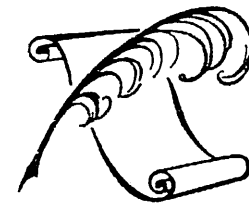


Facing Danger in the Last Wilderness

BY DOUG ALLAN



ROLTON HOUSE INC.

New York

1962

pp. 1-X, 1-214,

114, 124, 134

With a certain ironic amusement, I reflected that the city now seemed almost equally reluctant about loosening its grip on the latest visitor. Had it not inflicted me with dysentery and tried to retard me with floods?

I remembered that over the tomb of young Caillie, whose exploit brought him the highest honors from King Charles X, leading European geographical societies, and from the populace of France, a monument had been raised that emphasized one striking phrase: "*The Only European Who Has Seen and Described Timbuctoo.*" A significant tribute to a brave man and one which until comparatively recent years held true.

Just before a row of trees closed in around the city, I turned for one final look with western eyes at the world's foremost symbol of inhabited remoteness. Two masked Tuaregs, fiercely armed and mounted on tall, brown camels, were riding toward the mud-walled town. Atop a low, flat roof, blue robed figures were packing sand as their ancestors had done after each storm for a thousand or more years. A noisy troop of lovable youngsters, with shrieks of recognition, ceased their play near a herd of goats to watch their friend ride out into the desert.

With a subdued feeling of sadness, I realized that the few symbolic Timbuctoos still remaining around the globe are fast disappearing. A universal conformity is settling over the culture and thinking of even the most inaccessible areas.

The existence of the Timbuctoos of history have created heroes like Laing, Caillie and Barth. Curiosity about the strange and faraway lifted them to heights of bravery and achievement. And yet these explorers, by their very discoveries, have inaugurated the process through which the sometimes melancholy changes are begun. With their arrival, isolating walls tumble down and the ways of an outside world begin to flood in.

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The Black Rhino of Kilimanjaro

"THE rhinoceros, unquestionably, is the most vicious, the most cursed beast that roams the dark continent," said Doug Kennedy, an editorial friend of mine, when we were discussing an account of his experiences in Africa. "And," he continued, "meeting up with one of the worst of the rhinos happened to be my first encounter with African big game."

I have known Doug Kennedy for a number of years as one editor who actually gets right into his subject with all four feet. Yes, he really *lives* Adventure!

He had his first big thrilling adventure when he rescued Eddie Rickenbacker and his friends from floating debris after their twenty-one-day ordeal, following their crash-landing in the Pacific in World War II.

This and many other exciting experiences gave Doug Kennedy a little of what it takes to face the most treacherous beasts of the African wilds.

"But don't get the idea that guns and courage are all that it takes (I'm not even sure you could call it courage) to face those dynamos," he pointed out. "It makes all the difference in the world who your white hunters and trackers are. On this particular safari I had a tracker I shall never forget. Mamu was his name."

Mamu is the blackest man I have seen this African side of the Melanesians of the Solomon Islands, Kennedy continued. He wears a blue-black beauty mark, a self-inflicted scar that extends from the tip of his hairline, down straight through his forehead to the bridge of his nose. He also wears a bright-red T-shirt, and a pair of longjohn British shorts. When in the bush, or on the plains, he covers his red T-shirt with a nondescript bush jacket, obviously discarded by an oversized European.

By most standards Mamu is a small man. He would probably make a good flyweight in the U. S. His legs are scrawny but springy. His hands are calloused and work-worn, but when he fondly caresses and cleans a gun, or when he delicately skins an animal or cleans a bird, his hands work with the dexterity and assurance of a Park Avenue surgeon. Mamu has other talents: he is a quick-change artist with a flat-tire; he can produce a cooking or warming fire faster than an Eagle scout; he can foretell weather that would confuse a master meteorologist; he can spot game long before a 20-20 vision white man verifies it with binoculars.

In addition, Mamu is, I am told, a happily married man, deeply devoted to his wife and family. He has one small failing: he is inclined to get stinko drunk once his white hunter or client bags the big game they are after. Mamu stays perfectly sober after a client bags on oryx, kudu or gazelle. It is only the *big* game, like the black rhino, the elephant, or a black-maned lion which sets Mamu off on a three-day tear.

For Mamu is, above all else, a tracker. It is only when he is on the trail of something big that his normally stoic expression, his stiffly correct bearing, breaks down into a broad, toothy grin; down into a posture of sheer animal spirits. For Mamu loves his work and is quietly proud of his ability to tell at a glance that a rhino passed here two days (or two hours) ago.

A piece of bent grass, a nibbled thorn bush, a chunk of

bark off an acacia tree, the size and pace of a track, all give Mamu a vivid mental picture of a rhino. He can tell you whether a rhino has eaten well (by its dung); he can tell whether it has been spooked (by the length of its stride); he can tell whether the rhino is angry (by its foot marks when it pauses), whether the rhino is thirsty (by its string-straight path toward a water hole), whether the rhino is happy (by the contented back-scratching against a tree or anthill).

Mamu can tell all this in moments. He tells it in Swahili to his white hunter, Hal Prowse, an American who is a slightly larger and whiter carbon copy of Mamu.

In short, Mamu is a helluva fellow, a man of the Walangulu tribe who, during the Kenya Mau Mau emergency, tracked and fought loyally for his white friends. He is the kind of man who might have inspired Kipling's classic: "You're a better man than I, Gunga Din." Hal Prowse is also a helluva fellow, who has earned his spurs in one of man's most exclusive clubs: the two score licensed white hunters of British Africa.

I was doubly glad to have been along, for the rhino we were after was, in Hal's words, "the maddest damn rhino I've ever seen."

In trying to place a fair appraisal upon a rhino, the most you can possibly say in his favor is that he is an ugly, cantankerous beast who suffers from constant indigestion. And if your diet was the same as his—thorn bushes—you'd probably feel cantankerous, too. He also likes roots, which he digs up with his powerful nose, upon which projects his mighty horn, composed of modified hair and hard, tough skin. Each year this horn gets bigger. It is also used as a terrific weapon. And, worst of all, he has an irresistible urge to demolish with this powerful horn anything or anybody who gets in his way. He has no natural enemies.

The rhino and the elephant are the two most powerful mammals now living, and the elephant is too peaceful and

self-sufficient to have any cause to attack the rhino. The hippopotamus somewhat resembles the rhino in his bulky awkwardness, but that is all. He, too, is very peaceful, even timid, except when provoked into action; even then it is more defense on his part than aggression.

All three animals—rhino, hippo and elephant—are the lumbering type. The rhino has very little intelligence, although you could hardly call him stupid and, like the other two, has a very decidedly keen sense of smell. Also, his hearing is keen. Often, when he goes charging at the scent, he keeps right on going for a mile or so after he has passed it. He has severe myopia—can't see ahead much more than a hundred feet.

Rhinos have been known to attack trains, *head-on*; they have overturned and demolished one-ton trucks; they have run rampant through native villages, virtually razing them.

And they attack without provocation—or warning.

Our "maddest damn rhino" had been "spooked" at his early morning grazing by a herd of Masai cattle; his prehistoric pride had been further injured by being driven off his favorite grazing area. He had been tracked and tormented; he was thirsty and hungry and very tired of running. He was in three little words—mad as hell!

But I am getting ahead of my story.

Safari camp life, I learned, is made as easy and comfortable as possible. There is a good reason for this: the hunting is hard, and your white hunter's job is partly to keep you from suffering from cumulative fatigue.

Hal Prowse, our white hunter, chose our first campsite well, some one hundred miles due south of safari headquarters in Nairobi. He picked a spot hard by the banks of the Selengai River, now dry two months after the "small rains" in November. It was deep in the heart of the warrior Masai country, composed of bumpy, semi-mountainous outcroppings.

Far in the background, like a sentinel, stood Mount Kil-

manjaro, which as you may or may not know, means Mountain of God, surveying this wonderful natural scene from its 20,000-foot snow-capped eminence.

The campsite was well shaded by the gnarled and spreading branches of a grove of acacias; was well breezed by a gentle prevailing wind which kept the mosquitos at bay. Hal's five-ton truck had preceded us with most of the native boys and by the time we reached the site, tents were being set up with alacrity.

During the hundred mile trip from Nairobi, Hal, driving his hunting car over the backwoods roads at a fifty-mile clip, briefed me on what to expect. Bob Halmi followed in our dust in a Land Rover, lent us by the Rootes group. I met Mamu, who always rides with Hal, on the way down; but since my Swahili is limited to "*ndio*" (ye) and "*hapana*" (no), and Mamu's English is limited to yes and no, we hardly had much chance to communicate.

It was still about two hours before sunset when we arrived, so Hal suggested that we all reconnoiter the hunting grounds, some ten miles away. Using a Masai cattle track for a road, we soon arrived at what Hal called "Rhino Hill." I came to know it by the title of "Cardiac Hill." Hal and Mamu hopped out of the car and started trudging upward, heads to the ground like a couple of bird dogs. I started after them, but Hal waved me back, saying that the climb from this angle was sorta sickening. He was right; by the time I reached the top I was panting and blowing like a buffalo, and I had vivid recollection of what I had eaten for lunch.

This climb went on for four solid days, only Hal managed to dream up some sadistic variations. Next morning, for example, I found out that I had to get up at 4:30, swallow a steaming cupful of black *chai* (tea), and drag my butt up that damn hill before dawn. That afternoon Hal thoughtfully called for some rain which mired the car far from the base of the hill and made us trek through the black cotton soil, for two miles before we began to climb. That soil, in-

cidentally, would make fine commercial glue. It clings insistently to your shoes, weighing them down like a pair of lead-lined ski-boots.

After four days of this routine, I was ready to challenge almost anyone to a race up Mount Everest.

Perhaps it might be interesting to recall that at one time the rhino inhabited Europe and North America. That was during the Eocene Age, when mammals became the dominant animals, and the Miocene Age, during the development of the large mountain ranges. Today, these animals are confined to the warmer sections of Asia, India and Africa.

Actually, there are now only three distinct types of rhino. The Indian rhino has but one horn, while each of the African species has two. The black rhino is the smallest. It weighs a little over one ton, and has a pointed prehensile upper lip. It's to be found in Africa, south of Abyssinia, in the wooded, watered districts. The white rhino is the largest land mammal, except for the elephant, and feeds largely on grass. Its flesh is said to be excellent for food, especially in the autumn and winter. He often stands five feet eight inches, at the shoulder, runs to fifteen feet in length and travels with terrific speed.

I should point out, right now, that the only times to get a rhino are at dawn and dusk—unless you are hot on one's trail. He browses all night, mostly on the aptly named wait-a-bit bush which is armed with double prongs of two-inch spikes. Walk into one—and you wait more than a bit before extracting yourself.

During the hot daylight hours the rhino holes up and sleeps. At such a time you could walk to within five feet of him without seeing him.

We may have done just that several times. For we spent four frustrating days trying to locate fresh rhino tracks, and to no avail. I did manage to sharpen up my shooting a bit, particularly around noontime when the chances of bagging a rhino are just about nil. I found that wingshooting in

Africa (mainly for sand grouse, guinea hens and francolins) far surpasses anything found in the United States or Canada.

I also learned that knocking off camp meat (zebra for the boys; Thompson's gazelle for us) was relatively easy in this prodigious and profligate country. I was especially pleased to drop a zebra with a 235-yard heart shot, offhand, and was even more pleased to note that I had finally earned the approval of Mamu.

Hal quickly taught me what is commonly termed the Masai stalk. Under the rules of the hunting game in East Africa you cannot shoot unless you are 200 yards away from the hunting car. That means you can drive roughly up to 500 yards, alight and start your stalk. If you belly forward in the short grass, like a lion, the big game is liable to spook for good. But if you walk upright, like a Masai warrior, carrying your gun over your shoulder just as they carry their spears, the game, which is accustomed to the Masai, just eye you carefully and slowly begin moving away. Usually, I found, they will let you get within 200-300 yards (zebras are dumber) before moving away, uncannily, at just about the pace of your approach. If you stop suddenly, they spook; if you slow down, carefully bringing your rifle to your shoulder, they become quickly alert. At that point you have about three seconds to stop and draw a bead before they are long gone out of range.

But I was after rhino. Why? For one thing, simply because our white hunter, who had been practically weaned as an elephant hunter, said that the rhino was the most dangerous of Africa's big game.

Each night, around the campfire, Hal alerted me on what to expect when we got our chance to bag one. He warned me especially of one *inescapable* fact: that a charging rhino can cover 100 yards in eight seconds. He also warned me that a charging rhino offers no heart shot. You have to hit him on that lowered head, hoping to avoid the trophy horn. Hal particularly warned me to stand my ground, since if I

made the natural move backward my muzzle blast would nearly knock his head off.

All the talk promised excitement. And I got it.

That fifth day simply failed to dawn. We drove to the foot of Rhino Hill, then sat miserably cramped, cold and wet in the hunting car. To the south, back toward camp, we could see great masses of rain clouds; to the north was a blanketing fog to rival London's best.

Africa was slowly warming up to a new day. Through wisps of fog I could see zebra and gazelle grazing on the damp grass of the plains. Dead ahead lay rocky Rhino Hill, its crest enveloped in mist.

Hal and I sat in the front seat, huddled and unspeaking; Mammu and Gulu (our other tracker) sat in back, in I guess the same frame of mind.

We sat there—it was pointless to climb in that visibility—for the better part of half an hour until Halmi came roaring up behind us in his landrover, shouting, fresh rhino tracks! Fresh rhino tracks!

It turned out that the rhino had passed across the Masai cattle path we used for a road sometime *between* the time our hunting car had passed and Halmi had driven up.

We all went back down the cattle track and, sure enough, there were the tracks, round, firm, fully packed—and fresh! Mammu and Hal had a swift Swahili chat; while Gulu, whom we fondly named "laughing boy" because he was constantly clowning for Halmi's camera, jumped up and down in excitement.

Hal decided, since we were upwind, to make a big circle to get downwind of what Mammu had determined was the rhino's probable position. At this point we were only twenty minutes behind him, it was early morning, and the rhino was probably feeding.

We drove to a little rise in the hope that we could follow Hal. Mammu and Gulu with binoculars. But the weather

closed in and the thick patches of undergrowth soon swallowed them.

The waiting wasn't easy, but within the hour the hot African sun had burned through the fog.

Somewhere around ten o'clock Gulu came back through the underbrush with the news (in sign language) that the rhino was heading toward the near side of Hal's Rhino Hill. That meant that our best shooting and glassing position would be at the top of the hill.

The climb wasn't so bad this time since we were full of high hopes and excitement. At one point Gulu stopped, eyes bulging, to point out the tracks of a huge lion.

"Simba!" he shouted, stretching the sibilant to a gasp.

Shades of Edgar Rice Burroughs! I thought Burroughs had invented the word just for Tarzan, but Hal later told me that it really is Swahili for lion.

We finally reached the top of the hill and crept across the ridge line, expecting any moment to see Hal and Mammu below us with the rhino somewhere in the middle.

No such luck! We covered that hill for two hours. No sign of our trackers or the rhino.

Finally, Halmi caught sight of Hal trudging across the plain. The rhino, Hal told us, had been heading straight toward the hill at the time he had sent Gulu back. But ten minutes later Masai cattle had spooked it out across the plain, toward the horizon line.

Hal was afraid that we had lost him; a spooked rhino can bee-line thirty miles in three hours. Hal was also worried because Mammu, tracking barefooted in the sticky, clinging soil, had put a thorn halfway through his foot. Hal had left Mammu on the track, hoping we could pick him up later in the cars.

Hal clambered into his gun car, plunged into the lunch basket and announced what was obvious, simply: "My butt is draggin'." Halmi and I were sympathetic but astonished

that Hal, still on a hot trail, would take time off to eat. It was now noon. Hal had tracked for six hours. We had spent three hours on Cardiac Hill. The rhino had covered ten miles, maybe more.

"Better eat," said Hal. "We may still have a long day ahead of us."

We ate, hardly tasting it, but getting needed energy from the African hunter's drink: one-third sugar, two thirds tea.

Then we set out in the hunting and camera cars, fanning out across the plain, sticking to the higher ground, hoping for a glimpse of Mamu. We finally caught up with him about an hour (and five miles) later. Halmi saw him first, frantically waving his bright-red undershirt to attract our attention. As we drove up, he limped toward us, pointing back over his shoulder. The rhino, Mamu explained to Hal, had gone down through a deep, nearby rock ravine about an hour before. He was still traveling fast, obviously unhappy about his spooking, perhaps unhappy because he knew he was being tracked. At any rate, it was way past his nap time; so he was probably ugly on that account alone.

Hal took one look at the ravine, which extended for miles in either direction, and made a flat announcement: "From here on, we go by foot."

Mamu, munching on a piece of dried zebra, took the lead, carrying one of Hal's Jeffery .450 double rifles. Gulu, carrying Hal's other gun, stayed close by, watching for signs of the rhino's turning. Hal was third, binoculars in hand. I followed, toting the Winchester .458 which grew heavier by the mile.

The trail got a lot fresher after three more foot-weary miles. We had stepped up our pace and I could feel the blisters squishing in my shoes, the raw sores breaking out on my shoulders.

Suddenly, Mamu, who had been hurrying along head toward the ground, stopped dead. There, plain to see even for a nontracker such as I, was a confusion and profusion of

rhino tracks all heading uphill on a shallow slope, thick with the wait-a-bit thorn bush, the rhino delicacy. Our excitement mounted with each step up the slope.

At that point we began what turned out to be one of the most agonizing hours of my life. The stalk, the approach and the ultimate climax reminded me, in many ways, of the war. I had fought the war as a torpedo boat skipper where our targets were able, like the rhino, to fight back; where our targets, like the rhino, had built-in radar to detect our approach; where our targets, like the rhino, could kill us.

Tense, pace slowed to a silent shuffle, desperately trying to step in Mamu's sure-footed steps, we headed up the slope. The rifle got heavier by the moment; each wait-a-bit bush seemed determined to poke my eyes out.

Then we had a short reprieve. The profusion of rhino tracks *really* became a confusion—even for Mamu.

At a signal from Hal, we sank wearily against the nearest anthill, inhaling with the almost desperate breathing of men who have just finished a marathon.

Mamu and Gulu, almost down on all fours, spread out ahead of us, trying to sort out the fresh rhino tracks from the old.

The tracks were all around us, the familiar triple pug marks.

The respite was broken by Gulu who materialized from the foreground like a sudden shadow. Fingers to his lips, his body tense with excitement, he waved us forward toward a large and apparently impenetrable thicket.

Mamu was already at the thicket's edge, his hand held up in a gesture of warning. At this stage Mamu was the tacit boss of the situation—until the moment that Hal and I reached his side.

Then Mamu relinquished command to Hal at the precise moment we both saw the beast.

The verb "see" is used advisedly, for we could only catch a glimpse, in the dark shadows, of some gray-brown hide in

the thicket. He was about ten yards in and I could only marvel at how such a large beast, even with that prehistoric hide, could penetrate the impenetrable.

This was not the moment for marveling, however. Almost unconscious, I stepped back a couple of paces, banging the butt of the Winchester into Halmi's cameras. The noise was muffled by the rubber butt plate. But it was enough.

There was a crashing in the thicket, a deep-throated and angry snort. Gulu streaked off to the right like Jesse Owens on a busman's holiday. Mamu, smarter, slid silently behind Hal and me, holding Hal's other gun in readiness.

The rhino crashed out of the thicket, astigmatic eyes on the moving Gulu, now scrambling up a spindly tree. The rhino stood still for a long moment, just long enough for Halmi to catch him in his lens.

Then he spotted us: closer and fairer game. Head down, breaking pace, he switched targets. All hell broke loose!

All of Hal's warnings came back to me, including one final warning: "*squeeze the shot.*"

It was, I thought, much like being hosed by Japanese or German machine-gun tracer fire in night fighting. You watch the scene, detached, in almost morbid fascination. It is, truly, a moment of truth—and yet you have no time to be frightened.

Sighing on the spine—I wanted to protect my trophy—I began squeezing at the fifteen-yard mark. Hal, more aware of our danger, didn't wait. The crack of his Jeffery beat my Winchester by a fraction of a second. Hal's shot slowed him, spun him off course. Mine finished him.

In agonized slow-motion the rhino, horn down, skidded to a stop and rolled over.

The moment of truth suddenly became a moment of exuberant exultation.

We paced off the distance: six yards. Close enough!

Hal and I, with ritualistic solemnity, shook hands, while Bob Halmi had his moment of exuberance over the pictures

he was sure he had taken. I looked at Mamu who was busy putting a tape measure on the horn. He looked up, grinning.

I didn't mind the six-mile hike back to the hunting car in the gathering dusk or the jouncy ride back to camp.

We drank that night to Mamu, to the rhino, to Kilimanjaro—and to any number of other things that I've forgotten now.