

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DB - 23
 Sunday Drivers,
 Sunday Hunters

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 Institute of Current World Affairs
 522 Fifth Avenue
 New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Nearly all of the regulars at the Friday evening Stammtisch (reserved table) "im Minchen" are devoted sportsmen. The trade school principal, Heinie Heide, is an enthusiastic skier. Erich Decker, (DB #3) drags his wife out for long hikes. Emil Stork belongs to a bowling club. And potbellied Willi Friedrich, the dentist, is a hunter with body and soul.

Recently, the Stammtisch members decided to have a "dead hare" supper. Herr Friedrich promised to supply the game from an impending hunt, and in passing, he invited me to come along on the chase. On the basis of occasional pursuits of rabbits and woodchucks in New England, I had imagined that Willi and I, and perhaps a third would simply go out one morning and course the fields. Far from it. In Germany, the desire and pursuit of the hare is a big production.

It was 8:30 a.m. of a chill Sunday morning. The grass on the fields around Giessen was frozen bristling stiff, and the blushing sun was peeking over the Schifffenberg heights. Willi Friedrich and I drove out to the edge of town and down a rutty road until we came to a group of people. There were 38 men and two women, most of them armed with .10 and .12 gauge double-barreled shotguns.

"Donnerwetter," I cried, "what are we after? Elephants?" Herr Friedrich sniffed indignantly, "No," he said, "hares." Then why, I wanted to know, were we going out with a whole platoon. Because this, he explained, was a Treibjagd (drive hunt or battue).

The hunters were in full regalia; shiny black hobnailed boots, forest green loden coats, flared breeches, black hats with green bands, or green hats with black bands, and some with rucksacks. Five large dogs were tugging at leashes, all of them of the German shorthair breed. Their coats were steaming, and they whimpered from time to time.

As each new hunter arrived, the greeting "Weidmannsheil!" (good hunting) was exchanged. When all were assembled, the huntmaster called for order and explained the program for the day. He is a skinny, wizened fellow in his sixties, gimlet-eyed and obviously unaccustomed to long palaver. The huntmaster, Karl Seng, is in private life the commisar of Giessen's criminal police. In order to manage this hunt, he had leased a couple of dozen acres around Giessen for the privilege of hunting. Under German law, everything shot on this preserve belongs to him. If a hunter wants to keep the game he has shot, he must pay the lessee for it.

Each of these sportsmen had been personally invited to participate in the Treibjagd by Herr Seng. All of them had passed the "hunters test" - a stiff examination. And all of them had hunters' liability insurance.

At 9 a.m., the bugler blew a long call on his curved horn to announce the beginning of the hunt. The dogs began to howl. This call has been traditional in Germany for many centuries. Next, Huntmaster Seng posted the shooters for the first drive. He sent them out single-file to surround an area a half mile square. They stood about 50 yards apart. Meanwhile, ten of us who had been designated as "drivers" were posted in between the hunters.

The bugler blew a short call, the signal for the drivers to start marching toward the center of the square. It also meant that the hunters could start shooting as soon as they spotted a hare. We drivers raised a hue and cry. Some clapped. Others whistled. A couple cried: "Komm' Has', Komm Has'" (Come here! come here!). We stumped slowly over the frozen furrows, brown clods iced white with frost. Through the thin haze, we could see the dark figures of the hunters, guns now loaded and at the ready. They began closing the circle behind the drivers - but at a distance.

The drive was almost over, when suddenly a pale brown form rocketed up off the field about 30 yards from me. A big hare. He bounded off towards the space between Huntmaster Seng and the next hunter. A shot cracked through the cold air. The hare still scampered along like Harrison Dillard. Another shot. The hare somersaulted, his white tail and underbelly flashing. But he kept on running. Then he vanished into the russet earth.

Herr Seng unleashed his straining retriever and cried, "Apporte (go get him) Bodo, Apporte!" The dog galloped off, picked up the scent, lost it, ran around in a circle, found it, started off again, lost the scent once more, found it, and finally tracked the hare down. He was a good 300 yards away. We could barely see the dog as he seized the hare and throttled it between his jaws. The other dogs yelped jealously.

The horn sounded again, ending the drive. We gathered along a tiny frozen brook. The hound, "Bodo" came trotting in with his prey. The hare seemed really big - a yard long from toe to toe. A panel truck drove up; the driver got out and took the hare, cut a slit in one of its hind legs and shoved the other foot through the slit. Then he passed a slat between the legs and hung the hare on a rack inside the truck.

The huntmaster sent the shooters and drivers out again, one by one, to surround the adjoining two acres. "Herr Schmidt, go to the left," Seng murmured, "Herr Gans, go to the right. Weidmannsheil."

I went out this time with Willi Friedrich. As we thudded over the hard ground he told me a little about German hunting customs and language.



"...Go to the left."

For instance, he said, there is a complete hunter's vocabulary for the hare. A male is called a "buck". His eyes are "seers", his ears, "spoons"; his tail a "flower"; his fur, "wool". When he leaps off his "seat" the hare "clicks his heels." And when a retriever seizes him by the throat he sometimes "wails." Willi said there was dispute on this latter word going back to Middle Ages. Since then, German hunters have quarreled whether wounded hares "yell", "scream", or "wail".

Hunting laws, he added, had been handed down by the princes and emperors.

Thus Kaiser Ferdinand III stipulated that no more than two hounds be allowed to chase a hare on penalty of a 100 ducat fine. The most recent edition of hunting laws, said Herr Friedrich, was made in 1934 by Hermann Göring, a well-known devotee of St. Hubertus.



Jagdweather

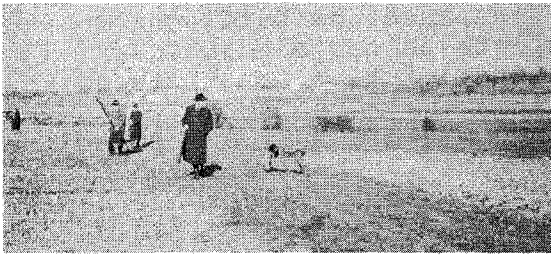
Not one hare was raised in the next drive, so we all tramped along a ridge to the next field. It was after 10 o'clock, and the sun was up, but the frost still lay on the grass. "This is Jagdweather (hunting weather)," said one of the shooters. "Or Hitlerweather," said another with a chuckle. (It rained so seldom when Hitler made a speech that Germans called clear skies "Hitler weather"). Bad weather is called "pig weather".

The third drive enclosed a deep ravine and a clump of beech trees. Towards the finish, shots rang out from the opposite side. The dogs yelped, and one could hear a hare wailing. Our panel truck came by to pick up the next victim.

Again, Huntmaster Seng sent us out to encircle a big plot - this time a large quarry, part of which was overgrown with bushes and brambles. It took a half an hour to post all the hunters and drivers. The bugler blew his short call and we scrambled down into the pit, whistling and shouting: "Komm' Has' Has' Has'!" As I crashed into the undergrowth, a hare sailed up in front of me and bounced past at arm's reach. "One to the right!" I bellowed, and a few seconds later there was a burst of firing.

Two more hares were killed in this drive. The third was chased down by Seng's "Bodo" and another hound named "Argo". They fought for possession of the struggling animal until the masters could separate them. It was "Argo" who finally snapped its neck.

The next five drives took us over level fields towards the south end of the city. Drivers and hunters unlodged a total of 12 hares during these hunts.



"Argo" retrieves.

line like a good halfback, they would put on a burst of speed and flash past the bewildered shooters into freedom. The other nine were not as adept a broken field running.

From the last field, it was only a few steps to the Frankfurterstrasse and a tavern. It was 1 p.m. and time for lunch. On the way in, the hunters recapitulated the morning's hits and misses. A couple pulled out leather covered flasks for a snort of cognac. The man who seemed happiest about lunch was a fellow who looked as if he had put away quite a few in his time. He weighs about 300 pounds. Of all the hunters, he was the only one to carry a leather field stool. He unfolded it between each drive. The wiry huntmaster, Seng, delighted in sending this one out on the longest part of the drive.



"When's lunch"

preserve on the other side of the railroad tracks. This was one of the large flats along the Lahn River - "good for hares", said a hunter. Again, Herr Seng sent us out along a wide periphery. The horn was winded. Breeches snapped shut over the big shells. The drivers stamped in towards the middle. Two more hares expired. One more got away.



Two expired

On the next drive, I was again next to Willi Friedrich. Both barrels of his old .10-gauge were loaded. From way off on the other side of the circle, we could hear shots. Instants later we saw a hare curving towards us. "Come on, Willi," I urged. The hare slanted right at him. Herr Friedrich pulled the trigger. A flat click. Misfired. The hare leaped past. Willi swung with him and fired the second barrel. Missed. By the time he reloaded, the hare had disappeared into a gulch, two hundred yards away.

Willi Friedrich got another chance on the following drive - this time at a hare who had managed to skip through a barrage from 18 different hunters. Herr Friedrich mercifully missed again. On this drive, a crow was foolish enough to cruise within range of the shooters. He was shot down neatly and retrieved by the faithful "Argo".

On the fifth and final drive of the afternoon, a buzzard was winged and bagged by another hunter.

The sun was almost down over the Taunus foothills when we trudged back to the truck with the last of the game. Another 16 hares were layed out on the ground along with the buzzard and the crow. The total for the day was 30 hares. Ten more had escaped. Huntmaster Seng estimated that 100 shots had been fired to bring in this bag.

As we strolled back to the tavern, Zur Linde, I asked myself about German-style hare hunting: It just didn't seem right to surround the animals with nearly impenetrable walls of guns. Certainly, some got away, but the odds were all against the hares. And those big cannon-like shotguns, choked so that they throw a spray of lead a yard in diameter. And the dogs. Heck, they don't give the animals half a chance. It's the same with deer and other game.

On the other hand, the Treibjagd is only one form of hunting in Germany. Hunters do go out singly and in pairs from time to time. And then the Treibjagd is, after all, a bang-up example of German thoroughness and efficiency. Whether it's sportsmanlike is open to question. They say it is. Most Americans would disagree.

Some things should be said in defense of German hunting. For one thing, although these hunters and drivers were out on Sunday, they were by no means Sunday drivers or Sunday hunters. Every one was a thoroughly qualified woodsman, trained in handling weapons, familiar with animal habits, and obedient to the laws of nature and the laws of hunting.

A case before the Giessen Juvenile Court this week gives an idea of how strict the German game preserve laws are. The youthful defendant had been out hunting on his father's leased hunting preserve. He shot a hare, wounding it. The boy chased the hare until he caught it - just over the line in the adjoining game preserve. Then, instead of turning over his hare to the lessee of the neighboring plot, as prescribed by law, he took it home. For that he got fined \$25 - a lot of money for a youngster.

The men who hunted with Karl Seng that Sunday were by no means what they contemptuously call "Sonntagsjäger" - the witless novices who buy up all the expensive equipment they can find and then go out to jeopardize the countryside.

Thanks to the small number of such Sonntagsjäger, the ratio of hunting accidents to hunters in Germany is many times lower than that in America, where anybody who wants to can buy a rifle, get a license, and start shooting. Moreover, the German hunter is a staunch supporter of game conservation rules - perhaps more so than his American counterpart.

These Giessen hunters are all members of the Hubertus Verband, the local hunting association. Almost all of them are, like Willi Friedrich, professional men - doctors, lawyers, professors, and businessmen. They are the burgher heirs of the noblemen-hunters of the past. Indeed, hunting in Germany is still a sport of privilege.

Usually, you have to be somebody to get invited on a hunt. But today, hunting, like other leisure class pursuits, is fast being drawn in to the stream of this fluid post-war society.



A Sonntagsjäger

Back at the tavern we all sat down at a long table. A game dinner that Karl Seng had ordered was served - venison stew, potatoes, salad, more beer, and more schnapps.

After the meal, Huntmaster Seng stood up and recounted the days deeds. He cited Herr Schmidt for shooting three hares, and Herr Gans for bringing down five. Herr Gans was toasted as the Jagdkönig - king of the hunt.

Willi Friedrich then told me about some of the gamy customs observed at table after the hunt. A hunter who has misbehaved, for example, is called before a "hunt court". If found guilty of the

charges, he may be sentenced to drink schnapps out of a gunbarrel. Or worse, a pint of lukewarm water. No one was called to accounts this time.

The postprandial festivities included more drinking, some hunting songs - "life is only a dream to a dying beast" - and a host of revolting jokes. When some of the hunters' wives arrived, the jokes became even cruder. It was getting late, and it had been a long day; 13 hours and 15 miles.

Next Friday, our Stammtisch had a supper of hare meat. Willi Friedrich admitted that none of the roast buckshot belonged to him. But it tasted good anyway.

David Binder
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