

Soldiers take aim at recovery in Center Hill Lake wild turkey hunt

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District

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LANCASTER, Tenn. — A wild turkey hunt at Center Hill Lake today gave soldiers rehabilitating from war wounds the opportunity to put aside the stresses associated with the every-day grind of physical and mental therapy while recovering at Fort Campbell, Ky.

The Nashville District's staff members at the lake hosted the second annual event for wounded warriors at the Warrior Transition Battalion participating in the "HOOAH" Program, which stands for "Healing Outside Of A Hospital." The six heroes at this year's event hunted all morning, met several country music stars, and ate up a turkey fry lunch complete with all the fixings.



For one soldier, being able to go on the turkey hunt is an important part of healing because it literally provided a meaningful new experience and memory.

A hunter for most of his life, Army Staff Sgt. Joseph Lowery cannot remember any of his hunting exploits prior to being wounded by an improvised explosive device that detonated under his car seat, Sept. 11, 2010, while on patrol in Afghanistan near the border of Pakistan.

Not only was Lowery wounded on the anniversary of the attacks of 9/11, but it happened to also be his wedding anniversary. Almost two years later, he continues his rehabilitation at Fort Campbell, Ky., and says he can't recall ever shooting a turkey before the day he was injured.

"I lost a lot of memory. I don't remember the first bird I ever killed," Lowery said. "So it was a day to remember."

Center Hill Lake Park Ranger Jamie Summers said it is special to treat the wounded warriors to a day of hunting and the whole community stepped up as well to support the event. The Corps partnered with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, local businesses and private land owners, some that purposely did not hunt on their properties since the start of turkey hunting season to ensure a successful hunt for the wounded warriors.

"It's an honor for us to get to do it," Summers said. "Anytime you can get outside and enjoy what Mother Nature provides, and the resources that the Corps provides... the woods and water, it's just some tranquility and peace from a war zone."

In addition, country music artists Aaron Tippin and John Anderson graciously donated their time and paired up with wounded warriors for the hunt. Tippin has three lifetime number one singles on the Billboard Hot Country Song Charts. Anderson is also well known with five number ones of his own,

including the monster hit “Swingin” in 1983.

Tippin is popular in military circles for his songs “You’ve Got to Stand for Something” during the Gulf War in the early 1990s, and “Where the Stars and Stripes and the Eagle Fly,” which he released following the 911 attacks.

Lowery said being able to hunt and interact with Tippin is one of the highlights of his day.

Other wounded warriors that participated included Spc. Trevor Jefferson, Staff Sgt. Michael D. Davis, and two other unnamed participants.

Jeff Hancock, a Nashville District employee, said he volunteered to be a hunting guide because the sacrifices of these soldiers are extreme and even heartbreaking. For instance, Hancock noted that Davis received his wounds in Tikrit, Iraq, just three months after losing his eldest son at the same location.

TWRA Officers Tony Cross and Mike Beaty in DeKalb County said these soldiers and their stories of sacrifice are why they also volunteered to give something back to the wounded warriors.

“It’s been a great day,” Beaty said. “We took one guy and it couldn’t have worked out any more perfect. We had a bird come in about 37 yards. We’ve got it all on film... the bird strutted for the camera and we got a lot of good footage, then he killed the bird. It was awesome – a little something to pay these guys back for all their sacrifices that they’ve made for us.”

Cross said TWRA’s bread and butter is hunting and fishing, and so it is natural for them to team up with the Corps of Engineers to support the wounded soldiers who are healing and can benefit from what the great outdoors offers them at Center Hill Lake.

“We really appreciate all of our men and women in the military and those who have been wounded, and give everything of themselves for us and for our freedom,” Cross stressed.

Afterward, the wounded warriors expressed their appreciation and enjoyment of the activities and show of respect they received.

“I had a great time. These guys really took care of us. The food was outstanding. The hospitality is second to none,” Lowery said. “Every guy had a blast out here.”

Summers gave special thanks to Prichards Foods in Alexandria, Tenn., for their contributions supporting the luncheon, Volunteer Bob Vantrease, who cooked breakfast and lunch, and to Center Hill Lake Natural Resource Manager’s Office employees, TWRA and several landowners who contributed to a highly-successful hunt for the wounded warriors.

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