



Killing a Pig

LOGAN NITZEL

Loosely inspired by George Orwell's landmark "Killing an Elephant," Logan Nitzel's personal narrative offers a vivid and unsparing argument against the use of military-grade automatic weapons in hunting. This essay was written for Writing I with Dr. Ben Wetherbee.

Note: Readers should be forewarned that this essay includes graphic descriptions of violence against animals.

IT HAS BEEN MANY MONTHS SINCE I last hit the trail in pursuit of game, and I do sorely miss the crunch of winter foliage under my ranger boots. The memories of the winter air eating away at the tip of my nose, the clink of cartridges in my ammunition pouch, and the feeling of fear and primal anger at the thought of pursuing dangerous creatures still flood into my conscious mind when I smell the cool air of morning. Coyote, panthers, bobcat, and black bear have all been my prey, and I theirs, but no creature of the Oklahoma hills strikes fear into a hunter's heart quite like the all-invasive American feral boar.

It was in the same Oklahoma hills these monstrous swine stalk that my forefathers sought to make good their destruction, since the time of the Chickasaws crossing the Winding Stairs and the first

white settlers staking their claims in '89. They killed first with the shafts of hunting arrows and the leaden balls English muskets, then with Winchester repeaters and Savage rolling blocks. It is with these same weapons we now pursue the descendants of our fathers' prey. We still race breathless through the undergrowth, hands gripping rifles and long-knives, boar fluttering in and out of our sight, their freight-train forms blazing trails as obvious as an interstate. We still hope they are more afraid of our tall stature and blitzkrieg tactics than they are of straying out of their territory. The pigs would rather turn about, pitting their nine-inch tusks and 400-pound physiques against our cold steel and smoking barrels, than risk being caught between both a rival herd and their pursuers.

In this way of chase, there is fairness. The hunter must risk a torn gut, crushed bones, and probable death to allow himself an acceptable shot, whereas the pig must gamble its ability to outrun or ambush the hunter against his ability to stop its charge. In this way, all lives are thrown into the crucible, and all have the chance of never coming out.

But it was all those months ago, the last time I donned my hunter's mask, that I learned of the new ways and their brutality.

I remember looking about the single room of the small concrete lodge. My father and grandfather threaded short, saber-like dirges onto their belts, and loaded .30 caliber rifle rounds into the loops of their bandoliers. They made small talk, checking and rechecking their firearms. My grandfather slipped bullets into his aged repeating rifle as he glanced over at my father, who was preoccupied with sliding cartridges into his Remington's tubular magazine. I myself was not concerned with this matter; my rifle only chambers one round, and I was not willing to carry it loaded around the cabin.

It was about this time that my gaze drifted across the room to the others. Guests of my fraternal great-uncle. They were all unfamiliar to me, and while they were all amicable, they carried themselves in a way that made me feel quite uneasy. This was a vacation for them. They were here for fun, and for sport. I had seen them

carry in their rifle cases (all-black, plastic affairs with combination locks) the night before, and had wondered what kind of long rifle could fit into a container so small.

It was then that the first weapon was revealed, much to my shock and bewilderment. There stood a man, dressed in hunter's camouflage, with an orange cap, wielding a glossy, black assault rifle. A battle rifle, in all its glory, complete with a recoil-absorbing stock, marksman's scope, and a bayonet lug. It was by no means the only of its kind present. Shortly thereafter, Kalashnikovs, AR-15s, M-14s, and a Czech SKS all made their appearance. Ten men stood about, loading bullets into 30-round magazines, clamping on scopes and grips, and threading suppressors and flashlights onto their barrels.

I looked back to my father, who met my wide-eyed gaze with a similar countenance.

The time for the hunt to commence had come. We marched out into the woods in a loose pattern, like a squad of skirmishers entering the fray. I, my father, and my grandfather made up the leftmost wing of the echelon. We moved as we had all been taught, stealthily, with precision and a feeling of taut energy. Our comrades, however, moved like heavy infantry, with no regard for the crackling of the leaves or the symphony of breaking twigs. They slogged along, their modern polymer weapons looking out of place in the gallery of oak and blackjack trees.

We three soon broke off, scurrying along a trail dotted with rutted pits and cloven footprints. Not much longer, after the sounds of the noisy column had faded away, we found ourselves approaching an end to the forest. We fell beside one another, each crouching a couple dozen paces abreast of the others. We began to creep along in this bent posture, trundling about like soldiers too afraid to stand up and be gunned down. I myself quickly made my way, stooped over, to the crest of a little hillock, where I laid prone under the watchful gaze of a lone little cedar, surveying the open field before me, in which nestled a little pond. I glared over the tall grass that made this field its home at my cohorts. Fifty yards to my right

crouched my father, his head poked over a fallen log. Thirty yards beyond him stood my grandfather, who leaned nonchalantly against the great bulk of a cypress tree. We sat there, comfortably, each of us realizing the value of this place as the site for an ambushade.

Our wit paid off not long after taking these positions, for, out of the forest, came slumping along a great sow. She looked very tired, the grey of her spiny pelt a testament to her age and immense strength. Her great bulk shuddered with each lumbering stride, and even in that quite docile state she seemed to have an aura of savage, animal power surrounding her.

I looked hurriedly over, and saw my father staring back at me. I shook my head and pointed to him and pumped my fist up and down twice, an old signal learned from my great-grandfather, a veteran of the last World War.

“No. You. Fire,” my hands mimed.

It didn't feel like my shot to make.

My father leveled his rifle at the beast, took careful aim, and, after what seemed like a decade, his rifle let forth a thunderbolt.

The giant example of fauna slumped forward, all her legs seeming to give out at once. She died mid-stride, without any knowledge of her impending doom. She passed instantly, painlessly, and with nobility. Her form made it appear like she was simply sleeping; her features were in repose.

It was after our return to the main body we learned this was not the case for her kin. We approached them from behind, and bled back into their ranks like ghosts, our arrival unheeded.

We witnessed the beginning of a slaughter. They had somehow trapped an entire herd in a dry lakebed and were resolute in not allowing any to escape. Boar screamed and bellowed, rushing wildly in every direction. They died in droves, their brothers, mother, rivals, and children being shredded by the fire from the battle rifles. They almost all let out death screams, the high-pitched squeal of a mortally wounded pig. I saw one individual attempt to race up the dam of the empty lake, his bull-like form riddled with bullets before

he could make it even half-way up the embankment. He couldn't let out a death-scream, which I later found out was due to his jaw being torn off by a hollow-point rifle round. I saw a sow, the young duplicate of our victim, trying to stand between her already dead piglets and the hail of bullets. She was quickly dispatched with a shot through her ribcage. One straggler, his back legs shattered, was dispatched with five shots from a pistol to the head. My father finally let in and shuddered at that sight.

It took about a minute and a half for the entire event to occur. It felt like many hours. The auto-loading rifles spewed industrial, machine-gun death. It was inhumane, and utterly infuriating. Slaughter, wholesale, on cornered, helpless creatures. This was in no way noble; those swine died in a blender. A crescendo of lead, gore, and the death rattle of their kind.

Thirty-four. That is the number of carcasses dragged from the cracked, dusty ground of the lakebed, not counting the many little piglets, whose bodies were left for the starving vultures. Our single prize made the count thirty-five.

They stacked the bleeding, sticky corpses in a rough pyramid. The striking resemblance to the piles of buffalo skulls found outside hunting cabins was not lost on my grandfather or me. Everyone took photographs and shook hands in front of their bloody pyre. We stood, almost shamefully, next to our dead sow. I unloaded my rifle, its unfired cartridge landing, sleek and deadly, in the palm of my gloved hand. I glimpsed back at the vacationing hunters and their piles of spent casings and stack of dead, broken pigs, wondering if they realized that they killed more than just a herd of swine that day.

The old way of hunting was dead too. ►►