



Pomp and ceremony are at least as important as shooting at game in a German hunt. Homage is paid each species of game by special songs performed on hunting horns.

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A LESSON FROM

# DIE JAGD

Photos by author

A lunch in the field during a German small game hunt is a major production somewhat similar to an American county fair.



We assembled in a raw and foggy December dawn at the special siding in Heidelberg reserved for the private train of the Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Army in Europe (CINCUSAREUR). Our party consisted of the CINC, his aide, the USAREUR Conservation Officer and myself, Political Advisor on the CINC's staff. The occasion was the annual official *Jagd* (hunt) of the *Landeshauptmann* (Governor) of the province of Hesse.

Each Governor in Germany hosts such an official hunt once or twice a year and invites a distinguished list of civil and government leaders, from the few remaining wealthy, aristocratic landholders to the cream of the industrial, commercial, official and military establishments. Sizeable U. S. military forces are located in Hesse, so the Commanders-in-Chief of the U. S. Army and the U. S. Air Force are invited to the Hessian shoot, together with a few of their staffs. I was included as a senior hunting member of CINCUSAREUR's staff.

All of us received formal invitations, plus an appropriate military travel order, authorizing travel on the CINC's train. Uniform was specified—hunting green, the approved German hunting costume. An American who appeared in red or blaze orange at a German hunt would be regarded at best as laughable or, at worst, discourteous. On this occasion, a state dinner would wind up the proceedings, so we brought with us more formal attire, also hunting green, to change into after the shoot.

We had an hour's comfortable ride, with breakfast en route, to Frankfurt and travelled by car another half-hour to a Hessian state shooting preserve. This preserve consisted of a sizeable island in the Rhine River and an adjacent peninsula, about 3000 acres of fields and woods. Waiting for us were the senior state hunting and forestry officials, a company of gamekeepers, 30-40 students of the Hessian State Forestry School for beaters and a number of distinguished guests.

Other guests were arriving in a steady stream of chauffeur-driven Mercedes cars. Finally, the Govern-

nor arrived dressed in appropriate green, although a non-hunter, and welcomed the many guests he knew personally or by the evident marks of their rank and status.

Then began the opening ceremonies with a Salute and Invitation to the Hunt blown on hunting horns by a platoon of selected *Jaegers* (gamekeepers). This was followed by a warm and friendly speech of welcome from the Governor. Then the Grand Marshal of the Hunt, the senior forester of the Province, outlined the rules of the day: What types of game were shootable (cock pheasants, hens on the final drive of the day only, hares, rabbits and foxes), cau-

tached to our numbers other than to divide the crowd into odds and evens, although the dozen or so top-ranking guests were singled out for the best places.

When all the guns were posted, we heard in the distance the horn blast signifying the beginning of the drive. Shortly afterward, the action began. Up and down the line could be heard warnings, "a Hense, a Hense!" or the jubilant "Cocker!" or "Haas!" (Hare) followed by a volley of shots. After the firing, came the line of beaters, whooping and clapping sticks against trees as they advanced. Each of us was too busy to pay too much attention to his neighbors as the pheasants



Before a hunting license can be issued in Germany, the hunter must pass a rigorous examination. The certificate above signifies the author has done so.

tioned on gun safety and wished the traditional *Waidmanns Heil* (Hunter's salute).

As the horn blowers renewed the Invitation to the Hunt, to the accompaniment of the howling of the gamekeepers' dogs, hunters were assigned numbers. I drew number 53. Then we filed off, even numbers with one senior gamekeeper, odd numbers with another, to our positions for the opening drive.

We were stationed by our marshal about 50 yards apart along the edge of a wood. The even-numbered hunters were similarly posted along the flank of the woods. Their line was roughly at right angles to ours. No particular significance was at-

came over at treetop height, but from the firing it was evident that each got some chances and some got many. Finally, the beaters reached the lines of shooters, and the hunting horn signalled the end of the drive, after which no one is permitted to shoot, however tempting the opportunity.

The beaters and the *Jaegers* with their dogs proceeded to pick up the fallen game. Along came a long, stylish hunting cart, drawn by two grey horses, and equipped with special racks in which the pheasants and hares were hung in rows, while the shooters were led to their positions for the next drive.

Each drive lasted about an hour,

including preparations and pick up. After the third drive, everybody assembled for lunch at picnic tables set up for the occasion and served by caterers equipped for and experienced at this kind of thing. First, a shot glass of *Schnapps* all around to warm the heart and drive out the December chill. Then a solid meal of hot, thick pea soup with chunks of sausage in it, thick slices of dark bread and beer and coffee to wash it all down.

When everyone had eaten his fill and had his smoke, the lines formed, and the afternoon shoot began. On the last drive of the afternoon, hen pheasants were also fair game, which assured that everyone finished with a flurry of shooting.

After the final pick-up, we found our cars and proceeded to an appointed lodge where a bonfire had been kindled in the courtyard. There, everyone assembled for the ceremonial high point of the day, the *Streckelege*, or laying out of the day's bag in rows in order of rank. All Central European game species are ranked according to their "nobility", with the *Hirsch*, or stag, at the top. In our case, cock pheasants took precedence, then hens, hares, partridges and rabbits, below which came only "miscellaneous," such as crows, jays and the like.

The total for each species was solemnly announced, upon which a selected group of horn blowers blew the traditional motif for that animal. Next came a brief word from the Grand Marshal, thanking and congratulating the shooters for a safe, successful and pleasurable day. We then repaired indoors for coffee and cake before changing to cleaner and drier clothes.

The Governor's dinner was another festive occasion, and eminently representative of what *die Jagd* means in Germany. The principal entree was roast boar. During the eating and drinking, we enjoyed a horn concert of hunting music selections from the works of the Mozarts, father and son, Handel and others, played by the students from the Forestry School.

At each place was a small book of German popular and traditional hunting songs, and all present



During the small game hunt, a wagon was used to transport the game.

joined in during various selections between courses and after dinner.

There is a very wide selection of German hunting songs which are part of the ritual of the hunt. Every German hunter knows them. At one point, the Germans called on the Americans to do our part. This led to a minor problem, since hunting is not the social and ceremonial occasion for Americans that it is for Germans. We have no repertoire of hunting songs. We got off a couple of ragged verses of "D'ye ken Jon Peel," then fell back on "Roll out the Barrel" for our encore.

The final event of the program was a mock trial, in which various guests were "tried" before a bewigged judge for breaches of hunting etiquette allegedly committed during the day's shoot. These ranged from firing before or after the drive signals, to shooting a hen pheasant in one of the early drives or, most heinous of all, stepping over one of the lines of game laid out in the courtyard at the *Streckelege*, an insult to the spirit of the fallen game.

Despite the impassioned and entertaining pleas of the appointed defense counsels, the accused were, of course, universally found guilty. They were sentenced according to

the severity of the offense to one, two or three shot glasses of *Schnapps* downed on the spot. The trial was conducted by accomplished comics and ended the formal proceedings.

Shortly afterwards, we returned to the train and on to Heidelberg, leaving a die-hard contingent of Germans to a long evening of drink, song and story.

Now *die Jagd* I've just described was admittedly the most elaborate I took part in during my stay in Germany, including a couple of other gubernatorial affairs. The general scheme and the philosophy behind it were always the same. For big game, it is different, but for small game, *die Jagd* is almost always a gang operation, by invitation, and ceremony and sociability are as important as the shooting.

Although the standard translation of *die Jagd* is "the hunt," there is in fact little hunting to it. On many hunts, some of the shooters join the beaters in the drives, and in a few, the whole party walks in line, and the shooting is at flushing rather than driven game. The basic ceremonies are common to all, and I never went on an invitation *Jagd* in which less than 25 shooters and as many beaters participated. Hunt-

ing American-style by just two or three friends is rarely done.

This form of hunting has grown out of the European aristocratic tradition of landholding. Up until World War I, the royalty and the nobility owned most of the agricultural and forest land of Central Europe, and jealously reserved all hunting rights for themselves. After the war, many aristocrats were obliged to sell or lease their lands and their hunting rights.

Where small holders split up the large estates, the hunting rights belong not to the peasant farmer landowners but to the community. They are leased by the community council of each district to the highest bidder for terms ranging from seven to twelve years. Former royal holdings now belong to the state and are generally reserved for VIP hunting occasions such as the one I have described.

Even in the communist countries, where all landholdings larger than garden plots are state property, the former hunting preserves are still leased to hunting clubs, and *die Jagd* is carried on according to the old traditions.

If you want to hunt in non-communist Central Europe, you have basically two options. If you are wealthy enough, you can find when the lease on a desirable *Revier*, or shooting preserve, is coming up at auction, and outbid the many competitors. The alternative is to develop a wide acquaintance among those who have *Reviers* and depend on invitations. Actually, this is not hard, since one more reliable shooter is usually an asset at the annual shoot on most *Reviers*. There's no place east of the Rhine where the common man can take his dog and gun for a day's hunting—no place.

Leasing a *Revier* involves a number of expensive obligations which the lessor must assume over and above the annual rental. He must hire one gamekeeper for every so many acres. He must provide winter feed for the game, and he must pay the farmers whose lands are included in the lease for all legitimate claims of damage done to crops by the game. In a *Revier* with a few wild boars in it, this last obligation can run pretty high. Then

there are the costs of entertainment at *die Jagd*.

There are rewards also, of course. To begin with, the holder of a good *Revier* is likely to be a pretty popular fellow. Then, by judiciously including fellow-*Revier* lessors in his invitations, he can be reasonably sure of getting enough return invitations to keep busy every weekend and holiday throughout the long shooting season. A *Revier* provides a built-in asset for taking care of most social obligations and many important business contacts.

Also, all game shot in a *Revier* is the lessor's by law. He can sell it either to hotels or in the market or to any guests who care to buy a brace of pheasants or a hare at the end of the day's shoot. No one in Germany sees any basis for embarrassment in paying at the end of the day for the birds he shot. The sale of game seldom, if ever, balances the costs of leasing and maintaining a *Revier*, but it helps.

The abundance of game in some parts of Europe must be seen to be believed. Daily bags are often tremendous. I recall one shoot on which I killed 19 cock pheasants and several hares, and I was not high gun by any means. To keep the game healthy, it must be har-

vested. After years of careful management and record keeping, game managers know how much wildlife any given *Revier* can support.

Instead of applying bag limits, the community councils set an annual game harvest total, *der Abschuss* plan, which each *Revier* lessor must shoot off during the year or be subject to a fine or, in extreme cases, loss of his lease. These plans are seldom made up for small game, since it is assumed that leaseholders will keep small game populations under control. It is strictly enforced on all big game which would otherwise do tremendous damage to crops and forests.

The small game season is long in most of Germany. Duck shooting opens in July, partridge at the beginning of September, pheasant and hares in November and all seasons run to the middle of January, except for partridge which closes in mid-December. November and December are the big seasons, of course, with hunts in small game *Reviers* every weekend. Some hosts have relatively small affairs of 25 to 40 guns, and they may have several hunts during the season. Others go for one or two big bangs with all the trimmings. The sight of a single hunter, or a couple of

The day's bag is laid out in a traditional manner according to each specie's rank.





An important part of the post-hunt ceremonies includes singing traditional German hunting ballads.

friends, working a hedgerow or a fallow field is a rarity indeed, and few Germans understand or sympathize with the American interest in doing it that way.

I have read articles in popular publications, suggesting that the American hunting style should, or will, become more European. Those who make such suggestions disregard the basic differences in social and hunting attitudes between Americans and Europeans.

European hunting is great if you like that way of doing it, but it is based on tight control by the few. All land is in private or state ownership. The host at any German hunt is absolute boss over who may shoot, what he may shoot and when he may shoot. Sociability is as much an objective of a day's hunt as is the shooting, and the idea of *hunting* for the game is non-existent.

The quality control of hunters is the most valuable element of the German system, and one we should adopt, in this writer's opinion. There are two essential conditions: Examination of hunting license applicants and a requirement that every hunter carry personal liability

insurance to cover any hunting accident in which he may hurt someone or damage property.

No one in Germany or Austria gets a hunting license until he has qualified for it by passing a stiff examination covering game identification, game behavior, hunting laws (with particular stress on the rights of landowners and lessors), types and characteristics of arms and ammunition and their appropriateness for different types of game, hunting traditions and ceremonies and, most important, the basic rules of gun safety.

I have hunted for many years, but I had to study hard for two weeks before I faced that exam, and I took it in English. Then, even after successfully passing, an applicant still does not get a license until he produces evidence of his financial responsibility in the form of a hunters' liability insurance policy. Licenses are renewable annually without further examination, but only if the insurance policy is kept current.

One of my boys passed the examination while we were in Germany. He studied hard for it, and

the things he learned made him a knowledgeable and reliable shooting companion. This past season there was a youngster in our American deer camp who was about the age of my son when he started. This lad had to be forcefully diverted from loading his 30-30 with the muzzle pointing at a companion's stomach. He shot at every movement near his stand and finally killed an illegal doe.

More recently, as a friend and I returned by boat to our duck blind on Maryland's Eastern Shore after a lunch break, we passed another blind occupied by three goons who had rented the blind for the day. Just outside their stool floated a freshly shot, immature whistling swan. Their reply to our forceful protests was unprintable.

There has to be a compromise between the German system and our wide-open system which can lead to a better image for the currently embattled American hunter and better sport for those of us who are willing to make an effort and to accept the responsibilities. I believe this compromise lies in better hunter quality control. ■