

## CHAPTER 9

### A LESSON ON FEAR

“I get this strange feeling right in my chest,” sputtered Andrew Shutov, flapping the shirt pocket over his heart for emphasis. “It is how you say, very funny feeling. Kind of tingling feeling.”

“The word I believe you are looking for, Andrew, is FEAR!” I offered, as we listened to our new Russian friend, Shutov, describe a close encounter with a large grizzly bear. “It’s called total, absolute, unbridled, fear!”

“Yes, fear!” Shutov shot back, “Very much fear.”

“And how about your shorts, Andrew? Do you need clean shorts?” I chuckled.

“Yes I think clean shorts would be good,” Shutov grinned. “I have very funny feeling in shorts, too.”

This conversation about fear and soiled shorts took place in September of 1994 at a bear hunting camp south of St. Petersburg. Shutov was filling in as cameraman for Bob Coker, one of three hunters who had joined me on a bruin hunting expedition to “The Land of the Bear”. Coker, from . . . . . was filming the hunt for a video he was working on. He wanted to film one of the first – if not the first - Russian bear ever shot with a bow and arrow. Shutov was supposed to

have been along as an interpreter but he got a little more than he bargained for when Coker's regular cameraman was unable to make the trip.

Coker had been sitting in a tree stand overlooking a small patch of oats when the action began to heat up on Day One. Coker had positioned Shutov in a ground blind a fair distance from the tree stand, hoping to capture the action on film for a video he was working on. The bears were supposed to come out into the field under the tree stand, a safe distance from Shutov. But, that's not the way it worked out.

As Coker watched four bears feeding in front of his stand, a fifth very large bear stepped out of the woods. The other bears immediately scrambled for cover, one of them almost running over Shutov, who was so frightened that he forgot to turn on the camera.

Shutov was still recovering from this harrowing experience when a herd of 20 wild boar began moving down a trail behind him. Two very large and very ugly boars broke off from the herd and began feeding towards Shutov. As they fed closer and closer Shutov decided to stand up and wave his arms to scare them away. Instead of running off, however, the two Russian boars charged. Fortunately for Shutov, they broke off their charge at the last second and ran into the woods just a few yards shy of ripping him up with their huge, razor sharp tusks. That's when the "very strange feeling" in Shutov's chest became very

pronounced. Again, he was too frightened to turn on the camera, missing some great action footage, but who could blame him.

“They were as big as the bears,” Shutov later exclaimed back at camp.

“They had very long and very sharp tusks. Tomorrow I sit in tree, too! No more sitting on ground.”

The next day Shutov *was* sitting in a tree stand next to Coker when Coker arrowed what just may be the largest interior brown bear ever taken in Russia with a bow. The big bear walked right under the tree stand before trotting off into the oat patch. Coker drilled the bear at 35 yards. The guides estimated the bear to be in the 8 foot range. We are waiting for final word from Coker’s taxidermist to determine the animal’s actual size. It was indeed a very nice bear.

The other two hunters, Paul Van Dam from Hamilton, Michigan and Jerry Honderd from Grandville, Michigan also encountered a lot of exciting action. Honderd, a 65-year-old hunter who made us “young” guys look old and tired, shot a nice 5-year-old bear the second day of the hunt.

“We hadn’t seen any bears all night so my attention was starting to wander when all of a sudden my guide nudged me and pointed toward the field,” explained Honderd. “There stood a big bear. It appeared like a ghost out of nowhere. I slowly raised my rifle and put the crosshairs on his chest. When I

squeezed the trigger the bear ran off like I never touched him. I couldn't believe how fast it took off and began to wonder if I had missed it."

Honderd's aim was true. The bear ran less than 100 yards before dropping from a well placed heart shot.

"I can't believe it! I can't believe I actually got a bear," Honderd exclaimed upon seeing his nearly 7-foot trophy. "Wait until I tell all my friends at Sunset!

Honderd's whimsical reference to Sunset Manor, a retirement village in Jenison, Michigan was a light-hearted poke at his age. Most guys Honderd's age get their thrills on the shuffleboard court. But not Honderd. At 65 years young he loves to jog and is starting to seriously get into big game hunting. This was his first ever bear hunt. What a way to start – shooting a grizzly in Russia!

"This was the best hunt I've ever been on," exclaims Honderd. "I'm sure glad I went along. I had a great time. The Russian people were a lot friendlier than I thought they would be, the accommodations were good, and the tour of St. Petersburg was a lot of fun. This turned out to be a lot more than a bear hunting trip. It was an adventure I'll never forget. I'm going again."

The other member of our group, Paul Van Dam of Hamilton, also found himself smack dab in the middle of a whole lot of bear action. After looking over a number of bear, Van Dam scored on a nice bruin two days before the end of the hunt.

“I was walking quietly to my stand with my guide when we heard the other guide’s dog begin to bark, back at the truck,” relates Van Dam. “My guide shook his head and his fist, mumbling something in Russian. I think he was ready to shoot the dog! Just then we saw bear’s ears poke up out of the oats. Then we saw the bear stand up. It had been laying down in the oat field. We were both shocked.”

“As the bear started to head back into the woods, I quickly raised my rifle and put the cross hairs on his chest and fired. I was sure I had made a good shot.”

It was a good shot. Van Dam scored on a dark colored grizzly approaching the 7-foot class. He was one excited hunter.

“I had no idea what to expect going into this trip,” exclaimed Van Dam. “It almost sounded too good to be true. This hunt was to rank right near the top of all the hunts I’ve ever been on. I was very happy with the number of bears we saw and impressed with how well organized the hunt was. There were no surprises and no disappointments. I thoroughly enjoyed every minute I spent in Russia.”

As for me, although I did carry a gun, I was more intent on getting some good footage for my TV program. I wound up filming 4 bears, 3 of them at very close range. This also made me a very happy camper. The final tally showed that our group had seen 21 bears and approximately 50 wild boar during our stay. Not a bad week!