

EARLY DAYS  
IN  
KATANGA

By  
R. R. SHARP



[ Bulawayo ] 1956

nr. 210

Kingstons Ltd.  
Bulawayo  
B 1124-19817

To My Old Friend  
JULES COUSIN, O.B.E.

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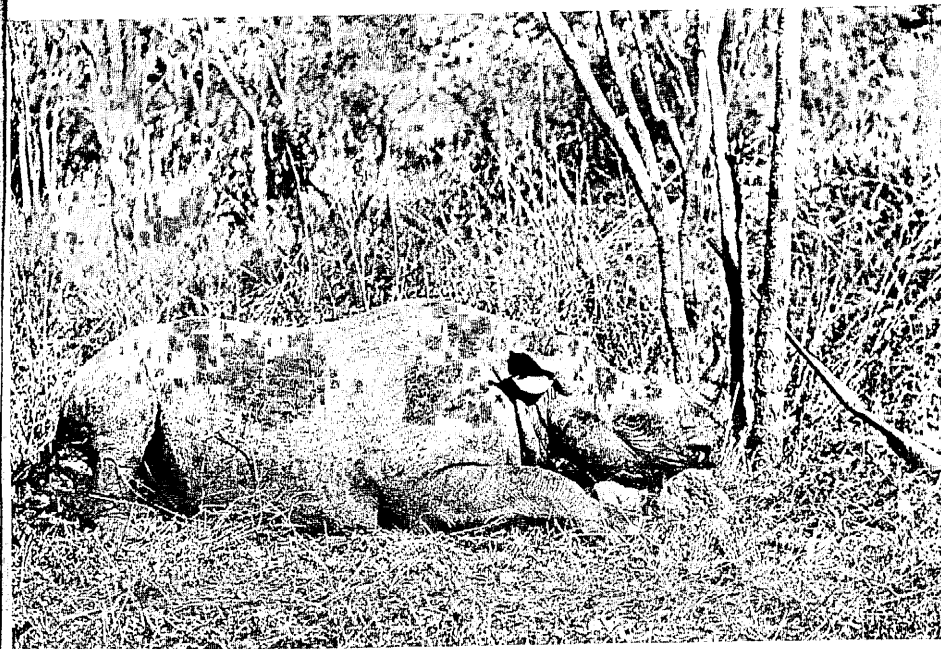
Printed by Rhodesian Printers Limited  
P.O. Box 8098, Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia

at its bottom. I had three white men under me and about 300 natives. One of the white men was an irascible little Cockney called Hirst, who ran the little hand-operated diamond drill. He had a shrill and far-carrying voice and commanded one of the best flows of language that I have ever known. From daylight to dark his voice could be heard all over the mine addressing his boys with the most delightful profanities.

Another man was Rademeyer, a miner. When I first went to Katanga I was only 23 and the "baby" of the Company and was regarded as such by all the old hands. Rademeyer was inclined to resent the fact that I, a mere kid, had been put over him and, in spite of all the tact that I could show, was wont to be rather unpleasant. One day when working in the adit I had occasion to point out a fault in the timbering and told him to remove and replace one of the sets. At this particular spot we were in some rather tricky slickenside ground, which would slip with the smallest encouragement, so that the timber would have to be handled with the greatest care. Rademeyer, however, lost his temper and before I could stop him began to knock out the wedges. The whole thing collapsed and pinned him by the legs, while I only escaped the same fate by inches. Luckily I was able to get him out without much damage, but he was lucky not to be completely buried. He had the decency to apologise to me and after that we got on a bit better.

The shafts at Kambove had all been operated up to now by windlass, which was a slow and laborious method. I decided to try to replace this on the main shaft with a sort of capstan worked by man-power. As usual a good deal of improvisation was necessary in the absence of materials, but the thing worked and greatly speeded up the work.

I had a lot of trouble at Kambove with natives going sick with ulcers on the legs; these ulcers were very common and were, I believe, caused by *Filaria*.



*Rhino killed in 1909, approximately on the site where Elisabethville Post Office now stands.*

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Crossing the border into the Congo we came to a Belgian Customs post, quite a new departure. The Customs officer was fortunately far more interested in our whisky than in the many dutiable articles that we had with us, and the matter of duty was soon amicably settled.

We arrived in due course at the Star of the Congo Mine where considerable changes had already taken place since my departure.

By this time, of course, we were all Union Miniere employees and a number of new faces were to be seen at the Star, including a sprinkling of Belgians, one of whom was the new General Manager, a man called Bertholet.

F. C. Moore was another new arrival from the Rand and one of my first jobs was to go to the Lubumbashi with him to carry out the first survey for the Smelter site, where preliminary work was to be started at once.

Some temporary houses were erected at Lubumbashi and as soon as they were ready I moved down there with Horner. Pending the arrival of Mrs. Horner, he and I shared a large hut. Perkins was also there, also Tom Bayne a brother-in-law of Robert Williams and Middleton, who was compound manager.

The first job started was the canal some one and a half miles in length, which tapped water from the Lubumbashi river and brought it down to a reservoir commanding the smelter site. Contractors were engaged to begin earthworks, such as railway sidings, excavations for foundations, etc., and bricks were made for offices, staff quarters, etc. Two of the first houses built were those for the Horners and myself, and it was a great day when I moved into a real house of my own.

In due course, Horner went down to railhead and returned with Mrs. Horner and Virginia, who was something of a celebrity, being the first white

baby. With them came also a Miss Salmond who was the first unmarried white girl in the place and who subsequently became Mrs Farquar.

During these early days at Lubumbashi I got quite a lot of shooting and became the official provider of meat for the camp. The valleys of the Lubumbashi and Karavia rivers contained lots of game, and it was here that I bagged my first rhinoceros. Rhinoceros are very rare in Katanga and this was actually the first one that I had ever seen. I had picked up the spoor one Sunday morning and, after following it for an hour or so, suddenly came upon it standing motionless at a distance of some 50 yards. A rhinoceros gives you the impression of being a quite impossible creature—something out of a nightmare or the imagination of an H. G. Wells! It couldn't happen in real life!

It is rather interesting to remember that this rhinoceros was eventually killed almost on the exact spot where the Post office of Elisabethville now stands.

I used to go out shooting every week-end and soon got to know all the country within 25 miles or so extremely well, and I had a number of places where I used regularly to camp. There was no difficulty in getting boys to go with me—in fact there was great competition to go in view of the probability of meat.

One week-end, when I camped about six miles away from the smelter site, I heard lion very close in the night and set out next morning to try and find them, hoping for a kill. I had nearly given up hope and was walking along parallel with the river where there was a belt of unburnt long grass along the bank. Suddenly, at about 100 yards distance, a lion and a lioness walked out of the grass, caught sight of me and proceeded to gallop off towards the bush diagonally away from me. The lioness was leading and I just had time to get a quick shot at the male: to my great joy I heard my bullet thud and saw him rear up on his hind legs, tearing at the air and roaring.