

FIELD
&
STREAM

Portfolio by
BRENT HUMPHREYS & CHRIS MUELLER

BACK OUTSIDE

These wounded soldiers worried that they might never hunt or fish again. Now that they can, getting out means more than it ever has

Interviews by COLIN KEARNS

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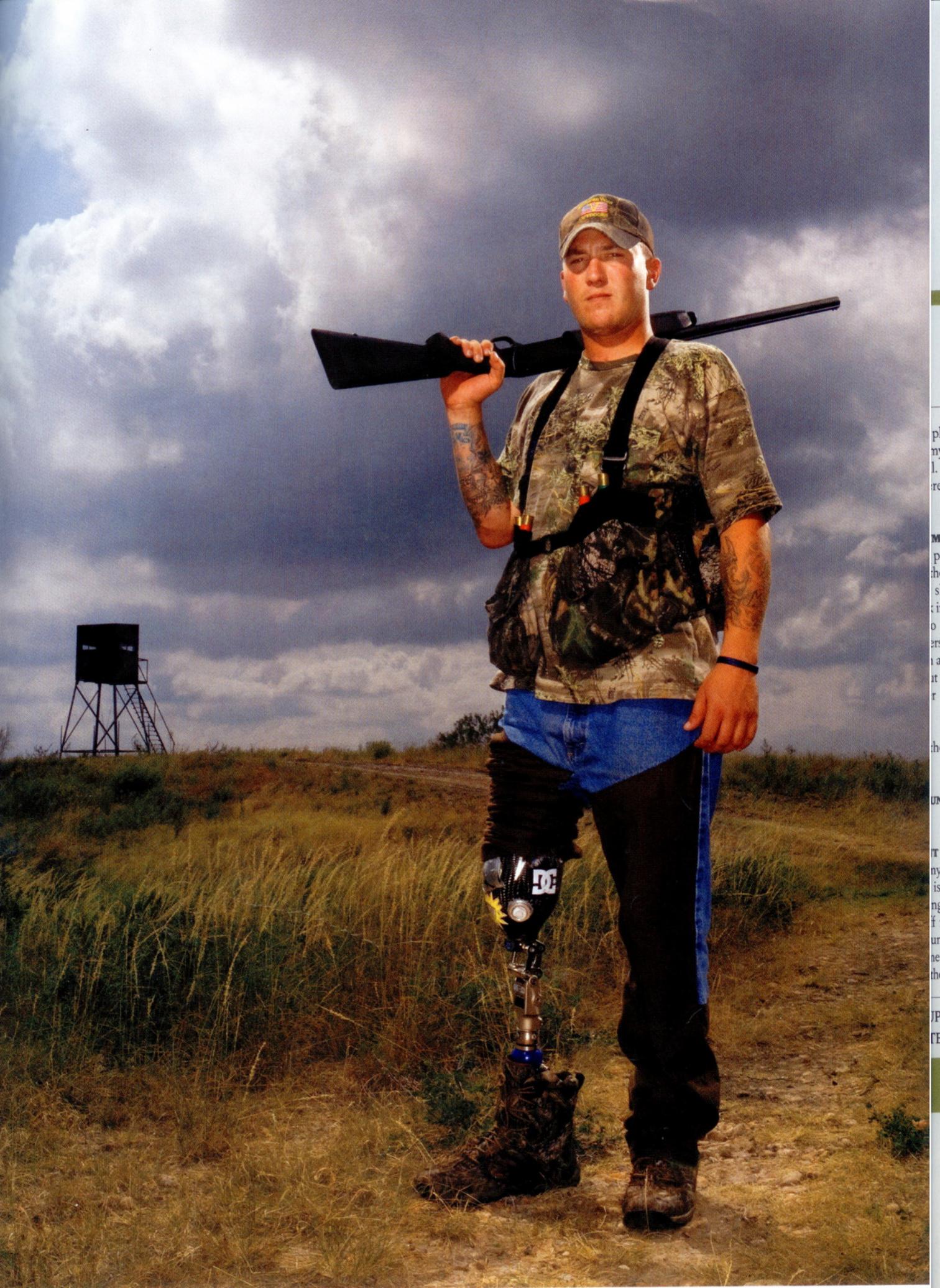
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Army Angler

Spc. Louis Dahlman, a lifelong fisherman, was injured by a roadside bomb in Iraq in May 2007. His story starts on p. 70.



BETWEEN ALL THE operations, doc there were moments when each of these wounded hunt or fish again. That first time back outside was Iraq changed everything: how they walk, talk fish. But once they were finally in the woods again, catching trout, shooting roosters, and hunting



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SGT. NICK BEINTEMA

BEINTEMA, 26, GREW UP HUNTING PHEASANTS AND DOVES IN LODI, CALIF. A 19D CAVALRY SCOUT, BEINTEMA WAS INJURED BY AN IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE (IED) IN TAL-AFAR, IRAQ, AND RETURNED TO THE U.S. IN MAY 2005.

I GREW UP BIRD HUNTING—mainly doves and pheasants—due to the fact that there's not huge deer or anything like that in California. Bird hunting was fun because I'd compete with my dad or my cousins. And once I started eating these birds, I realized they tasted good, too. The best part was just going out with my dad or my buddies and getting away. There was no b.s. out there—just whatever you bring with you.

MY FAVORITE GUN WOULD HAVE TO BE MY REMINGTON 870 PUMP. I've had it since I was 16. There's nothing fancy about it, but the things I've done to that gun: I've dropped it out of the truck. I've dropped it in the water. And it still works.

I TURNED 21 IN IRAQ. That was no fun.

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE JUST A REGULAR CONVOY PATROL. I remember punching one of my buddies as I smoked a cigarette in the back of the vehicle, and that's about it. My friends who were there said I was screaming and yelling after the IED exploded, but I don't have any remembrance of that. I woke up about a week later, and I couldn't talk because my jaw was wired shut. I saw my mom, and I started writing on a dry-erase board, telling her to get out of Iraq. That's when I found out I was in the U.S. at Walter Reed.

THEY TRIED SURGERIES ON MY RIGHT LEG DURING THE FIRST EIGHT MONTHS, but it was point-

less. I was never going to have feeling in it again. Finally I told them to take it off.

MY DESIRE TO HUNT KICKED IN EVEN MORE AFTER I GOT HURT, because I had nothing but time. And I didn't wait to get my prosthetic before I went on my first hunt. They had me sitting in a handicap blind that uses hydraulics to rise about 15 feet in the air. We saw some does, and I was going to shoot one, but then a 4-pointer appeared and stopped about 20 yards from the blind. I pulled the trigger and then let out that last deep breath. I couldn't see with all the smoke from the black powder, but I could hear the buck kicking in the bushes, so I knew he was down. My hands were shaking. It was really exciting. That was my first deer—the first time I'd shot anything larger than a bird. Since then I've shot does, teal, doves, my first Rio Grande turkey, and javelinas.

GETTING OUTSIDE IN GENERAL FELT GREAT. I was more mobile than I'd been in eight months, and I thought, *If my ass can crutch out here in the snow, I should be able to go do anything with my prosthetic.*

EVERYONE AND YOUR MOTHER CAME TO VISIT ME IN THE HOSPITAL: President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, Tony Hawk, Henry Rollins, Drew Carey, Toby Keith—even Niki Taylor, the model. She got in my bed next to me, and I never wanted her to get out. I've got pictures to prove it.

AFTER I'D GOTTEN MY PROSTHETIC, I was pheasant hunting in Minnesota and I misplaced my foot and fell into a creek. It was colder than hell. After that I learned real fast to watch where I'm walking.

I'VE HAD TO MAKE A FEW LITTLE ADJUSTMENTS WHEN I HUNT. Pants can be annoying to put on because of where the socket is on my prosthetic. I like hunting in Texas because I can wear shorts. Boots with flat bottoms are the best to walk in, because ones with an arch make it tough to know when to kick my prosthetic out. And waders are a real pain in the ass. I was wearing them on a duck hunt, and to have to pick my right foot out of the mud and kick my leg through the water didn't work out well.

ONCE I GOT MY PROSTHETIC, I found the best physical therapy is just living your life.

MY FAVORITE THING TO DO IS DOVE HUNTING. That and pig hunting—I love pork.

THOSE MORNINGS BEFORE A PHEASANT HUNT back home when I go downstairs and my dad's drinking coffee, and our black Lab, Jake, is going psycho because he knows what's coming...and when I sit down and Jake won't get off me, or when I bend to put on my boots and he jumps on my back: Those are the things that make me happy and make me laugh every time I think of them.

"YOU CAN PLAY THE 'WHAT IF' GAME ALL DAY LONG, AND IT AIN'T GONNA DO NOTHING FOR YOU. I GAVE UP A LEG, BUT I'VE DONE STUFF I WOULDN'T HAVE DONE HAD I NOT GOT HURT. I CONSIDER MYSELF FORTUNATE."



STAFF SGT. JACK CORMACK

CORMACK, 57, GREW UP CATCHING BASS, WALLEYES, AND CATFISH IN WEST VIRGINIA. A 31B MILITARY POLICE OFFICER, HE WAS INJURED DURING ROCKET FIRE IN BALAD, IRAQ, AND RETURNED TO THE U.S. IN FEBRUARY 2005.

I WAS 5 OR 6 WHEN I CAUGHT MY FIRST FISH, a blue cat. My dad and all my uncles fished a lot, so it made me feel like one of the guys.

MY MAIN REASON FOR GOING TO IRAQ even though I was over 50 years old was that I didn't want anyone young going over there who could possibly get injured or killed. If I went, that meant there was one more young man that I didn't have to worry about.

WE GOT POUNDED SO HARD WHERE WE WERE IN BALAD that they nicknamed the place "Mortarita-ville." One day my partner and I were evacuating a bunch of wounded men in a building during a rocket attack. I picked up one of the young men when the second wave of fire came in, and I was knocked down. That's how I wound up injuring my neck and lower back. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

I STAYED IN THEATER BECAUSE I WAS MIS-DIAGNOSED. They said I had a compression fracture, but I had actually ruptured my lumbar discs. By the time I got home, bone fragments in my lower back had already damaged my sciatic nerve, and my left foot was starting to flop.

WHEN I GOT BACK, NOTHING HELD MY INTEREST. I felt like half a man. But my wife, Merry, is one strong-willed lady. She knew how I was when I went over there, and that's the man she wanted

back. She told me to get off my self-pitying butt because we were going fishing.

MY FOOT STILL FLOPS AND I CAN'T SUPPORT MY WEIGHT ON MY ANKLE. I have a prosthetic that slides under my foot and straps around my shin, and I use a cane. But I can stand up straight like a real soldier and not have the pain kill me.

I DROVE A FRIEND OF MINE WHO'S ALSO A WOUNDED SOLDIER to a flyfishing trip that was being put on by a group called Project Healing Waters. The people there wound up teaching me how to flyfish, and they gut-hooked me. I can't shake it now.

I WAS A FISH KILLER BACK IN THE OLD DAYS. I wouldn't kill one now. After my last deployment, I find myself thinking more about my grandchildren, and their grandchildren, and so on. I would like for there to be some fish left for them.

IF I DIDN'T HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR, I'd have broken many fly rods already.

THIS YEAR, I CAUGHT A 5-POUND BROWN TROUT IN PENNSYLVANIA ON A NO. 24 TRICO. I pulled the fish in, traced the line down to the fish, and saw that I got him right in the corner of the jaw. I thought, *The only way I got this fly there was because the good Lord was holding the darn line.*

WHEN I FINALLY GET A FISH IN THE NET, I realize how much pain I've got in my back. But at the time I'm fighting it, the pain doesn't register. I can't describe it. Fishing also gives me such a strong focus that it helps me deal with my PTSD.

MY WIFE, she's the best thing that's ever happened to this hillbilly.

ONE OF THE TOUGHEST PARTS ABOUT FLYFISHING is learning how to do it with a straight back and not being able to pivot at the hips. I find myself turning my entire body to follow a drift instead of rotating at the hips. I'm trying to adapt and come up with my own system of flyfishing for my body. I haven't figured that out yet.

IF YOU SAW MY PICKUP TRUCK, you'd see there's no give-up in me.

THIS SUMMER I WAS FISHING FOR TROUT AND SALMON in the east outlet of Moosehead Lake in Maine, and I guess the bass fisherman came out in me, because the weeds around this tree stump in the water kept drawing my attention. So I flipped my Crippled Chub fly over to the stump, thinking that ol' Mr. Largemouth might be there, and I caught the largest bass of my life. He was 4½ pounds. I'd seen other guys catch bass that big, but I'd never been that fortunate. I reverted back to that feeling I had when I was a kid. I felt like one of the guys again.

"THEY SAY A BAD DAY'S FISHING IS BETTER THAN A GOOD DAY AT WORK. I'LL GO ONE BETTER: THE WORST DAY'S FISHING IS BETTER THAN ANY DAY IN THE COMBAT ZONE."



SGT. DAVE WALKER

WALKER, 34, GREW UP FLYFISHING FOR TROUT AND SALMON IN VEAZIE, MAINE. A COMBAT MEDIC, WALKER SUFFERED MULTIPLE CONCUSSIONS FROM MORE THAN 30 IEDS IN IRAQ AND RETURNED TO THE U.S. IN SEPTEMBER 2007.

I LEARNED HOW TO FLYFISH DOWN AT THE VEAZIE SALMON CLUB. During the summers, I'd ride my 10-speed to the club with my rod in a duffel bag on my back. I fished with the old guys there. I wanted to fish with them more than anything else.

FLYFISHING IS AN ART. And it's more challenging than just dragging a worm.

WHEN I WAS ABOUT 12 YEARS OLD, my grandfather gave me my first fly rod and reel. That was like getting a million bucks. He was probably the biggest influence in my life for fishing. My favorite fly is the Gray Ghost. Any time I'm up near Millinocket, I stop at the cemetery and place a Gray Ghost on his grave. I loved that old man.

I WAS STATIONED AT FORT RICHARDSON, IN ANCHORAGE, FROM 2000 TO 2003. It's right in the heart of some of the most awesome fishing you could ever dream of. I requested to be stationed there. Take a guess why.

I HIT IRAQ IN OCTOBER 2006. I was in more than 30 explosions. I had five concussions. The last one on August 13, 2007, sent me home.

I WAS CONSCIOUS FOR ABOUT 15 MINUTES AFTER THAT LAST IED. Then I was out cold for an hour. The next day I started feeling not so good. The day after that got a lot worse. I had difficulty doing everyday things like brushing my teeth. I

couldn't figure out how to take the cap off the water bottle, and I couldn't understand why the water wouldn't come out. I couldn't understand what people were saying. I stumbled and swayed when I walked. And my head was just splitting. I'd never felt pain like that in my life.

I HAVE POST-CONCUSSIVE SYNDROME. It's also called traumatic brain injury. It's basically when your brain gets rattled real good. You have difficulty with motor skills, speech, and general thinking. It's disruptive.

THE FIRST FLYFISHING TRIP I TOOK since I've been back was at Rose River Farms in Virginia. As soon as I got there, I felt really lucky. I was so happy to fish again. Everything was kind of difficult at first, because I wasn't getting into my rhythm. I was afraid I'd lost it. But as the day progressed, so did my fishing. I did catch some trout. I felt like I was on top of the world.

I'M CONTENT WITH TROUT AND SALMON, and especially brook trout. They taste the best.

THE WAY I FISH HAS CHANGED SOME BECAUSE OF MY BRAIN INJURY. My fishing is limited to places that are near a road. My doctors won't let me get in the river because of my balance issues. And I still have difficulty tying knots. My hands shake from the tremors. Casting was difficult at first, but I picked that back up quickly.

NOW IT MIGHT TAKE ME 20 MINUTES TO A HALF HOUR TO TIE EVEN THE SIMPLEST WET FLY because my hands will shake. Sometimes I have to start over because I forget some of the steps. But I love it. I even got to tie a red-white-and-blue Atlantic salmon fly for Vice President Cheney. It was an honor. It's not every day you can give the vice president a fly you tied.

SURE, I'D DO IT ALL AGAIN, even if I knew the outcome.

THE HEADACHES ARE THE WORST. I have them all the time. When it gets really bad, it feels like someone's pushing my head down into my neck. The light bothers me a lot during these times, so I constantly wear prescription sunglasses. And I use a cane to steady myself.

FISHING GIVES ME SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO.

FISHING MEANS A LOT MORE TO ME NOW. I can go fishing, and it takes my mind away from all of the ailments, doctors' appointments, scans, and tests. It gives me time to clear my head, relax, and take in some nature. I mean, yeah, catching fish is nice, but it's just kind of a bonus if I do.

FISHING HELPS ME FORGET ABOUT SOME BAD MEMORIES.

"I MISSED FISHING EVERY DAY IN IRAQ. I WOULD'VE LIKED TO FISH THE TIGRIS RIVER, BUT THE SNIPERS LIKE TO SHOOT SO THAT WASN'T A GOOD OPTION."



STAFF SGT. BRAD ALEXANDER

ALEXANDER, 35, GREW UP HUNTING DEER AND WATERFOWL IN WESTERN KENTUCKY. A 19D CAVALRY SCOUT, HE WAS INJURED BY A SUICIDE BOMBER IN MUQDADIYA, IRAQ, AND RETURNED TO THE U.S. IN AUGUST 2006.

WHEN I WAS 8 OR 9 YEARS OLD, I went wood-duck hunting in flooded timber in western Kentucky with my dad. It was the first real hunt I'd ever been on. I had a new pair of hip waders and my 20-gauge 870. My first shot connected, and I felt validated and certified. I remember talking about it that night with my dad about how excited I was and how I wanted to keep hunting.

I'VE HAD MY REMINGTON 700 .270 SINCE 1987. I love it. It's my favorite gun in the world.

LORD YES, I MISSED HUNTING WHILE I WAS IN IRAQ. I used to keep my Cabela's catalog close by. I ordered a couple duck calls and goose calls so I could practice while I was deployed. And I'd watch duck hunting videos on my portable DVD player. I always had some connection to hunting.

WE WERE ON A DISMOUNTED MISSION IN THE DI-YALA PROVINCE IN AUGUST OF '06. I had just finished talking with my platoon sergeant when I turned around and saw this woman standing right in front of me. There was nothing I could do. She looked at me. Then she detonated herself.

I KNEW IF I DIDN'T DIE, I was going to lose my left leg. So when I woke up in the hospital and saw that it was gone, I'd already come to accept it.

THE FIRST TIME I WENT HUNTING AFTER MY INJURY, I DIDN'T HAVE MY PROSTHETIC. But I was

able to get in this great little blind that was hooked on to the hitch of a tractor and hunt from my wheelchair. I watched the sun come up and the silhouettes in the sky, and I shot some ducks. It was just such a relief. It was mental healing, it was physical healing. It was absolutely wonderful.

FOR MY DREAM HUNT, I'd love to get up to Canada and be able to spend three or four days just whacking some geese.

MY INJURY HAS JUST MODIFIED HOW I HUNT. Before, I really liked to stalk and creep through the woods with binoculars, trying to get as close to a deer as I could. Now I just hunt a little bit slower. I don't have the speed or the desire to go walk great distances anymore.

I USED TO LEAVE ALL MY HUNTING CLOTHES IN BAGS OF RAKED LEAVES FOR THREE WEEKS AT A TIME. I wanted to smell exactly like where I was going to hunt. I've gotten a bit lackadaisical since then, but I still try to maintain some scent protection and do the best I can.

LAST NOVEMBER I TOOK MY SON, BRADFORD, OUT IN THE WOODS. We saw a small buck. Bradford, who was 4, asked me to shoot it, but I said, "No, that's just a baby deer. We're gonna let him go." I don't mind shooting does for herd management on private land, but I won't take any buck that has the potential for quality.

SOMETIMES I GET THE DESIRE TO RUN. I wish I could take off at a sprint.

LAST DECEMBER, I SPENT THREE DAYS AND TWO NIGHTS HUNTING THIS BUCK IN TEXAS. Finally, on the last morning I got him. It's the biggest deer of my life. He scored 144, and that was with a broken brow tine. I'm guessing he was around a 151 or 152.

THE MOMENTS WHEN I GET TO TEACH MY SON ABOUT DEER TRACKS and what animals eat and what to look for to help him spot things—just teaching him how to hunt—that's when I'm happiest in the outdoors.

WHEN I CAME HOME FOR CHRISTMAS IN 2006, I WAS STILL ON CRUTCHES. One afternoon when I got to my parents' house, there was a brand-new Yamaha Rhino sitting in the driveway. A bunch of my friends had gotten together on their own and bought me the vehicle so I could continue to enjoy the outdoors and have more mobility. I couldn't believe it. I was crying.

THERE'S THAT POINT IN THE MORNING when it's dark and nothing is happening and nothing is stirring except for those unseen things scooting about. Then the sun comes up over the ridge, and everything comes to life: owls in the trees, turkeys walking. It's just amazing. I like to think of this as watching the world wake up.

"I'VE NEVER BEEN ANGRY SINCE THIS HAPPENED. I LOVE THE ARMY. I LOVE THE PRESIDENT. I LOVE THE ADMINISTRATION. NO REGRETS AT ALL."

STAFF SGT. BRADLEY GRUETZNER

GRUETZNER, 27, GREW UP HUNTING DEER ON HIS FAMILY'S 5,000-ACRE LEASE IN EASTERN TEXAS. A 19D CAVALRY SCOUT, HE WAS INJURED BY AN IED IN IRAQ'S DIYALA PROVINCE AND RETURNED TO THE U.S. IN JANUARY 2007.

I WAS BORN INTO DEER HUNTING. I killed my first deer—a 3-pointer—when I was probably 10 years old. He wasn't anything to brag about, but he was still my first deer. I could hardly breathe.

I MISSED HUNTING WHEN I WAS IN IRAQ. But I looked at it like I was on a different kind of hunt.

THIS IS WHERE EVERYONE TELLS ME I'M CRAZY: I don't care about going to Africa or Canada to shoot something exotic. Give me South Texas with its monster whitetails. All I want is a whitetail that I can hang 20 or 30 hats on.

WE HIT THE IED ON MY 45TH DAY IN COUNTRY DURING MY SECOND TOUR. The last thing I remember is talking on the hand mic on our way back from a mission. Six weeks later I woke up in Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

THEY AMPUTATED MY RIGHT ARM, 4 INCHES BELOW MY ELBOW. After it happened, I remember crying and talking to my wife, thinking that I'd never hunt again or do any of the stuff I love to do. But after I got out of the wheelchair, I started feeling better, and I thought: *They already won half the battle: They blew me up. I'm not gonna let them win the rest of the battle.*

FOR MY FIRST HUNT AFTER MY INJURY I WENT HOME TO THE DEER LEASE WITH MY FAMILY. I was using my crossbow because I was too weak to pull

a bow back. I wasn't in the stand for 15 minutes before some does started running toward a corn feeder. After I shot one, I was sitting there, screaming, "Yeah, I got one! I finally got one!" like it was the first deer I'd ever shot.

EACH DEER SEASON I WON'T SHAVE UNTIL I KILL MY FIRST BUCK. And when I'm at deer camp on opening weekend, I wear the same socks...well, as long as I can stand it.

WHEN I SHOOT WITH A CROSSBOW, it just reminds me, *Hey, you're missing a hand.* Shooting with a bow makes me feel normal. So I asked my prosthetics guy to make me a special arm just for bowhunting. When I'm ready to shoot, I put my mouth over the release and pull the trigger by moving my lips. I've gotten pretty good with it—almost like there's nothing wrong with me.

BECAUSE OF MY BRAIN INJURY, my balance is really off, which makes it hard for me to be quiet and spot-and-stalk. So now I hunt from ground blinds a lot, which is still a rush. When you have a deer that's close enough to hear you breathe if you don't breathe just right, it's awesome.

MY FAVORITE PART OF A HUNT IS WHEN DAYLIGHT BREAKS, OR WHEN THE SUN SETS. Just sitting in the woods, hearing the animals that don't have any idea you're there. And when you pull back or draw a bead on a nice buck, your heart starts jumping in

your throat and your palms get sweaty...or in my case your palm.

AFTER I GOT HURT, I went hunting on 385,000 low-fence acres in Texas. We tried to spot-and-stalk at first but didn't have any luck. Then we tried hunting from a box stand, and I ended up shooting the biggest buck of my life—148.

I'M NOT CRIPPLED. I'm just missing a hand.

THE WAY I LOOK AFFECTS ME. If I was missing a foot or leg, I could wear pants and you'd never know. But because I'm missing my hand, it's more noticeable. I know people stare.

I DON'T REGRET ANYTHING ABOUT JOINING THE MILITARY. I would do it all over again.

I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHY I PREFER BOWHUNTING. Maybe it's a combination of the fact that I can shoot a compound bow even though I shouldn't be able to, and that everything has to be perfect when you bowhunt. To me, that makes a kill more of an accomplishment.

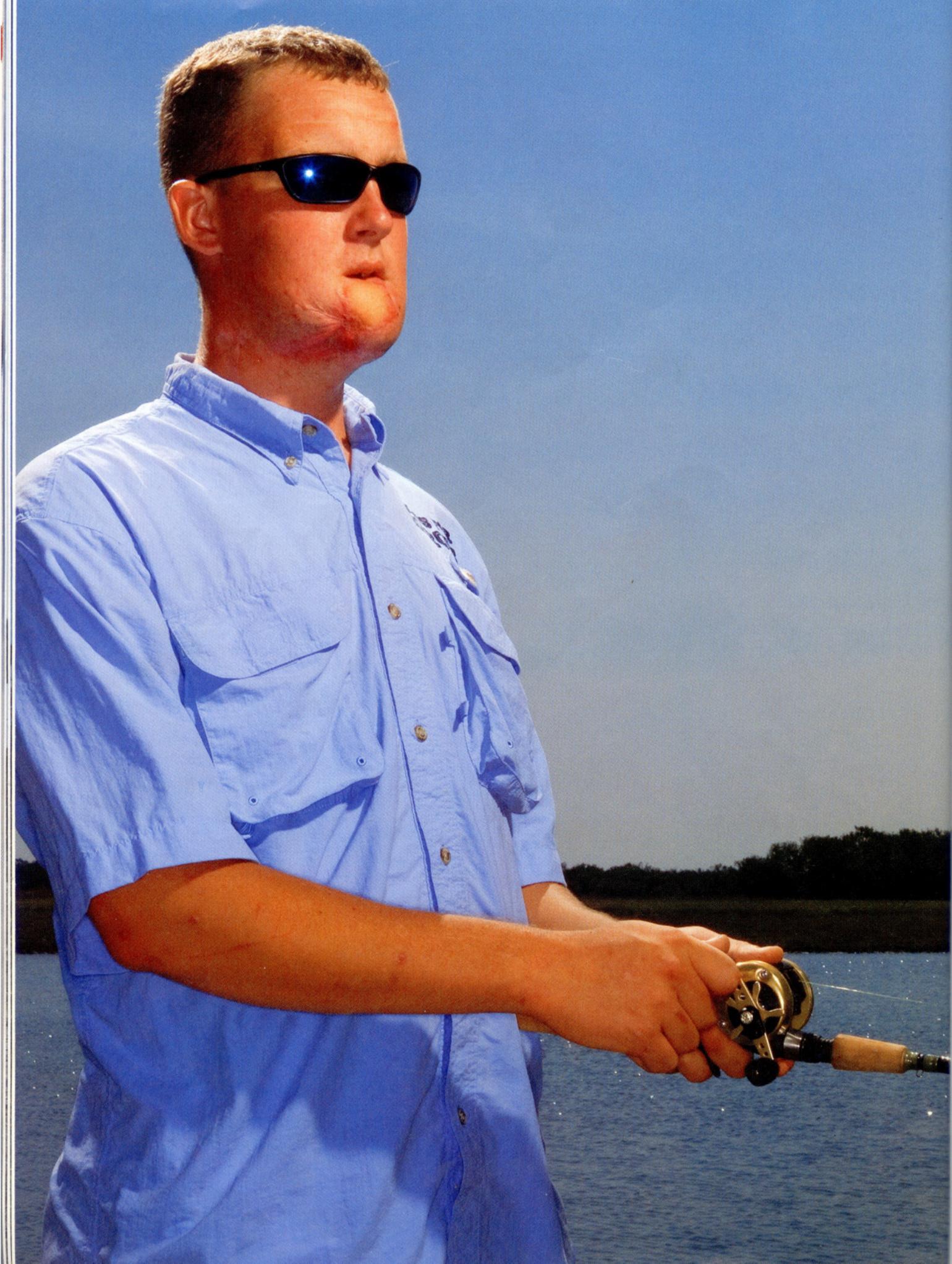
I'M JUST LOOKING FORWARD TO GOING HOME, going hunting, and being a daddy.

I'D LIKE TO CLOSE MY EYES AND NOT REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED. But when I wake up and put my arm on, it reminds me. I can't forget.

"DURING A HUNT AFTER MY INJURY, I REMEMBER SITTING IN THE BLIND AND THINKING, I DON'T EVEN FEEL HURT. WHEN I'M IN THE WOODS I FEEL NORMAL."



got deer.



SPC. LOUIS DAHLMAN

DAHLMAN, 26, GREW UP CATCHING CATFISH AND WALLEYES IN EVERLY, IOWA. A 19D CAVALRY SCOUT, HE WAS INJURED BY A ROADSIDE BOMB SOUTH OF BAGHDAD AND RETURNED TO THE U.S. IN MAY 2007.

I'VE BEEN FISHING MY WHOLE LIFE. Some of the best memories I have growing up are from when I'd go up to the Red River in Minnesota with my friend for three or four days at a time every summer. It was just like camp, and the fishing was great. The average catfish was 3 to 4 pounds, but I caught some as big as 15 pounds. I started going there when I was 12 or 13 and kept going until I joined the military.

PATIENCE IS THE BEST SKILL FOR A FISHERMAN. That's how I've had my best luck.

AS FAR AS POUND TEST AND LINE DIAMETER, I like to use less than I need so I actually get to fight the fish instead of just pulling it in.

ABOUT TWO AND A HALF YEARS AGO, when I was stationed at Fort Polk, I'd fish the jetties for red-fish down by Cameron, La. I went there one Friday night with some friends, and we weren't catching anything. They moved to another spot, but I stayed put. I caught a 37-pounder. My arms were hurting by the end, but when I saw that fish, I thought, *It finally paid off.* I'd been there two or three times to catch a bull red, and I actually did. It was all worth it.

I WAS THE GUNNER ON THE LEAD GUN TRUCK FOR A LOT OF CONVOY ESCORTS IN IRAQ. The night I got injured, we were running a convoy just south of Baghdad. As we got to the other side of an

overpass, an EFP [explosively formed penetrator] went off. A copper plate from the bomb caught me in the face, and pretty much took off my whole jaw.

I WAS KNOCKED OUT TEMPORARILY. I came to my senses and woke up surrounded by fire. I didn't panic. My jaw was hurting so I tried to touch it, but all there was to touch was the roof of my mouth. That's when I knew I had problems. I thought, *I wonder if I can keep them from calling my mom.* I didn't want her to know about this, because I didn't want her to worry.

THE DOCTORS TRIED TO REBUILD MY JAW WITH BONE FROM MY FIBULA, but I got an infection from that, so they had to go and take it all out. Then they took muscle from the right side of my chest, broke my collarbone, and rerouted all that muscle to my jaw. With the last surgery I had, they took a cadaver bone, hollowed it out, attached it to soft bone that they harvested from my hip, and put that in my jaw. If all goes as planned, I still have about two years of surgeries left.

AS SOON AS I WAS WELL ENOUGH, I was, like, *I need to find a place to fish.* I heard about Hunts for Heroes, and I got on the next fishing trip, which was in a tournament in Sergeant, Texas, that benefited wounded soldiers. I caught a 5½-pound speckled trout and won the whole thing. It was awesome. The first-place pot was \$150 or \$200.

Plus I won the \$100 side pot. I gave the money right back. I wanted to help the wounded soldiers who just got hit, so they could get back on track and do stuff like fishing too.

I WAS IN THE SAME TOURNAMENT AGAIN THIS YEAR. I caught a 7-pound speckled trout and came in second. That fish is my pride and joy. The fight was just awesome.

I DON'T HAVE ALL OF MY STRENGTH BACK, but I'm getting there. The hardest thing was relearning how to eat because I just have that one bottom tooth. You don't realize how much you use those teeth until you don't have them.

GOING DOWN TO THE COAST TO FISH—and just getting outdoors—it's what keeps me going during the week. If I know I'm going fishing, it's all I look forward to. I get out of San Antonio, and I get to relax and fish. It's just great.

I'M RIGHT-HANDED, SO I CAST RIGHT-HANDED. Any time someone tells me that all I do is fish, I can tell them, "Yeah, but it's rehab for my right shoulder."

I'VE ALWAYS HAD A PASSION FOR FISHING. That really hasn't changed much since I got hit. But I definitely realize how lucky I am to have what I have. I mean, if I'd been hit 2 or 3 inches up from my jaw, I wouldn't be here right now. At the snap of a finger everything can change. **FS**

"PEOPLE CAN SAY WHAT THEY WANT, BUT IT DOESN'T REALLY BOTHER ME HOW I LOOK NOW. I GOT INJURED DOING SOMETHING A LOT OF PEOPLE HAVEN'T DONE: SERVING MY COUNTRY."

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank the following organizations, all of which provide free hunting and fishing trips to wounded veterans, for their help with this story: Hunts for Heroes (huntsforheroes.com), Project Healing Waters (projecthealingwaters.org), and Wounded Warriors in Action (woundedwarriorsinaction.org).

—THE EDITORS