

Chancellor reckoned that “the Britons would not go to war for a mere scrap of paper”—wrongly as it turned out, and on 4 August 1914 the United Kingdom declared war on Germany.

S. H. Christy was heartily welcomed back to his old regiment with his former rank and assigned as second-in-command of B Squadron. The 20th Hussars regiment was in France in two weeks, where in the late afternoon of 3 September, while B Squadron was retiring in good order across the Marne River via the La Ferte Bridge, Captain Christy and his favorite mount were killed instantly by German artillery fire. He was buried in the Perreuse Chateau French Nation Cemetery at Signy-Signets.

Did S. H. Christy ever take possession of Westley Richards number 17425? And how did this .577 Nitro Express double rifle find its way to Ernest Hemingway’s gun cabinet? At this point we must resort to several hypotheses, and these hypotheses may raise questions about their literal truth. However, paraphrasing Hemingway, “some things are truer than if they had actually happened.”

The first hypothesis is that S. H. Christy *did not* take delivery of the double rifle made for him by the Westley Richards gun-making firm, even though the factory’s premises in Birmingham were less than an hour’s train ride from Shrewsbury station. Parish accounts describe a grieving Christy as being greatly affected by his wife’s death, and although he continued the philanthropic works in which he and Violet were engaged at the time of her death, until the Great War intruded, Christy became reclusive and was not interested in anything occurring outside the parish of Cardington.

The second hypothesis is that, more likely than not, Freddie Guest obtained the .577 Nitro Express double rifle sometime prior to his safaris with Bror Blixen. Although Christy, a member of the landed gentry and a cavalryman, and Freddie Guest, a polo player, shared a mutual interest in horses, they did not move in the same social circles. While both had served in the Boer War during the same period it is unlikely that they ever met. Yes, Christy could have taken delivery of the Westley Richards double rifle 17425 at some time prior to his setting off for France in August 1914, but since he and Violet had no children the double rifle would have been inherited by one of his older brothers, who could have sold it to Freddie Guest. However, I believe it far more probable that Westley Richards, perhaps after a communication from

S.H. Christy that he was no longer interested in purchasing the rifle, retained .577 Nitro Express number 17425 in inventory.

Exactly how and when this Westley Richards came into Freddie Guest’s hands, absent locating some contemporaneous record of its acquisition, is unknown. The letters of Bror Blixen, frustrating because they are incompletely dated, contain references to some of the firearms the Guests used while on safari with him. There is no mention of a .577 Westley Richards, though interestingly, there is a reference to Freddie’s use of a .505 Gibbs Magnum Mauser. This .505 Gibbs came into Blixen’s possession (most probably as a gift from Freddie Guest) and became Blixen’s “signature” rifle.

Although Patrick Hemingway confirmed that Winston Guest had the .577 Westley Richards in Cuba in 1942–43, what evidence exists to place the double rifle in Guest’s hands prior to Guest’s joining Hemingway’s “Crook Factory”? The evidence is tenuous, but here it is. In his “Lyon’s Den” column dated 26 June 1953—the day before Ernest and Mary Hemingway embarked aboard the *Flandre*, flagship of the French Line’s fleet of passenger liners, widely syndicated columnist Leonard Lyons wrote that he had accompanied Hemingway to the basement shooting range of Abercrombie & Fitch’s sporting goods store on Madison Avenue. In the column entitled “A Day in Town with Hemingway”, Lyons quoted Hemingway as stating he had once hunted in Africa with Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt, who brought only 10 of these .577 shells, and did not bring more “because they cost so much”.

Lyons gamely accepted Hemingway’s offer to fire a round, but was quite unprepared for the recoil—which threw him and the double rifle to the floor of the indoor range. There is a rather handsome scar on the buttstock of the Hemingway .577 that probably resulted from Lyons’ dropping the rifle. While Lyons was an astute chronicler of café society with a world-wide audience, he

was not a gossip columnist, and Lyons was a close-enough friend of Hemingway that his widow listed Lyons as an honorary pallbearer for Hemingway’s funeral. As we have seen earlier, Alfred G. Vanderbilt II was staying with Bror Blixen when Hemingway arrived at Philip Percival’s farm in December 1933. The chance quote from the “Lyon’s Den” seems to indicate some ownership or at least permitted use of the .577 Nitro Express by Vanderbilt. So, the third



Photos above and on facing page courtesy of James D. Julia



hypothesis is that Winston Guest brought the .577 Westley Richards his father had earlier acquired for Vanderbilt to use. The .577 Westley Richards would not formally become Winston Guest's until he inherited it upon Sir Freddie's death in 1937. Blixen thought enough of the Guest family's generosity to him that he made the arduous trip from British East Africa to London to attend Sir Freddie's funeral.

No record of Winston Guest's gift or sale of the .577 Westley Richards to Hemingway has been located, but whatever the means of transfer, Hemingway certainly possessed the big double rifle during the 1953–54 safari. The rifle is mentioned in Mary Welsh Hemingway's recollection of her life with Hemingway, *How it Was*, and there are photographs of Hemingway with the Westley Richards in the sixteen pages of coverage of the 1953–54 safari published in the 26 January 1954 issue of *Look* magazine. This safari, scheduled to last for five months, consisted of the Hemingways, Philip Percival, in his late sixties, but coaxed out of retirement out of loyalty to Hemingway, a Cuban friend, Mayito Menocal, a game ranger, photographer, and 22 scouts and attendants.

Hemingway definitely used the .577 to dispatch a previously wounded rhinoceros—quoting from the caption on page 29 of the magazine: “He came at a trot that turned into a gallop. I let him come much further that it was good for either of us in order to be truly sure. As the .577 fired he whirled with the shot and you could not see him in the rising of the red dust.” Other photographs show Hemingway with the .577 Westley Richards barrels forward over his right shoulder and he and Mary Welsh Hemingway stand facing Mount Kilimanjaro. In the introductory “Behind the Scenes” sidebar Hemingway is shown holding the Westley Richards as he faced off with a small bull elephant at a distance of perhaps forty feet.

Earl Theisen, the photographer accompanying the Hemingway party took over 3,000 photographs, and photographs of Hemingway posing with the big Westley Richards double rifle and lion and Cape buffalo trophies, have been published elsewhere.

Hemingway's health was gravely affected by his three near-death experiences at the safari's conclusion, and Mary Welsh Hemingway's primary concern was getting her invalid husband to appropriate medical care. The Hemingways' hurried departure from Kenya meant that their firearms were left in the care of friends who secured them in a bank vault. The firearms eventually were shipped to the Finca Vigía. In January 1959 the corrupt and repressive government of Fulgencio Batista was overthrown by Fidel Castro, and in the initial heady days of victory Castro's Communist regime seemed bemused enough by the long-time presence of one of the world's most famous authors to leave the Hemingways to their own devices. However, as the true nature of the Castro regime manifested itself, the unhindered movement the Hemingways enjoyed in this most beautiful but also the poorest country in the Western World was severely circumscribed. It was not long before a detail of Castro's troops appeared at the Finca

Photo courtesy of James D. Julia





Westley Richards No. 17425 was built for Stephen Henry Christy of Shropshire, England, in 1913. In 1953 Ernest Hemingway took it on safari, but only after it had been used by the likes of Freddie Guest (seated) and Blor Blixen (second from right), shown here with Guest's "Gypsy Moth," used for scouting plains game. Photo courtesy of David Trevallion

Vigía, and confiscated many of the Hemingways' firearms.

Realizing there was no place for them in the "Workers' Paradise of the New Cuba," the Hemingways began shipping art work, treasured belongings and firearms out of Cuba as unobtrusively as they could. The Hemingways left the Finca Vigía for the United States in July of 1960, Ernest for good, though Mary Welsh Hemingway was able to return later and retrieve a significant amount of Hemingway's papers. Hemingway still owned the house on Whitehead Street in Key West where he and Pauline had lived, and leaving Mary Welsh Hemingway in New York City, Hemingway visited his old friends Charles and Lorine



Thompson, staying at their Key West home for several days the year prior to his death. Hemingway had known the Thompsons since 1928, and Charles Thompson was one of the few men who had out-shot and out-hunted Hemingway. Charles Thompson had accompanied Ernest and Pauline on the 1933–34 safari (he was given the pseudonym "Karl" in the *Green Hills of Africa*), and the fact that he obtained bigger and better trophies than Hemingway caused a rift between the two very competitive men—though thankfully, both men realized the absurdity of the rift, and it healed quickly.

In some way not documented, Charles Thompson, who was perhaps Hemingway's best friend, became the owner of the Westley



Lower two photos courtesy of James D. Julia



Photo courtesy of James D. Julia Auctioneer, Fairfield, Maine

Richards .577 Nitro Express double rifle, serial number 17425. My last hypothesis is that an enfeebled Hemingway, realizing that he would never again safari to Africa, gave the .577 Westley Richards to Charles Thompson in hopes that Thompson would once more take the big double rifle to the milieu for which it had been created. And yes, Charles and Lorine Thompson did return to Africa, and Charles did bag an elephant, though whether the rifle he used was the Westley Richards .577 obtained from Ernest Hemingway was not recorded. From the Thompson estate Westley Richards serial number 17425 passed into the hands of the person who consigned the rifle to Julia's where the Hemingway Westley Richards .577 will have been auctioned by the time this article appears in the *Double Gun Journal*.

Hemingway's *oeuvre* commands an increasing world-wide respect, and memorabilia associated with the writer bring high prices. The legends surrounding Hemingway continue to grow: in the 50 years since his death numerous biographies have appeared, a Hemingway Society and Foundation has been established, as well as a Hemingway Resource Center, and critical analyses of his novels and short stories are published almost monthly. Autographed letters bring prices in the multiple of thousands of dollars, and first editions of Hemingway's earlier novels easily top one thousand dollars. Even esoteric items such as a Hemingway Cigar Band (apparently not sanctioned by either Hemingway or his estate) fetch ten dollars or more. Handwritten drafts of



Papa and his rifle take a well-deserved siesta while on his second safari in East Africa.

Photo courtesy of David Trevallion

novels and short stories have been auctioned for more than six figures—and subsequently have disappeared into private collections.

Hopefully, the identity of the buyer can be reported, and Hemingway's Westley Richards .577 will be displayed where people sincerely interested in this iconic, larger-than-life writer may view it, and perhaps better understand the complex, tormented soul that was Ernest Hemingway. The essence of what makes Hemingway's writings so unique will never be captured, but perhaps he left a clue in a paragraph deleted from his 1954 Nobel Prize Banquet Speech: "There is no lonelier man than the writer when he is writing except

the suicide. Nor is there any happier, nor more exhausted man when he has written well. If he has written well everything that is him has gone into the writing and he faces another morning when he must do it again. There is always another morning and another morning."

Author's Note: The presale estimate for the Hemingway Westley Richards .577 NE at the J. D. Julia Auction 14 March 2011 was \$150,000–\$200,000, but spirited bidding between two phone bidders resulted in a hammer price of \$339,250 (including the buyer's premium).

The buyer is an American who prefers not to reveal his identity at this time. However, the buyer plans to take the rifle to Africa, and there will be substantial media coverage when that event occurs.

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