



**EJ UNGERMAN** and fellow troops assigned to the maintenance on Osprey tiltrotor aircraft in Afghanistan.

# The 7,658-Mile Deer

By Edward Ungerman

**I**T STARTED OUT when my wife and I were driving our 19-year-old son EJ to Marine Camp Geiger in North Carolina. A mechanic on an Osprey tiltrotor aircraft, he was being deployed to Afghanistan on, appropriately enough, July 4th. The goodbye was sad and I hoped some of the skills he acquired hunting in the woods of Pennsylvania would help him overseas if he got into any sort of survival jam.

For the next couple of weeks we pondered what we could do to make life a little easier over there. We have a camp by Tionesta, where there is a little store in East Hickory that has some beef jerky our son has always liked. So, when we went to camp we would always be sure to stop in and buy \$20 worth of jerky and send it to him. Once we sent the jerky it would take two to three weeks to get to him. EJ said he had to fight off the other soldiers whenever it arrived but,

of course, he always shared what he had. And that's how we got the idea of how to really help some of the troops over there: have an entire deer made into jerky. The first obstacle was to see if it was legal; the second was to see if it would stay without spoiling.

I contacted WCO Gary Fujak and he informed me of the details. Then he told me about a deer processor called Kips. In the past he had checked and processed deer carcasses brought in during deer season. Kips was contacted and I was told what had to be done. He said they would do everything possible to make it happen and he would work with me on the cost. All I had to do was get a deer. No problem, I thought. I talked it over with everyone who hunted with me, including my brother, John, my son, Jeff, and my two hunting buddies Al and John. Surely with all of us out there, someone would get a deer.

Archery season opened and Jeff hit a big buck but it got away and was found dead days later. Al was the other archer, and he saw deer but never got a shot. Next up was muzzleloading season. John and I usually got out during this season, but due to other obligations, we never got out this year. At that point I started to get a little apprehensive about getting deer jerky for the troops.

Next up was bear season. We hunted bears and scouted for deer at the same time. John and I hunted in the Minister Run area in Forest County. The day brought beautiful weather, but we didn't see any bears or deer. We changed locations on Monday, to a State Game Lands in Venango County, and once again, we didn't see anything. I told John that if our plan was going to reach fruition, it would have to be in the firearms deer season.

We met at camp the day after Thanks-

giving and sat around talking about what was at stake. At first we had thought we would take a doe the first day, but last year the season was changed in our wildlife management unit; the antlerless season didn't open until the first Saturday. In western Pennsylvania it rained hard on the first two days of the antlered season. We selected an area not far from camp that we thought might produce some deer. From talking to the locals, we learned that the hard mast was in short supply, though. Al and I saw some tails on Monday and Tuesday, but we hunted only three hours in both days.

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On Wednesday we went to Minister Run area. We didn't see any deer. On Thursday we took a break and went fishing for steelhead at Lake Erie. John, Al and I discussed our options for Saturday. We all agreed that the first antlerless deer that came by would be taken.

At 8 o'clock on Saturday the first round of does came through. I didn't have a good shot, but I thought they would continue past my son, Jeff. An hour later, I started pushing toward the others, and within 10 minutes I



spooked four more deer but no one got any shooting. I then met up with Al and we met with the others and told them to stay put, as we'd drive for them. Al and I went up an old logging road and three deer ran in front of us; we didn't shoot. Two more came through and the second one stood there for a second too long. A standing 80-yard shot with my .270 got the deer I needed for the jerky. I had my deer back at camp in less than one hour. I finished the day pushing for the others, but no other deer were taken.

With the temperature reaching 45 degrees I was anxious to get this deer to Kips, so after shutting down the camp for the winter, we were on our way.

When we arrived, though, Kips was swamped with deer. Paula greeted us and I told her who I was, as I had kept in contact with her about our plans. When I told her we desperately wanted the jerky shipped

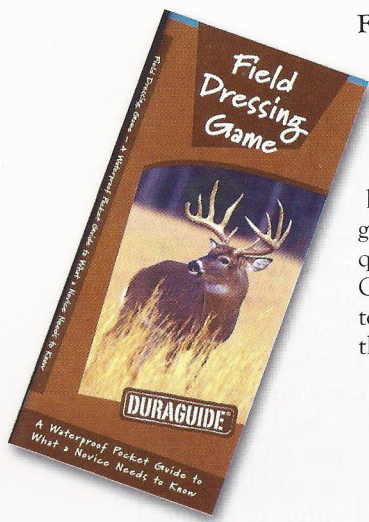
to Afghanistan in time for Christmas, she met with Kip and then came back and said they would make processing our deer a priority.

On the last day of deer season I got a call from Kips on my cell phone while hunting. They came through. I picked up the jerky and the price put a smile on my face. I paid for it, gave them a tip, and told them what a big favor they had done for me. On Monday we shipped it out for the troops in two packages.

A short while later my son called from Afghanistan and said he received one package and his fellow troops thought it was the best they had ever eaten; some didn't know it was deer. On December 23, though, the second package came back undelivered. That one had the thank you signs in it from Kips and other Christmas items, but one package was better than none, I thought. The mission was accomplished. I am deeply grateful to WCO Gary Fajak, Kips and, most of all, all the service men and women protecting our country. □

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## Review:



**Field Dressing Game Duraguide**, Waterford Press, \$6.95. A pocket-sized, waterproof and virtually indestructible, and an absolute essential for every hunters' pack. The *Field Dressing Game* guide provides a simplified introduction to safe practices and procedures for field dressing various species of game and fish, including rabbits, squirrels, deer and large mammals, ducks/geese, pheasant, turkeys and small game birds. Also included are useful facts about hunting etiquette, and the safe cooking of wild game. Waterford Press Guides are available for purchase at 800-434-2555, [www.waterfordpress.com](http://www.waterfordpress.com); and at book and outdoor retailers around the country.