

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 6, 2013

Aberdeen, Maryland: A Sportsmen's Town: Cal Ripken Sr. and Jr., came from Aberdeen. Cal Jr. was one of my baseball heroes, as was Stan Musial. Like Musial, he played for only one team, his "hometown" Baltimore Orioles, only 30 miles from his home. I remember well his passing Lou Gehrig's record of 2,130 consecutive games at the new ballpark called Camden Yards. Built on the site of Camden Station, this was the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad's oldest and largest station in its headquarters city. The only time I followed the Orioles, I watched or checked on Ripken's continuing streak that culminated with his 2,632nd consecutive game in 1998. In retirement, he has made Aberdeen even better known with his sports complexes and incentives for young athletes.

The Ripkens, while certainly the most famous, were not the only outstanding sports figures who called Aberdeen home. When my father became a serious trapshooter in 1914, one of the most outstanding marksmen in that sport was Lester S. German. German worked for one of the ammunition companies and shot as a "professional," teaching people to shoot and promoting his company's products. My father attended his first "Westy Hogan" tournament at Atlantic City in 1915, and there were 450 16-yard targets on the program, shot over a three-day period. Les German broke 449, making news throughout the trapshooting world with his near-perfect score. He was bigger-than-life in other ways and could eat four wild ducks at a single meal. He shot through the 1920s, and we have captured on 16 mm movie film Les German in action at Betterton, Maryland, in 1925. About 1932, he suffered a paralyzing stroke, after which he lived about two years. During this time, however, some friends brought him to the "Old Timers' Shoot," staged by my father at Yorklyn on June 30, 1933.

J. Smith Michael and Charles B. Osborn, both of Aberdeen, were young men German taught to shoot clay targets. Both were considered Class A shooters, and Michael won several championships in the 1920s. Charlie Osborn, who owned a large cannery along the railroad in Aberdeen, stopped shooting for several years but got his second wind at the end of World War II. He won the Maryland State Championship at the Oriole Gun Club in Baltimore in 1947 with a score of 195 out of 200.

J. Calvin Michael was Smith's son who married Osborn's daughter, Edna. Coached by his father, Calvin became good as a teenager, and he scored high in the Marshall Marathon at Yorklyn and in the Maryland championships in the years before World War II. In 1942, he lost the Maryland championship to D. Frank Beck of Havre de Grace by a single target. At the conclusion of the war, Calvin Michael came into his own. For many years he seemed to win the Maryland State Championship about two years out of three, at least twice with 200 straight. On one of these occasions, a young farm boy from the Eastern Shore named Casper Clough had practiced with his father "behind the barn," and they thought he was ready for the Maryland State contest. Casper was at the top of his form and finished with 199. The trouble was, Calvin Michael broke 200.

To become the official high-average trapshooter in the country, the average had to be on a minimum of 2,000 registered targets. In October 1948, with the end of the shooting season fast approaching, Calvin had missed 24 targets that year, but he had shot at only 1700. Ray Loring, Manager of the Amateur Trapshooting Association, told him that he had a chance to be the high-average trapshooter, if he could shoot another 300 registered targets to bring his total to 2,000. He found three nearby clubs that each had 100-target races scheduled in October and November, not a time of year noted for high scores. He entered all of them and broke 100 straight each time, finishing the year with 1,976 out of 2,000, for an average of 98.80%. Vic Reinders of Waukesha, Wisconsin, a perennial winner, was second in 1948 with 98.68%.

Calvin and Edna's son, J. Smith Michael II, also of Aberdeen, became a top trapshooter, but I never knew him as it was after my time in the sport of trapshooting.