



The Army

12-19

Mr. Jim

THROUGHOUT THE EARLY AND
MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY, BOBWHITE
QUAIL POPULATIONS PEAKED AROUND
THE SOUTHEAST.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JOEY FRAZIER



About four years ago, I met David Connelly, a bird hunter from North Carolina who leases a farm near Turbeville for his quail club. He invited me to visit the club on several occasions to photograph his dogs and to hunt birds with him. These were great days spent with a good friend and excellent bird dogs. It was like turning back the clock to a time when quail and quail hunters were plentiful in South Carolina. David hunts from a Jeep, and on the back is a metal plate with “Mr. Jim” inscribed on it.

Jim Connelly, David’s father, bought the Jeep new in 1976 and outfitted it with a high rear seat for the hunters and a dog kennel to make it the perfect hunting vehicle. According to David, his father was born in 1919, placing Mr. Jim squarely in the time frame of the bobwhite quail’s reign as the “prince of game birds,” to quote renowned outdoors writer Havilah Babcock. Sadly, the elder Connelly passed away in 1981, but he left behind a legacy of his bird hunting days in the form of hunting journals, home movies and of course, his son David.

Here are a few of the stories as told by David Connelly.

Subsistence hunting was real during and after the Great Depression. Many families, especially those in rural areas and on small farms needed the wild game to put any sort of food on the table. That was true for Mr. Jim’s family of eight, according to David. By the end of bird season, Mr. Jim’s brother, Rob, often rejoiced, saying “It sure will be good to get to eat chicken again.”

In those days, permission to hunt was much easier to come by as most farm families were in the same position and sharing was a way of life, even sharing their land with neighboring hunters. It was just a way to make ends

meet and be neighborly at the same time. Spare change was hard to scrape up, so communities took care of each other. Maybe that is why quail seem to be everywhere, like manna from heaven. Maybe, in a way, it was. The birds were most available when country folks needed them most.

Even as a young teen, Mr. Jim was an avid bird hunter, always in search of a new covey to prospect. One so-called “old maid” schoolteacher would not give permission for anyone to hunt her property, but one day a friend told Jim he had finally worn her down and had permission to hunt the property. So, the boys sneaked away from school to check out the fields and the piney woods. They were delighted to put up several coveys. Just as the hunting was getting good, Jim’s friend became anxious and wanted to leave. It was about three o’clock in the afternoon.

Jim asked, “Why the hurry?”

His friend replied, “My permission ends when school is out!”

Mr. Jim learned to love the outdoors and how to train bird dogs from his dad. They hunted together and learned the importance of hunting etiquette and sportsmanship. Most importantly, he learned the value of family and tradition — values he passed down to his own family starting when they were very young. In fact, not long after, Mr. Jim and Mrs. Mable were married, she told him she wanted to learn to bird hunt, too. When he asked her why she wanted to do such a thing, she answered, “If I want to see you at all on the weekends, I will have to go bird hunting, too.”

During those days, it was a bit unusual to see a lady in the field behind bird dogs, carrying a twenty-gauge L.C. Smith side-by-side. As the story goes, Peewee, as Mr. Jim called her, knew how to handle the little gun and excelled at wing shooting.

It was Mable Connelly who kept the journal of their hunts, and David still has them today. She recorded daily hunting reports, including the location of the hunt by farm name, the weather,



the names of the hunters, the names of the dogs on the ground, the number of point and flushes, and the number of birds killed. Those journal entries, most dating from the 1950s and early 1960s, are amazing to read.

On a three-day hunt near Summerton in 1957, Mable recorded three hunters, twenty-one coveys, and fifty-six birds killed.

On another day, the journal simply read, “No hits, no runs, no errors!” Anyone

who has ever hunted birds must have experienced days like that.

But hunting birds meant much more than sport to Mr. Jim. Having grown up a subsistence hunter, he valued the people who owned and worked the small farms in rural communities. When he got to a certain position in life, he made it a point to remember his “upbringing” as the old folks used to say. And he took his young son, David, along during the



BO TAKES HIS SEAT IN THE FRONT OF THE JEEP. Michael Hook and David Connelly on a bird hunt and Mr. Jim poses with a treasured field trial trophy. (photo, right, courtesy David Connelly).



holidays when they would deliver gifts and food to the families who allowed them to hunt. Sometimes, those visits were short, just handing a package through the door. Other times, David remembers how Mr. Jim would “sit a spell,” as the visit meant more than the gift. It’s the kind of thing a real bird hunter will appreciate.

Mr. Jim passed away in 1981. Fortunately, the stories survive in

Peewee’s journal and Mr. Jim’s home movies and in David Connelly’s memory. He tells me how much he loves bird hunting, and I don’t doubt it. But I really think he bird hunts to recreate the memories, because he loved his dad so much. The bird hunters I know are all cut from that cloth.

Joey Frazier is editor of *South Carolina Wildlife*.

Editor’s Note: We only know Mr. Jim’s stories through written and recounted memories. But there are a lot of bird hunters around South Carolina making new memories — and retelling some from the past. SCDNR Small Game Project Leader Michale Hook and I have been collecting those stories. Look for a companion feature in our next issue.