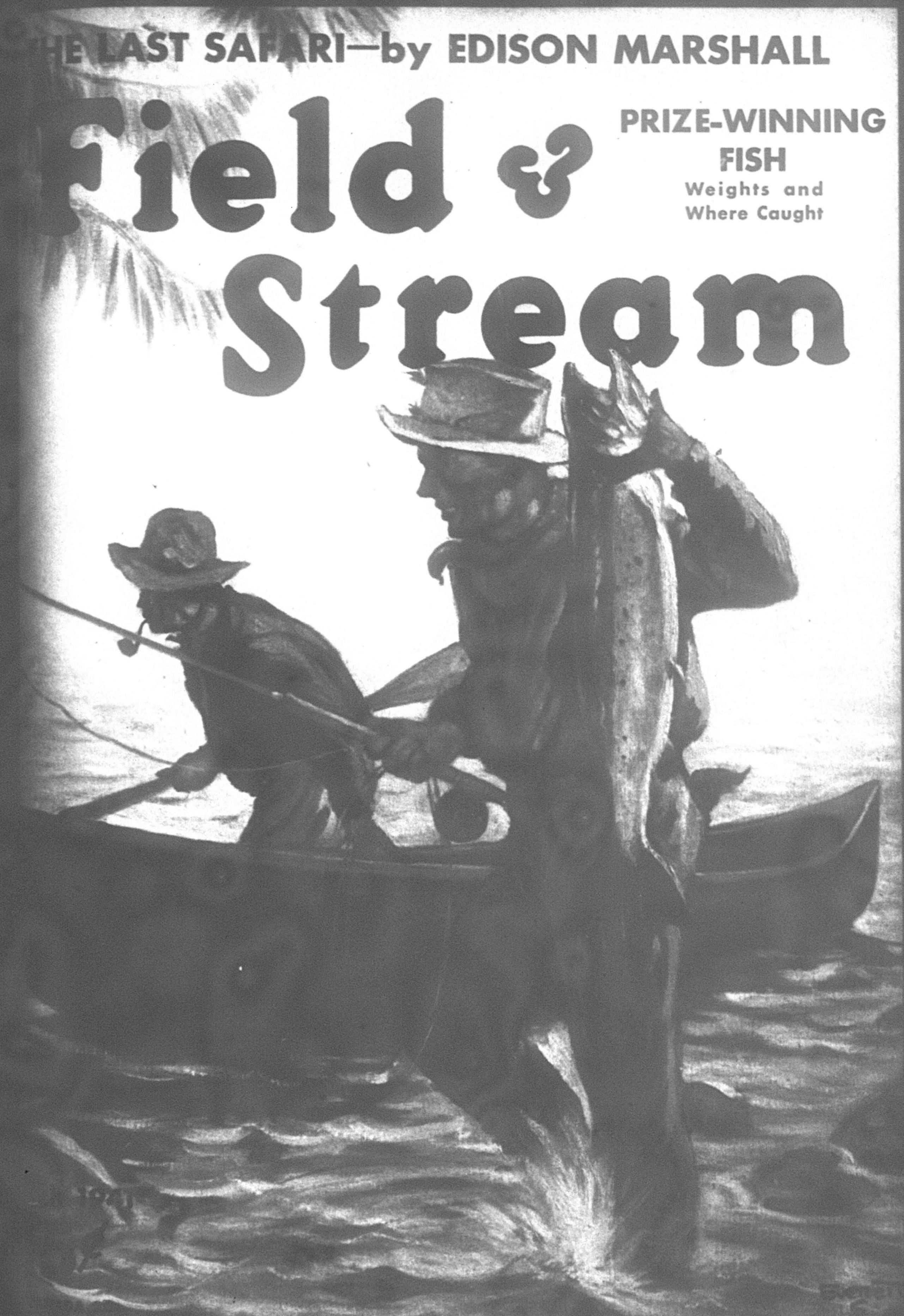
THE LAST SAFARI—by EDISON MARSHALL
Field & Stream
PRIZE-WINNING
FISH
Weights and
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Field & Stream

Vol. XLV *March, 1941* No. 11

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Issued monthly by Field & Stream Publishing Co., 515 Madison Ave., at 53rd St., New York, N.Y. Yearly subscription, U.S.A., $1.50; Canada, $2.00; foreign countries, $2.50. Single copies, 15c; Canada, 20c

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 Entered at the New York Post Office as Second-Class Matter, March 25, 1898, under act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Greenwich, Conn. *Printed in the U. S. A.*

THE LAST SAFARI

A charging rhino and Bwana Cottar fight it out

By EDISON MARSHALL

No lion had ever laid a claw on Bwana Cottar's body

WHEN we read of the exploits of big-game hunters, very rarely do we hear much of their guides. Their short names appear occasionally in the tales, but usually only as stooges for the stars, and they remain dim figures who paddle canoes, carry packs and skin out heads. In my own hunting stories I have been guilty of hogging the camera, but the other day something happened to waken me to the guides' real place in the picture.

Looking back over my hunting adventures, I discovered that the guides were fully as memorable as the game. Indeed, trips were successes or failures in almost the exact degree of the companionability, skill and woods lore of the guides. They are going to be the heroes of my next series of hunting tales.

When that time comes, I shall write of Dean Cochran, my first big-game guide in the spruce forests and the high parks of the Selkirk Mountains. The idea of any visiting sportsman trying to treat Dean as an underling would be laughable; he is a gentleman and a scholar if I ever met one.

I shall tell of a Swede and a Norwegian who, although marooned with me on a sand-bar in Pavlof Bay for three weeks and never affording me a shot at a bear, yet made our bear hunt one of the most pleasant memories of my days. I shall portray Mauf Hamilton of Quesnel Lake, one-quarter Indian and one-quarter Scotch nobleman and four-quarters perfect companion.

John MacDonald, half Scotch and half Gurkha, who knows more about tigers than any living man, will get his due in those pages, and so will De Fosse and his wild-born son who reminded me of Mowgli in the *Jungle Books*. But because of a certain message that has just come out of East Africa, a message long expected yet so arresting, simple yet so strange, I cannot wait to tell of the most amazing character I have ever met on the hunting trails, to me the most towering figure that the big-game world has known in this century—Charles (Bwana) Cottar of the Elephants.

When I first met him, in Kenya in 1929, he was not yet sixty, although long past his prime. Leopards had dug their poisoned claws into his flesh on four different occasions; he had been tossed by rhinos, knocked down by buffaloes, stepped over by elephants; he had nearly died of thirst in the sands of Juba Land, and repeated bouts of black-water fever, any one of them enough to kill an ordinary mortal, had wasted his magnificent frame.

He was not equal to hard marches, and sent his son Bud to accompany me on the long trail. Yet his mere presence in camp and his occasional strolls with me through the nearer hills lifted my commonplace hunting trip into the realm of great adventure. I had sensed this fact almost from the first day, and about the end of the second week it came clear.

Bud and I had been out after lions. I had wanted a lion above any other African trophy. I needed one with that urgency which only other hunters can understand; to me a lion was the symbol of Africa. For nearly two weeks we had searched the rock heaps and the bared bones of the hills, on which Simba likes to lie up in the heat of the day. We had trod the game trails through the thorn thickets and entered the little rifts in the green labyrinths of the dongas, and examined the high grass around the grazing zebra herds. Still we had seen nothing but lionesses and young males, and as we returned to camp in the still, brief African twilight both of us were very much discouraged.

We found old Bwana sitting on a box before the camp-fire, drawn and white. Plainly he had undergone some nerve-shattering experience in our absence. Actually he did not know what nervousness meant when there was shooting to be done—he feared nothing on the earth or above or under it—but due to his condition he always suffered a violent reaction. However, he soon recovered and told us just what had happened.

After supper he had climbed a hill for a last look at the game. Suddenly, out of a grass patch fifty feet in front of him, a large male lion had raised his head. As Cottar flung up his rifle he heard a growl behind him. Whirling, he saw two other lions, likewise big males. Then lions began to appear on all sides of him.

One of them had opened his great jaws and yawned. They had all looked at him as might a gang of alley cats at a stray canary. A hunting mob of at least seven males, Cottar said.

"They were going to gang me," Cottar told us. "They'd have done it, too, if I hadn't opened up on 'em and put the fear of God in 'em." Of course, he meant the fear of Bwana Cottar, a fear the wild beasts knew well. Then his eyes began to glisten and gleam. "I killed one, and wounded another of the devils."

It happened that Cottar had assured me that he would not shoot at any game I wanted for my bag. Of course, this could not hold an instant if life were in danger; but from what I knew of lions, Cottar's life would have been far less endangered if he had not fired his rifle. It is a rare thing for lions to make an unprovoked attack in daylight on such a tall, fearsome, unknown foe as man.

BY firing into that mob and wounding some of its members, Cottar had invited disaster. Still I did not mention this. Looking at his fierce old eyes, suddenly I realized that he had done the only thing possible, considering the man he was, the life he had lived, and the things that he lived by.

Cottar felt about lions as early American pioneers felt about Indians. The question of abstract justice, of right and wrong, had been drowned in blood, and the only good Indian was a dead Indian. Cottar had seen his porters and his mules killed by lions; they had hunted him when he was caught out defenseless in the dark. To him they were not big-game animals, but implacable enemies.

As fast as game laws were made to protect lions, Bwana Cottar would break them. My desire for a trophy—indeed, his own livelihood as a hunter's guide and outfitter—went out like a light when he saw a lion. Up went his old lever-action, blazing away.

No, Bwana Cottar could not be judged by ordinary standards, no more than could Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett. He was blood brother to Kit Carson and Jim Bridger, and belonged no more in the civilization of these times than a polar bear belongs in a cement tank in a big city zoo. He was as out of place in the twentieth century as would be the cave-bear and the hairy mammoth.

WHEN Oklahoma and Texas got too tame for him, around the turn of the century, he had gone straight as a homing pigeon to the last land on earth he could call home—the dark elephant forests and the sun-baked lion plains of Africa. Even there, only a few appreciated him. A law firm hung and made mock of one of his savage, ill-spelled letters. The Game Department laid elaborate traps to catch him and haul him before a big-wigged judge, until he gave the kiboko—the cruel rhino-hide whip—to its native spies. I heard a Chief Game Warden, safe behind his desk, insult the old trail-breaker to his face, and wondered how he would fare if he had spoken so out on the veldt, unsupported by English law—and I thought he would not have dared. However, some of the old elephant hunters knew and understood him well, before they went out under the feet of the raging bulls.

To have him with me on a hunting trip was one of the greatest privileges in all my big-game experience. I think that such experts as Carl Akeley and Martin Johnson would confess they were beginners in the lore of wild animals compared to Charles Cottar. It was not often that he could be bothered with a camera; but when he took the time from his hunting, he made some of the finest big-game motion pictures ever seen.

Many of you, too, have seen them. Among the first African animal pictures, they had been sold for a song in Hollywood, and then, adulterated with some silly imitation gorillas carrying off native girls, they broke records at the box office. In that film, a visiting lord would raise his gun as though to shoot a lion. Then the soft lighting of southern California would change suddenly to the white glare of Africa, the lion would be shown lying dead, and the bearded face of old Cottar would emerge into view. Some of the water-hole scenes in the film have never been surpassed, if equaled. He photographed such rare bucks as greater kudu and giant sable.

Cottar had never forgotten that he was an American, and liked to take Americans into his hunting grounds. On the other hand, he expected great things of them, the kind of shooting he remembered on the Texas prairies, which was embarrassing to a greenhorn hunter. I had shamed him once or twice in front of his black boys by wild misses; so I took a special pleasure in an early-morning shooting incident, when he had accompanied Bud and me on the hunt.

I had been the first to spy a large animal standing under a thorn tree. This alone was a considerable triumph, for Bud had eyes like a wild goose, and the old man seemed to wear a pair of telescopes, with X-ray attachment, under his grizzled brows. He immediately identified the animal as a bull eland with almost record horns, the like of which I coveted for my trophy room.

The range was well over two hundred yards, and the rifle did not fit me well. When, after the shot, the beast ran off, I readily agreed with Bud that I had made a clean miss, although I had had the sense of holding true when I squeezed off the trigger. Not so, said Old Cottar. He was sure he had heard the impact of the bullet against the bull's hide.

We went up there to see. Fifty yards from the tree we found the great bull, shot cleanly through the shoulders. And then Kinini, my gun-bearer, spoke in Swahili to his fellows. "Not every bwana can kill Pofu with one shot," said he.

COTTAR had heard the black boys comment, and did a little plugging for his native land. "Ah, but every American bwana can kill Pofu with one shot," he answered.

Thereafter Cottar went with us often on short jaunts. Occasionally, while Bud scouted game, he would take me out alone. And although it was flattering to have him put confidence in my ability to shoot straight, on one occasion he trusted it almost too far.

We were following a game trail through

—the thunder of the rhino's feet on hard ground, and then a crashing of brush

Cottar was the most amazing character I ever met on the hunting trails

a thorn thicket when the ugliest animal I had ever seen flushed from his lair and made off into a patch of brush. A rhino could call himself a beauty compared to him. But there was something about his heavy body, short legs, bristled back and long snout that spelled hog. Actually, he was an old boar wart-hog with a fine pair of tusks.

He had no more than entered the thicket when he came crashing forth, and bore down on us at the astonishing wild-pig speed. Thinking that we were the target of a deliberate and furious charge, I flung up my rifle.

To my amazement, old Cottar grasped my arm with his left hand. "Wait a minute," he told me. "There's something queer going on."

It was queer enough for me that we should be standing there, our guns silent, while three hundredweight of wild boar rushed down upon us at something better than thirty feet a second. The only reason I was able to hold on and await developments was that Cottar's right hand was firmly on the trigger guard of his old .405, ready to drive its battered butt-plate against his shoulder.

Cottar knew what he was doing. When about twenty yards distant, the hog slammed on his brakes and stopped short. It was as though he had never seen us before, and very plainly something had happened since his first glimpse of us that made him forget our existence. Instantly he darted off in another direction.

"COME on," Cottar whispered, and now there was a glitter in his eye and a look of deadly purpose on his face that told me some serious shooting had to be done. "The pig wasn't charging us. He was getting away from something in that brush patch."

We closed on the patch, and peered in. The scene before our eyes would have furnished a perfect animal study for Lynn Bogue Hunt.

Lying at ease on the ground, with her head resting on her front paws, was a lioness. Standing beside her, his mouth opened in a yawn, was her full-grown, richly maned mate. Apparently they had both just wakened from their midday nap.

"Shoot!" Cottar whispered. "Quick!"

As Cottar spoke he held his rifle down. It must have taken a strong surge of his will, and he had to hold it down by main force. Yet in that split second while I was getting up my gun I wished that the old man had taken some other occasion to show his confidence in my shooting and his own self-control.

The range was much too close to suit me. The lion shut his great jaws with a snap, and sleep had gone out of his eyes and the baleful fire had gone in. He had moved very slightly, yet enough that his posture had changed from one of indolent ease and lazy power to angry defiance. It would be more than that in an instant. The range was too close to suit him, too; he seemed to be gathering himself to charge. With one light bound the female had sprung up beside him.

That meant I must not only shoot quick; I must also shoot straight. I wondered afterward if I could have done so, save for Cottar and his old gun waiting beside me.

The bullet struck the lion just in front of the shoulder bone and plowed through the heart and lungs. Then I could thank heaven that Cottar had persuaded me to discard the 9.5 mm. bolt-action I had brought to Africa and shoot his big .470 double that Paul Rainey had once carried throughout the Continent. The ball weighed an ounce and was driven by 75 grains of the most powerful powder known, yet the mortally stricken lion tried to attack. He died with his face toward me, his eyes full on mine.

COTTAR did not consider that we had had a narrow escape. Though he was getting along in years, all stoved up and nearly blind in one eye, still his rifle had been loaded and ready. Indeed, he was fit to be tied because some brush had got in his way and the lioness had escaped.

That night, around the camp-fire, with old Cottar holding his fine, big hand to shield his eyes from the blaze, and the lions grunting on the veldt and the hyenas laughing and sobbing, he explained what a narrow escape was really like.

For instance, there was the second time—no, it was the third—that a leopard had got on him. He had hurled the beast off, but it bounced back like a rubber ball. He had worn a pistol at his belt. He was more than average quick on the draw, yet he had not been able to put his hand on the butt, so busy was he, fighting off the beast's fangs from his throat and its scooping claws from his belly. Fundi, his lean old Kikuya gun-bearer, had saved him in that *shauri*.

Then there was the time that a buffalo had knocked him down and was about to finish him in the Roman-holiday buffalo style. Lying on his back, Cottar had got one foot on either side of the bull's neck against its shoulders and, bracing his legs, he had let the buffalo shove him around until he could pump another shell into his lever-action .405. No less a hunter than old (*Continued on page 74*)

Bwana Cottar poses with an African pygmy hunter

ten minutes he sprawled on top of the dead cat, never taking his eyes off it. Every few seconds he'd give a great squall of triumph and shake the carcass furiously. Then he'd sit very still, watching for the slightest sign of resistance. His eyes shone green, and every hair on his back was turned the wrong way.

During all this procedure the rest of the pack sat around at a respectful distance. Even Rover was very meek indeed. This was Stranger's cat, and they knew it. The big red pup had found himself. His luck had changed.

THE LAST SAFARI

(Continued from page 22)

Lord Delemere had warned him that he had better not try the trick again.

That *shauri* was not as nerve-wracking as one with a cow elephant when he was poaching ivory in the Ituri forest. His gun had been disabled, and the angry elephant had hunted him more than an hour, thrusting her trunk in every bush for his scent, and once actually stepped over him. The trouble with being killed by an elephant, Cottar told me, was that there was rarely enough remains for an elegant funeral.

But no lion had ever laid a claw on Cottar's body. His luck was so phenomenal in this respect—he had killed so many lions and the mathematical chances had been dead against him for so long—that he had begun to believe there was a trick in it. In other words, the gods of Africa were saving lions for the coup de grâce. Somewhere out there on the veldt, perhaps even now a cub, there was a lion fated to kill him.

He told me this in 1929. I have never seen old Cottar since, but all the time I have been waiting to hear whether his dark prophecy came true. Quite likely, I thought, he would die in bed. So often Fate gives us trivial and unsatisfying conclusions to her greatest tales.

On the other hand, the gods of Africa are cunning without end. Moreover, in all their illimitable years, they had never met a tougher antagonist, a more defiant foe, than old Bwana Cottar from the States, and they must needs go to great pains. Perhaps they had played a very deep game. Perhaps they had led him on to beware of lions, so that he would drop his guard against their other ministers—elephants, leopards, buffaloes, and rhinos. Possibly it was one of these that awaited him at some thorny rendezvous.

Even so, it would be a fitting end for the old hunter. I only hoped that the light he had followed would not fail him at the last, whereby he would die in the dark, with his boots off. I had this in mind when I wrote in the February, 1939, issue of FIELD & STREAM: "When Africa finally kills him after some bloody *shauri* in the bush, he may not go to our tame smug heaven, but where he does go he'll find old Kit Carson and Custer waiting there."

Now, at last, the news from Africa has arrived. I do not refer to the news of an air battle on the Ethiopian frontier, a skirmish between the Italian and English forces in their war of empire. Such will be recorded by careful historians and presently forgotten, but this news is the stuff of legend, to be told and retold, as that scene when Wild Bill Hickok sat at cards, or when Yellow Hair faced the foe on the Little Bighorn.

Because of the war, Cottar's safari business had been bad; so he and his son Bud made a little trip together into the Masai Reserve. It is said they meant to make some motion pictures of big game. If I had been an old bull elephant with two hundred pounds of ivory, and knew Bwana Cottar as most of the old bulls had known him long ago, I would have thought twice before venturing into the field of his camera. No elephant came near, but there was an old rhino living in that bush.

He may have looked like any other rhino. For years he had been roaming about the Masai Reserve—sulky, surly, ready to charge any living thing that crossed his path, and no thought ever occurring to his foggy mind that he was set apart from every rhino that ever wore horn on ugly head, never dreaming that he had been chosen from all the beasts of the jungle and the veldt as an instrument of fate.

Bwana Cottar became separated from his son. As he was making his way through the bush the rhino charged him. Cottar flung up his old lever-action .405, and its noise was carried to Bud's ears; you can picture him stopping and listening for a second shot, although one was usually enough. There was a brief delay—you can fancy Bud starting to walk on, reassured—when the rifle roared again.

In that brief period there had been other sounds that Bud was too far away to hear—the thunder of the rhino's feet on the hard ground, and then a crashing of brush. Cottar's bullet had gone straight, but the maddened beast had not fallen, had pressed home his charge, had driven his horn into the old hunter's thigh and tossed him into the thickets.

Cottar kept hold of his rifle. Only those who do not know him well need be told this. Terribly wounded, he continued to fire, probably cursing and swearing with all the power of his failing breath. He fired until his magazine was empty, every bullet finding its mark. Finally the rhino fell, mortally wounded, and they looked at each other, these two old Africans, across the bloody grass. Probably they both knew it was all over.

Bud ran up and dispatched the rhino. He did what he could for his father, and what they said to each other is not yet known. After cutting away the bush, Bud brought up the lorry, with the idea of carrying the mangled man to the hospital.

He did not live to get there. An hour and a half after the accident, the old hunter breathed his last, with his boots on, under the open sky of Africa and amid her hills—the end that Cottar's friends would wish for him.

His death marks the end of an epoch in African history. He was the Last of the Mohicans; all his great companions are either dead or have lost the trail. From now on, written law will rule the veldt; the country will be settled by tame people; automobile roads will follow the paths that old Cottar cut through the thickets; cities will stand where he made his lonely camps.

The lions will grunt at night, the hyenas laugh and sob, the vultures watch from on high, and the wild elephants drift on silent feet through the vast forests of the Congo; but Bwana Cottar has gone away, and we will not see his like again.

RECORD BEATERS

(Continued from page 43)

the weeds and rocks, and had only to reel him in until I could get my hand in his gills. Then over the side he was rolled, to be wrapped up in a piece of canvas for the ride home. After my experience with the big one last year, I carry a piece of canvas about six feet square and just roll Mr. Fish up in this and he doesn't do so much kicking around in the boat.

"Upon arriving home, friend wife informed me that I was due to make a radio recording at WWJ at one o'clock, which I had forgotten; so the muskie and I shoved off for town, where he was weighed and measured and then taken up to the News