



VITAL SHOTS ON THE ELEPHANT

Plate 1

THE DANGER SIGNAL, EARS PRICKED, TRUNK ALERT.  
THE TWO FRONTAL SHOTS HAVE BEEN ROUGHLY SHOWN BY RINGS DRAWN ON THE PHOTOGRAPH.

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VOLUME XIV

## BIG GAME SHOOTING IN AFRICA

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With one hundred & fifty  
ILLUSTRATIONS



pp. 1-445

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## SOUTH AFRICA (Continued)

## CHAPTER FOUR pp. 352-365

## BIG GAME IN THE EARLY DAYS

By SIR A. P. GORDON CUMMING, BT.

ONE of the earliest white men to bring African big game shooting to the notice of the public was Roualeyn Gordon Cumming. He was born in Scotland in 1820, and joined the 4th Madras Light Cavalry in 1839; but not liking India he transferred to the Cape Mounted Rifles. His inborn passion for hunting, however, was too strong, and he resigned his Commission. From 1844 to 1849 he did five trips into what was then the far interior of South Africa, shooting every variety of game and trading ivory, where no white man had yet penetrated. To quote his own words, "I was the first to penetrate into the interior of the Bama-ngwato. I should have pushed still further, but the great losses I experienced in cattle and horses prevented me from doing so." He was helped on more than one occasion by Dr. Livingstone, who was then in charge of a Mission Station at Bakatla.

He was armed, of course, only with muzzle loaders, and for his first trip his battery consisted of three double-barrelled rifles by Purdey, William Moore & Dickson, of Edinburgh—the latter two-grooved—"The most perfect and useful rifle I ever had the pleasure of using"—and one heavy single-barrelled German rifle, carrying 12 to the lb. Besides these he had three stout double-barrelled guns for rough work when hard riding and quick loading were required, several lead-ladles of various sizes, a whole host of bullet moulds, loading-rods, shot-belts, powder flasks, and shooting belts, 3 cwt. of lead, 50 lbs. of pewter for hardening the balls to be used in destroying the larger game, 10,000 prepared leaden bullets, bags of shot of all sizes, 100 lbs. of fine sporting gunpowder, 300 lbs. of coarse gunpowder, about 50,000 best percussion caps, 2000 gun flints, greased patches, and cloth to be converted into the same. He later acquired a large Elephant gun carrying 4 to the lb., and a Dutch rifle carrying 6 to the lb. Two of these weapons, the two-grooved and the six-bore, subsequently burst, but luckily without harming any one. For Elephants he used specially hardened bullets, using a composition of one of pewter to four of lead.

His transport consisted of Cape wagons. This type of wagon was a large and powerful, yet loosely constructed vehicle, running on four wheels. Its extreme length was about 18 feet; its breadth varying from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 feet; the depth of the sides was about 2 feet 6 inches in front, but higher towards the back of the wagon. All along the sides two rows of iron staples were riveted, in which were fastened the boughs forming the tent, which

arched over the wagon to a height of 5 feet, with a strong canvas sail over all. The wagon was steered by a pole, called the dissel-boom, and was pulled normally by a span or team of twelve oxen, but a full second team was often needed to get the wagons through rivers and difficult places.

In spite of this antiquated material, in five years he killed over one hundred Elephants, besides numbers of every variety of the big and small game of Africa.

He was a crack shot, as it must be remembered that with these old-fashioned weapons he had to make an allowance in elevation for any shot at over 50 to 75 yards range. On one occasion he claims to have made a fine double shot, "Knocking over two old Blesboks right and left, at a hundred and a hundred and fifty yards"; and another day he shoots two Kudus and a Palla, one of the former from the saddle as he bounded past at a hundred yards.

He acquired great skill in loading in the saddle at full gallop, a feat which might test the skill of many with a modern breech-loader, especially as he was often dressed only in a shirt and the kilt. A well-trained horse was, of course, essential, and his best was named "Kirkland," and is described as the best shooting horse in Southern Africa. He understood his work so well that he would suddenly halt in full career when his rider wished to fire, if the latter merely placed his hand on his neck. He writes, "I remember having a discussion with the C.O. of a regiment of Heavy Dragoons on this subject, and we agreed that nothing can surpass a double-barrelled smooth bore. When a two-grooved rifle has been once or twice discharged, the bullet requires considerable power to drive it home, and to a mounted man this is very inconvenient. I consider that no regiment in the service was more effectually armed than my own corps, the Cape Mounted Rifles, who were furnished with short double-barrelled smooth bores, carrying 12 to the lb. and having stout percussion locks. To accelerate loading, the hunter ought to have his balls stitched up in their patches and well greased before taking the field. This was my invariable custom, and after a little practice I could load and fire in the saddle although riding at a gallop."

His courage amounted to recklessness, but it must be remembered that the game he was hunting were generally unaccustomed to guns and men. As he says himself, "The guides pointed out the herd of Elephants standing in a grove of shady trees, the wounded one being some distance behind with another Elephant, who was endeavouring to assist it. These Elephants had probably never before heard the report of a gun, and having neither seen nor smelt me were unconscious of the presence of man."

And again: "The Buffaloes crossed the valley in front of me; but by riding hard I obtained a broad-side shot at the last bull, and fired both barrels into him. He continued his course, but I separated him from the troop. My rifle being a two-grooved, which is hard to load, I was unable to do so on horseback, and followed with it empty in the hope of bringing him to bay. After following at a hard gallop for about two miles I was riding within five yards of his huge broad stern. I expected every minute that he would come to bay, and give me time to load, but this he did not seem disposed to do. At length, finding I had the speed of him, I increased my pace and going ahead I placed myself right before him, thus expecting to force him to stand at bay; upon which he instantly charged me with a

low roar, very similar to the voice of a Lion. My horse Colesberg neatly avoided the charge, and the bull resumed his course." To quote another story: "I presently beheld a bull Black Rhinoceros standing within a hundred yards of me. Dismounting from my horse I secured him to a tree, and then stalked within twenty yards of the huge beast under cover of a large, strong bush. Hearing me advance he came on to see what it was, and suddenly protruded his horny nose within twenty yards of me. Knowing that a front shot would not prove deadly, I sprang to my feet, and ran behind the bush. Upon this the villain charged, blowing loudly, and chased me round the bush. Had his activity been equal to his ugliness, my wanderings would have terminated here; but by my superior agility I had the advantage in the turn. After standing a short time eyeing me through the bush, he got a whiff of my wind, which at once alarmed him. Uttering a blowing noise, and erecting his insignificant yet saucy-looking tail, he wheeled about, leaving me master of the field."

On another occasion with a Rhinoceros he quotes: "Spurring my horse, I dashed ahead and rode right in his path. Upon this the hideous monster instantly charged me in the most resolute manner, blowing loudly through his nostrils. Although I quickly wheeled about to my left, he followed me at such a furious pace for several hundred yards with his horrid horny snout within a few yards of my horse's tail that my little Bushman thought his master's destruction inevitable." And an episode with an Elephant: "We heard her preparing for a second charge when the natives beat a retreat, but I very rashly waited to receive her and just as she cleared the cover I let fly at her forehead. Regardless of my shot she came down upon me, at a tremendous pace, shrilly trumpeting. It was a near thing, for I was burdened with my rifle and Rhinoceros-horn loading-rod, and my shooting-belt containing about forty rounds of ammunition. I escaped her by my speed, and the instant she halted I faced about and gave her the other barrel behind the shoulder." And again with a Lion: "I suddenly beheld two huge yellow Lionesses about a hundred and fifty yards to my left holding a course parallel to my own. I rashly commenced a rapid stalk upon them, and fired at the nearest, having only one shot in my rifle. The ball told loudly, and the Lioness wheeled right round and came on, lashing her tail, showing her teeth, and making horrid murderous deep growls. The instant the Lioness came on I stood up to my full height, holding my rifle and my arms extended high above my head. This checked her in her course, but on looking round and observing Ruyter slowly advancing she made another forward movement, growling terribly. I felt that this was a moment of great danger, and that my only chance of safety was extreme steadiness: so, standing motionless as a rock, with my eyes firmly fixed upon her, I called out in a clear commanding voice, 'Holloa! old girl, what's the hurry? Take it easy; holloa! holloa!' She instantly halted, and seemed perplexed, and I then thought it prudent to beat a retreat, which I did very slowly, talking to the Lioness all the time."

Another adventure with a Hippopotamus: "I took the Sea-cow next me, and with my first ball gave her a mortal wound, knocking loose the great plate on the top of her skull when she commenced plunging round and round. I was in a state of great anxiety about her, for I feared she would get into deep water and be lost. To settle the matter, therefore, I fired a second shot from the bank, which, entering the roof of her skull,

A. P. Gordon Cumming,

Big game in the early days, 3 SP-365



Plates 112-117

## A MEMORY OF R. GORDON CUMMING

PHOTOS OF PICTURES TO ILLUSTRATE SOME OF HIS WANDERINGS IN S. AFRICA 70 YEARS AGO. FOR THE YARNS THEMSELVES, WHICH THESE PICTURES REPRESENT, SEE THE TEXT.