

Rex Stout's Most Extraordinary Meals

Harper's: Some of the most magnificent food in fiction has been served up in the old brownstone on New York's West 35th Street where Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin live. The conclusion that you, their creator, must have eaten some pretty memorable meals seems inescapable. What's the most extraordinary eating experience you've ever had?

Rex Stout: In 1945, the Army Air Force, as it was called then, took 14 writers to the European Front. We were all on the Writers' War Board, of which I was chairman. Naturally, we had a good many meals of different kinds. (Among other things we had lots of dried eggs. Have you ever eaten dried eggs? Don't.) At one point, this was in late January, they took Mark Childs and me to the front in France to an Army Air Force installation about 15 kilometers east of Epinal in the Vosges Mountains. As soon as I got there the colonel said that their mess sergeant had read some of my books and knew that I was supposed to know a lot about cooking. And so, a few days before we arrived, he had gone out with a couple of other guys and they had killed a wild boar. I was told that the animal had weighed 185 pounds when they brought it

in. They'd skinned it and fixed it and had it all ready. For two and a half days, all I ate was wild boar.

The very first thing I had, for lunch that day, was the heart of the wild boar, cooked in a certain way by the mess sergeant and cooked pretty well. And that evening we had pork chops. The next morning at breakfast we had wild boar bacon. And the next day at lunch we had a couple of slices of fresh wild boar ham. That evening we had a roast. Honestly, I don't know what part of the animal it was, because I wasn't used to wild boar.

All of the meat had a gamey flavor to it. There was more of a difference between it and pork than between venison and beef, for instance.

In a way the best meal we had from this boar was days later, because when I left the sergeant gave me a plastic package (even then we had some plastics) with a big hunk of head cheese in it that he had made from the boar. I took that back to London with me and eight of us writers ate that head cheese for lunch at the Savoy Grill.

At my age, which is 86, I have had a lot of funny and some interesting and some pretty bad extraordinary eating experiences, but I think that the wild boar was maybe it.