

Behind the Badge - Top 10

By Joseph Wenzel

Bradford County WCO

It had been raining for several days and local flooding was eminent. I was tired and decided to crawl into bed for the night. It seemed like hours when I woke up to my ringing cell phone, but I noticed the clock showed only 11 p.m. At first I thought I was imagining things, but it really was my phone ringing and vibrating away on the night stand. When I answered I was surprised to hear the voice of patrolman Rich Horton of the Athens Township Police Department.

Rich apologized for bothering me, but informed me that he was in the middle of an apparent poaching case and needed my assistance. He gave me an address in Sayre where I would find what he thought to be unlawfully taken deer, and let me know officers from Sayre would remain on the scene.

At that moment he was at his station, waiting for Magisterial District Judge Michael Shaw to arrive for an arraignment of suspect Bucky Sleaze. I told him I'd be right there. As I got dressed I thought this is crazy: Who in their right mind would be out poaching in June and in pouring rain?

After arriving at the address in Sayre, I was greeted by Officer Tom Wilson. Tom led me to the backyard and a maroon Ford Taurus. "We didn't move a thing, Joe," Tom said. "We wanted you to see this for yourself." The first thing I noticed was two guns inside the car, a pump action shotgun and a bolt action .22 rifle. Tom told me the car belonged to the woman who was renting the home where the car was parked, and that she was inside with some kids.

"We better talk to her and get her consent to search or else get a warrant," I said. As we approached the door I could see through the curtains in the front windows a woman sitting on a chair and a few young kids were crawling around. I remember thinking how late it was and that the kids should be in bed — a place where I wish I still was, for that matter.

Sheila Chartreuse answered my knock on the door, and as the door opened we could see a few nice deer head mounts hanging on the walls of the meagerly furnished home. Sheila was pleasant and invited us in. I identified myself and asked her if she would give me a statement as to what happened, and if she would give us consent to search her car and parts of her home for any unlawful items.

We informed her of her rights, and I was surprised at how cooperative she was. She told me she would help in every way, and that the only thing she asked of me was that I would remove anything illegal from her home and car, and especially the guns that belonged to her boyfriend Bucky Sleaze. I asked where the mounted deer heads came from and Sheila told us they belonged to Bucky.

Sheila went on to calmly explain that earlier in the evening Bucky asked if she wanted to go spotlighting deer with the kids. Sheila said that this was common practice and that her kids liked it. They packed up the kids around 9 o'clock and headed out of town. Sheila explained that her 14-year-old son, Jack, was in the backseat with her 4-year-old son, Mikey. Her 2-year-old daughter, June, was sitting on her lap in the front. She noted that they were

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driving dirt roads adjacent to the New York border, as Jack, with a loaded .22, worked the spotlight and Bucky, with a loaded 12-gauge, drove. She also added that Bucky's driver's license had been suspended. Sheila casually claimed they had done this before and thought it was something everyone did. When I told her it was unlawful, she seemed surprised.

On this particular evening Bucky turned off Mile Lane, a steep winding narrow state road, onto McCardle Road, a road Sheila said was always quite productive. Jack immediately spied a doe about 25 yards off the roadway. He held the light steady as Bucky carefully opened the driver door and quietly slid the shotgun into shooting position. When he pulled the trigger the doe dropped in her tracks. Bucky and Jack methodically jumped from the car and ran to the deer while Sheila slid across the seat and drove off. Her job was to drive down the road to make sure the coast was clear, park for a few minutes then head back.

As this was occurring the landowner, Al Cole, was reading when he was startled by a loud shot. As the same thing had happened the night before, he decided to investigate this time. Despite the pouring rain, he hopped in his truck and went for a spin around the farm. Al drove down his lane and when he hit the dirt township road he saw headlights coming toward him. He stopped to see what was going on when a maroon Taurus pulled into his lane and turned around. When the car turned he jotted down the license plate number — which proved to be invaluable. Al watched the car drive down the roadway and pull over. Then, following, he saw what appeared to be two men standing in the darkness holding guns, blood on their clothing, and a dead deer nearby.

Concerned with his safety, he looped around on another road to get back to his farm lane, which took some extra time, and at home immediately called 911.

The Bradford County 911 center immediately dispatched Patrolman Rich Horton, who was patrolling nearby. Rich is an avid hunter and sportsman, and when he got the call about possible poaching he was eager to respond. He arrived at the Cole farm and gathered as much information as he could, but he wanted to try to catch the suspects before they got away.

Thanks to the license plate number, Rich traced the vehicle to Sheila Chartreuse, from Sayre. Familiar with the area and figuring the suspects would take the quickest route home, Rich notified Sayre Borough Police about where to look for and head off the maroon Taurus. Officer Horton drove the route he expected them to take, but after meeting Officer Watkins they realized the vehicle had not shown up, so they decided to go to the Sayre address.

Upon arrival they saw the Ford parked behind the house. Without hesitation Rich and Derek cautiously approached the front door. After they knocked they could hear footsteps approaching the door, and when it opened both officers immediately recognized Bucky Sleaze. Sleaze was no stranger to law enforcement officers: He had a history of drug and alcohol abuse, and of being unstable. Officers Horton and Watkins identified themselves, which seemed laughable at the time because they all knew each other quite well.

Bucky wasn't tall but he was very muscular. Officer Horton is a big guy and both Horton and Watkins are very athletic. But none of that seemed to matter because, without warning, Sleaze charged out the door and began attacking both officers. Sleaze inflicted some pretty good jabs, but it wasn't long before he was on the ground in handcuffs. In the meantime, more police officers had responded to the scene.

By the time I arrived everything was under control, and I was pleased Sheila was being so cooperative and helpful. I always try to not appear condescending, but I couldn't help but to scold Sheila for putting her children in such a dangerous position.

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With consent, I opened up the unlocked car and retrieved a Remington 12-gauge from the front seat. One slug round was in the chamber and three more in the magazine. On the back seat lay a spotlight and an old rusty bolt action .22 rifle with a fully loaded magazine and a round in the chamber.

The trunk lid was ajar, with remnants of what appeared to be a deflated kiddie swimming pool hanging down over the bumper. When I opened the lid Officer Wilson and I saw a large pool of blood and deer hair. I photographed everything, all while keeping my lens clear of rain drops. The heavy rain had already washed most of the blood away from the outside of the car and grass, but deer hair across the yard led us to an outside cellar door.

We found our way in the darkness and turned on a pull-chain light. I entered first and immediately noticed several sets of deer antlers and a few deer skulls crammed on the ledge of the old stone cellar wall. I snapped a few photos and counted what appeared to be 10 sets of deer antlers. Officer Wilson and I proceeded into the furnace room of the dirt-floor cellar. As the beams of our flashlights swept across the damp, dark room we could see what appeared to be blood and deer hair. The smell and stench was sickening. I remember gagging a few times and had to go outside and take a breather.

As we searched, Officer Wilson began poking an old iron furnace poker into a blood-soaked cardboard box. Turned out the box was filled with the entrails of a freshly killed deer. Looking at the remains, which were still warm, it was evident that the doe had still been nursing fawns.

I began bagging what I could, along with the deer antlers by the entrance way and loaded it all up in my vehicle. I went back up to tell Sheila that we would be leaving and what I was taking with me. I don't think she was pleased to learn what was left for her to clean up. I also advised her that she, and her juvenile son, could be facing criminal and game law charges.

I thanked Officer Wilson for his assistance and then headed over to Athens Township to meet Officers Horton and Watkins, who were just finishing up with the arraignment of Bucky Sleaze.

Apparently Judge Shaw was less than impressed with Bucky's actions, especially his assault of two police officers. Judge Shaw set bail at \$100,000 cash bond. Before Bucky was taken to the Bradford County Correctional Facility in Burlington, I had a chance to talk to him.

I entered a small holding room at the magistrate's office where Bucky sat on a chair, handcuffed and his legs shackled. All he had on was a pair of old tattered jeans covered with blood; no shirt, no socks, no shoes. When he saw me enter the room he glared at me with a cold stare. I identified myself and asked if he wanted to say anything to me.

He kind of grinned and chuckled to himself. He seemed a bit surprised to see a WCO who he had never dealt with before. I asked him where all the antlers and nice deer mounts came from and he said they were all killed in New York. It was pretty obvious he wasn't going to say anything incriminating, so I left.

The Game Commission's Northeast Region Office was closed, so I wasn't able to gather any records we might have had on Bucky. Having been a regional supervisor prior to transferring to Bradford County, I vaguely recalled a few of our WCOs having run-ins with a guy by the name of Sleaze.

The next morning I discovered that Bucky Sleaze, who was 30 at the time, killed a Canada goose on a town park pond in Sayre in 1989, when he was 13, and that he also had been charged in 1992, 1994, two times in 1995, 2000, 2001, three charges in 2004, and now my

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case in 2006. He also has a track record in New York. As a result of his actions on this particular night, Bucky was charged with multiple counts of simple assault, aggravated assault, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, corruption of minors, endangering the welfare of children, defiant trespass, loaded firearms in vehicles, unlawful use of lights, and unlawful taking and possession of game and wildlife.

Bucky spent four weeks in the county lockup until his preliminary hearing. His attorney convinced the judge to lower the bail, so Bucky could be released. In the meantime, I charged Sheila with loaded firearms in a vehicle, unlawful use of lights, unlawful taking and possession of game or wildlife. She entered a guilty plea and Judge Shaw assessed a penalty of \$1,219.

Sheila's son Jack was charged with one single count of unlawful taking and possession of game or wildlife. A juvenile hearing was held and Jack was assessed a \$350 fine and sent to a juvenile group home in western Bradford County for an undisclosed period of time. Jack showed no remorse, which kind of sent a chill down my spine. It took almost a year to settle Bucky's case as it proceeded slowly and with a lot of continuances. Bucky did end up spending a few more months in jail but was then released on probation.

In 2010, when the Legislature was working on a new package of wildlife laws to help curb poaching, which would later be called Act 54, the Game Commission was asked how many people could potentially be affected by the new legislation if enacted. Specifically, the legislators wanted to know how many people had been charged with poaching big game within the past seven years, and how many of them were repeat offenders. The list revealed that one individual was convicted of 23 such incidents, two had 21, another two had 19, one with 17 and another had 16.

Our man Bucky Sleaze was obviously somewhere on that list, and most recently Law Enforcement Chief Randy Shoup at the Harrisburg headquarters revealed that Bucky had at least 14 convictions in the past seven years, so he is somewhere near the top 10.

In 2010, I stopped at a local garage to talk to the owner about a recent repair. WCO Wade Kramer, who was a cadet at the time, was with me. The mechanic kind of laughed when he saw me and pointed back to Sheila Chartreuse, who was standing by a car. Sheila smiled and waved to me and said, "Bucky and I are married now. I'll bet he was your biggest bust ever."

"No, not really," I replied.

Bucky then appeared from inside the garage. He waved and started walking over. He told Wade and me that he wasn't poaching anymore. As we drove away Wade asked if I thought he would really stay out of trouble. "Only time will tell," I said.

A while later I was informed by New York State DEC Police that Bucky, who had moved to New York, was under investigation for the unlawful taking of deer. (His Pennsylvania hunting privileges are suspended until 2019.)

Last October, I was called by Athens Township Police to the scene of a spotlighting and shooting incident. I met Athens Township Police Officer Roger Clink in a matter of minutes, but there was no vehicle to be found. I told Officer Clink that I would stick around, and I backed in a pull-off area near where a witness had seen a spotlight working when a shot was fired. Unfortunately, the witness, who called 911, didn't get a description of the vehicle. They did, however, see the vehicle cross over into New York.

About 45 minutes after Officer Clink left the scene a vehicle drove slowly toward me from the New York side. The vehicle was being driven on the wrong side of the road, and a

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spotlight was meticulously working the field where the shot had been fired, giving me reasonable suspicion that they were involved in the prior shooting.

As soon as they passed by me I pulled out with my lights activated and pulled the vehicle over. Three large men jumped out of the small SUV and started to approach my vehicle. I exited and ordered them to stand against their car. I immediately recognized the driver as Moose Sleaze — Bucky's cousin. I radioed the PGC Northeast dispatch center and gave my location, and then approached the suspects. It was obvious that I was going to come up empty, as Moose politely offered to show me the inside of the car. Other than a spotlight there was nothing else in it. Moose started to joke that he wasn't like Bucky, which I took to mean Moose just hadn't been caught yet.

I left the scene and went back to the Athens Township Police station to meet up with Officer Clink. I started to explain what had just occurred when he received a radio call from Bradford County 911, reporting that there was now a green pickup parked near where the shot had been fired from earlier.

Clark and I ran to our cars and proceeded to the location, only five miles away. We were there in no time, but again found nothing. I did see the taillights of a pickup heading toward New York, and it was moving at a high rate of speed. I backed in and sat at my spot until after midnight, again coming up empty handed.

A week later as Athens Township Police Officer Denny Slater was on an investigation regarding the illegal riding of ATVs, he was approached by Waldo Sleaze, another cousin of Bucky's. Waldo told Officer Slater that it was Bucky who had shot a big 8-point the night of the latest incident. He told the officer that Bucky is now driving a green Dodge pickup, and that he had come back to pick up the deer in a different vehicle after it had been shot.

A few days later Bucky called our Northeast Region Office and gave them a phone number where he could be reached if we were looking for him. This is an example of how arrogant Bucky is. I suppose it's just a matter of time until we cross paths with Bucky again, and sadly enough, he will continue to move up in the rankings. □