

Mallards and Messerschmitts: American Hunting Magazines and the World War II War Effort

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As soon as Pearl Harbor occurred in 1941, American sportsmen rose to support the American war effort. American hunting and fishing magazines chimed in with article after article stressing the long-assumed tradition of hunting as training for war. Although there is not firm proof that previous hunting experience made better marksmen of soldiers, nor that wartime experience in itself encouraged postwar hunting, the magazines, and their editors in particular, saw the war as an opportunity to reinvigorate hunting in twentieth-century America. Editors and article writers stressed various themes of the connection between hunting and military preparedness. Hunting would make better, steadier marksmen, acquaint troops with the outdoors, train them in woodcraft skills, and in general make them tougher. Homefront hunters would likewise have obligations which only hunting could fulfill: keep the number of predators in trim so they don't kill valuable meat animals or destroy grain crops needed for the troops, supplement or supplant domestic meat supplies, to keep herd and flock populations in check to prevent starvation of the animals, and to form ad hoc hunters' civilian defense groups. The magazines dwelt on these themes in regular feature articles, editorials, advertisements, covers, and other illustrations. Toward the end of the war, the focus switched slightly to one of nostalgia for hunting back home, and predictions of a on-and-half times expansion in the postwar hunter population. The magazines also speculated on the application of wartime technology (such as jeeps and planes and scopes) for postwar domestic hunters. Only occasionally did a writer sound a discordant note, usually about ammunition shortages or fears of government confiscation of private weapons. Mostly, the hunting magazines, particularly the major three, *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and *Sports Afield*, saw the war as a great opportunity to recast hunting as patriotic duty and reverse the general twentieth-century trend of loss of interest and criticism of hunting as sport.