

## Purple Heart Tour brings military men to hunt turkeys near Wadena



MAY 18, 2015 7:00 PM • [JANELL BRADLEY FOR THE COURIER](#)

WADENA | A U.S. Marine having completed tours of duty in Afghanistan and Iraq, told organizers of the Purple Heart Tour that his weekend turkey hunting in Northeast Iowa was so much more than he could have ever hoped for.

"I've been all over the country ... all over the world and this is the prettiest area I've seen," says John, who flew to Iowa to participate in the Purple Heart Tour a weekend in April. He would not give his last name.

"It's so tranquil and relaxing," he said of the rolling

hills around Wadena where he and three other members of the U.S. military spent four nights after flying into the Cedar Rapids Airport.

The Purple Heart Tour was founded by Lt. Col Dan Hammack, U.S. Army Reserves Special Forces. The sole purpose is to organize a series of group hunting and fishing events for active duty Purple Heart recipients or those who have received commendations for valor in the War on Terror.

Five years ago, Hammack contacted Jason Steere of Clarksville, about organizing a pheasant hunt in Iowa. Since then, an average of six soldiers participated in the annual fall hunts for birds. To fund the trip to Iowa from North Carolina, Georgia or Florida, fundraisers are held.

As plans were made for a first-ever turkey hunt, Steere, Waverly Purple Heart Tour president, arranged for the military men to stay in a furnished cabin high atop a hill just west of Wadena, owned by Ken and Sandy Boeding, New Hampton.

This was the first year for a turkey hunt, but the soldiers said the experience was unequalled.

The Purple Heart organizers arrived in rural Wadena with three to four trailers loaded with equipment including four ATVs, blinds, food and other items. Guides are included in the weekend and help the soldier become familiar with the territory where he is to hunt and help to call in the tom turkeys. As part of this hunt, Bill and Andi Roys hosted the guides in their home.

PHT registered for and acquired each soldier's hunting license, which costs \$102 for a tag and \$125 for the out-of-state license.

"We pay for the license, airfare, food and drink, and ammunition," Steere said. "It's a thank you to them for what they do for us. These are men that are fighting for our country." Steere said most of the participants are still active duty.

Up at 4 a.m., the men and their guides had a light breakfast before getting set in their blinds by 5 a.m.

Steere said there was a great deal of camaraderie amongst the soldiers, the guides and their hosts, as everyone hoped to get the biggest "Wadena Tom." As an incentive, Purple Heart Tour provided a knife set to the hunter bagging the biggest turkey. After a day of hunting, the group was hosted at the Eric and Cindy Boehm farm south of Wadena, where there was a steak fry Friday night and a fish fry Saturday night.

"As time went on, more and more people offered to let us hunt on their property. It seemed like everyone wanted us to get a turkey on their land," said one of two Marines on this trip.

JoJo Cobb, a Sgt. First Class with the U.S. Army, said his only goal for the weekend was to have a great time and enjoy the outdoors. Another hunter, a Marine from Texas now stationed in North Carolina, said he had never had such a wonderful offer made to him in his 19 years with the military. Bagging a 22 lb. tom turkey on Saturday, he felt honored to have been asked to participate.

"I'm just amazed with how patriotic everyone in Iowa is, especially in this area," he said.

Steere said he felt confident each of the men left Iowa wanting to return. "We hope we showed them what small town Iowa is really like."

"We never know what we'll encounter when these men arrive. They might be here this weekend and the next week they could be deployed," said Steere.

The Waverly Purple Heart Tour is a 501c(3) organization and annually sells raffle tickets on prizes like guns and hunting equipment to raise funds for their cause. Donations can be made to Jason Steere, Purple Heart Tour; 11536 Spring Ave., Clarksville, IA 50619.