

Could Annie Oakley Have Prevented World War I?

With One Shot from Her Rifle Annie Oakley Could Have Prevented a World War

By Richard Sweeney

With one shot from her rifle Annie Oakley could have prevented a World War.

She was an international star at the time performing elaborate rifle tricks in America and Europe. The Wild West of America had been reduced to a traveling circus and the female star was Annie Oakley.

Annie Oakley was born in Darke County, Ohio. Annie was the fifth of seven children. Her parents, Susan and Jacob Mosey, were Quakers from Pennsylvania. Her father, who had fought in the War of 1812, died in 1866 from pneumonia and overexposure in freezing weather.

Annie began hunting at the age of nine to sustain her siblings and her widowed mother. She sold the hunting game to locals for money, and her rifle talents would eventually pay off the mortgage on her mother's house.

In Europe she performed before Queen Victoria and other crowned heads of state but traveling to Berlin to perform was a cause for tension given the international climate at the time. Annie was tense and uneasy about her performance when she took to the shot of her life. Annie had been, just moments before, performing her trick shooting act to the amazement of thousands of local citizens she had been startled when a prominent man had stepped from the crowd and challenged her.

The man was the infamous and newly crowned Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany and his act of bravado could easily have been his last. He challenged Annie to shoot the ashes from his cigarette.

When Annie retold the story she said that Wild West bravado had forced her to take the challenge. She had performed the stunt numerous times but his fame made her nervous. Apprehensively she paced off the distance and regretted having those shots of whiskey she had drunk the night before that had left her feeling off her game all day.

The arrogant Wilhelm drew a cigarette from his gold case and lit it with a flourish. Annie took a breath, aimed and fired. The shot knocked the ashes from the cigarette and brought the crowd to its feet cheering.

Annie continually set records into her 60s, even after she suffered a debilitating automobile accident that forced her to wear a steel brace on her right leg. In one shooting contest in Pinehurst, North Carolina in 1922, the then sixty-two-year-old Annie hit 100 clay targets from a 16 yard mark.

Annie Oakley died on November 3, 1926, of pernicious anemia, at the age of 66 and was buried in Brock Cemetery. Still until her death that shot was a moment the brassy Annie regretted and never forgot. Had the bullet been even a scant few inches off course, the quarrelsome leader of Germany who played a major role in starting World War I would have been removed from the world.

Takeaways

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