

# Retrievers of the Past...

By Joule Charney

## 1960 NFC-AFC DOLOBRAN'S SMOKE TAIL

“  
Smoke took  
everyone by  
**SURPRISE**  
”

THE NINE-YEAR-OLD DOG wasn't performing well, he wasn't considered a likely contender, and his owner was contemplating retiring him. Fortunately, Richard Hecker entered his dark horse, FC-AFC Dolobran's Smoke Tail, into the 1960 National anyway.

Smoke had been winding down his career. He ran only a few trials in 1959, with wins confined mostly to the Amateur stakes. He didn't qualify for the National until September 1960, at a trial in which there were a mere thirteen entries.

Then came the 1960 National...Smoke took everyone by surprise. He didn't leave a trail of smoke behind him, as the ball-of-fire he once was. This dog's mettle could have been measured, instead, by the unending wags of his tail, on land and in the water, telltale signs this oldster could thoroughly enjoy every moment of the 12 series event while he showed the retriever world that old dogs can turn a National trick.

“Whatever toll age had taken on his previous tremendous drive was more than offset by his ever increasing wisdom,” according to Field Trial News, then a publication of the Wisconsin Amateur Field Trial Club. Smoke “ran a splendid trial. In the critical 10th, 11th, and 12th Tests, where a mistake could have been fatal, Smoke just didn't make any. As has been the case in practically every National, he did not beat every dog in every test, but at the conclusion of the stake, there was no question



Ann and Richard Hecker with NFC-AFC Dolobran's Smoke Tail

of his overall average performance for four days – definitely and positively the best of the 55 Top Retrievers in the country.”

Smoke and Dick Hecker were a team since Smoke's puppyhood. Dick was his sole owner, trainer and handler. “The combination of Smoke and Dick Hecker is, and always has been, a tough team to beat,” according to the News. Together they achieved five Double Header wins. Smoke ended his field trial career with 158.5 Amateur and 110.5 Open points. He earned his AFC in 1956, his FC in 1957, and qualified for five National Opens and five

National Amateurs, receiving National Finalist acclaim in 1958 and 1959. He was inducted into the Retriever Hall of Fame in 1994.

“Dick Hecker was an attorney and quite competitive and outspoken,” recalls Lanse Brown, a field trialer who is still in the game. “The Heckers were very active in the Southern Arizona Club, among others, and Dick was very helpful in the logistics of various Nationals.”

The dog-handler team element was not lost on the Sports Illustrated magazine writer who watched the 1960 National with “some

150 ladies and gentlemen of the dog set ... in leather-paneled breeches, smart tweeds and soft, green Tyrolean hats, nearly all of which sagged under the weight of various club badges and field-trial medals that constitute status symbols in the sport. From shooting sticks, stools and the tail gates of their station wagons, they followed the action," Sports Illustrated noted.

"Collecting enough points to prove worthy of this August assembly was not a matter of retriever excellence alone. In a field trial ... the handler is 50% of the team. 'He is so important, in fact,' said a San Francisco man, 'that at a national, it is he who all too often freezes up, tries too hard and spoils his dog's showing.'"

The last portion of the Sports Illustrated feature article was entitled "Smoke in the Cactus." In this National in Weldon Spring, Missouri, which began with 55 Starters, only four remained for the 12th and final series. "One was Mrs. George Murnane's defending champion, Spirit Lake

Duke, handled by Joe Schomer, and one, surprisingly, was Mrs. Heller's companionable, gold-dentured Chesapeake, Baron. But most surprising was the exhibition of control and responsiveness being given by a small, lightweight (55 pounds) dark horse Labrador called Dolobran's Smoke Tail, who was handled by his owner, Richard Hecker, a Tucson lawyer."

"I was afraid old Smoke was getting a little too far along for this sort of thing," said Hecker at the end of the trial when his dog ran off with the first prize, "but I was wrong." Smoke's victory made his owner the first amateur ever to win the trials. "We've been together for nine years - I paid \$125 for him as a 10-week-old - which accounts for how well we work together, but I figured our chances of winning this national, our fourth, were pretty darn slim. You see, old Smoke has spent most of his life dodging cactus on the Arizona desert, hunting quail and doves."

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## DOLOBRAN HISTORY

Like a puff of smoke, NFC-AFC Dolobran's Smoke Tail seems to be one of those dogs who lives on in obscurity, and quite undeservedly so. The record of the dog with the callname Smoke does not explain his lack of notoriety. He not only won the 1960 National Open, his 269 combined points lodge him in 18th place on the Top 30 High-Scoring Retrievers of All-Time list. This is even more remarkable, given that his achievements were earned more than fifty years ago. Just over two decades ago, he was inducted into the Retriever Hall of Fame, in 1994. So, why is it this dog seems to have little to no name recognition?

Perhaps it is because Smoke sired only four titled offspring. The Dolobran kennel name seemed to come out of nowhere and go nowhere. Here is what we do know...

Smoke was born in 1951 out of FC Dolobran's Spook and Dolobran's Mighty Mite. Spook was born in 1948 and earned 29 Open Points, according to the 25th Anniversary Edition of the Labrador Retriever Club's Performance records. Spook's dam, Dolobran's Lassie, is the farthest back the Dolobran name has been traced in canine lineage.

Spook was owned by Clement Acton Griscom II. His father, Clement Acton Griscom, was born in Philadelphia in 1841. Griscom built an eighty acre estate on the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad and named it *Dolobran*, after the family home of one of his ancestors, Governor Thomas Lloyd, born in 1640 in Dolobran, Montgomery, Wales. After settling in Pennsylvania, Thomas Lloyd became President of the Provincial Council, 1684-1688, and Deputy Lieutenant-Governor, 1691-1693. For eight of the eleven years he lived in Pennsylvania, he was the highest officer or Chief Magistrate of the Province.

The family name of Lloyd descends from Ievan Teg, also known as *Evan the Handsome*, whose family owned and occupied Dolobran in Montgomeryshire, Wales, dating back to 1476.

Griscom was a shipping magnate known for having built "palatial vessels, the Lusitanias of their day," according to a 1912 New York Times extensive special obituary article. He also is noted for his efforts to build an all-American merchant marine to rival those of Britain and Germany, the shipping powers at the time.

Griscom and his wife Frances entertained many distinguished visitors at the Pennsylvania *Dolobran* estate. The house is listed by the Heritage Documentation Programs, a division of the U.S. National Park Service tasked with documenting historic places in the United States. Records of measured drawings, archival photographs, and written reports are archived in the Library of Congress.

In 1901, Griscom purchased almost 1,000 acres in Florida and called it *Horseshoe Plantation*. He continued to buy surrounding land until the plantation grew to more than 10,000 acres. Griscom brought cattle from his Pennsylvania Dolobran farm, used 75 acres for pecans, of which he was quite fond, and allocated one-third of the acreage to tenant families who cultivated



Pennsylvania Dolobran Estate, courtesy Library of Congress, Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS.PA.46-HAV.2-1, 1881.

cotton and corn. The remainder was utilized as his private hunting ground for bobwhite quail. The current owners have English Cocker Spaniels and other bird dogs.

Although Spook's sire, FC Hi-Tail Of Wyandotte, does not have the Dolobran name, his place in retriever history is highly significant. He was sired by the recipient of the 1937 Field and Stream Trophy, FC Banchory Night Light Of Wingan. At that time, the high point Open dog of the year was recognized as the Field and Stream Trophy Winner. It wasn't until 1941 that the first National Field Championship was held.

A Smoke daughter, FC-AFC Frances Fishtail, most likely was named after Griscom's wife, whose first name was Frances. Another titled Smoke daughter was FC-AFC Bean Ball. For unknown reasons, Dolobran was not included in their names.

Another descendent of the Lloyds may be connected with the retriever world. Lord Lloyd of Dolobran wrote the introduction for the book *Sketches in Stable and Kennel*, published in 1933. This very prominent individual became Baron Lloyd of Dolobran in 1925 and served as the British High Commissioner to Egypt until 1929. In the 1930s, he worked with Winston Churchill who appointed him Secretary of State for the Colonies when he became Prime Minister in 1940. Later that year, Churchill conferred upon him the additional job of Leader of the House of Lords; however, Lloyd died in office early 1941. Lord Lloyd also is known for championing the cause of religious tolerance, a tolerance that was seldom shown to his Quaker ancestors, some of whom had been imprisoned for their religious beliefs.

The Lloyds of Dolobran also are connected to the *Lloyds of London*.

By contrast, the Sports Illustrated reporter wrote that “Del-Tone Ric’s owner, a St. Paul stockbroker named Charles Cook, was himself so shattered by the dog’s failure that he ordered Handler Bill Wunderlich to sell him for cost: \$6,000.”

The writers from both Field Trial News and Sports Illustrated were struck by the flawlessness of Smoke’s performance.

“It seemed pretty clear,” concluded the Sports Illustrated reporter, “that a dog that had learned to dodge cactus in the desert wasn’t likely to make any mistakes – anywhere.”

### One Heck of a Handler

One way to appreciate the odds against Smoke winning the 1960 National is by reviewing the trial’s statistics, particularly the breakdown of professionals versus amateurs, and handlers with multiple dogs versus those running one. It often is said that there is a huge advantage in running more than one dog. With each subsequent dog, the handler has more knowledge of the trial, especially the pitfalls, and how he or she wishes to run it.

In total, there were 30 handlers running 55 starters. Of these, there were 16 professionals handling 40 dogs. By comparison, there were 14 amateurs handling 15 dogs. The only amateur who handled more than one dog was Dick Hecker, who ran his AFC Princess Patricia Stieg in addition to Smoke.

Here is where some extra advantages might have existed... There

were 10 professional handlers running 34 multiple dogs, and they read like a Who’s Who of retrieverdom. In decreasing order, they were: 7 dogs – D. L. Walters (two owned by Mr. and Mrs. Bing Grunwald, two owned or co-owned by John A. Love, Jr.), 5 dogs – “Billy” Wunderlich (two owned by Charles C. Cook, two owned by Rockbend Kennels), 4 dogs – Ed Minnogie (two owned by Cyril R. Tobin), 4 – “Cotton” Pershall (all owned by John M. Olin, Nilo Kennel, Trial Chairman), 3 dogs – Walter H. Berth (two owned by Dr. and Mrs. Donald S. Thatcher), 3 dogs – Joe Schomer (all owned by Mrs. George Murnane, Macopin Kennel) and 2 dogs each – Tony Berger, Van Morris, Ray Staudinger, and Paul Wood. Six Professionals each ran one dog.

“... The judges openly stated that the trial would continue until there was an unquestioned winner.”

Another staggering statistic is the number of dogs running in the 1960 National who won other national retriever events: 1957 and 1959 NFC Spirit Lake Duke (plus HOF 1992); 1961 and 1963 NFC-AFC Del-Tone Colvin, 1960 NAFC-FC Queenie Of Redding, 1962 NAFC-FC Carr-Lab Hilltop, and 1963 NAFC-FC Pepper’s Jiggs. Additionally, there were two non-National winners who became Hall of Famers: Dairy Hill’s Night Cap (1994) and Paha-Sapa Chief II (1993).

Richard Hecker was “one of the original prime movers of The Double Headers,” which is “composed of members, all amateur handlers who have with the same dog, which the handler must have owned at the time, won both the Open and Amateur All-Age Stakes in the same AKC licensed or member club all breed retriever trial,” according to the definition in older Performance Books.

Smoke and Dick Hecker held the record of five Double Header wins for eleven years, from the inception of The Double Headers in 1960, until 1972.

He contributed this foreword to the 1967-1972 Performance Book: “Our membership grows slowly but pridefully. In our first year, 1960, with only 13 charter members, we took both the National Amateur and the National, the latter with the only amateur trained dog as yet to do so. Since then, we have added over 30 new members, captured 8 out of 12 National Amateur titles, and August Belmont and Don Weiss assisted Cotton (who handled four dogs in the 1960 National) and the Shoe (Paul Shoemaker, who ran one) by breaking in on the Berger-Walters-Riser monopoly of 7 National crowns in 11 years.

“Auggie really performed the hat trick. While serving as National Secretary, Field Trial Chairman, and head of most of the committees, he found the time to pick up two consecutive National Amateur wins in 1967-68, then tacked on the National Championship to earn the only solid gold Double Header pin thus far issued. More are available for any of our amateurs who can come up with a dog like Soupy.

“It is fitting that a do-it-yourself group of this status continue to boost the retriever sport in all ways possible, and in particular by carrying on with the Open and Amateur record books.”



# OTHER INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE 1960 NATIONAL

**Breeds:** 51 Labradors (50 Black, 1 Yellow), 2 Golden and 2 Chesapeake, 47 Males - 8 Females

- The average age of the starting dogs was approximately 5 years and 8 months
- Two dogs were over 9 years old: Nelgard's Baron (9 years and 9 1/2 months) owned by Mrs. Walter Heller, and Dolobran's Smoke Tail (9 years and 2 months) owned by Richard Hecker.
- 15 of the 55 starters were Amateur handled
- There were 2 woman handlers, both Amateur



THE DOLOBRAN ESTATE OF CLARENCE A. DOLOBRAN.

Pennsylvania Dolobran Estate, courtesy Rural Pennsylvania by Rev. Samuel Fitch Hotchkin, c. 1897.

Smoke's long-standing record was surpassed at the end of 1972 when Mike Flannery and 1972, 1975 NARC River Oaks Corky earned their sixth Double Header win. Corky continued to win one more Double Header. His record of seven has yet to be topped. Corky continues to hold the Lifetime Points total of 505.5. Smoke's 269 Lifetime Points put him in 18th place of the Top 30 High Scoring Dogs of All-Time by Points.

## One Heck of a Dog

Another factor that brought out the best of the best in 1960 was the number of series of that National. It took 12 to decide the Winner.

**10th Series** - "The ten mandatory tests had been completed and the question in every one's mind, spectators and contestant alike, was 'Is there a clear winner?'" according to Field Trial News in its National feature article. "All had a few ups and downs. The judges openly stated that trial would continue until there was an unquestioned winner."

"The answer was given in but a few moments - another test was called."

**11th Series** - "Good lining, precision handling, prompt and positive response were all a necessity. Once again, Dolobran's Smoke Tail put on what looked like the top job. Still it was apparent, the judges were not completely satisfied they had an absolutely clear winner." Six dogs made started the 11th Series. Only two were dropped, leaving four going into the 12th and final Series.

**12th Series** - The final series was a land blind and a single land mark. The other three dogs were less than stellar on the blind. Even two-time National Winner Spirit Lake Duke "had a couple of cast refusals and was a rifle roamer." Two of these dogs were "good" on the mark and one handled. Smoke "took a good line, responded to whistle and took casts correctly. Unquestionably, the best job in the test. He had no trouble on the marked fall.

"There had been surprises throughout the trial, but it seemed rather evident the judges had found their unquestioned winner when the announcement was made, 'The trial is completed.' It was well that another test was not required. The sun was setting in the West and darkness fast approaching."

There was barely one puff of daylight left. In a stellar puff of Smoke, the Dolobran dog made National history. ■

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FIELD TRIAL NEWS

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1960

### THE 1960 NATIONAL

THE JAMES W. BARRY, CHIEF MARSHAL, ROBERT FITZ, CHAIRMAN and their assistants, the STAFF, the 1960 NATIONAL TRIAL, were held at the Pennsylvania Dolobran Estate, November 15-16, 1960. The trial was held on the estate of the late Clarence A. Dolobran, who was the first to introduce the dog to the trial. The trial was held on the estate of the late Clarence A. Dolobran, who was the first to introduce the dog to the trial. The trial was held on the estate of the late Clarence A. Dolobran, who was the first to introduce the dog to the trial.

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