it was with some trepidation that I celebrated my success. A palpable stiffness in the air remained for the rest of the hunt. Time heals all wounds (except those on a dead elk) and I trust that our relationship will once again get back to where it was.

No more elk were taken and we returned to Wisconsin with one. Now I will convert a portion of our garage into a butcher shop and on Monday will begin the daunting task of reducing one large elk to meal size portions. There will be elk on the menu for a number of days