



AN ORIENTAL PIG TALE

The boar was 20 feet away and snorting. I fired, and pigs exploded in all directions

In hunting wild boar on three continents, I had learned to expect the unexpected. And in trying to keep pace with my rugged guides in the Vietnam jungle, I found exactly that

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THE SUN WAS HIGH, and the jungle was sultry and maddeningly still. Suddenly the unmelodious and unmistakable grunt of a wild boar broke the stillness. My native guides whirled and peered into the impenetrable tangle of vines, bamboo, and hip-high grass.

I curled my toes and slipped off the rifle's safety as little beads of sweat dribbled down my neck. Boar hunting wasn't new to me, so I knew that at this point I should expect the unexpected.

Boar hunting, in fact, has become a kind of specialty with me. An army officer for more than 20 of my 44 years and currently assigned to the army's Procurement Office in Chicago, I live in suburban Palatine, Illinois, with my wife and teen-aged daughter and son. But my duties have taken me to foreign lands, where I've sampled the hunting.

Somehow, it has always included pigs—long ones and short ones, black ones and red ones, and lots of

in-betweens. I've seen and shot pigs on three continents, using methods varying from stillhunting to driving and hounding.

My first boar hunt came while I was serving with the Army of Occupation in Germany shortly after World War II. Boars were plentiful in the forests along the Main River near Frankfurt, and I was invited to participate in a drive hunt. These hunts were great social as well as sporting events, and custom and tradition played important parts.

Things started off with the sounding of hunting trumpets as the group—about 20 shooters and as many beaters—assembled in a small forest clearing. A few toasts were drunk, and the master of the hunt then announced the rules for its conduct. Safe shooting practices were stressed, and it is a tribute to this system that hunting accidents are almost nonexistent in Germany.

More trumpeting followed, and then each shoot-



Montagnard guide gulps rice from straw bag | show my approval of the tusker I bagged near the end of a grueling day's search

AN ORIENTAL PIG TALE continued

er was carefully stationed at a point on the perimeter of the area to be hunted. I was told that it's considered a cardinal breach of hunting etiquette for a shooter to move more than a few yards from his station.

Once on my stand, I tensed up a little and eagerly awaited the music of a squealing or snorting pig on the run. I could barely hear the beaters whooping and the dogs yelping, so I wasn't expecting any action just yet.

But boars often don't make their presence known until the last moment. Suddenly there was a loud crashing and a couple of low grunts as a boar broke out of the underbrush less than 20 yards from me. Somehow I overcame a case of buck fever, raised my gun, and fired. I was lucky and made a good shot, and the boar fell after running just a few yards.

It wasn't a large boar, but it was enough to whet my pig-hunting appetite. And it taught me that fast action is a must. I've had my share of misses, but I've also downed some pretty nice boars. Mine have never been exceptional, but I have seen some old boars—the Germans call such a pig a *keiler*—that weighed over 400 pounds.

The boar hunt that I mentioned at the outset was taking place in the exotic jungle of Vietnam, but it had its beginning in the very prosaic surroundings of a popular chop suey joint in Saigon. The time was several years ago—before the current combat in Vietnam—when I was doing a one-year tour of duty in that country.

Relatively few servicemen were stationed there in those days, and our duties were strictly advisory. Few Americans back home even knew where Vietnam was, and fewer—even today, I suspect—realize that its jungles are loaded with all kinds of game. (But see *OUTDOOR LIFE*, November, 1963, for the story, "Double Take on Elephant," by J. M. Barker—*Ed. note.*)

Those jungles have five different varieties in the deer family alone, ranging from the tiny barking deer to the 600-pound sambar. Africa has its Cape buffalo, but

Vietnam has the larger gaur and two other huge, wild bovines besides—the wild water buffalo and the banteng. Boars and bears roam the jungle as do leopards and tigers. The list is topped off by the very sizable herds of wild Asian elephants. Small-game species are too numerous to mention.

I hadn't been in Vietnam very long before I learned of the excellent hunting opportunities. Through one means and another, I contacted people who put me in touch with the hunting situation. One of these was my boar-hunting host, a Frenchman named Henri Saunier.

M. Saunier, born in Saigon 60-odd years earlier, represented one of the last vestiges of French colonialism in Indo-China. He lived on his tea plantation about 125 miles northeast of Saigon and made frequent trips into the capital. He often visited me on these trips, and we talked hunting whenever we met. The old man was enthusiastic about big game and delighted in telling me stories about the "good old days." I always enjoyed the tales.

That's how this boar hunt came to be planned in the chop suey joint. Saunier and I were dining at Cheong Nam's, a popular Chinese restaurant in Saigon. The food was good, and the prices were low—enough reason to cause the Americans in Saigon to dub the place Cheap Charlie's. The name stuck, and the proprietor proudly proclaimed it on a sign above the door. According to reports I've heard from returning G.I.'s, the place still operates under that name.

The old man and I talked hunting throughout the meal, and by the time we got to the preserved kumquats, he was insisting that I come up to his tea plantation for a few days' hunting.

I needed no urging and a few weeks later was able to accept his invitation. The plantation was located on what is known as the Djiring Plateau at an altitude of about 3,000 feet. The area has a relatively sparse population, and the lush jungle surrounding the plantation is as dense as any in the world. Saunier was waiting as my jeep bounced up the driveway.



Holding a primitive ax, Keng ponders our next move



Landowner Henri Saunier and I planned my hunt in this Saigon restaurant



Cigarette helps me gain confidence of another guide, K'Toi



K'Toi with earthenware jar, symbol of wealth to Montagnards

"Bon jour," he said, "and welcome to my little house." What the old boy modestly referred to as his "little house" was a luxuriously appointed pink-stucco villa surrounded by a colorful array of tropical fruit trees, all overlooking vast tea fields. I was quickly settled in very comfortable quarters, and it was arranged that the hunting expedition would commence the following morning.

There was to be a variety of game on the program, but the old man was quite insistent that boars be first. He gave no reason for this but merely kept insisting, "First you must shoot the peeg."

That was O. K. with me. The boars of Asia don't run quite so large as the European species, but they provide just as much of a challenge. I wondered, though, why Saunier stressed the importance of hunting boars first. I found out.

It was barely daylight the next morning when I was awakened by a gentle tap on the shoulder. I rubbed my

eyes and saw one of Saunier's servants standing over the bed. A lone gold tooth flashed through a broad grin as he repeated a sing-song phrase in his native tongue. I didn't have to know the language to get the idea that it was time to roll out of the sack. In a few minutes, I was dressed and enjoying the breakfast of hot tea and toast that my grinning friend had brought to my bedside.

Saunier was already supervising the loading of the jeep when I joined him outside. I was a little disappointed that he would not accompany me. He explained that, at his age, he was no longer up to the rigors of hunting the jungle. He presented the three Montagnard tribesmen—K'Toi, Kim, and Keng—who were to be my guides. I later learned that all male members of their particular tribe had names beginning with K.

Saunier spoke at some length with the tribesmen—he knew several Montagnard dialects as well as Vietnamese—and then explained to (continued on page 102)

AN ORIENTAL PIG TALE

(continued from page 71)

me the instructions he had just given.

We would jeep to a point about five miles distant, he said, and from there simply stalk the prey on foot. I was surprised that we were to hunt boars in that dense jungle with no driving, no beaters, and no dogs. But I've learned to respect and accept the customs and hunting methods of different locales.

With well-wishes from my host, we climbed into the jeep and took off.

A gravel road led us to a narrow, overgrown jungle trail, and here we left the jeep. My three eager-beaver guides started off at an exhausting pace. And they proceeded to walk the pants off me that day—up and down countless hills, squirming through huge

vine tangles, wading through tall elephant grass. I wondered how I'd ever even see a pig in that stuff.

It made me recall bear hunting in Japan. The Japanese call their wild pigs *inoshishi*, and I hunted them several times when I was there in the late 50's. The thickets we hunted weren't so dense as the Vietnamese jungle, but they were heavy enough to make me doubt whether I could see the pigs.

The Japanese hunting method was a sort of halfhearted drive. While European bear hunts are highly organized, the opposite seemed true in Japan. Both beaters and shooters always seemed indifferent and were content to rely heavily on luck. Much to my consternation, however, I saw some pretty good boars taken on those hunts.

Sometimes the shooters had to wait a long time for action or even for the beaters and dogs to come near. A group I hunted with went on three unproductive hunts in a row before discovering that our beaters were simply going around to the other side of the mountain, tying up the dogs, and loafing or sleeping for a few hours. On subsequent hunts, we arranged for a bonus to be paid for each boar brought to bag, and that worked fine.

But back to the Vietnamese jungle. The early morning air was cool, and the grass still dripped with dew. Overhead, in front, and behind, the jungle's wildlife was bustling, and the birds provided constant music.

But the real noisemakers were the gibbons. These small apes are black and white, tailless, and about two feet tall. Extremely agile, they travel in groups of 20 or 30 and scream incessantly as they swing through the trees. We ran into several groups of them, and their sudden shrieking startled the wits out of me each time. This amused my guides no end.

The sun rose higher and the jungle grew quieter as we pushed on, my guides constantly fanning out to look for spoor. We found plenty of sign, but none of it was fresh. By noon my knees were beginning to ache. With gestures and grimaces, I tried to induce the Montagnards to slow down. This produced plenty of grins and nods, and some conversation among them, but the pace didn't slow at all.

We'd just crossed a small stream and were finally examining some fresh tracks when we heard the low grunt I mentioned at the beginning of this story. We were lined up single file on a trail that cut a clear swath about 15 feet wide. I tensed further as Kim, ax in hand, began to skirt the heavy underbrush from which the sound had come. Suddenly the grass parted, bamboo toppled, and a huge boar crashed out onto the trail.

Now, I like to retell tales of the big boars I've shot, like the fine old tusker I got by "moonlighting" near a small village in the foothills of Germany's Bavarian Alps. As its name implies, this hunting is done at night. Powerful electric lanterns are sometimes used, but it's traditional and preferable to

shoot by the light of the moon. On a bright night, this can be done very nicely.

Good 7 x 50 binoculars, which show up an area with surprising brightness, are a necessity. In addition, my F. N. Mauser was fitted with a 4 x 81 Hensoldt scope, which has plenty of light-gathering power.

I hunted with a farmer the first night but spooked the herd of pigs that had been damaging his crops. The next night, I went back and bowled over an immense pig with a single 180-grain .30/06 slug. He was an old boar with trophy-size tusks and weighed just over 300 pounds, the largest I've ever taken.

But this one in the Vietnam jungle simply got away from me. I saw the big pig for only a couple of seconds while he crossed the relatively open trail, and I couldn't shoot; two of my guides were in the line of fire. In an instant, the boar was gone.

The guides were excitedly Monday-morning-quarterbacking my performance, and I was offering some excellent excuses. It didn't matter that they were jabbering away in their language and I in English, or that neither side understood a word the other was saying. When a hunter goofs, whether on a whitetail in the Adirondacks, an elk in Wyoming, or a boar in Vietnam, it produces about the same kind of conversation. Anyway, we all ended up laughing about the incident and then decided to take a lunch break.

Eating lunch was an uncomplicated affair for my companions. Each carried a small woven-straw bag containing cooked rice. They simply raised the bags and poured the rice into their mouths.

For me, Saunier had personally stashed into one of the packbaskets what he considered a more fitting bill of fare: a few pieces of cheese and sausage and a couple small loaves of freshly baked French bread.

After lunch, we sprawled on the grass and loafed in the shade. I was pooped and glad for the rest, and I stretched the break into an hour or more. But my guides began to get fidgety and soon shouldered their packbaskets, so I picked up my rifle, and we resumed our hunt.

Much of the next two hours was spent following unproductive tracks. We saw or heard no game except for a few peacocks. The huge birds all flushed from the ground with a tremendous flapping of wings and a racket that makes a rising pheasant seem like a canary by comparison. I jumped each time and watched in awe as the long-tail birds leveled off and sailed through the dense jungle.

But I hadn't forgot the boar I'd seen a few hours earlier, and I was getting anxious for a shot at another.

It was late afternoon when we finally ran into some pigs. We had climbed almost to the top of a steep hill and had stopped to let me catch my breath. Suddenly K'Toi raised his hand and commanded our attention.

I cocked my head and squinted but

saw and heard nothing. Then there was a slight swish in the grass. I caught K'Toi's eye, and he nodded slowly. A few more sounds tipped us off to the presence of several pigs.

By this time, they had got our wind—perhaps we had disturbed their afternoon siesta. They began grunting and rustling about in the heavy underbrush, but we still couldn't see them.

Carefully following the sign-language instructions of K'Toi, I stalked stealthily through the tall grass and bamboo. And darned if I didn't come within 20 feet of a boar!

He spotted me and snorted, and I didn't wait to find out his intentions. I fired, and there was a loud squealing and a tumult of other noises as half a dozen more pigs took off in all directions. When the melee simmered down, we picked up a blood trail and found the boar about 50 feet away.

My rifle was a Model 70 Winchester .375. Ordinarily, a bolt-action rifle would be my last choice for boar hunting. Fast-handling carbines are best, and I've also had good results with slug-shooting shotguns. My preference is a Savage Model 99 in .300 Savage caliber. I was somewhat overgunned with the .375, but I had brought only one rifle with me, and the big bore was needed to handle the bigger game that was to follow on the schedule.

I pride myself on being able to clean, skin, and quarter an animal reasonably well in the field. And I've watched and assisted professional big-game guides who could do the job much better than I. But I've never seen a quicker or neater job than the one Keng did on that boar. A few slashes with his crude knife, and in almost no time the carcass was cleaned, the head and feet removed, and the hog quartered and loaded into packbaskets.

It was early evening by the time we returned to the villa. Saunier was elated over the kill. He examined the contents of the packbaskets and repeatedly exclaimed, "Magnifique!"

A little later, I found out why Saunier had been so insistent that I shoot a boar. That sly old fox simply wanted the meat. The old man was an accomplished chef, skilled in the art of French cooking. Although he had a whole platoon of servants running about the villa, he personally took over in the kitchen when the mood struck him.

That evening, he demonstrated his culinary talents. From his well-stocked cellar, he fetched a bottle of fine Burgundy and served it with a dinner of roast wild-pork tenderloin smothered with shallots and mushrooms. It was a sumptuous feast, and we dined over it until well past midnight.

It was a fitting way to end a good day afield. My jungle hunt added to the variety of terrain and hunting methods I've encountered in pursuit of boars. In desert, jungle, and snow-blanketed forest, I've found that pigs can usually be counted on to provide plenty of suspense and challenge. Guess that's why I hunt them every chance I get. 181 182