

Thinking Sideways Podcast

Episode 18: Amikäfer

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[Theme song plays]

Steve: Well hi there, and welcome back to Thinking Sideways the Podcast. I am Steve.

Devin: I'm Devin!

Joe: I'm Joe.

Steve: ...and we - as always - are going to get into a story that doesn't quite have an answer and try and figure it out. Because Joe loves to solve them.

Joe: Oh yeah, we'll solve this one for sure.

Devin: Yeah.

Steve: Ok, alright, good deal.

[Devin laughs]

Steve: Ah well, let's hop right into the story. I'm not going to tell you what it is quite yet. I want to set the stage. So it's 1950, and we're in Germany...

Devin: I better stop talking then, huh?

Steve: No, it's ok.

Devin: Ok.

Steve: And, it's a nice sunny, it's May, and wait - do you hear that?

[Sound of plane flying]

Devin: Yeah, what was that?

Steve: That is a US airplane...

Devin: Oh!

Steve: ...flying over the field that we're standing in.

Devin: Okay.

Joe: Okay.

Steve: Because we're in Germany, in the 1950s, which means that it is now an occupied territory.

Joe: Yeah.

Devin: Pretty normal.

Steve: Yeah, pretty normal, which makes sense. Well, there's a problem though with this, and that is what happens supposedly within days of this particular plane, or any plane, flying over this field. And that is the appearance of the potato beetle.

Joe: Ah! Not just any potato beetle, the...

Steve: The.

Devin: The.

Joe: ... Colorado.

Steve: The Colorado potato beetle. You are absolutely correct, sir. So here's what the story is, ladies and gentlemen. According to the accounts, and this is one specifically, it was the 23rd of May, 1950, and a farmer by the name Max Tröger had noticed American planes flying over his fields - he's in East Germany - and the next morning - according again to his account - he was shocked to discover that his fields of potatoes were full of potato beetles.

Joe: Not just any potato beetle.

Steve: The Colorado potato beetle.

[**Devin laughs**]

Joe: Precisely.

Steve: ... which, ladies and gentlemen, if you don't know anything about the beetle - and we'll get into some details on it - but it's pretty devastating for potato crops.

Devin: So this is like the German Irish potato famine.

Steve: Essentially yes. If you actually try and put that in, the Irish potato famine always comes up.

Devin: Of course.

Steve: Which makes this difficult, unless you know what to look for.

Devin: Right.

Steve: So, here's what's going on, is, after these planes go by and all these farmers were reporting that there's Colorado potato beetles all over their fields, the East German press goes nuts with it. The politicians are making speeches, they are accusing the US of having dropped all of these potato beetles on their crops.

[Vintage radio sound bite plays]

Steve: And I'm guessing that this propaganda campaign came from is that the Americans are trying to cut down on our food supply and therefore take us over, those imperialists.

Joe: Yeah... I'm sure the people of East Germany were really, really scared about the possibility we'd boot the Russians out...

[Everybody laughs]

[Sound bite ends]

Steve: Yeah, that's a problem. Well, like I said, there was a giant propaganda campaign that came up from this, there were posters, little leaflets, bits on the radio, speeches as I said. They were going crazy, talking about this sudden infestation and how it was the fault of the Americans. They actually nicknamed the Colorado potato beetle "Amikäfer" which I understand translated is "Yankee beetle". Is that correct?

Joe: Yes, that's correct.

Steve: So what happens, is children are at the end of their school days not allowed to just go home. They actually have to go out to the fields, and go through the crops and try and pick up as many potato beetles as possible.

Devin: That's the real tragedy from this, right? Is that the kids were losing homework time...

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: Yeah, that's exactly what it was.

[Devin laughs]

Joe: I'm sure they were really thrilled to be out there...

Devin: That was the long game of Americans, right, we were trying to make the German stupid, by just taking out all the homework time for young Germans

[**Steve laughs**]

Steve: Yes.

Joe: That's exactly it.

Steve: There are accounts that these children - some didn't really care, some believed it, girls evidently were really squeamish about touching these beetles. And from the accounts they would get 20 to 25 beetles an afternoon each, and then put them in a glass bottle so they'd be shipped off to be destroyed.

Devin: I read one account, it was in an interview with a boy who had been going out to the fields and he said, "Yeah, I don't really believe that the Americans are dropping these, but you know, we have to pick them up anyways."

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: "Mom and dad said to do it, so I'm gonna do it"

Joe: Well, it's like if you are living in a country that doesn't have any pesticides to speak of, then you've got to do something if you want to eat.

Devin: Yeah.

Steve: Yeah.

Joe: Can't be having your crops destroyed.

Steve: No, because you've got to understand, the potato evidently was a main crop for the German people. That was a main food source.

Devin: Mhm.

Joe: Well, especially right after World War II.

Steve: Exactly! Again, you've got to remember what the era is. There's, you know, things have been destroyed...

Joe: Still kind of hard times for a lot of people...

Steve: ... hard times, you're trying to get back on your feet. You grow whatever food you can.

Devin: And potatoes grow and they are hearty.

Steve: They are a hearty little thing.

Joe: And you can make vodka out of them too.

[**Steve laughs**]

Devin: This isn't Russia, Joe.

Joe: Yeah, that might be one reason why there was such a scarcity of potatoes, because there was a quote here from somebody who recalls sharing a single potato between herself and her mom and dad for breakfast. So it probably wasn't just the potato beetles, it probably was the Soviets carting away half the potato crop to make vodka back in the homeland...

Devin: Yeah

Steve: Yeah, maybe. Well, what comes out of this is that nearly half of the crops for 1950 were destroyed in East Germany...

Devin: Wow!

Steve: ...by the Colorado potato beetle.

Devin: That's substantial!

Steve: Yeah. That's a huge reduction in available food crops...

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: ... which is not a good thing.

Devin: Especially if it's a staple.

Steve: Yes. It's one of those main staples. So, like I said, in the beginning the Germans were blaming the US for dropping the beetles on them. The US of course was saying, "No, we didn't do it, it wasn't us". And we're going to get in the theories about what's going on and you know, why is this invasive species suddenly there?

Joe: It actually had been in Europe before.

Steve: Yeah, and we're going to go there, but I do want to talk about the beetle a little bit. Because we hear about this beetle, you don't really have a lot of context, so I just want to give some background on this particular little bug. So the Colorado potato beetle is very prolific. A female can lay about 800 eggs in a season...

Devin: Ugh... no.

Steve: Yes.

Devin: Insect birth things freak me out.

[**Steve laughs**]

Joe: Yeah.

Devin: As a woman! I just have to say.

Steve: So their eggs are only about a millimeter, they're really small, they lay them in bunches of 20 to 30 at a time on the bottom of leaves, so they're not easy to spot. Because if you've ever seen a potato leaf, they have lots, they're just covered in them, so you can imagine everyone of those covered in eggs on the bottom.

Joe: That's a lot of leaves to turn over.

Steve: That's a lot of leaves to turn over.

Devin: Mhm.

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: And basically what happens is, they hatch and those hatchlings immediately begin to eat the leaves. They do what's called "skeletonizing", where they basically eat all of the leafy matter and you just get left with the veins of the leaf.

Devin: Yeah.

Joe: That reminds me of about every other shrub in my yard.

[**Steve laughs**]

Steve: And then eventually they go on through their lifecycle, they pupate, they turn into a larva, which goes underground, then they come back up and they're an adult, at which point they're eating again.

Devin: Ugh...

Steve: And they're eating the leaves again.

Joe: And laying eggs...

Steve: ...and laying eggs, and the hard part about the larva is, they will do what's called... "diapause" I believe is how you pronounce it, which basically means if the conditions aren't right, they'll just stay essentially in hibernation in the ground...

Devin: Ohhh, yeah.

Steve: ...and then wait 'till it's nice to come out again.

Devin: That's the worst!

Joe: Mhm.

Steve: ...so you're thinking, "Oh, it's a cold snap, yay, they are all going to go away." No, they just come right back.

Devin: I feel like mosquitoes do that too.

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: But anyway, the Colorado potato beetle can go through up to three generations in a season.

[**Devin sighs**]

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: So that is a lot of little bugs.

Joe: Yeah, well, I certainly would think that if it is possible that we rounded them all up over here and dumped them over there just to get rid of them.

[**Steve laughs**]

Joe: Sounds like it.

Steve: Yeah, well that could be.

Joe: Yeah.

Devin: Well, that's... The multiplication of those is just amazing. It's astounding, especially if you don't have anything that's really eating them, no natural predators in that area, no pesticides. If the best you can do is school-aged kids picking off the beetles they can see, you know you think of, you drop 800, right, and each ... 400 of those are females and they each lay 800 eggs every what, month?

Steve: Essentially.

Devin: I can't do that math in my head, but...

Steve: No, me either.

Devin: But that is just, I mean, easily millions really, really soon.

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: Yeah, and they're very recognizable, they're a very distinct little beetle, they're I believe also referred to as the ten-striped beetle...

Devin: Oh!

Steve: ... because they're kind of yellowish orange and they have ten brown stripes across their back.

Devin: Actually yeah, I know what you're talking about now.

Joe: And they're a decent size, they're about a millimeter - excuse me - a centimeter long...

Steve: Yeah, they're not a little bug at all.

Joe: Yeah, no.

Steve: They've got some size to them. And here's a couple of facts. So we talked about how many eggs a female will lay...

Devin: Mhm...

Steve: ... a single larva, and again, this is just hammering the point home on how much they can devour... will eat forty square centimeters of leaf in a day.

Devin: That's... okay.

Joe: Mhm...

Steve: That's a lot of area to be devouring.

Devin: Yeah.

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: ... and the other hard part about the beetle is it is extremely resistant to insecticides.

Devin: Oh.

Steve: Meaning that they're very good at adapting, so for a couple of generations or a couple of years you might wipe them out with one poison, but then they're going to adapt to it and suddenly you've got to find something else.

Devin: Do they only eat the potato plant, one kind of potato plant?

Steve: No, they will eat potatoes, cucumbers, there's something else that I can't think of at the moment. They do several crops, but their favorite is potatoes.

Devin: So it's not like you could just rip out this one breed of potato and plant a different kind, it's....

Joe: Think about it, it's not the potatoes they're eating. It's the leaves.

Devin: That's true, yeah.

Joe: So yeah, it would be pretty hard to switch plants like that.

Devin: Yeah.

Joe: But I think they actually had some success with DDT and then unfortunately a DDT resistant strain of the beetle turned up.

Steve: Yeah, as it always does.

Joe: Yeah, nature's kind of funny that way.

Steve: Yeah, yeah. So let's go ahead and let's hop into some theories.

Devin: Ok!

Steve: ... as to how the beetle got there or what the deal is. So we will go ahead and take the bull by the horns and we will take on the popular theory, which is that the US did it.

Joe: Mmm.

Steve: The potato beetle is known to have made its way into Germany in the past. I believe in the late 1800s there was an outbreak, but it was contained, they were all destroyed. But the potato beetle was in England, they were known to be in parts of France, so it wasn't as if it had never been on the European continent. But if we're going go ahead and say that the US did it, here is some of the facts.

Devin: We're saying the US intentionally did it...

Steve: Yes, that it was an intentional dumping.

Devin: It was like a bomb drop.

Steve: It's essentially biological warfare...

Devin: Ok.

Steve: ... is what we're looking at, here.

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: ... but we're going to say this is an early biological warfare program. So some things that did come up is that in that region of the world the potato beetle normally makes its first appearance mid July, about that. These fully grown adults were appearing in May, in mid to late May. So that's a full two months early.

Joe: Hmm.

Steve: There also were no signs of larva, so it was just suddenly we have a bunch of adults scrambling around, which, if they were going to go through their lifecycle, you would think there would have been signs of larva in the area...

Devin: But don't the larva bury themselves?

Steve: Well the larva will first eat the plants and then dig down and hide in the soil to emerge as an adult.

Devin: Okay, yeah.

Steve: So theoretically there should have been some larva signs...

Devin: Yeah, okay.

Steve: But there were none.

Joe: But when the larva emerge from the soil, are they changed into beetles at this point?

Steve: Yes.

Joe: Okay.

Steve: They go through four stages. The larva, I believe, is the second stage. So there's egg, larva... There's a third stage where they don't eat...

Devin: Pupa.

Steve: Pupate, yes.

Devin: Pupae? How do you say it?

Steve: Pupa. And then they pupate.

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: And then there's the fourth stage, which is adulthood. There are some places though, at that time that potato beetles were showing up where they shouldn't have.

Joe: Well, don't they always show up where they shouldn't be?

[**Devin and Steve laugh**]

Devin: Shouldn't they be nowhere? Really?

Joe: Yeah, that's kind of the way I see it.

Steve: Let's see, so in Zwickau the beetles were found in the square in front of the rail station. Which doesn't have any potatoes.

Devin: Yeah, that's a weird place ...

Joe: Well maybe the Americans put them on a train.

Steve: Maybe.

[**Devin laughs**]

Steve: ...Near a dam in Sosa they were discovered in bathtubs inside of houses. These are kind of weird places for a beetle that would normally go after a plant to appear.

Devin: Yeah, but it's also a weird place to get airdropped into...

Steve: This is very true.

Devin: I mean, airdropping into a bathtub ...

Joe: Yeah, and also, bugs are kind of stupid that way.

[**Devin and Steve laugh**]

Steve: They do, they just show up places.

Joe: They could show up in the darkest places. You know, a lot of this stuff got introduced to Europe just through shipments of food from like America, etc. and then between the European countries and stuff, so if they're infesting a shipment of food that's being shipped by rail, it wouldn't be that unusual to see one in front of a rail station.

Steve: That's very plausible. Absolutely. And that's the first thing that I thought when I saw the rail station, but then at this dam it seemed a little weird that they're crawling around on the firewood and in the house in the tub. Then again, it might have been a swarm of them that just moved into the area. It's hard to tell, because...

Joe: You never know, the railroad...

Steve: ...there's not a lot of concrete facts.

Joe: The railroad tracks might run right past the house and the dam, I mean who knows.

Steve: Here's another thing that came up - and I found this in one place, so I can't say how reliable this is...

Devin: I love those.

Steve: ... but there is information that says that a leaked report from an American investigative committee was discussing the bad tactics and insufficient preparation of the whole - as in entire - potato beetle campaign. And they were criticizing the fact that the spreading of the beetles over the German Democratic Republic had not followed the distribution plan.

Joe: I see.

Devin: Hmm.

Steve: Ok, so this is supposedly an official leaked report.

Joe: From an American investigative committee from what, from where?

Steve: I don't know, that's the hard part. I couldn't find it anywhere else. Everything I looked for, it didn't surface anywhere else. So I don't know how strong that claim is. Another bit in the "Americans did it" theory, intentionally did it, is there is information out there about a chemical, which is referred to at the time as E838. Which was a new pesticide, which was being marketed to take care of the potato beetle.

Devin: Aha!

Steve: So it makes sense, according to this theory, that what you do is if you want to get the German people under your thumb, and you want to make them depend on this pesticide and have them purchase it from you, go ahead and introduce the pest. Then they have no choice but to turn around and buy the product from you, to protect their fields and their crops.

Devin: Did they?

Joe: They didn't.

Steve: I didn't see anything...

Devin: It didn't work?

Steve: Well, no, there was giant campaigns of pesticides being put on the fields. I've watched some of the old propaganda films, and they are driving up and down with tractors and guys using gas and pumping it into the ground and spraying it everywhere. What they're spraying, I have no idea, because it doesn't say, obviously, it's a three-minute propaganda movie...

Devin: Hmm. It probably made the potatoes really healthy, too.

Steve: I'm sure that it didn't...

Joe: It made them taste better...

[**Devin and Steve laugh**]

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: Ohh, so...

Devin: I guess that might have been the trick, right. You introduce to kill off half the supply and then you get the Germans to poison the rest, and you're done.

Steve: There you go. Problem solved.

Devin: Easy.

Joe: So in other words, under the heading of "the Americans done it", there's one "the American government done it" and another one is "Western capitalist companies did it".

Steve: Yeah, essentially, I'm lumping them all under the Americans, whether it's the American government or American companies, or corporations...

Devin: Yeah

Joe: Yeah

Steve: ... I'm kind of just putting it all under that umbrella.

Devin: That's fair, you can kind of assume that, you know, at that point in time, a big enough American corporation could say "hey, US government, I have this idea. You're gonna love it"

Joe: Hmm

Steve: "Just run with me on this"

Devin: I then it could just be like they're in cahoots at that point.

Steve: Yeah. Which is easily conceivable.

Devin: Mhm.

Steve: Because it did happen, and there's all kinds of anti-trust things that came out in that era, so very easily could have happened.

Joe: Mhm. The thing about it is if you really want to push your chemical and you really want to make some money, you probably want to do it to a bunch of farmers in a country that actually has some money, and East Germany really didn't have any money.

Steve: No, it really didn't.

Joe: But the biggest hole in the whole idea that American warplanes dumped all these beetles is that these farmers that discovered all these beetles suddenly in their fields, wouldn't they have also found thousands of tiny little parachutes?

[**Steve laughs**]

Joe: Because you can't just dump the beetles, they would plummet to their death.

[**Devin and Steve laugh**]

Steve: You are amazing, sir. You're absolutely amazing.

Devin: That's the best mental I've had all day.

[Joe laughs]

Joe: It's ok, I'm joking a little bit.

Steve: We'll move onto the next theory on that note. Which is that the Germans did it to themselves.

Joe: Yeah, and this is a little obvious thing, because the communist countries, I mean you don't really need to do any work to get them to have crop failures and famines. They just kind of do it to themselves.

Devin: I guess that I... yeah, it makes sense to me.

Steve: Well, there's actually some documentation as to why this could very well be and I kind of fall in the same camp as Joe, I kind of think that part of the problem was that they did it to themselves.

Devin: Yeah, I think, you know you are in a place where your people kind of hate a place like the United States, but don't totally hate them yet, so maybe you self-sabotage a little bit and say "look at what these horrible Americans are doing to us..."

Joe: Or, more likely, they sabotaged themselves through sheer incompetence.

Devin: That's also totally, yeah.

Steve: Let's roll back the clock though. Let's roll back the clock ten years. This theory, we have to step back in time even farther, so we're gonna go to 1940. Germany has invaded France, so they take it over, they're investigating anything that they think is important in terms of industry, capital, you name it research, they want to find out what it is, so that they have an idea of what all their allies are up to.

Devin: Ok.

Steve: Well, the German military was investigating the Le Bouchet research facilities. During that investigation going through all their paperwork, they found paperwork that was linking intentions of the French and English to go in together and basically dump potato beetles on Germany, to slow down their war effort. If you think about it, you've got a giant war machine, you need tons and tons of food.

Joe: Yeah. That's not a bad idea.

Steve: In the past... now so obviously the Germans freak out a little bit, they're not happy about this, 'cause this is a problem, so they need to make sure "are we ok, what's gonna happen here?" As they keep going through the records and they invade more and more of France, they keep finding more stuff from this same research facility...

Joe: Because they had taken the records elsewhere for safekeeping?

Steve: Right, absolutely correct. And those records gave the Germans a pretty clear picture of how a plan to drop the beetle on them could take place. In comes professor H. Kliewe, who was a bit of an esteemed researcher and he somehow managed to get himself in with the military and get himself in charge of a secret program to look into potato beetles.

Devin: That seems like a thing that wasn't so hard at the time.

Steve: I imagine it wasn't.

[**Devin laughs**]

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: Like I said, we've got the professor here and he and other people, obviously in charge, are monitoring reports of their secret agents. So we've got secret agents involved...

Devin: Ohh.

Steve: ... and one of their secret agents who happens to be in England sends back a report, and it's dated April 30th 1942, and it says that the English have received from the Americans a cargo of 15000 potato beetles, plus an unknown number of Texas ticks. Surprisingly, the Texas ticks just disappear. Nobody hears from them again.

Joe: They escaped.

Steve: I'm pretty sure they're in Bora Bora.

Joe: They could be in England.

Steve: But this puts them in a full fledged panic and they start to work, because they've got to get up to speed. And in 1942 the Germans establish the potato beetle defense service...

Devin: No, I want you to say that in German.

[**Joe laughs**]

Steve: Joe, are you able to say that one at all?

[Devin laughs]

Joe: Kartoffelkäferabwehrdienst.

Steve: Wow!

Devin: Just the...

Joe: Kartoffelkäferabwehrdienst, I think is how it's pronounced.

Steve: Ok, and they also went ahead and they set up a potato beetle research institute. Can you give this...?

Joe: Kartoffelkäferforschungsinstitut.

[Devin and Steve laugh]

Joe: My cheesy accent!

Steve: Well done!

Devin: It's better than I can do.

Joe: You know, I think just as a little aside here, it's actually pretty well known that the British MIS controlled just about all of Germans agents, if not 100% of them in World War II.

Steve: Mhm

Joe: Because what they would do is, instead of compartmentalizing between agents, they'd send an agent over there, and they'd say "hey, get in touch with agenda sounds, you know, Frau whatever their last name is, or Franz. Get in touch with Franz and he'll help you get set up and everything like that. He'll give you some handy tips on how to get along in England and everything. Go, get in touch with Franz." Franz had already been caught and turned by the Brits, and so they kept rounding up agents like this, and they essentially controlled the entire German intelligence network inside of England.

Steve: So it's very possible that this report was complete and total bubkis.

Joe: Yeah

Devin: Ohh, I was...

Joe: Disinformation, yes.

Devin: Yeah, I was gonna say, what we're saying here is that the English were like "alright, what's the most outrageous thing we can try and convince the Germans of right now?"

Joe: Well, you know, one of the things you do, you try to get them to waste resources.

Devin: Oh yeah.

Joe: If at all possible. Get them to, like, you know, instead of "let's get them to worry about stuff that you're not even remotely pursuing", you know. And so they won't defend themselves against the stuff that you actually are pursuing. And just get them to waste their time and to waste resources.

Devin: Great.

Steve: This is the perfect example of that, because here's what happened: So the potato beetle research institute and defense service, both of them got together, and in October 1943 they took 40000 live potato beetles and they - via a plane - released them over a field in Speyer - is that how you say that?

Joe: I think it's Speyer.

Steve: Speyer. The beetles were painted so that they were easier to see so that the troops in the fields could find them...

Joe: Unfortunately they painted them camouflage...

[**Devin and Steve laugh**]

Steve: They managed to recover 100 beetles.

Devin: Jesus

Joe: Yeah, oopsy.

[**Joe laughs**]

Steve: They did it again with 14000 beetles this time, and they only got 57 of them back.

[**Devin laughs**]

Steve: They then went "ok, well maybe we should stop using the real thing" and they started using fake wooden beetles, and they didn't do any better. They recovered the same number of them in the field.

Devin: Of just inanimate, painted beetles.

Joe: Yeah.

Devin: They couldn't find these things that aren't moving.

Steve: Little wooden pieces that they just dropped that were painted, and they could only find 50someodd out of 14000. That's really bad!

Joe: They kind of shot themselves in the foot there.

Devin: Yeah.

Joe: You know, actually the little wooden beetles, it might be that the living beetles tried to mate with them and so... They might have actually interrupted the breeding cycle.

Steve: Naw, you might have... No you don't. So that's what the Germans did.

Joe: Why did they release these beetles? What exactly was the point?

Steve: Well, they were planning on turning the tides and using them against the British.

Joe: Uh huh.

Steve: Their idea was, "Well, we'll go ahead and if you want to do it to us, we're going to do it to you, and we'll just spread them all over England." Which obviously they couldn't gauge how well it worked, but they still reported in 1943 or - excuse me - in '44 to the high command that they were ready to put out an operation of a massive potato beetle infestation and all they needed was to have the word and they would drop them.

Devin: Well, obviously they were, because even they couldn't find their own beetles...

Joe: Obviously, you know...

Devin: ... so they knew that the English people weren't going to be able to find their beetles.

Steve: Yeah.

Joe: The only other problem they have with getting them in there was like, how are they going to get them over there? They would have to....

Steve: During a Blitzkrieg?

Joe: Uh... I don't know...

Devin: For a couple of hours in a plane I bet they could survive.

Joe: The RAF is pretty good at shooting down bombers, I mean they maybe possibly couldn't have...

Devin: So they shoot down a bomber and the bomber crashes and the beetles...

Joe: And all the beetles get out?

Devin: ... the beetles escape from the bomber... Right?

[**Steve laughs**]

Steve: Yes. Okay, well that is the end of "the Germans did it themselves". We've got...

Joe: So you're saying that there's ones that they released? Because this happened...

[**"Ride of the Valkyries" plays**]

Steve: Well, to me it seems like, okay, well if you've released, in these two accounts, basically 54,000 beetles onto your own soil, chances are they're going to get a foothold.

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: And they're going to start spreading, and if it's during the war, it may not be noticed and right after the war, people really aren't reporting what's going on, so if a crop fails, it fails.

[**"Ride of the Valkyries" ends**]

Devin: I guess the other question is that you said that they do that hibernation thing, if the weather isn't right or whatever. So I guess the other question is, what kind of weather was happening then, because if they dropped all those beetles, right, people would've noticed those beetles and then if they had all the larva, and the larva were in their little pause period, because the conditions weren't good for - you know, I don't know how long they can survive...

Steve: I don't either, to be honest...

Devin: But you know, if they could survive for, you know, eight years or whatever, which...

Steve: I don't know that they'd survive that long, but I imagine there would be enough of them around that they would be all over the place...

Joe: There's still food to eat, they would just go through their regular lifecycle, just like always, so...

Steve: Hard to say, but let's move on to theory number three.

Devin: Okay.

Steve: Which is a very simple one. The Germans didn't have enough pesticides, and they weren't using them.

Joe: Yeah.

Devin: Hmm.

Steve: It's a very, very simple theory that post war you're broke, you have no money, nobody's giving you much aid in terms of agricultural supplies, so you do what you can and that's all you can do, and if you aren't spreading insecticides on your fields on a regular basis to keep down just all manner of pests, go figure, suddenly they just bounce right back and take over.

Devin: Hmm.

Joe: Yeah, when you think about it, something like a factory that would produce insecticides would be a pretty popular wartime target for allied bombers.

Steve: Yes.

Devin: Oh, yeah.

Joe: And so, if they had any pesticide factories at all, then it was probably pretty inadequate in terms of supplies.

Steve: And that's exactly it. So it makes sense that they could've just already been there and normally were controlled with whatever pesticides were used, but let's move on to our last theory here, which is just another case of "they accidentally got speed there by people."

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: Because we do this all the time.

Joe: Oh, hell yeah.

Steve: We introduce things everywhere. Like I said before, the beetle had made it to German soil in the late 1880s and it had been controlled. According to - again, a couple of different sites - there are reports that at a US military base in Bordeaux, the Colorado potato beetle began to infect the area, I'm guessing because - as you've said earlier, Joe - they came in on food stuffs...

Joe: Yeah.

Steve: ... and then just got lose and got a foothold and according to these reports they then spread during World War II, they went to Belgium, the Netherlands and Spain, which all are kind of right near Germany, so it makes sense that they naturally would have just progressed into that country, because they don't really care where the border is. All they care about is where the food is.

Devin: I was going to ask if there's any kind of record of big windstorms or anything like that happening around this time, if the beetles were just trying to fly to another field or something and got blown by a big gust of wind.

Joe: Kind of like the Wizard of Oz...

Devin: Kind of, yeah. Like, "We're not in Kansas anymore"... "Oh my god, we're not in Spain anymore."

Joe: Yeah.

[**Steve laughs**]

Steve: "The weather here sucks!"

Devin: I don't know if a big... because you know, I assume they fly...

Steve: Yes, they're a beetle so they can fly.

Devin: So, I don't know how they travel from one field to another. I would assume they would fly...

Steve: They would fly.

Devin: ... and if they, I don't know how far they travel, or anything like that, but that could help explain why the people weren't seeing signs of larva or eggs or anything like that, just full form beetles.

Steve: And I think we've talked about in other stories in the past about ... There's a giant windstorm and it sucks everything up, and carts it fifty or a hundred miles and then just - boop! - drops it all.

Devin: Yeah.

Joe: Well, the other thing is that, you know, let's recall the Germans dumped 54,000 of these things...

Steve: Yes.

Joe: ... onto a field and were hardly able to find any of them, which means, these things could be spreading all throughout your fields and your whole region and until it reaches a certain point...

Steve: Of density...

Joe: ... you would not even notice.

Devin: Yeah.

Joe: ... and so these little guys are hard to see even when they have been painted.

Steve: Yeah, so that's exactly right, so it's one of those stories that there's all kinds of ways. I personally think that there's no one theory that's right, I don't think that the US did it intentionally, I don't think the Germans did it all on their own, I think that it's everybody involved in this story is probably a little guilty.

Devin: Yeah.

Joe: Yeah, it's more of...

Steve: We don't know exactly what caused it.

Joe: Yeah, I mean, if you're going to look for historical press, then to easily ... governments that are incompetent and they have things like crop failures and famine. They want to blame somebody else.

Steve: Of course!

Joe: Of course these Germans...

Steve: You want to stay in power!

Joe: Yeah, so, that's kind of my thing.

Steve: And I think you were saying before when we were talking about this previously before we started recording, is that Berlin is in East Germany, right?

Joe: Uh huh.

Steve: So, there's going to be airplanes that are from the US flying all the time...

Joe: All the time.

Devin: Mhm.

Steve: So it's not as if this was an uncommon thing to have US planes going overhead.

Joe: I'm sure that American and British and French planes were flying from all points of the compass, or at least from the West... because West Germany kind of semi-encircles East Germany or did - not anymore - and then with Berlin right here smack in the middle. So you could have planes approaching from the Southwest, the Northwest, the West and all in between...

Steve: And the Berlin wall didn't go up for another ten years, you know there could be planes that were coming from the other direction too, before it became a No-Fly zone.

Joe: Yeah, and so I don't really see the motive, to be honest with you, for us to do that, because especially given - and this is post war - it wasn't definitely established that Germany was sort of semi-permanently divided at this point in time. It was still a state of tension between the Soviets and the Allied Forces. And it still hadn't really crystalized into the form that it finally took with the building of the wall 10 years later and then many, many more years of oppression in Germany and all that. But it wasn't set in stone as of 1950.

Steve: No.

Joe: And plus, Europe was still recovering from the war. And so the idea of deliberately - and there was already a lot of food shortages and famines in Europe because of the war - so the idea that we would want to go out there and just make things worse, well...

Steve: Doesn't make a lot of sense.

Joe: We were kind of trying to get the continent to recover, you know, so that's yet another reason why I think it was probably just - it happened and the East Germans just didn't want to shoulder any of the blame themselves... so point a finger at the axe.

Steve: Indeed.

Devin: Yeah.

[**Steve sighs**]

Steve: Well, that having been said, that's the end of our theories. Ladies and gentlemen, as always we're going to go ahead and put up some of the links to this story on our website, so if you wanted to check them out, you're more than welcome to. That website is thinkingsidewayspodcast.com. We're always looking to hear from our listeners, so if you've got some thoughts on this story that you want to share or you disagree with something that we said, let us know. We appreciate that.

Joe: Or if you are a East German potato beetle, we want to hear from you.

Steve: Yes, indeed! You can always go ahead and send us an email. That email address is thinkingsidewayspodcast@gmail.com.

Devin: We actually have some listener mail.

Steve: We do, that's right!

Joe: Well I say ... We get thousands a week, did one of them stand out?

Devin: Yeah, this one was really great. I liked it a lot, so I thought I'd share it with our listeners.

Steve: Yeah!

Devin: So it's from a woman by the name of Stephanie...

Joe: Hey, Stephanie!

Devin: Hey, Stephanie, and it just says "Hello, I came across your show recently, after about a year of hoping a podcast like yours would pop up somewhere on the internet. I like your whole vibe of presenting known information about mysteries accurately, and trying to make educated guesses about what happened. I also end up cracking up a lot during your shows." And then she gives us some suggestions of shows that Stephanie, we want to assure you, we're definitely going to take on... In the future... I don't know about near future, but...

Steve: I remember looking at those recently when the ones that she had suggested, so those were good suggestions.

Devin: Yeah, so we love to hear from you guys about how much you love us.

[**Steve laughs**]

Joe: Yeah, definitely.

Steve: Well I'm just glad somebody else is laughing at our jokes...

Devin: Yeah, me too.

Steve: Obviously we're not that funny, but at least we're sort of funny...

D We think we're funny...

Steve: We're hilarious.

Joe: We already fooled some anyways, but thanks for the story ideas and yeah... We'll get right on that.

Steve: Very cool.

Joe: Email aside, what else do our listeners need to know?

Steve: Well, they can always listen to our show. That's a real key to a podcast.

[**Devin and Joe laugh**]

Devin: Yeah. Being a listener.

Steve: Now, our website always has the podcast on it, and you can always stream it right through there. We're also on iTunes, so you can download or if you want, we are also on Stitcher, so if you want to use your mobile phone and go ahead and stream it right there, another option for you, we always make it available.

Devin: If you do iTunes or Stitcher, please feel free to leave us a rating or a comment.

Joe: A good rating.

Devin: Or a review. I mean if you like us - I'm not going to say, "Leave us a good review!" But, leave us a good review if you like us!

[**Joe and Steve laugh**]

Steve: Leave a review. We like to hear from you folks.

Devin: Yeah.

Steve: So that having been said, I think it's time to roll this one up. So, thank you ladies and gentlemen, and we look forward to talk to you next week!

Joe: So long everybody

Devin: See ya!

[**Outro music plays**]