

'OFFENSIVE SPIRIT' in the defence of hunting

WHO would ever have put money on Volodymyr Zelensky being able to defend his country in the face of Russian military might this time last year, holding out just long enough to convince the big guns that he was worth backing? The one card he had in his hand was conviction. This enabled him to act with an offensive spirit, which convinced his troops, countrymen, allies and enemies that he was going to be a tough nut to crack.



Volodymyr Zelensky acted with an offensive spirit which convinced his troops, countrymen, allies and enemies that he was going to be a tough nut to crack

Similarly, in 1542, a tiny militia of 3,000 Cumbrian Light Horsemen or 'Prickers' stood grim faced against 18,000 invading Scots, on the banks of a small river on the Solway Moss. Due to a series of military blunders and command disarray, Lord Thomas Wharton's Prickers utterly routed and defeated the Scots who were documented as being 'beguiled by their own guiding'. Ring any bells?

Anyone who thinks that we are not several decades into an ideological war against our way of life or who thinks that politics is not intrinsically linked with war, as much as hunting is with farming, must have been rocking themselves gently back and forward in a dark room with their fingers in their ears.

Nicola Sturgeon's rapid escape from Holyrood likely heralds the emergence of Kate Forbes, just as the impact of the Gender Recognition Reform Bill lands in her lap. With it will likely see the end of the unhappy marriage of inconvenience with the Green Party, the main driving force behind the Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill, that testament to wilful ignorance, prejudice and cultural vandalism.

So, in order to talk about the subject of defence, it might be worth understanding its core principles, from a military perspective. Alongside depth, all-round defence, mutual support, reserves, deception, is 'offensive spirit'.

I'd like to concentrate on 'offensive spirit' because without it, you're already defeated. I don't mean 'offensive' in the sense of offending people's sensitivities, too easily done these days by half, but rather a

spirit of being on the offensive. If one's defensive strategy is to remain fixed in the bottom of the trench with your head below the parapet hoping it'll all go away, then you will certainly be ingloriously defeated.

The position of 'don't do anything, you'll only make it worse' or 'just get the best days we can have before we're finished' is not particularly helpful for the next generation. That stance lacks conviction and will not achieve a successful outcome.

If all that one thinks is politically achievable is flushing to Guns with two hounds and a licence to do

anything further than that, issued by NatureScot, then that is a direct reflection on the capability and intention of those organisations championing the cause as opposed to what is politically achievable. Those sort of 'allies' really aren't allies at all. They're reluctant partners and are potentially part of the problem and not part of the solution.

How does one get an 'offensive spirit'? It is borne out of a sense of conviction. That conviction derives from having a strong cause and the skill and means to deliver a positive outcome.

Daniel Greenberg KC, who drafted the legislation for the Hunting Act, admits to a deep sense of moral unease that it was 'legislating against a minority on a moral issue'

In support of the case for 'natural hunting', researched evidence on animal welfare, wildlife management and pest control provides the basis for the protection of the minority for who natural hunting is a culturally affiliated belief, their entire way of life.

That is worth fighting for with a sense of conviction, delivered with 'offensive spirit' towards a higher aspiration than we currently see within our representation.

I'm done apologising about hunting with supposed allies from the wider field sports community because the case for natural hunting stands up on its own. Once we have demonstrated our cause with conviction, who knows,



people might take a leaf out of the Irish book and join together in a bit of 'mutual support' and provide further 'depth'.

Tackling stereotypes is also a useful correction that is needed. The red-faced toff in the top hat is as untrue a stereotype as the moaning 'Karen', so engorged with rage that her life didn't prove as satisfying as she'd thought was her entitlement and who resultingly hates herself only slightly less than she hates us. Or the balaclava wearing supposed 'tough guy' from Manchester screaming obscenities at old men and children as he wonders if he's got enough money for a Gregg's sausage roll or the minibus ride back to his grimy urban lair.

So, with our sense of conviction leading us towards acting with 'offensive spirit' what could that actually mean? You only need look over the border into Scotland to see prejudice and wilful ignorance staring you in the face. So, we challenge it because we know that all scientific researched evidence was deliberately ignored to suit the agenda of Mairi McAllan and the SNP-Green Party alliance.

Submissions from the Veterinary Association for Wildlife

Management were ignored proving that the Bill had no shred of animal welfare consideration at its root; consultations were not published, the list goes on. As opposed to Environment Minister Mairi McAllan's start point of 'The Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Bill would ensure there was no place for hunting with dogs north of the border. Any evidence to support that? Maybe it should read: "A judicial review might conclude that there should be no place for politicians who are prejudiced and wilfully ignore evidence north of the border."

When it is very likely that the passing of the *Hunting Act 2004* will soon be evidenced as exceptionally bad law that has had a detrimental impact on the species it pretended to protect, now is possibly the time to put a cold towel around the political head and take a proper, evidence-based view on these matters and leave prejudice to one side. The only 'smokescreen' at play here, is the eradication of a rural minority way of life under the smokescreen of animal welfare.



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And we want to follow that example in Holyrood? Scotland should have done better than that and have been the first government to actually confront such a contentious issue and produce a measured and balanced outcome, devoid of prejudice and based on evidence, not misguided opinion. It has lost that opportunity.

What is the animal welfare basis for proposing such an unworkable dictat? In 2002, the League Against Cruel Sports had admitted the flaw years previously when its then chief executive, Douglas Batchelor, had said in a leaked memo: "Pairs of

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dogs are utterly useless in flushing to Guns."

Realising that some evidence or opinion was needed to change the Scottish law, in 2016 Lord Bonomy was commissioned by the Scottish Government, to review the efficacy of the 2002 Act. His scope was extremely narrow. 'The review will look at whether current legislation is providing the necessary level of protection for foxes and other wild mammals while allowing for the effective and humane control of these animals where required.' It goes on to say: "The review will not consider the following:

- whether predator control is necessary to protect livestock or wildlife
- the operation of other wildlife legislation unless it has a direct bearing on the operation on the 2002 Act
- other types of predator or pest control"



The rural affairs, islands and natural environment committee, the government and the entire process would have had much more credibility and have been more likely to produce an accepted and workable outcome, if it had recommended commissioning studies to gain evidence on the following points, based on welfare aspects, effectiveness, practicality, and necessity:

- Flushing foxes from cover using a full pack.
- Flushing foxes from cover using two hounds.
- Flushing foxes from cover using different numbers of hounds.
- Welfare aspects of shooting foxes and wounding rates.
- Welfare aspects of all alternative methods of control.
- Identifying best methods of control over varying terrain.
- Seasonal variations for wildlife control.
- Rural community social impact assessments.
- Rural community economic impact assessments.
- Balancing climate change targets with wildlife population management.
- Ability to prosecute cases of cruelty and unnecessary suffering.
- Enforcement of the law by Police Scotland.
- The effectiveness of the *Bonomy Report* recommendation for the existing hunt code of conduct.
- The effectiveness of hunt monitoring as suggested by Lord Bonomy.

Due to seasonal variations in weather and wildlife populations, a realistic view on the timeframe required to conduct such research must be taken, somewhere not less than 5-10 years to achieve that task properly and enable effective comparisons. The legal process to then decide whether 30,000 years of wildlife management using dogs should be amended based on someone's misguided political opinion today, might then receive widespread support from both sides of the argument.

As Jim Fairlie MSP revealed during one of the evidence sessions, 'Let's be honest, banning mounted hunting is really what this is all about.'

Is that yet another serving of bad law that we're expected to swallow? Let's get forward, 'raft up and act' with conviction now. People follow people who demonstrate conviction.

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Sir Tony Blair is on record as saying that the *Hunting Act 2004* was his biggest single political regret. Daniel Greenberg KC, who drafted the legislation for it, admits to a deep sense of moral unease that it was 'legislating against a minority on a moral issue' and that 'Instead of an effective measure, therefore, the Act and the Bills for it were largely an exercise in what it has now become fashionable to describe as 'virtue signalling'.

Dennis Skinner put it more bluntly by saying that it was 'revenge for the miners'.

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