

I'm a Master Sergeant and have been in for 20 years now. I'm currently deployed to Baghdad, Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. I'm on a 15-month deployment that will end in October of 2008. My current job title is Medical Regulating Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge. What that means: I have a 10 man/woman crew who work 24 hours a day and coordinate moving all injured patients to the appropriate level of care in Iraq. If and when need be, we also move them back to the U.S. for care. It is a very difficult but very rewarding job knowing that we are helping save lives every single day.

I will be retiring to Rocky Head, Ala. (just outside Ozark) when I return. My family is already there waiting for me. I look forward to getting back and climbing that tree to watch that wonderful world pass by that we call "Hunting Season" with a little more appreciation after being over here.

*MSG Steven Rutland
Baghdad, Iraq*

Despair to Euphoria

*(What a difference
3 hrs 40
minutes
can make)*

By **Stephen Rutland**



Once I came back down to earth and realized I had killed the biggest deer of my life, the work began to get him out and hang him in a tree.

On this November day, I traveled the full spectrum of the mental highs and lows of hunting. At 1:18 p.m. I had walked out to the small wooded island in the field that sat 300 yards in front of my stand. I had been watching deer travel to the island day-in and day-out like clockwork. The Imperial Clover field was doing its thing.

It had rained that morning, was nearing 70 degrees and there was just no interest to get out of bed at 4 a.m. to hunt and get wet. Around midday we decided the front was moving out and that the deer would probably start to move a little more. In the 30-minute drive to the hunting area the temperature fell at least 15 degrees. I decided that I would venture out to the island and take a look. This would work out well since wind was blowing from the southeast from my stand.

As I entered the island I was able to move very quietly due to the morning rain showers. The left side was thick with vines and briars. The middle and right sides were fairly open. As I approached the middle I heard this thundering crash to my left not 20 feet from me. A buck and doe had jumped and headed toward the next zip code. All I saw was a huge rack and white tails fleeing. His rack had hit a limb and it sounded like a Louisville Slugger smacking a telephone pole. I ran as fast as I could to the edge of the island and managed to get a three-second glance at the buck 300 yards away slowly walking into the woods. I could hardly believe the body size of this animal.

I have never felt such despair in my 30 years of hunting. I was almost physically sickened because of the missed opportunity. I played it over and over in my mind. What could I have done differently? Could I have moved slower or waited longer between short movements? No, I don't think any of that would have mattered. He didn't get that big because he was dumb or slow.

As I sat there on the Imperial Clover field the rest of the afternoon in a depressed mood, I was trying to pep myself up for just having the opportunity of seeing a deer like that. I watched the far wood line as the young bucks chased does around and sparred back and forth over them. Just before dark all of the bucks in the field scattered. I knew this would happen for one of two reasons. A predator (human or animal) will make the deer scatter, but the does didn't leave. The second was a large or dominant buck. This convinced me that the old man of the woods was probably making his presence felt.

I peered back into the woods and noticed what I thought was a deer looking out. For a few minutes I kept talking myself out of believing that it could really be a deer that big. Then the deer leaned his head over and back up. I got to my feet as quickly as I could. I had been sitting there for hours watching and ranging the distance. I knew that it was 289 yards from my stand.

The deer I had spooked had merely just wandered in the woods and laid down right there the entire time.

The pucker factor was pushing 10-plus at that point. He got up and eased out into the edge of the field to rough up the scrape the young bucks had been working. He was standing broadside to me. I leaned against a tree and squeezed out a round from my rifle. The bullet hit under him and sprayed him with dirt. He immediately flung his body around, looking at the ground. To my complete shock he did not run away. He turned completely broadside once again and went back to working the scrape. I chambered another round and took the time to properly count the lines on my scope. I then managed to pull the trigger with the right crosshairs on the animal and he dropped in his tracks. So did I.

I had to sit there for a few minutes to let my brain and body adjust the chemical imbalance created from the previous few minutes. After I was able to walk and think straight, I went back to the truck and got the 4-wheeler and a buddy to go with me to pick the animal up. As I approached the deer, I just could not believe the body on this animal. He was pushing 275 pounds. He was the largest deer I had ever seen in the woods. I attribute this to genetics and the Imperial Whitetail Clover and the Imperial No-Plow that I had planted.

I planted Imperial Clover and Imperial No-Plow in several locations on my 16-acre Kentucky farmland. My farmland is mostly rolling hills to flat terrain. The soil is a dark clay-based soil, so both the No-Plow and Imperial Clover are great choices.

Once I came back down to earth and realized I had killed the biggest deer of my life, the work began to get him out and hang him in a tree.

The best part of the whole experience was that I had my two best hunting buddies, Mike and Tony Rubel of Florida, there with me. My 12-year-old son was there the following weekend to kill his first deer ever, just 45 yards from where I dropped my deer. My 5-year-old daughter asks me everyday when she will get to go hunting with me. I tell her this Christmas. I look forward to her going out there with me and seeing the excitement in her eyes.



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