

O U T D O O R S

Deer Camp

Veteran's Day

Fiction by Jerry & Roberta Curreri

The second night in deer camp is always an interesting time. Fresh meat on the poles outside means great eating—tenderloin and backstrap. Stories of hits and misses are swapped back and forth, and a couple of shirttails are bound to be hanging on the buck pole. As the week runs by, there's a lot of coming and going; some of the unlucky ones can get only a day or two off from work and the youngsters have to go back to school. The old-timers stay out the season, and a few of us can close up shop for the entire week. Marty and I always stayed one week, so we could come back after Christmas for the flintlock muzzleloader season. Usually it was just Marty, me, and Uncle Warren in camp—him being permanent and all—for the smoke pole hunt.

"So, Uncle Warren, is it true you shot your first deer with a flintlock?" Marty grinned.

"That's right, boy. That was right after I finished with a couple of King George's finest in the Revolutionary War," he replied, grinning.

"Stop joshin', Uncle Warren," I interjected. "Marty, you know it was after the Civil War. Right, Uncle Warren?"

"Laugh all you want boys, but I guess

we'll know tomorrow who can shoot or not shoot these contraptions."

And boy was Uncle Warren right!

Marty and I spent breakfast strategizing while Uncle Warren looked on. We both surreptitiously glanced over at him when we thought we had a good idea, knowing that Uncle Warren pretty much knew every nook and cranny on our 400 acres and the surrounding game land. Generally, he just grinned and frowned and grinned some more, and once he caught me looking and threw me a wink.

"You boys do all the planning and thinking you can," he said finally, "but remember: these deer have been hunted for three months straight now and are liable to be anywhere and react in any way. It will be hard work that gets a buck today—a lot of sloshing through wet snow, pushing brush, and worrying about keeping your powder dry."

"Well, do you have any ideas, Uncle Warren?" Marty asked.

"Seems to me those deer might be holed up in that gully down the way," he said as he pointed out the cabin window. "You might think about figuring a way to get in there."

"Awfully thick in there," I said, already imagining picking thorns out of my legs and backside.

"That's why it's called huntin'," Warren laughed.

So the gully it was. Of course, things started out badly and got worse. I started in while Marty hugged the top. Every fifteen minutes we'd switch, hoping to push one out in front. Once I thought I saw a flash of white, but it might have just been some snow sliding off a pine

bough. Now the third round, Marty pushed a big doe right down to me, but I was so snarled up in a tangle that I didn't even get my flintlock up.

About two o'clock I met up with Marty in a big thicket, and we both were cold, wet, and miserable. Just then we heard a shot come from the direction of camp—that distinctive pop-boom of a flintlock rifle. Marty and I both looked at each other and grinned. Uncle Warren had shot another one, no doubt.

It took us twenty minutes to trudge through the slush and snow. When we reached the cabin Warren was already inside, and a nice seven-pointer was lying by the deer pole. Marty and I hooked it to the hoist, and up it went.

"Nice to see you boys, and don't drip on the rug. And, oh yeah, thanks a lot."

"For hanging the buck?" Marty asked. "No. For splashing and plowing around when you came up through the gully—just before you bounced that buck right up through the hemlocks beside the camp."

"You were in the hemlocks?" Marty asked.

"Heck, no," Warren laughed. "I was on my way to the outhouse and saw him coming. Ran back inside, grabbed my rifle, primed the pan. Stopped him with a grunt at fifty yards, and wham!"

"So you never went out?" I asked.

"No. Only a damn fool would go out today—or two damn fools. You know a fellow who fought in the Revolution as well as the Civil War needs his beauty rest," he winked.

