

Ernest Hemingway And His Westley Richards Double Rifle

by
J. E. Fender

Every reader of the *Double Gun Journal* knows of Ernest Hemingway, has read some or all of his writings, and likely has opinions, either favorable or unfavorable, of the man's writings and personae. Whatever your measure of the man Ernest Hemingway's writings forced readers to reflect upon and question their own perceptions and beliefs, and irrevocably altered the way American literature is written, read, and understood. Fifty years after Hemingway committed suicide we remain interested in the iconic writer who is still the second most translated author who wrote in English (the mystery writer Agatha Christie is the most translated). We are well aware of his love of fishing and hunting, and of his long and abiding love of firearms. Any firearm with an impeccable Hemingway *provenance* interests us, and of particular interest is a Westley Richards double rifle in caliber .577 Nitro Express that went under the hammer at the distinguished Maine auction house of J. D. Julia in March of this year with a pre-auction appraisal of \$150,000–\$200,000.

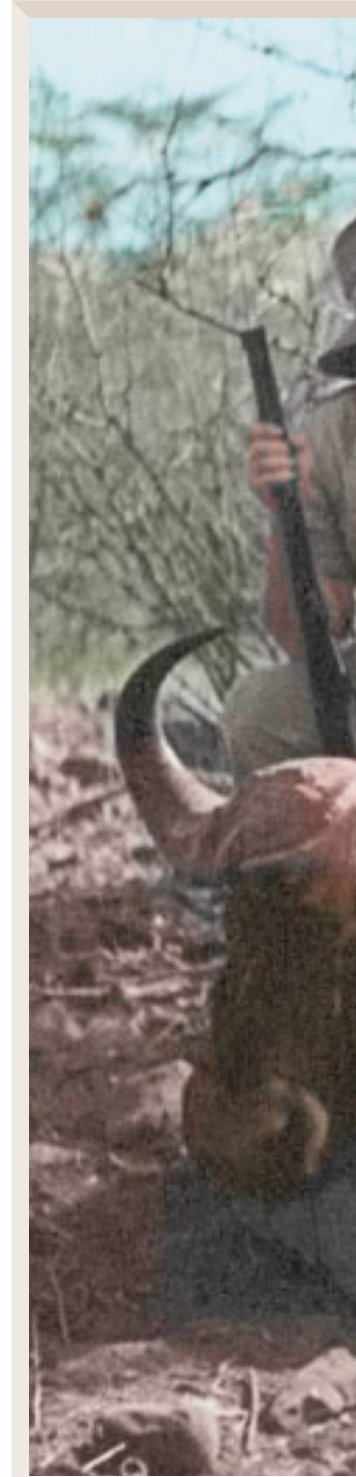
This double rifle was used by Hemingway during his second African safari in 1953–54, and while the essence of that safari was captured in an elaborate article in the 26 January 1954 issue of *Look* magazine, Hemingway never published during his lifetime an account of this second visit to Africa to rival that of his December 1933–January 1934 safari captured so vividly in his 1935 book *Green Hills of Africa*. However, Hemingway did leave several manuscripts in a Cuban safe deposit box, and one partial manuscript written in 1956 and described as his "African Journal" dealt with the 1953–54 safari. The 200,000 word manuscript was extensively edited by his middle son, Patrick, and was published by Hemingway's long-time publisher, Scribner's, in 1999 under the title *True at First Light* to coincide with the centennial of Hemingway's birth. Another adaptation of this manuscript, entitled *Under Kilimanjaro* was published in 2005. Given his agonizingly slow recovery from injuries received in two light aircraft crashes in a two-day period in late-January 1954, either of which could have ended his life, further injuries when he subsequently lost his balance while fighting a bush fire and was severely burned, extensively prolonging his convalescence, and the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature in October of that year, Hemingway's failure to publish a more contemporaneous account of the 1953–54 safari is understandable.

The firearms accompanying Hemingway's first safari are far better described. As a young man Hemingway had read *African Game Trails*, Theodore Roosevelt's account of his post-presidential 1909–1910 hunting in British East Africa, and he had been impressed by the life-size mounts of two lions on display in Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History. J. H. Patterson had sold the skins to the Museum in 1924 for the then very considerable sum of five thousand dollars, and the lions were indeed those Patterson described in his famous *Man-Eaters of Tsavo*.

Hemingway had long dreamed of hunting in Africa, but that first safari, quite an expensive proposition in the midst of the Great Depression, would not have been possible without the financial assistance of Augustus ("Gus") Pfeiffer, a doting uncle of Hemingway's second wife, Pauline Pfeiffer, who contributed twenty-five thousand dollars—over half a million of today's dollars. Hemingway was advised on appropriate firearms by Richard Cooper, a wealthy, somewhat eccentric English *bon viveur* who owned a large coffee estate near Lake Manyara in the Great Rift Valley of Tanganyika and who had hunted extensively throughout Africa. Various referred to as "Major Cooper" or "Colonel Cooper", or just "Dick", Cooper had been an officer in the British Army and in 1917 while serving in France was credited with shooting down at least one German aircraft strafing British forces, with his .450 Holland and Holland double rifle.

Hemingway had been introduced to Cooper by Jane Mason (who most Hemingway scholars agree was the model for Margot Macomber, who figured so prominently in Hemingway's famous *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*), and it was Cooper who put Hemingway in touch with his friend, Bror Blixen, who with Philip Percival formed Tanganyika Guides, Ltd. Philip Hope Percival had not been one of the guides retained by Newland, Tarlton & Company for the Smithsonian-Theodore Roosevelt African Expedition of 1909/1910, but when Roosevelt accepted the invitation of Alfred Pease to hunt lion from horseback on Pease's ranch outside Nairobi, Pease hired Percival as an assistant—and launched Percival's impressive career as the "dean of East African professional hunters".

A somewhat travel-worn Hemingway, with wife Pauline and Charles Thompson, a close friend from Key West in tow, arrived in Nairobi in early December 1933 without actual assurance that Percival would be their professional hunter. Fortunately, Percival was just ending one safari and agreed to take the





Ernest Hemingway is shown here with a large Cape buffalo which he took while on his second African safari using the Westley Richards .577 featured in this article. Photo courtesy of the John F. Kennedy Library

Hemingway party if he were given sufficient time to organize the necessary details for their hunt. Hemingway, Pauline, and Thompson waited at Percival's home at Potha Hill in the Tanganyika colony, and used the time to acclimate to the altitude and shoot some plains game.

While waiting for the 20th of December departure Hemingway struck up a friendship with Bror Blixen and met the wealthy

thoroughbred horseman Alfred G. Vanderbilt II, son of the multi-millionaire sportsman whose philandering was forgiven when he unhesitatingly gave his life jacket to a woman to save her life, though his was lost when the *Lusitania* was torpedoed by a German submarine on 7 May 1915. Vanderbilt, accompanied by his equally wealthy polo-playing neighbor from Brookville, New York (dubbed by *Business Week* magazine as the



wealthiest town in America), on the northern coast of Long Island, Winston Guest, a second cousin of Winston Churchill, who was Guest's godfather, had just concluded a highly successful safari with Blixen. Blixen, an aristocratic Swede with a title, is perhaps better remembered today for his marriage to his Danish second cousin, Karen Dinesen, who wrote numerous well received books under the pen name Isak Dinesen—and who Hemingway conceded was equally deserving of a Nobel Prize for Literature.

Contrary to some reports, Hemingway did not meet Guest at this time since Guest had already departed for the United States to play in previously scheduled polo matches and marry his first wife, Helena McCann, a granddaughter of department store magnate F. W. Woolworth. Hemingway was impressed by a marvelous pair of tusks from an elephant Guest had taken and which Blixen was preparing to ship to Guest, along with other trophies. Although more renowned for having taken the Prince of Wales (later briefly King Edward VIII of England) on two safaris, Blixen guided Winston and the entire Guest family on several occasions, including one which he organized for father, Captain, the Right Honorable Frederick (more commonly known as "Freddie"),



Photos courtesy of James D. Julia

17424	By 28. 01. 1913	Serial	17424
17425	By 28. 01. 1913	Serial	17425
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17432	By 28. 01. 1913	Serial	17432

CBE, PC, DSO (Commander, Order of the British Empire, Privy Council, Distinguished Service Order), mother Amy, elder son Winston, younger son Raymond (later U. S. Ambassador to Ireland), and daughter Diana.

To term the Guest safaris as “luxurious” would be an understatement. Freddie Guest brought out two Gypsy Moth aircraft to use in scouting game, as well as a seven passenger Bellanca to shuttle family members between Nairobi and the hunting camps. Winston Guest earlier had brought out a string of polo ponies with the avowed intention of running down lion and Cape buffalo from horseback, but Blixen tactfully dissuaded Winston from this effort. The weight of Winston Guest’s elephant tusks Hemingway found so impressive was apparently never recorded, but his sister Diana killed one elephant whose tusks, as weighed on a railroad station’s baggage scales, went 125 and 126 pounds. So close was their friendship, that when safari life lost its glamour, or to use Blixen’s phrase, “Life is life and fun is fun, but



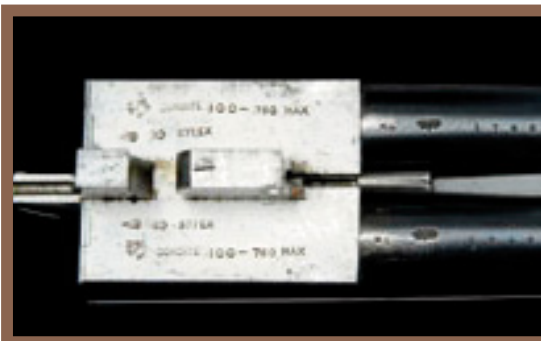
Prior to the auction, the author and James Julia discuss Hemingway and his rifle, Ser. No. 17425, which left the Westley Richards factory (above) in October of 1913.

it’s all so quiet when the goldfish die” and Blixen left Africa for good in 1938, Guest retained him to manage the hunting on Gardiners Island, just off the eastern Long Island shore, which Winston Guest was leasing at the time.

Winston Guest, whose grandmother had married Henry Phipps, a partner of Andrew Carnegie in the Carnegie Steel Company, had a winter home in Palm Beach, Florida, and sometime after the Hemingways’ return from Africa met Ernest Hemingway and established an enduring friendship. I cannot confirm the actual date of the first Hemingway-Guest meeting, but Bror Blixen and his third wife, Eva Dixon, in the company of Dick Cooper, visited Vanderbilt and Guest in 1935, then went on to visit Hemingway in the Bahamas. It is possible that Guest accompanied Blixen to the Bahamas and thus met Hemingway—of course, Guest and Hemingway certainly knew of each other through their various mutual friends.

After Hemingway relocated to San Francisco de Paula, some 15 miles outside Havana in 1939, Guest was a frequent visitor to Hemingway’s Finca Vigía (translated as either “Lookout” or “Watch Tower” farm) where Hemingway would reside a third of his life. They became such close friends that Winston Guest was Hemingway’s best man on the occasion of his 14 March 1946 marriage to Mary Welsh, and Hemingway was Guest’s best man when Guest married his second wife, fashion icon and socialite Lucy Douglas Cochrane (universally known as CeeZee) one year later. Both weddings took place at the Finca Vigía.

J. E. Fender, J. D. Julia, and W. R. factory photos by David Trevallion; others courtesy of James D. Julia.



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In 1942 Guest became Hemingway's second-in-command or executive officer in what many critics described as a cockamamie scheme to arm Hemingway's sport fishing boat, *Pilar*, and patrol Cuban waters in search of German submarines. Hemingway's wife at the time, Martha Gellhorn, from whom he was already more than a little estranged, was certain the scheme had been concocted in order to obtain severely rationed gasoline which would enable Hemingway to continue fishing for billfish. Whatever the motivation, the operation was vintage Hemingway,

Guest served admirably until "Operation Friendless" ended the first of April 1943, with no German submarines sighted, much less sunk. Even though then aged 36 and considered too old for military service, Guest was not a dilettante, and after one final celebratory party at the Finca Vigía managed to obtain a commission in the United States Marine Corps. Perhaps the celebrated African aviatrix Beryl Markham who frequently scouted for elephant in her Avro Avian for Guest on safari with Bror Blixen, described him best as a "dynamic Mr. Guest, who seems to wring



Photo courtesy of David Trevallion

and from his coterie of exiled Basques, jai-alai players, hangers-on, diplomats and wealthy friends such as Guest, Hemingway put together the "Crook Factory" to embark on "Operation Friendless" (named for a favorite cat). Wrapping a canvas banner emblazoned with "American Museum of Natural History" around his *Pilar* and armed with Thompson sub-machine guns, hand grenades and .50-caliber Browning machine guns (which were soon removed because shooting them would have shaken *Pilar* to pieces) Hemingway prowled the waters north of Cuba searching for German submarines. Certainly German submarines had torpedoed many of the slow tankers ferrying petroleum and gasoline from the Caribbean refineries to East Coast and United Kingdom ports. There had been substantiated reports of German submarines surfacing near fishing boats in the Caribbean and demanding foodstuffs and newspapers.

Hemingway became quite fond of his second-in-command, who had been nicknamed "Wolfie" by Hemingway's sons Patrick and Gregory due to Guest's supposed resemblance to Lon Chaney's character in the 1941 motion picture *The Wolf Man*.

from each moment of his life its ultimate squeal of excitement".

Unknown at the time, but a possible reason why Hemingway received permission and logistical support from the U. S. Embassy in Cuba to engage *Pilar* in a seemingly harebrained scheme was the contemporaneous highly classified "Q-Ship Project" which began in March 1942. Q-Ships were small but well-armed warships disguised as inconsequential merchant ships, targets hopefully not worth the expenditure of a German torpedo. The concept indeed envisioned a German submarine's surfacing in order to use its deck gun to destroy the merchant ship—at which time the Q-Ship would expose its superior armament—and if surprise and weight of metal on target prevailed—sink the submarine. These "decoy" ships were modeled on a British Royal Navy effort in World War One. However, when the Q-Ship USS *Atik* went down with her entire crew (a loss later attributed to the decoy's being torpedoed by the German submarine *U-123*), the Q-Ship project was cancelled. Viewed in this light, "Operation Friendless" was not as quixotic as it appeared.

A long-time friend who shot extensively with Hemingway at

Havana's Club Cazadores del Cerro (Hilltop Hunters Club), Ellis O. Briggs, a senior consular official in the United States Embassy in Havana, included a lengthy chapter about Hemingway's hunt for German submarines in his 1957 book, *Shots Heard Round the World—An Ambassador's Hunting Adventures on Four Continents*, confirming that the United States Government thought enough of Hemingway's plan that the U.S. Navy installed sophisticated high-frequency radio-detection equipment (HF/DF—the so-called Huff-Duff) aboard *Pilar*. The Navy further contributed a senior non-commissioned officer to operate the HF/DF gear which computed bearings to submarines surfaced to transmit radio messages. Triangulating bearings from two or more sources would provide a "fix" on a submarine's position precise enough to permit aircraft or high-speed surface vessels to locate the submarine. HF/DF was a technology German U-boat commanders feared, for dozens of German submarines were sunk shortly after being "fixed" after transmitting radio messages.

"Wolfie" Guest is reported by Hemingway's only living son, Patrick, who accompanied the "Crook Factory" on several sorties, to have had the Westley Richards .577 Nitro Express aboard *Pilar*. However, in order to authenticate the Hemingway provenance of the Westley Richards double rifle it is first necessary to review this firearm's creation.

The Westley Richards' day books record that double rifle .577/100/750 (cartridge caliber, weight of nominal cordite powder charge and nominal bullet weight), serial number 17425 was created for "S. H. Christy, Esq." and was ready for shipment from Westley Richards' Birmingham premises as of 31 October 1913. "S. H. Christy" was Stephen Henry Christy, born 6 April 1879, who in 1913 was living with his wife at Plaish Hall in the parish of Cardington in the Shropshire Hills of the West Midlands region of England. Plaish Hall, still privately owned, is a country manor, the main house of which was reportedly the first brick

building constructed in Shropshire. The property (and as legend has it, complete with the ghost of a craftsman enticed by an early owner to build ornate chimneys in exchange for his life but who was hanged upon completion of the work when the treacherous judge, William Leighton, reneged on his promise) is historically and architecturally significant enough to be listed on the British equivalent of the Registry of Historic Buildings.

S. H. Christy had joined the 20th Hussars, a light cavalry regiment in 1899, served in the Boer War and the Sokoto-Burmi campaign in North Nigeria, rose to the rank of captain, was awarded the DSO (Distinguished Service Order), was wounded in action and was mentioned in dispatches. He resigned his commission in order to marry Violet Chapell-Hodge and settle down to married life. Captain Christy was an excellent horseman, and the one surviving photograph I have located shows him in the livery of the Master of the South Shropshire Hounds. His experiences with the

20th Hussars in Africa may have kindled a desire to return there to hunt, hence the order for Westley Richards 17425, but whether Captain Christy took delivery of this double rifle is unknown. His wife of a short eight years became ill and died on 27 November 1913. Captain Christy was certainly too preoccupied to consider his .577 Nitro Express or Africa during his wife's illness and death, and a parish newsletter written a year later reported that he never recovered from his loss.

There is no record of Captain Christy's leaving England until August of 1914. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary on 28 June 1914 plunged the Continental European nations into the horrors of total war. England was initially not a participant, but Germany's Schlieffen Plan, which

called for the capitulation of France in 42 days, necessitated the invasion of France via neutral Belgium. Britain and Belgium were allied through the London Treaty of 1839, but the German



Center two photos by David Trevallion, others courtesy of James D. Julia