

A police quarrel over “Maggots” in Soljanka stew

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In July 2001, a police unit from the German federal state of Brandenburg served a Soljanka stew to a police unit from the federal state of Baden-Württemberg. In the latter federal state which is located in a rich part of Western Germany, Soljanka is unknown. In Brandenburg (formerly Eastern Germany), however, it is a well-known, and popular dish.

During a joint task force operation against 5000 motorcycle rockers in Luckau, Brandenburg, the policemen of Baden-Württemberg complained for many days about the local food situation. On the last day of the operations, the Brandenburg police decided to order food from a local butcher (instead of using the regular military/police food kitchen) to stop those complaints. The butcher delivered one large trough of Soljanka stew. In the stew, one of the Western policemen found three “maggots”. This produced a massive outrage over the still worsening food condition, and the state of Baden-Württemberg sued the state of Brandenburg for bodily injury of their personnel.

In an attempt to straighten out the situation, photographs of the “maggots”, and the Soljanka, were presented to the forensic entomologist. It could be clearly seen that the insect larvae were dead (i.e., stretched out) which meant that they might have been heated up in the stew. This led us to the conclusion that most likely, no harm might have been resulted from eating the larvae. Secondly, we found that the head parts of the alleged “maggots” were darkened in a way that is not found in any blow fly larva (Calliphoridae in the wider sense) but only in beetle (Coleoptera), or butterfly (Lepidoptera) larvae. This observation made it likely that the food was neither spoilt nor rotten but that somebody had thrown the insect larvae into the hot Soljanka. We considered it to be unlikely that beetle, or butterfly larvae should be found in a butcher’s kitchen but could not rule out this possibility with absolute certainty.

Until today, it remains unclear whether the Western policemen tried to prove their point (i.e., bad food in Brandenburg) by collecting beetle, or butterfly larvae in the field, and throwing them in the Soljanka dish, or if the Eastern policemen played a practical joke on their nagging Western colleagues.