Ron Nading, “You’ve gotta be f____ kidding me!”
By Steve Kilpatrick, WY Wild Sheep, E.D.

That was Ron’s response on the second phone call from Brian Scott, our MC at the 2016 Sheep Banquet. Ron was driving back from Wapiti, Wyoming where he had finished teaching a Boy Scout course when his cell phone sang out. Ron is a no-nonsense type guy and didn’t have time to BS with someone he thought was “messing with him” while driving late that night. He also didn’t know a crowd of almost 400 was listening to him hang up either. They requested a call back which Brian promptly did. Brian said, “Hey man, don’t hang up, I got something important to tell you.” Ron listened until Brian finished telling him he had won the Hunting With Heroes sheep tag. He promptly belted out the above statement. You can imagine the reaction from the attendees. He said he didn’t know everyone was listening, but knowing Ron, I think his response would have been the same had he known. Ron’s family roots come from Iowa, but he got to grow up in Cody, Wyoming where he hunted deer and small game. He had never hunted elk, moose or sheep prior to enlisting in the Navy immediately after high school in June of 1990. Enlisting was just what you did since both of his Grandfathers served in WWII (Army and Army Air Corp), and his Dad served in the 9th Infantry Division in Vietnam. We can even go back further to a relative that received the Congressional Medal of Honor and was Honorary pallbearer for Abraham Lincoln. Furthermore, his brother spent 8 years in the Navy, 15 years in the Air Force and retired as a General. Ron spent 21.5 years in the Navy. He became a Chief Petty Officer, spending a great deal of his time as an underwater demolition expert recovering ships, planes and helicopters. While performing his duties and training exercises he received a broken arm/wrist, a messed up shoulder and damaged knees. A hard helicopter landing in 2005 gifted him with back injuries. An arterial gas injury from diving and returning to the surface too quickly gave him lingering effects. He has had two ACL reconstructions and is past due for a knee replacement. He still sleeps with an oxygen bottle because of lingering lung issues. Ron finally slowed down a bit to take a Physician’s Assistant position in the Navy before retiring.

Ron retired to Casper, Wyoming in 2011 to be close to his Mother and two brothers. He is not idle. He finished his Bachelor’s Degree in Emergency Disaster Management and is about to finish his Master’s Degree in Strategic Leadership. Ron also teaches judo and is a Scout Troop Leader. He says he doesn’t have time for the needed knee replacement. No dust settling on this guy’s shoulders.

Ron was at the Casper Veteran Center when he came across a write up about Hunting With Heroes. He called Dan Currah and filled out the paperwork to go pronghorn hunting. Then he met Colton Sasser at a meet-and-greet, went pronghorn hunting with him and they became close friends. He got to hunt antelope again the next year and was also offered a bull elk tag. However, Ron’s true colors were revealed when he asked that it go to another wounded veteran who he felt needed it more.

Today, Scouting has also helped enormously. Ron has teamed up with his brothers and started a National Youth Leadership training program. They will be assisting with a National Scout Jamboree consisting of over 1,000 youth. With Colton and Dan as his second family and now Scouting his third, Ron’s life is considerably brighter. The dark places are leaving.

The second hero in the mix is Chris Sandmark from Casper, Wyoming. He moved from SE Washington state to Casper 26 years ago. He was an air traffic controller in Seattle and then later in Casper. He is also a hunter and successfully harvested a Wyoming mountain goat in 1995 and a moose in 1999. Chris has not harvested a bighorn, but religiously acquired his preference points. Chris met with Dan and Colton from HWH, and the tag transfer to a 50% or more disabled veteran was in progress. Chris had also served in the Army from 1969-1970, just a year and a half out of high school. He has met with Ron before and after the hunt. His comment was, “I got more out of this than Ron.” Moving forward. Like most everything these days, there are expenses and somebody needs to pay the bills. The Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation granted Hunting With Heroes $10K to offset hunting expenses. We preferred the funds be used to assist wounded veterans hunting sheep. Hunting With Heroes
was also successful in acquiring funding from other sources. Funding secured, next steps. It's mid-October, Cody Brown and his crew of Casey and Cory Albright and Fritz Meyer at Wind River Backcountry Outfitters of Dubois, Wyoming have been hunting sheep and other big game species all year. They are honed and ready to graciously provide outfitting services for Ron through Hunting With Heroes. This was the hunt of Ron's dreams. Ron, "I felt extremely fortunate and grateful to have this chance". He would be hunting the Badlands, NE of Dubois which is one of the most unusual picturesque geologic formations in the state. Besides being beautiful, it's a beast to get around in, and that's why rams choose this area as a winter range. Some glassing on the first day produced some rams for Ron to focus his attention on. Not only was the terrain arduous, but the Dubois wind came into play, adding horizontal force in addition to the vertical force of gravity. Balance is important in this terrain. Casey and Cody maneuvered Ron through the sheep terrain until they were about 440 yards from the group. Yep, there was a really nice ram in the group of three. However, they were laying down and at an angle that didn’t provide the best opportunity for a killing shot. So, they played the "sheep game" which is simple but nerve racking - just watch and wait. Patience. After an hour or so, they did what sheep often do - stand up and immediately start walking without providing a good shooting angle until they are out of sight. Ron's heart naturally sank but this wasn't Cody and Casey's first rodeo. After a short move downhill they were back in sight of three feeding rams. Ron found the best position for himself and his 7mm rifle, selected the largest ram and meticulously squeezed the trigger. Bang, the rifle bucked a little followed by a slight buck from the ram. It was a perfect shot behind the left front shoulder and the ram took a few steps and fell on the scenic landscape of the Badlands. As Ron said, he had just harvested a beautiful majestic animal in the most beautiful and majestic setting in Wyoming. While this was Ron's first witness to a sheep harvest, it was Cody's 103rd. Whether it's the first or 103rd, the sense of magic mixed with gratefulness permeates the soul. The graciousness didn't stop. Once the private landowners Fred Fish and, Steward and Fred Downing, heard about Ron's success they were quick to invite the hunting party to use easier access through their properties at the lower end of the Badlands.

In closing Ron stated, "If it had not been for the generosity of Chris Sandmark donating his license to the Hunting With Heroes program, I would not have had this life experience. I am so grateful for Hunting with Heroes, the Wyoming Wild Sheep Foundation, the Wind River Backcountry Outfitters, and numerous others. It has helped me through my transition back into the "real" world and has helped me build friendships with like-minded disabled veterans. Also, keep in mind the families. They bear the brunt of our service and provide the core support. They must be recognized and thanked as well. My life has changed because of all of you." Well Ron, our lives have changed too. They are enriched because of you, your family and your fellow veterans. We thank you, our fellow wild sheep companion.