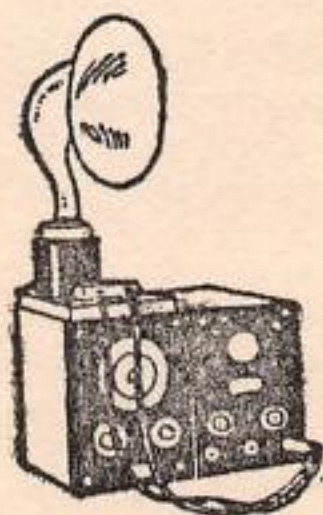


THE RADIO BOYS IN DARKEST AFRICA

BY GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

AUTHOR OF

"The Radio Boys on the Mexican Border," "The Radio Boys with the Revenue Guards," "The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty," "The Radio Boys Search for the Inca's Treasure," "The Radio Boys Rescue the Lost Alaska Expedition," "The Radio Boys Seek the Lost Atlantis."



FRONTISPIECE

A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers

New York

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT FOR A RHINO.

HERE the expedition settled down to the serious business of shooting big game with a camera, while the days insensibly rolled into weeks. For Chief Ungaba and his people were friendly and, as the park-like country with its lofty hills, great stretches of thorn bush and spreading forests comparatively free of underbrush, abounded in game, Mr. Hampton decided to use the village of Ungaba as a base of operations from which side expeditions could be sent out.

Under the tutelage of Nielsen, the boys had developed into excellent motion picture photographers. And whether they lay concealed for days in brush shelters, awaiting the opportunity to film animals coming to a water hole to drink, or whether they crawled for hours along game trails, dragging both rifle and big camera with them, they returned not only with their enthusiasm undampened but also with many feet of film which they felt certain would

prove on development to be amply worth all the effort expended.

That these trips were not without incident goes without saying. Time and again they had narrow escapes, as when Jack on one occasion crawled around a rock with a view to film buffalo feeding in a grassy depression at the base of the hillside, only to find a particularly deadly snake, the mamba, coiled on the sunny side just at the place where he would next have placed his hand. Drawing back with lightning quickness, he drew his revolver and shot the snake. The sound of the shot sent the buffalo tearing and lumbering away and spoiled his chance of getting a picture of them, a chance which he had spent a full hour in acquiring. But he saved his life.

Many weary hours, too, were spent in stalking animals, so that the obtaining of each separate bit of film was an adventure in itself. The common jungle grass retarded progress and its pollen getting into their eyes set up an irritation which half-blinded them. They were never without at least one member of the party suffering from swollen eyes. Anticipating this, however, they had come provided with eye wash for the alleviation of distress. It was the dry season, and they wore only the lightest of clothing, consisting of sleeveless shirt

and knee length pants, "like Boy Scouts," Bob remarked. Consequently, they suffered much from the scratches of various other varieties of grass with barbs, of the tall plumed reeds with stiff leaves which cut like a knife and, especially, from the "cow itch." This latter name they gave a plant having seed pods covered with fine hairs which pierced even through clothing and set up an excruciating itching.

On the whole, however, the hardships were less than they had expected to encounter, and a hot bath in a collapsible tub on the return from a picture-taking expedition went far to make life bearable. Moreover, they had the consolation of piling up thousands of feet of film which they felt assured would be invaluable.

"I can just see the kids sitting in the motion picture house when some of these scenes flash on the screen," said Bob, one night, after returning from a particularly trying expedition upon which eland, giraffes, buffalo, hyenas and adjutant birds had been filmed. "Only we need some more thrilling stuff."

"I should think you'd have gotten enough thrills on that runaway raft to last you the rest of your life," said Nielsen, smoking his pipe on the opposite side of the camp fire. "Just the same, what you say about our films of animal life is true. I won-

der," he added, turning toward Mr. Hampton seated on a camp chair at his shoulder, "whether we couldn't persuade Chief Ungaba to organize a rhinoceros hunt. I have a hunch we'd get a thrill out of that."

"Good idea," approved Jack. "Let's try it."

After some further discussion, it was agreed that the next morning all should wait on Chief Ungaba and prefer their request. Accordingly, they turned in and slept soundly and at an early hour arose and entered the village which lay not far away across an open meadow. Whenever camp was pitched at an African village, the party was careful to locate some distance away, both because the odors of these villages frequently become offensive and to avoid possible friction arising between the native populace and the bearers from alien tribes.

The village was up and astir, and as the boys passed along the main street toward the central square where Chief Ungaba's hut was located they found their interest excited by sights which never became stale. Cooking fires were going outside the mud-walled, thatched-roofed huts, and over them the Kavirondo women with their "tails" were busied preparing breakfast for their lords and masters who still lolled on sleeping mats within or else yawned sleepily at door openings, watching the whites.

These so-called "tails" worn by the women never failed to amuse, and many a hearty laugh had they given the boys. Made of plaited grass and tied to a string about the waist, they fall down behind, and denote the status of the wearer. Little girls wear little ones, engaged girls slightly larger ones, and married matrons the largest of all. As loin cloths comprise practically the only clothing worn by men, women or children, the tribesmen looked as if, said Bob, "they were all ready for a plunge." Some, however, considered themselves well dressed, indeed, for their bodies were smeared with red and white clays, producing an effect which they considered decorative in the extreme but which the boys regarded as particularly ghastly.

Chief Ungaba sitting at the door of his hut was not an especially kinglike object as he knuckled his eyes sleepily. He failed to note their approach at first because of the fact that he was leaning sideways as if to hear without being seen while listening to sounds of high shrill voices raised in altercation within the hut.

"What's going on, I wonder," asked Bob of his companions.

Mr. Hampton laughed heartily. "The chief's wives are hard at it," he said. "They are having their regular morning squabble. Poor man, he has

six first wives, and they lead him a dog's life. He is chief everywhere except in his own house."

Scarcely had he finished speaking than a piercing shriek cut through the clamor of angry voices, followed by another and another. Then a sobbing young woman ran headlong from the hut, clutching her hair, while behind her three older women crowded each other in the doorway. They stared triumphantly until the younger woman disappeared amidst the adjacent huts and then withdrew.

"The old ones kicked the best looking one out," said Nielsen, grinning a little bit. "Well, age has to protect itself. Now that they've banded together to get rid of her, however, they'll probably fall to fighting amongst themselves."

The noisy quarrelling subsided, however, as if by magic, and once more peace reigned in Chief Ungaba's household. The lord and master who had cowered away from the door as if trying to squeeze into the wall, when the fight was carried into the open, now, upon the withdrawal of the women, stood up and stretched his arms wide in a yawn. The boys couldn't repress a laugh, but they smothered it with their hands so as not to let the sound reach his ears.

Then, as Mr. Hampton approached, the chief for the first time became cognizant of their presence,

and a smile of welcome broke over his broad, full-lipped, humorous face.

"A quarrelsome woman is worse than a hyena, and five are enough to defend a town," he said. "My white brother will understand."

He spoke in the Kavirondo tongue, but Mr. Hampton and the boys had been studying the simple language with the aid of their interpreter Mabele, and during their lengthy stay they had acquired a rough working knowledge of it which made the chief's words understandable.

"Chief Ungaba speaks words of wisdom," answered Mr. Hampton, gravely, but with twinkling eye.

And the chief, observing the twinkle, laughed outright.

Thereupon, Mr. Hampton broached the subject of the proposed rhinoceros hunt, to which the chief readily agreed. He was willing enough to lend his warriors for the purpose of beating up the reeds of a nearby marsh, as Mr. Hampton promised him in return the carcass of the slain beast. The high-powered rifles of the Hampton party would prove far more efficient weapons against the tough hide armor of the monster than the bows or spears of the villagers. And the obtaining of fresh meat was

always a consideration. Indeed, there would be a great feast in the village.

Negotiations concluded, the whites returned to camp with the assurance that on the edge of the reedy marsh some two miles west of the village in the middle of the afternoon they would find Chief Ungaba's men awaiting them for the hunt.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE RHINO'S PATH.

THAT assurance was fulfilled, for when the Hampton party arrived on the scene tall warriors armed with spears and with clappers for producing a particularly atrocious racket already had spread in a wide circle around the marsh.

Mabele who had preceded them came running up with the intelligence that a huge rhinoceros, the largest seen in that district for a long time, had been observed entering the marsh the preceding night. Although a plains animal, yet it resembles its river-loving brother, the hippopotamus, in its regard for cool damp spots. And this marsh was a noted haunt of the rhinos.

Many acres in extent, the marsh stretched away ahead in an expanse of tall reeds and low trees. And although the boys knew at least two score beaters were converging toward the plain edging the marsh where they had taken their station, yet they could not see them. Now and then, however,

the sound of a clapper could be heard. Nor was there any sign of the rhino.

Three motion picture cameras had been brought along, so as to photograph every phase of the hunt. And Nielsen, Jack and Frank were to operate them. Bob, the best shot of the three boys, and Mr. Hampton constituted the armed hunters of the party. They were not to kill the monster until good pictures had been obtained first of the rhino emerging from the swamp and of the beaters converging upon his lair.

As the most expert of the operators, Nielsen had elected to go into the marsh with his camera and follow up the beaters. And Mr. Hampton accompanied him as his protector. This left the three boys alone in the plain.

It was a morning of blazing sunshine and, early though the hour, the day already had become uncomfortably warm. Frank suffered especially, as he lugged his big camera to a vantage point some distance from Jack so that they would be able to take in the scene from various angles.

"If the rhino charges you, what will you do?" asked Bob, carrying Frank's film box.

"I'm going to run," said Frank. "What d'you think?"

"Doesn't a sense of duty to your employers fill

your breast?" demanded Bob, as if in surprise. "I should think you'd stick on the burning deck and let the rhino charge right over you in order to get a picture of him in action."

"You've got another think coming," replied Frank, coming to a halt and adjusting the tripod. "Guess this is far enough away from Jack."

"But just think," persisted Bob, "of what a gorgeous picture it would make. Imagine sitting in a theatre at home and suddenly seeing a huge rhino come lumbering toward you, as if he were going to charge right out of the screen and into the audience."

"Talk to Jack," said Frank coolly. "I can't hear you. Whoo, it's hot. Wish the battle would begin."

Close at hand in the marsh, as if his words had been a signal, a tremendous uproar of cries broke out interspersed with the ratchetting sound of the clappers in the hands of the native beaters.

"Better get ready," advised Bob. "That sounds pretty close."

Frank leaped to his feet, all eagerness, the lassitude of the moment before forgotten, and took his place at the camera.

"See anything yet?" he called.

"No," said Bob. "And I don't hear any shots,

either. So I suppose Jack's father isn't potting away. But what an infernal din those beaters are putting up."

The noise died down, became more remote, and Frank relaxed his tense attitude at the camera, while Bob once more laid down his rifle.

"Huh. Guess the rhino headed for another direction."

"I suppose so," said Frank. "Certainly the beaters are withdrawing."

Once more they were alone on the sunny plain with its tall buffalo grass, alone except for Jack whose head and chest only could be seen above the tall grass some distance away. He waved a hand and they replied similarly, but he was too far away to make himself heard except by shouting and so did not call to them.

Perhaps five minutes had elapsed during which no immediate sounds except the drone of huge flies and the tiny hum of insects broke the somnolent stillness. The boys spoke now and then in low voices, but in the main were silent. Bob's keen glance played continually along the edge of the marsh, but Frank had taken seat on the film box and was sunk in revery.

Suddenly Bob's hand gripped his shoulder, and Bob's voice whispered low:

"Sh. Here he comes."

Frank sprang to his feet and gazed in the direction indicated by Bob.

A huge brute with dark, dun-colored hide had parted the reeds of the marsh not fifty yards away. He stood sideways at the edge of the plain, formidable horned head lifted as if listening to the distant sounds of the beaters.

"He eluded them in some way," whispered Frank. "What a picture."

Swinging the lens of the camera about until he brought the rhino into focus, he began to turn the crank.

The rhino abandoned his listening attitude and, dropping his head, began to move slowly forward on a line bringing him midway between Jack and Frank. Although his legs were short and ponderous, so huge was his body that it towered above the buffalo grass which parted before him like water before a scow.

Over him fluttered a perfect cloud of small birds, like a swarm of bees hiving on a bough. They made continual darts at the huge back, picking off ticks and performing his toilet for him. The boys had heard this phenomenon described, but had never witnessed it, the only rhinos they had seen heretofore being those captives in Zoos.

Now and again as he moved slowly along, the huge beast would lift his head. And at such times he gave the watching, spell-bound boys the impression that he was sniffing the air as if in search of his arch-enemy, man.

Realizing that should the rhino become aware of Jack's presence and charge him, his comrade would be without protection as he had the sole rifle of the outfit, Bob crouching low began making his way to a point in the rear of the rhino where he could afford protection to Jack as well as Frank.

And well it was that he took this precaution. For a time the rhino continued his slow advance on the line which would avoid both boys, stopping occasionally to repeat his gesture of lifting his head as if to sniff. Bob suddenly recalled that, although the day was calm, still there was a bit of breeze blowing, and that it came from Jack's direction. Frank, therefore, was to leeward of the rhino and fairly safe from detection, as the great beast is short-sighted. But Jack was to windward and might be detected.

Remembering what he had heard of rhinos to the effect that they are short-tempered and fearless, Bob hurried the more and presently found himself in the broad trail beaten down by the rhino and not far behind him. Ahead, not twenty yards away, he

could see the grotesque, broad quarters of the beast.

"The thinnest spot in the rhino's armor is immediately behind the foreleg, and that is his most vulnerable spot," Mr. Hampton had said on parting.

Bob remembered. He remembered, too, that the high-powered rifle he carried was guaranteed to shoot a steel-jacketed bullet that would penetrate even rhino hide. And the range was close enough. He breathed more freely, now that he had come to such close quarters. His momentary panic at thought of Jack's danger began to disappear.

Anyhow, he said to himself, the rhino appeared likely to stalk clear out of the picture, without ever spotting the presence of his photographers to either side.

But Bob was mistaken. Suddenly the monster swerved to the right without warning and charged with amazing swiftness directly toward Jack who was not more than thirty yards away. His great head jerked at every lurch.

Bob started running through the grass at a tangent which would place him close to the beast before the latter could arrive at Jack's post. He cast a glance in Jack's direction, expecting to see the latter pick up his camera and decamp, but was amazed and alarmed to see Jack busily grinding away.

"Great guns," he muttered, "that rhino must be charging directly into the camera. Why doesn't Jack run?"

But Jack continued at his post, and the truth was, as Bob dashing forward in alarm suspected, that in making the most of his wonderful opportunity to obtain a film of the rhino charging head-on he had forgotten for a moment the important consideration of looking out for his own safety.

CHAPTER XIX.

SAVED FROM THE MONSTER.

ON came the rhinoceros, and Jack seeing him grow larger and larger in the eye of the camera until his bulk seemed to fill the whole world continued to crank the machine, exulting in the realization that he was obtaining what undoubtedly would be the finest film of the whole expedition to date, perhaps the finest and most thrilling of all including whatever pictures lay in the future.

He was oblivious, in his blazing excitement, of the fact that the rhinoceros was charging directly at him. He could not hear Bob's frenzied cries. He was unaware of Frank running toward him from the background.

When finally, as the rhino came so close that looking into the camera finder Jack could see little more than the huge formidable head with its little eyes inflamed in anger, he realized with a shock that in another minute it would be too late for him to escape.

What was more, all the risk he had run would go for nought, because the great beast would trample the tripod and camera and destroy the film.

Then Jack acted with a speed of which he had not considered himself capable. But what one can do under stress of tremendous excitement is considerable.

Sweeping the legs of the tripod together, he slung the camera over a shoulder and leaped away, not running in the path of the charging rhino, but at a right angle from it.

Seeing his prey escaping, but unable because of his great bulk to halt his mad career in time, the rhino crashed forward. He passed directly over the spot where Jack had been stationed not sixty seconds after he had departed. One foot struck the film box and sent it lurching forward, and another pile driver descended crushing it into the ground.

But that was the end of Mr. Rhino. For ere the great beast could turn to pursue his quarry, Bob's rifle rang out and, drilled through the heart, the monster halted, swayed on his feet, then fell over on his side with a crash that made the very ground tremble.

Jack returning, white-faced now that he began to realize how close had been his escape from a hor-

rible death, could not speak as he wrung big Bob's hand. And the latter was still filled with nervous excitement himself.

They merely looked at each other, hands clasped, trying to grin, with Bob clutching his rifle and Jack his camera, until a rather hysterical cry of "Hold it," from the rear caused them to swing about.

A score of feet away stood Frank, turning the crank of his camera. He stopped and leaving the machine in position approached his comrades.

"Picture of the slain monster and of his near-victim and the latter's saviour exchanging pleasantries," he said.

Then his tone sobered and grabbing Jack by the shoulders, he shook him fondly.

"You good-for-nothing rascal," he said. "I almost died of heart failure when I saw you sticking to your post. From the rear it looked as if the rhino were running right over you. Then I saw you dash away to one side and, believe me, lad, that was the welcomest sight I've ever laid eyes on."

Jack looked apologetic. "Sorry I caused you fellows any worry on my account," he said. "The next time I'll be more careful of your feelings."

"And, oh, yes," added Frank, as they approached the fallen rhinoceros and stood looking at his vast proportions, "I did what looked like a sort of heart-

less thing. Seeing I couldn't be of any use, as I was without a rifle, I put down my camera, which I'd grabbed when running toward you, and started cranking."

"But, say, that's great," cried Jack. "You got some of that charge yourself then, too?"

"I did that," said Frank. "You obtained the picture of the rhino charging head-on. But I got a film of his charge on you, with you sticking to the camera until in another minute he'd have been upon you. And I got Bob running up and firing at the crucial moment, the rhino's fall, and your handshake afterwards. Oh, I tell you, I got me some real films."

Temporarily thrown off the trail of the rhino, Mr. Hampton and Nielsen now put in an appearance followed by scores of Chief Ungaba's warriors. And an excited throng it was which gathered around while the boys related their adventure for the benefit of the two white men and Mabele in turn told the crowding blacks what had occurred.

"Well, I guess we've done all we can for today," said Mr. Hampton finally, after the story had been told and Jack had been both scolded for his foolhardiness and congratulated on his lucky escape. "Suppose we return to camp and leave the Kavirondos to skin the rhino and bring in hide and meat."

The three boys readily acquiesced in this decision, as all were so shaken by their experience—Frank and Bob, in fact, suffering more by reason of their fondness for Jack than did the latter himself—that they were glad to depart.

But Nielsen decided to stay behind in order to obtain a film of the skinning and cutting up process. So the four others departed for camp where, after a bath and a change of clothing, they gathered in front of the tent to talk over the day's events and speculate upon the character of the feast which Chief Ungaba would give that night and to which they had been invited. In fact, they were to be the guests of honor.

Presently Jack arose and strolled away again to his tent, Bob calling to him a lazy inquiry as to what he was doing.

"Going to listen-in on the radio," said Jack. He paused a moment before going on. "There's not much to listen to in this part of the world," he said. "But you know that night before last I heard Cape Town. And then, too, there is always the possibility of getting the wireless signals from some of these better class coast boats, even though they are more than a thousand miles away."

"Yes, and the lake steamers, too," supplemented Frank, rising. "I heard one of them carrying on a

lengthy conversation about freight rates the other day with a trader at Entebbe. Seemed the trader chap was a wireles nut and had gone to considerable expense to put in a station."

"You're right except for one thing," said Mr. Hampton. "I heard of that station when at Kisumu. Entebbe is on the northern side of Lake Victoria. And when the trader put in his station, he didn't find it so very expensive, because the British government gave him a subsidy. That might be a valuable outpost in case of trouble with the natives, which some of the Germans who are still lurking in the hinterland might stir up."

As Mr. Hampton ceased, the two boys who had waited for him to finish, started once more for the tent.

A long silence fell between the two left behind. Bob outstretched on a poncho was too comfortable even to talk, and Mr. Hampton was busy posting his "log," as he called the daily record of their travels and adventures.

Presently a sharp call in Jack's voice caused his father to look up, while big Bob who had been almost asleep rolled over and propped himself on an elbow. Jack stood in the doorway of the tent, beckoning.

"Dad, Bob, come here. The radio."