



Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Scott with Shanti at Miami Zoo.

Rhino Roundup in Nepal

By Ralph S. Scott

After having donated a rare white tiger to the Crandon Park Zoo at Miami, I nonchalantly asked the Director, Dr. Gordon Hubbell "What next?" "A pair of baby Indian rhinos," he promptly replied with an impish grin. I vaguely recalled that Frank Buck had brought a pair of rhinos out of Nepal in 1928 (see 'Bring 'Em Back Alive'), and imagining myself a latter day Frank Buck I rose to the challenge. The survivors of this rare one-horned specie, some eighty in number, were reported to be living in a swamp in the Terai of Nepal near the Indian border. A much larger group of some 400 live in the Kaziranga Sanctuary in India, but despite security efforts, poaching continues to threaten the animals.

The Germans call the "Unicornis" *Panzereinhorn*, hence the name Panzer was adopted by the German tanks during World War II. Shrouded in the mists of history this animal would have followed the way of the dinosaur, had it not gone into the impenetrable swamps where the dwindling numbers have taken refuge.

Since the animals are in the King's Reserve Forest, Royal permission had to be obtained to capture a pair of rhinos. Fortunately, the Royal Crown Prince Birendra of Nepal was our house guest at that time so, being an opportunist, I gingerly told of our hopes of rhino catching and the eventual gift to the Miami Zoo.

After two years of planning, Royal permission was granted, however His Majesty wanted national television coverage to promote tourism for Nepal. After considerable searching for a national outlet, Lowell Thomas Sr. kindly consented to do a High Adventure T.V. episode. He was already a familiar figure in Nepal and favorably known to His Majesty, the King, as Mr. Thomas had filmed the coronation ceremonies some fifteen years before for his famous Cinerama production.

No one was less qualified than I to be thrust into the role of Production Manager and wild animal catcher. However, I was acquainted with the Nepal scene and I had Royal permission. Crisis after crisis

appeared on the agenda from the first day of our expedition until three months later, when we saw the beautiful bird (707) take off into the wild blue yonder with our baby headed for the USA.

On arrival in Nepal, we were met at the airport in Kathmandu on February 8, 1970 by the Chief of Hospitality only to learn that our outfitter had failed to make any arrangements. The camera crew with 50,000 feet of film and 2000 pounds of gear was off-loaded on the ramp, ready for the great adventure whereupon my role as a Production Manager came to a grinding halt amid howls of disappointment. Into this melee ambled our 'savior' the jovial, moon-faced, American born John Coapman, the owner of Tigertops Hotel deep in the heart of the Terai jungle. The Hotel is perched on poles some twelve inches in diameter, overlooking the very swamp which is the home of the bulk of the rhino population of Nepal. John had learned of our predicament through the grapevine which is very efficient thereabouts, so he was well aware of our big trouble. He offered us his famous tourist spot complete with 150 servants, elephants and rhino know-how, all practically for free. Of course he did expect to reap the publicity for his Hotel when the T.V. offering was shown to a Thomas audience of thirty million viewers. We were overjoyed at this turn of events and the expedition was ready to move. It seems that his daily chore was to move the rhinos around a bit for the camera bugs and tourists at his Hotel. The whole setup was a camera dream, especially with the world's most experienced rhino-rodeo expert to direct.

After Lowell Thomas had filmed the wedding of the Royal Crown Prince, he flew to Tigertops Hotel over the Himalayas into the Tarai to film what is believed to be the first time that the Indian rhino was ever darted in Nepal. The practice is well known in Africa. In fact, we 'imported' Dr. John King to handle the gun. He had darted over one hundred rhinos and had had great success in their conservation efforts.

Lowell Thomas assembled the hunting party mounted on 28 elephants, festooned with cameramen, sound crew, a few tourists and the usual entourage of some 90 'boys'. John Coapman, Director of the Rhino-Rodeo as he called it, was introduced by Lowell Thomas as a fellow American with a strange pursuit in far-off places. My part of the expedition was duly noted whereupon the caravan lurched across the shallow river to the ancestral home of the rhinos. The elephant grass was 16 to 18 feet high and so dense that only an elephant could part it with its trunk. The swamp is thirty miles long and five miles wide, hence it was passable only during the dry season. The elephants were deployed in a circle about one half mile in diameter with John standing on an elephant directing the shrinking of the huge circle with the ease of an orchestra conductor. As if by magic, the outside of the circle and the flanks drew closer and closer until one could hear the tremendous grunts of an adult rhino coming directly

to the dart gun. A parade of elephants had flattened the tall grass to make a track some thirty feet wide, while the gun elephant was concealed in the grass across the open track. John was on the lead elephant quietly sweeping in his ponderous mounts with signals from his Aussie hat. Suddenly, a challenging grunt from a mother rhino as she burst onto the track with a baby at her nose. All the gallery was now shouting to confuse the mother and the elephants began to trumpet and the great uproar was shattering. She feinted a charge but turned back into the grass with the baby always at her nose so that a stealthy tiger could not pick off the little one. A diligent search failed to turn up a sleeping beauty, so the exciting day ended on a slightly disappointing note.

The next day, we drove out an adult male rhino and darted it to test the M-99 drug which we had been using. The roundup followed the usual pattern with several break-outs from the ring and a bit of skirmishing with a small tusker upsetting the big male with a neat rollover. It was a beautiful example of wrestling in the wild and I doubt if the cameraman got that sequence, but it was a thrilling encounter. The dart glanced off the rump due to a bad angle firing but after another try, the M-99 took effect and the old boy slept soundly as we softly padded back to camp. One hour later, he would arouse from his 'nap', charge at an imaginary foe and plunge back into the sea of grass.

Early the next morning, we heard rumor of a baby about five miles distant, so the procession ambled off up the river swishing along in the elephant grass. After making three circles and with two breakouts, the mother came charging out with her baby, ready to take on the whole group of pursuers. It was a splendid show of mother courage and as primitive as it might have been enacted a million years ago. She was hit squarely in the shoulder, the dart remained in as she retreated with the baby into the grass. After an hours search, we found her sleeping peacefully with the little fellow running about bewildered on seeing the ring of elephants. It was necessary to give the little chap the sleep treatment with a smaller dart and a lesser dose of M-99. In fifteen minutes he was actually snoring. The pulse taken, strangely enough by the tail, respiration was noted as well as other effects of the drug for a scientific report on the condition of the animal. A great body of technical information is being gathered for the use of the dart gun in catching and zoo operations. The wounds were being sterilized with great care before the baby was trussed upon a slat platform for the trip to camp. The baby was a male, estimated to be eight months old and weighing about 500 pounds. We placed an old tire under his head to prevent damage from a pounding, should he wake up in a bad mood. Before the trek ended, the tire was needed for on awakening, he strongly objected to be taken for a 'ride'. Large bamboo poles were placed under the platform and some twenty willing hands hoisted the platform and began the three mile

trip back to camp across the river. From a distance, it looked like a bunch of ants ferrying a hot dog. A terrific uproar occurred when the platform was lowered down by the river. It seemed that the three boys underneath had not been warned of the let-down. No casualties but a few bruises. Back in camp an armed guard was posted lest a tiger should attempt to carry off our prize. The night was filled with merriment and beer drinking, for the 'boys' had captured a great animal to whom they gave a wide berth in the jungle.

Out of respect for a Holy Day, the entire group took off and we had an enforced rest when we least wanted it. Following the day of rest, the crew was eager to go back into the swamps and after a few empty circles and two break-outs, we darted another baby. We were all in high spirits for it seemed like 'mission accomplished'. But our jubilation was short lived for the baby was another male and had to be turned back to the jungle.

As will happen in most safaris, time was running out and the black monsoon clouds were piling up against the mountains. The torrential rains would swell the streams and all escape from our jungle home could be cut off for months. Our camp at Tigertops Hotel was about ninety air miles from Kathmandu. Several anxious days were spent trying to arrange for air transportation, but since the airfield was only a cleared-off cow pasture, commercial pilots would not venture.

After a flight to Calcutta and many frustrating attempts to charter a plane, I dared an old World War II hedge-hopping pilot to fly an old DC-3 to the rescue. Perhaps the two thousand dollar bonus added to my persuasion. When we circled the field near Tigertops Hotel at the appointed hour, there was not a living thing to be seen. Imagine our despair! It appeared as though our plans had collapsed—which could mean the loss of the charter flight and most importantly, the possible loss of the reserved space for the rhino aboard the cargo plane due to take off from Calcutta. Weeks of planning seemed lost. After several minutes of frustration, a plume of dust appeared on the horizon and a most welcome sight greeted our eyes when the rhino caravan suddenly materialized. It was reminiscent of an old movie when the cavalry column came to the rescue. Needless to say there was much rejoicing and back slapping at the happy turn of events.

Soon we were airborne, taking a few leaves off the tree tops as we zoomed away for the Calcutta airport some 900 miles away. The cage which was much too large, was secured with ropes to the sides of this old troop transport. But when turbulence began, the cage would slide about and threaten our feet which had to be tucked up on the metal bucket seats. This made the rhino nervous and my wife, a former nurse, baby talked to the toto who seemed to understand and stopped his plunging around in his cage. She applied soothing ointment to the ears and nose of the rhino after he had skinned them against the cage, and healing salve to the rope burns which were slightly infested with magots. He stood

surprisingly still during the treatments and enjoyed being hand fed grass until we finally landed in Calcutta.

The Calcutta adventure was unbelievable. The monsoon rains were sweeping the landing strip and the airport tower would not clear us since we had not asked for landing permission. The pilot explained that had permission been requested in advance, it might have been denied. So he decided to put the plane in a distress landing pattern and take a chance on clearance. Customs men came streaming out in jeeps to take charge of the 'intruder'. After much talk, we were taken to the Customs shack for thorough inspection. Martial law had been declared in Calcutta, cholera had broken out and the 120 degree heat made the situation almost unbearable. The cage for international shipment had already been made in Calcutta according to specification. But it proved to be eight inches too long to fit into the aircraft. So through-out the night, inept little carpenters whittled down the teak wooden cage with primitive tools. To add to the confusion a



Starting on the rhino roundup in Nepal.



Shanti being taught to kneel for the King of Nepal when he comes to Miami.

large oil truck had broken the airport scales, so the cargo had to be taken miles away for the weighing-in bit. The bill of lading was finally prepared after an endless discussion about a health certificate from Nepal because it was being questioned by the local doctor. The Customs official thought the whole thing highly irregular since there was no bill of sale from the shipper in Nepal. Fortunately, we had unwittingly transported with our cargo, a Customs official from Nepal and with his wordy explanation, order was restored and the document issued.

The day dawned clear with our baby well fed, sleeping soundly and all was ready for the take-off one hour ahead of schedule. Right on the button, the beautiful new cargo ship 707 Boac—dropped out of the sky and within an hour our baby was airborne for the USA.

His arrival at Crandon Park Zoo was hailed with great enthusiasm but when he was turned into his

pen, which had a pipe fence around it, he made a dash for freedom only to get his head wedged between the pipes. For a moment, it looked as if our expedition had ended in failure, but with eager hands and a pipe cutter, the rhino backed off dazed but docile.

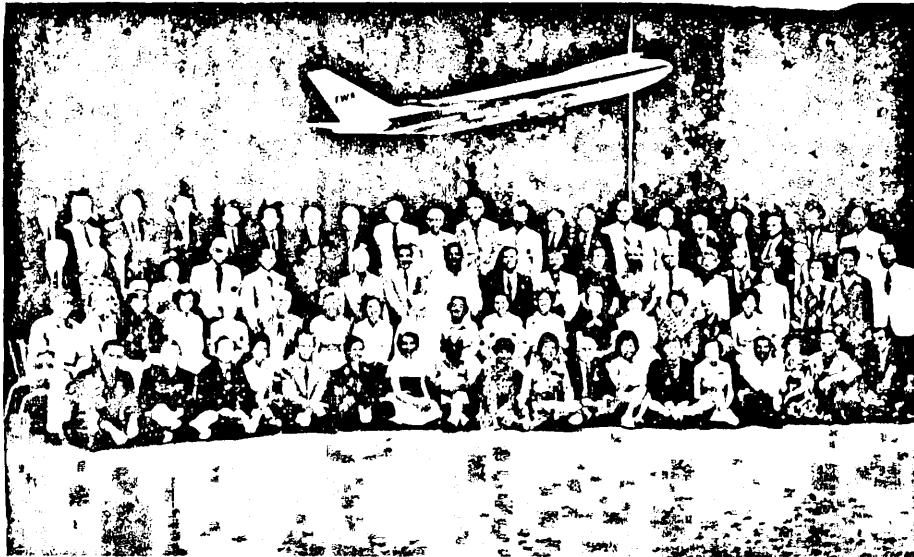
Ten days later, I received a cable that a female had been captured, so I returned to Nepal to repeat almost exactly the traumatic experience of a few weeks earlier. The male is named Mohan meaning God in Hindi, the female is named Shanti meaning Peace. The pair seems as blissfully happy as two love birds in the Miami Zoo. The pair is valued at \$50,000 and there is a good possibility of a breeding program, otherwise the conservation effort is meaningless.

Our deepest thanks to His Majesty, King Mahendra Bikram Shah Deva, the generous ruler of the tiny Kingdom of Nepal, on top of the world and just south of Shangri-la.

continued from page 25

**SHIKAR-SAFARI INTERNATIONAL
CLUB MEMBERS AT GAMECOIN . . .**

A review of the conference, plans for the future and safari auctions was given at the closing by Harry. It was time to adjourn to the Hook and Bullet Club for the farewell party. See you May 5, 1973 . . . same place . . . Kwaheri . . . Pat Auld.



First row sitting, left to right:
 Bill Simmons, Dave Ommanney, Walter Denison, Illie Anderson, Martin Anderson, Mury Denison, Helen Stumberg, Soski Piroeff, Waverly Simmons, Darlene Robinson, John I. Moore, Louise Timken, Hugh Corrigan, Ann Corrigan, Cliff Sanders, (peeking around Ann), C. J. McElroy, Margaret Maddox, Dan Maddox, Jose Ruiz.
 Second row sitting, left to right:
 Second from left, Carolene Wrenn, Pat Auld, Rose Piroeff, Bettye Bettington, Phil Bettington, Ophelia Bohannon, Jewel Shurley, Joyce Wilson, Helen Vinson, Helen Knutson, Tilde Hayes, Betty Legarde, Camille Weatherby, Ethel Hansen, Theda Hall, Barbara Huntington.
 Third row, left to right, standing:
 Heaton Wrenn, Miriam Fisher, Rudy Valentino, fifth from left, John Rhea, Howard Misner, Hasle Martens, Berry Brooks, Bill Weiss, Toddie Lee Wynn, Jim Shirley, thirteenth from left, Basil Bradbury, Emerson Hall, Charles Erwin Wilson, Jr., Pringle Boyd, Ed Boyd, Alvina McElroy, Fred Huntington, Virginia Craft, Carol Brehm, Clarence Brehm.
 Fourth row, left to right, standing:
 Dan Galbreath, Harry Jersig, Leo Roethe, Phil Williamson, Jim Rikhoff, John Pollon, John Legarde, Bud Braubham, Joe Jonas, Sr., Jerry Vinson, Dan Auld, Sr., Dave Bohannon, Ralph Scott, Roy Weatherby, Dr. Wilmer Hansen, Ben Bird, Ben Cecchini, John Denison, Ventura Barnes, Tim Hixon, George Landreth.



Soski Piroeff met his match with the lion cub at Game Coin.