

THE DIARIES OF  
LORD LOUIS  
MOUNTBATTEN

1920–1922



Tours with the Prince of Wales

Edited by  
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COLLINS  
8 Grafton Street, London W1  
1987

I received the Maharaja of Benares, when he came to pay his official call, and was present at the ceremony when David gave him *itr* and *pan*. I also received the fat old Maharaja Kumar when he was sent with a deputation to fetch David for the return visit. We drove out seven miles through absolutely deserted streets, though of course practically the whole way led through country. We had to cross the Ganges by a pontoon bridge to get to Ramnagar Palace. Here the usual return visit ceremony was gone through. I had forgotten to bring a handkerchief and the P.M.O. very kindly passed me his for me to have my *itr* put on. I was sorry for him as the *itr* was particularly strong.

We now crossed the Ganges in a motor boat, the steps of the Palace Ghat being lined by queer old irregular State Troops and two of the gorgeous state barges being moored up near by.

At the other side the Maharaja had a silver barouche waiting and landaus for the Staff, in which we drove to the Benares Hindu University. Here David and His Highness the Chancellor (the Maharaja of Mysore) exchanged addresses. David's was excellent, consisting mostly of sound advice to the undergraduates, which was almost entirely wasted since those rude young cubs had not troubled to turn up. Although the term was in full swing only just over 100 out of the odd 1500 turned up.

The official lunch took place on return. The Maharaja, who is too orthodox to eat European food, sat by and watched, exchanging speeches with David at the conclusion. We now once more embarked in the motor boat and processed down the river.

Benares is too picturesque for words from the river, especially the countless ghats or waterfront steps, which were crowded with people who waved a welcome to David. In two places we saw fires at which bodies were actually being cremated in the crudest possible way, while further dead bodies lay waiting their turn, covered only with flowers. Temples were everywhere.

When we got back I changed into a lounge suit, and went into the tent where exhibits of local craft were being shown. I had always heard of the wonders of Benares brocades and handwoven stuffs in gold and silver, and bought half a dozen people Christmas presents of these attractive stuffs. I also attended a parade of pensioners with David before leaving by train at 7.30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, 14 DECEMBER We arrived at the small terminal station of Bhikna Thori at 10.00 a.m. and were met by the Prime Minister of



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Nepal, H.H. Maharaja Sir Chandra Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana. Jung Bahadur is a fine old man with a genial smile and a good flow of English at his command. On the platform there were at least eight or more men who looked very alike, these proved to be sons, grandsons, sons-in-law, nephews, etc. of the old man. We embarked in our good old Crossley cars and drove about a quarter of a mile up to a point where a white signpost said 'Nepal Frontier' and beyond which a triumphal arch had been erected. On either side were drawn up Guards of Honour, one from a very smart Nepalese Regiment, the other from the escort of the British Envoy to the Court of Nepal. The former are men of the same type as our Gurkhas, that is to say Mongolians, but coming more from the centre of Asia they are much taller. They were dressed in smart red kourtas (shirt-like coats) and had an excellent European brass band; the latter are native Indian troops.

After David had inspected the Guards we drove on to the Camp which had been pitched about another half mile on. We are now no longer in British territory, for Nepal owes us no allegiance and though a faithful and loyal ally it is a foreign country, and a most exclusive one at that for no foreigner may pass the borders without the Prime Minister's permission on pain of being shot.

A road has been constructed through the jungle and a great space has been cleared and turfed on which our camp has been pitched. All round a strong zareeba of stout branches with pointed ends has been built to keep out the various wild animals which abound in the jungle round about, such as tigers, bears, rhinoceroses and wild elephants. As a matter of fact the zareeba will not keep out wild elephants and as they are sacred and may not be shot the only alternative has been to build a kind of platform about 30 or 40 feet from the ground, or machan as it is more correctly called. This is roughly built of branches and is scaled by rickety steps made of branches bound round with grass. Two herds of these wild elephants are known to be in the district, one of them even came up to the camp only a short while ago. They have also laid huge bonfires to frighten them and other wild beasts away, and of course dozens of sentries are on duty all round so we ought to be safe enough amidst these wild surroundings.

The camp is bounded on one side by the steep and precipitous bank of a river, which is dried up except for a small trickle. The view is simply magnificent. I can't help thinking of Kipling's jungle books and fitting Mowgli and all the animals into this jungle.

About 11.00 a.m. our party split up, some going about twenty

miles out after a tiger which had been tracked from its kill that morning, while David's party in which I was included went to a place only four or five miles from camp. Here we left the cars and selected pad elephants, which knelt down to let us mount. I got a most delightful little fellow, with a funny fast walk. The pad is made of leather and is usually quite plain, with handles in front and behind to hold on to. One sits immediately behind the mahout, who sits astride the creature's neck, one leg behind each ear. The mahout usually holds a thin stick with which he thumps the elephant hard on the head every now and then, the latter taking about as much notice of this as though he were being tickled with a straw.

However, the mahout also has an ankus as an alternative, which is a nasty-looking instrument consisting of a large iron spike and a hook mounted on a short and thick wooden shaft or else a steel shaft. It is only used when the elephants become unmanageable, as when near a tiger, the pointed end being used to prod the beast on behind the ears, the hook to hook into its ears and pull it round or back. The queerest instrument of the lot however is a wooden mallet, like a nine pin, which ordinarily hangs by a piece of string from the back of the pad. When it is desired that the elephant should hasten its pace much more than usual, the mahout's boy, who stands behind holding on to two lines from the girth, turns round and picking up the mallet proceeds to belabour the root of the elephant's tail, with that side of the mallet which is studded with nails. If only a slight increase of speed is desired the other or plain side of the mallet can be used, but as a rule with only little effect.

We set off on these pad elephants, I carrying my two rifles with me. Presently we came to a spot where there were a number of other elephants, some with howdahs, some with tables and chairs and food for luncheon, and some with photographers, etc. We waited here till word came that the tiger had been successfully ringed and then we transferred to the howdah elephants. I, being modest, waited till the last and so got the worst howdah. The ordinary shooting howdah is made of basketwork and wood, with sides sloping up till it is high enough in front for one to stand, without fear of being thrown out, to shoot. My howdah was a highly modern contraption, with sides no higher than my knees, so that it was out of the question to stand up and I had to shoot sitting down. The sides were made of metal and padded on the inside. The seat was only raised one inch off the floor, which was covered with rubber matting like in a motor car. The front



of the howdah had little shelves and cupboards and cartridge racks, and on the right there were positions for a double barrel and a single barrel rifle. My elephant being slightly smaller than the three preceding ones and the howdah so much lower I was not troubled by overhanging boughs much, those that seemed at all likely to be in the way were promptly cut off by the mahout with his kukri, which all gurkhas carry.

After half an hour's ride we came upon a huge line of elephants which we joined, thus entering the ring of elephants encircling the tiger. All the guns were put together at one place, three each side of David. We advanced slowly towards the centre of the circle, whose diameter must have been quite half a mile. Presently we halted and some specially trained elephants were put into the centre to drive the tiger towards us. Presently there was a rustle in the undergrowth and much yelling on the part of the men and something streaked by, which I could not properly see. I was afraid that this was our tiger, but it turned out only to be a sambhur, a kind of large deer. Another advance, halt and false alarm, as a barking deer leapt out quite near me.

The circle was much smaller now, not more than two or three hundred yards in diameter, and the elephants in the centre were busy nosing about, when suddenly some of them started trumpeting loudly and all the mahouts yelled furiously and in the distance I could see the long grass and undergrowth rustle. I was duly thrilled to learn that this time the rustle had been caused by a tiger.

After a further wait we distinctly heard the tiger growl. Then there was a rush along the line and more trumpeting and yelling. I was feeling thoroughly excited now and peered anxiously ahead for a glimpse of the tiger. Presently I was rewarded, for I saw the grass parting and as I got my rifle up a light brown body flashed past an opening in the undergrowth and was gone.

Another wait. The elephants beat down towards us again and this time the tiger came out on my left, but so perfectly has nature camouflaged his coat that he was very hard to see, the more so as he was decidedly not standing still. David fired, two more shots rang out, and then I fired although the tiger had passed a good way to my left. He appeared to be all right, for a little later an incautious mahout approached too near and with a roar the tiger charged and got the elephant in the leg just as it was escaping. Finally they succeeded in driving him down again and this time I saw him so distinctly that I took careful aim and fired together with several others. We waited to

see results. After a while, as nothing happened, our side advanced cautiously to find the tiger stretched out full length, dead, a bullet having passed through its neck. This shot is attributed to Col. Worgan's<sup>1</sup> last shot, and another shot in the hindquarters to David's first one, and according to the custom which gives a tiger to the first shot it was called David's.

The tiger was a fine one measuring 9 ft 3 ins in length up to the tip of his tail. We had lunch near by and returned to the cars by pad elephants, reaching there about 4 o'clock.

THURSDAY, 15 DECEMBER We arrived at the place at which our elephants were about 11.45 and at once transferred to them. We went out a mile or so on pad elephants and then transferred to the howdahs. This time I took care to get a first-class howdah, mounted on a really big and intelligent-looking creature. Hardly had we got settled before further news came to say that the tiger had broken the ring and got away. We proceeded however and joined in the line of elephants that were sweeping out, endeavouring to ring the tiger afresh. In this we proved unsuccessful and as it was by now half past one we stopped and had lunch. I was deeply grieved to find that they actually expected the royal party to eat off the ground like mere mortals out shooting, as they had not brought any tables and chairs on elephants!

I saw several perfectly pathetic looking calves tied to pegs at various places, waiting to be killed by some tiger. I think that is the most unpleasant aspect of the whole affair.

On our way back to the cars one of the Prime Minister's sons, the one who is running this camp and shoot, came up to me and said, 'And why should not the noble lord shoot a rhinoceros?' I looked round but as there seemed to be a dearth of noble lords in the immediate neighbourhood I came to the conclusion that he must really be addressing me and answered, 'Why indeed not?'

He then promised to take me out himself after one in a day or two and went on to talk about Papa, saying that he was still remembered in Nepal and how Jung Bahadur, himself, took him into his howdah to shoot his tiger. At first I wondered if he knew who I was and who my father was but when he went on to speak of the debt of gratitude everyone, including Nepal, owed him for his order to the fleet to stand

<sup>1</sup> Colonel R. B. Worgan, attached to the Prince's Staff to supervise transport and other such arrangements.



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fast in 1914<sup>1</sup> I began to realise that this man knew a lot. He is General Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, son of the Prime Minister and son-in-law of the King, a general by birth and a very nice and intelligent man.

We took him back in our car and I have rarely been so entertained by a flow of witty and intelligent conversation. He knows all the family, since he was in London in 1908 and also studies all the newspapers assiduously. He knows all our old and new names, who my brother is, whom he married and when. About me he knew less since he asked, 'Are you a married man?' The reply being in the negative he proceeded, 'Please write to me when you are, so that I may share your joy.'

FRIDAY, 16 DECEMBER New of a tiger came about 9 o'clock this morning. There were two kills which they were endeavouring to ring and we waited in camp until the news should come that this had been accomplished. It was not until shortly after noon that the news came and we started out.

We motored to a place called Baghai about 13 miles from Bhikna Thori and there mounted our elephants, some going on pads, others, including myself, in howdahs. The tiger was inside a patch of high reeds and pampas grass, surrounded on two sides by trees. Those trees that were in the way were quickly cleared by elephants, who can push over fairly large trees with their heads and pull branches off with their trunks. On my side there were no trees, and the shikar elephants started beating from my corner. After about five minutes two shots rang out in rapid succession, followed shortly afterwards by a third shot. These proved to have been fired by David and Joey. The latter fired the first two at a range of about twenty yards and thought that he had hit the tiger in the head. David loosed off at the tiger as he passed him at high speed and did not think he hit him.

For the next twenty minutes or so the tiger gave no sign of his existence, although the shikar elephants were moving about.

I felt sure that Joey had killed him and sat down in my howdah. Hardly had I done so than there was a roar, unmistakably the voice of the tiger, and I leapt to my feet. In a minute he appeared out of the tall grass in front of me some twenty yards away. I fired at his shoulder and he leapt back into cover, as he did so I fired the second barrel of my express rifle and then Armstrong handed me my shot gun, which

<sup>1</sup> A deed for which posterity too often gives the credit to Winston Churchill, though in fact he did no more than endorse the First Sea Lord's decision.

was loaded with contractile bullet cartridges, and I blazed away both barrels at where I could still see the grass moving. Armstrong thought I hit him three times, but the mahout was wiser and said to him in Hindustani, 'No, the Sahib hit the tiger in the foreleg once only.' As the tiger had come out with his left side facing me this meant that I had hit the near foreleg, and on subsequent inspection of the body this proved to be the case.

Another five or ten minutes passed during which the wounded tiger lay low, and as the shikar elephants were having no success our side of the ring was ordered forward. I advanced with them, but slightly in advance so as to give a better radius of fire. Presently there was a roar and the tiger charged out at an elephant to my left. I swung round but there were two elephants in the line of fire and I could only fire as the tiger was returning to cover.

Another three minutes passed and this time I advanced well in front of the line so that if he charged again I should get a clear shot. Sure enough there was a snarl and the tiger came out straight in front of me not ten yards away. This time I was ready and, aiming, as I had been taught, between the eyes, I fired.

The result was amazing, for he simply crumpled up and fell in his tracks. He proved to be a very fine tiger measuring 9 ft 7 ins between two pegs placed at the tip of the tail and the nose. The Nepalese usually measure round the curve of the back, which would bring this one's length up to nearly 10 ft. Its weight was estimated at 450 lbs. Its coat was in good condition and was well marked. There were three holes visible; the one in the leg, which was the one my mahout saw me get, the one in the forehead where I had finally killed him, and another in the back of the head.

This I at first attributed to Joey and I said to him, 'If this is your shot, as you fired first it is your tiger.' He replied, 'I thought I hit him but am not certain, so it may be your tiger.' Colonel Worgan decided that the whole question must be settled by Mr Ellison, the taxidermist attached to the camp, after the beast had been skinned. To this we all agreed. Mr Ellison when he saw the skull at once decided that both holes in the head had been made by one bullet, passing in at the front and out at the back, which could only have been my final and fatal shot. In other words the tiger had only been hit twice and on each occasion by me, so that it was my tiger. Naturally I was frightfully pleased but I am afraid that I talked a good deal too much about the whole question and as to the possibility of it being mine or Joey's tiger,



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which was silly of me and I am sure could not have added to my popularity with the others.<sup>1</sup>

SUNDAY, 18 DECEMBER In obedience to H.I.M.'s wishes there was no shooting, much to the disgust of the Nepalese, who do not understand our Sunday. They were also disappointed that David did not go out after big game yesterday, as he merely shot jungle fowl and snipe in the afternoon, but I am afraid that David very definitely does not care for this ring tiger shooting. It is not very sporting, as the tiger has practically no chance of escape, and whenever David goes he feels that he is stopping other people from shooting until he has shot first, although he has issued orders that no one is to wait for him to shoot. In fact he is too keen about his riding and polo to care much about anything else and he goes down every morning to knock a polo ball about.

I went down to the skinning camp and saw my skin. It was interesting but I could have done with some itr.

MONDAY, 19 DECEMBER Another blank day for me and at the same place, Kasra. I have now motored 120 miles after rhino without seeing even a sign of one. Two rhinos were supposed to have been marked for us by trackers, but one got away too far before we arrived. We were hot on the trail for the other one, expecting to see it any minute, when suddenly my elephant shot forward, nearly throwing me out of the howdah. I naturally thought that we had come across the rhino and it had charged.

It afterwards was explained to me that the big tusker I was on had suddenly gone 'must'.<sup>2</sup> This is exceedingly dangerous as it is the only time when an elephant will not obey his mahout and generally sees red. This one first went for the cow elephant ahead of me and rammed his tusks into her. The mahout hit him an awful thump on the head and away we went. The elephant banged the howdah up against trees and branches so that we had to cower down in the bottom and hope for the best. I have rarely been so buffeted about, and it was ten times worse than a P boat in a gale. The old bull elephant careered over the roughest ground and was eventually brought up by the mahout, who

<sup>1</sup> 'I have been having slight troubles with the Staff – partly my own fault and partly not –' Mountbatten told his mother two days later, 'but everything is all right again.'

<sup>2</sup> Or musth, a state of frenetic sexual excitement which periodically afflicts male elephants.

had drawn his kukri and was slashing away with the blade at the brute's forehead, cutting it to ribbons before he got the elephant at all under control.

WEDNESDAY, 21 DECEMBER This was our last day in Nepal. Personally I was sorry, as life in camp amid all the wild jungle surroundings has had a great fascination for me. For David's sake I am glad that we are going back to places where he can play polo, as he has been caring less and less for this shooting. In fact he has spent three out of the seven shooting days after small game. On Saturday he went out after birds, and both yesterday and today he waited in till after 2.00 p.m. for news of cover near by and when this did not come he went out walking up game with a shot gun. Today, as well as jungle fowl, peahens and green parrots, he shot a large snake nearly ten foot long, of a species which has not yet been identified but which is believed to be poisonous.

There are no telephones or telegraphs in Nepal, neither are there trains. The road into Katmandu, the capital, is so arranged that the last stages of it can only be accomplished on an elephant and the few cars that are used in the city have had to be conveyed there in pieces by elephants.

The Maharaja has presented all of us with a very fine kukri and a set of Nepalese coins each. Mine has a sheath covered with silver, the arms of Nepal being worked in in gold. Besides this General Kaiser has given me some ordinary kukris and is sending me his photo.

It is reputed that this shoot has cost Nepal 46 lakhs or about £300,000. Anyway it is safe to say that the total is at least a quarter of a million sterling. About 30 head of big game have been obtained, all told, and so each animal may be considered worth £10,000. I believe that there are only between three and four hundred elephants here and not seven hundred as I was told before.

Another feature I have so far omitted to mention is the magnificent view one gets from the camp of the Himalayas. The peaks are about 150 miles distant. They make the Alps appear like valleys, as the Red Queen would have put it. Incidentally the name is pronounced here 'Hmahlyers'.

THURSDAY, 22 DECEMBER Patna was reached at 10.00 a.m. The metre gauge train only took us as far as Paleza Ghat where the S.S.



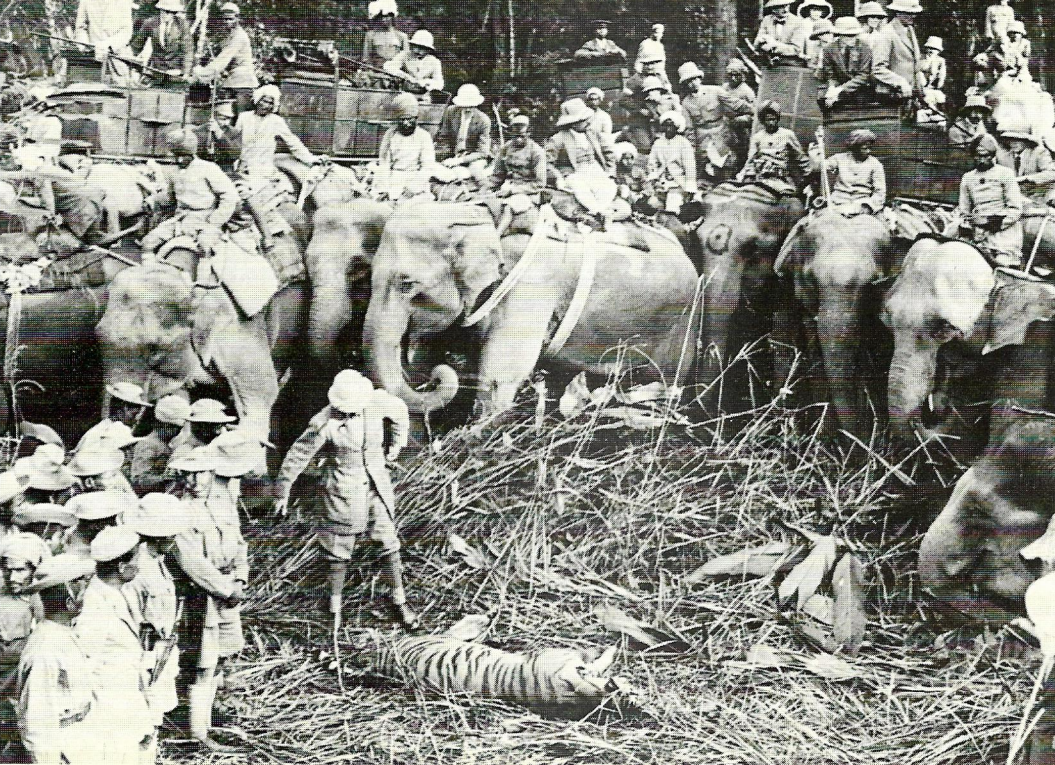


*above:* One of the Crossley motor cars passes back into British India during the visit to Nepal (14 December 1921).

*below:* The first tiger killed, with the five guns who were present (from left to right): Piers Legh, Admiral Halsey, H.R.H., Mountbatten and Colonel Worgan (14 December 1921).







*above:* The scene at Baghai after Mountbatten shot his tiger (16 December 1921).

*below:* The procession on arrival at Rangoon (2 January 1922).

