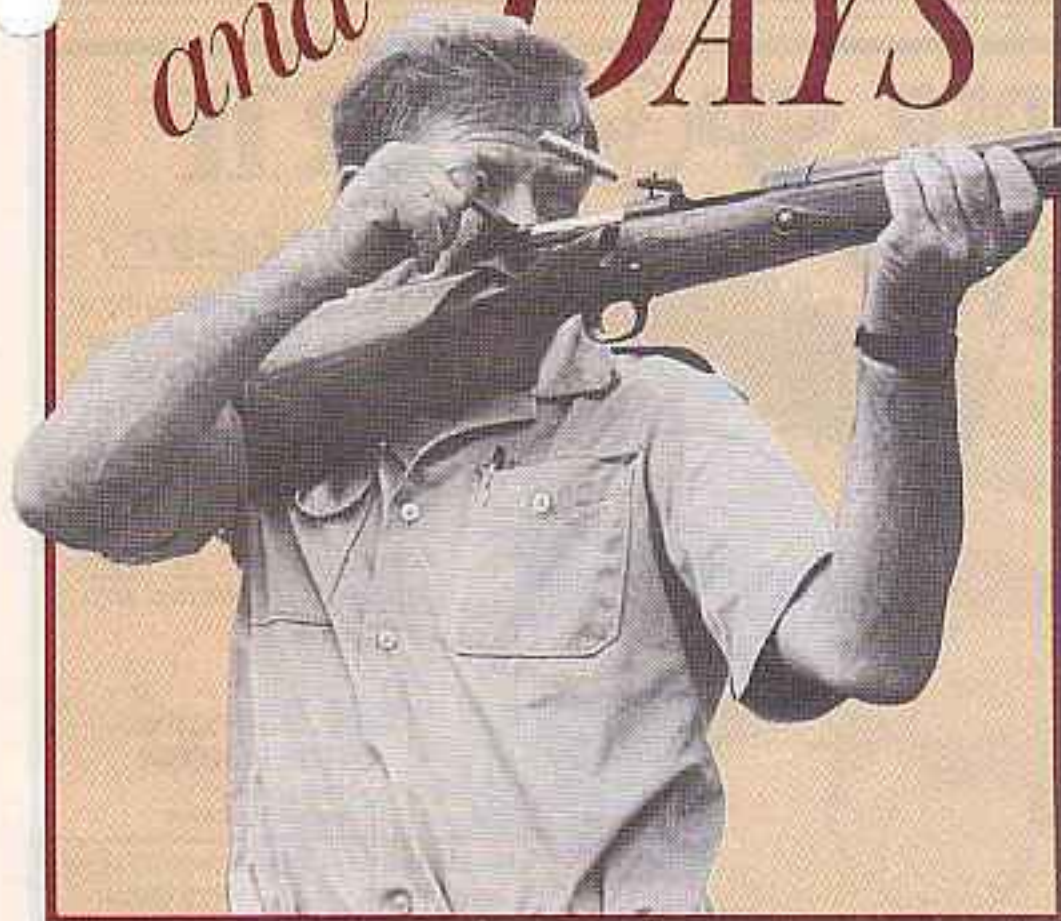


KENYA GUNS and DAYS

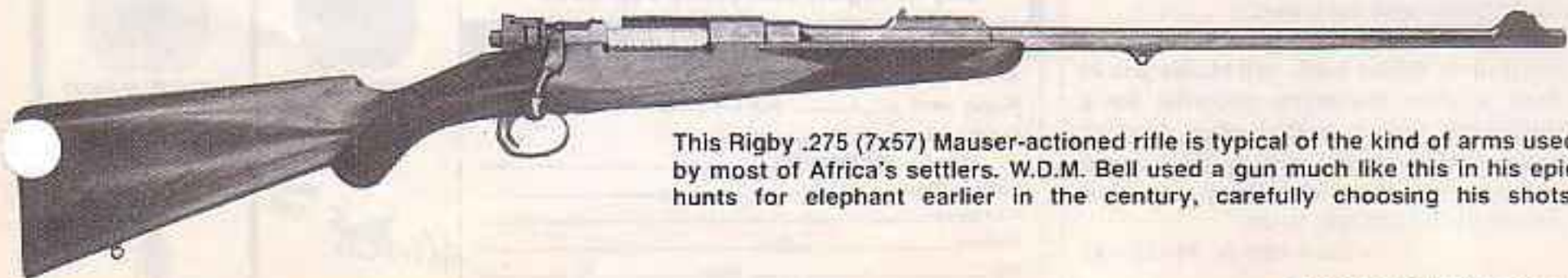


BY FLINN AAGAARD

THOUGH I can walk all day, running has never been my style, and 9000 ft. of altitude up in the Mt. Kenya forest did not help. But Stalin, Jens' big German shepherd, was barking "bayed" more urgently than ever, so I kept pounding on through the dew-wet forest with the big stinging nettles burning my bare knees, desperately trying to keep up with Jens and Joe.

As we burst out into the little glade where Stalin had been holding her at bay, the buffalo cow flung up her head and glared at us, completely ignoring the dog that danced in front of her. It was obvious that she would stand no longer. Jens had done a lot of control work around here trying to keep the buffalo out of his wheat, and she knew all about dogs and men.

Joe threw up his double .500/.450, but instead of the expected "boom" all he got was a dry "click"—a



This Rigby .275 (7x57) Mauser-actioned rifle is typical of the kind of arms used by most of Africa's settlers. W.D.M. Bell used a gun much like this in his epic hunts for elephant earlier in the century, carefully choosing his shots.

misfire! Jens got off a shot with his 10.75 mm Mauser as the buffalo turned to go, and I noticed a burst of spray from her damp hide as the bullet struck the front of her shoulder. Then she was gone, and Stalin af-

we caught our breath, Joe broke the double rifle and extracted the dud cartridge. The primer showed some firing pin indentation, but perhaps not quite as deep as it should have been. Both rifle and ammunition were old, as the .500/.450 (which in English usage means a .500 case necked down to use a .450 cal. bullet) was obsolete even then, and fresh ammo unobtainable. Joe shrugged, and slipped another cartridge into that barrel.

Stalin was barking anew. Jens yelled at us to come on, and we started running again. We came to a little game path that seemed to head towards the commotion, and followed it, with Jens about 10 yds. in the lead. Suddenly the buffalo appeared, coming back up the path with the dog at her heels. Jens threw a quick shot at her, but she just shook her head and came on.

Jens stepped back off the trail as he reloaded, tripped on a root, and fell flat on his back. As she drew level with him, the buffalo saw Joe and me, and slid to a halt just as Joe pulled the trigger on the .450—another "click!"

I managed to poke the barrel of my .375 H&H past his shoulder, and fired as Jens also got a shot into her from where he lay sprawled on the ground. The buffalo appeared to be flung sideways off the trail, and lay kicking as Joe tried his left barrel. That went off OK, and the buffalo was still.

Examination showed that none of Jens' shots with the 10.75x68 mm—using "solid" full-metal-jacket bullets, mind you!—had got inside. The one fired as she came up the trail at him hit her in the upper lip, shattered on her teeth, and ended up as confetti at the back of her throat. The bullet he fired from the ground exploded on her shoulder blade, blowing out a saucer-like hunk of hide and muscle, but leaving hardly a mark on the bone.

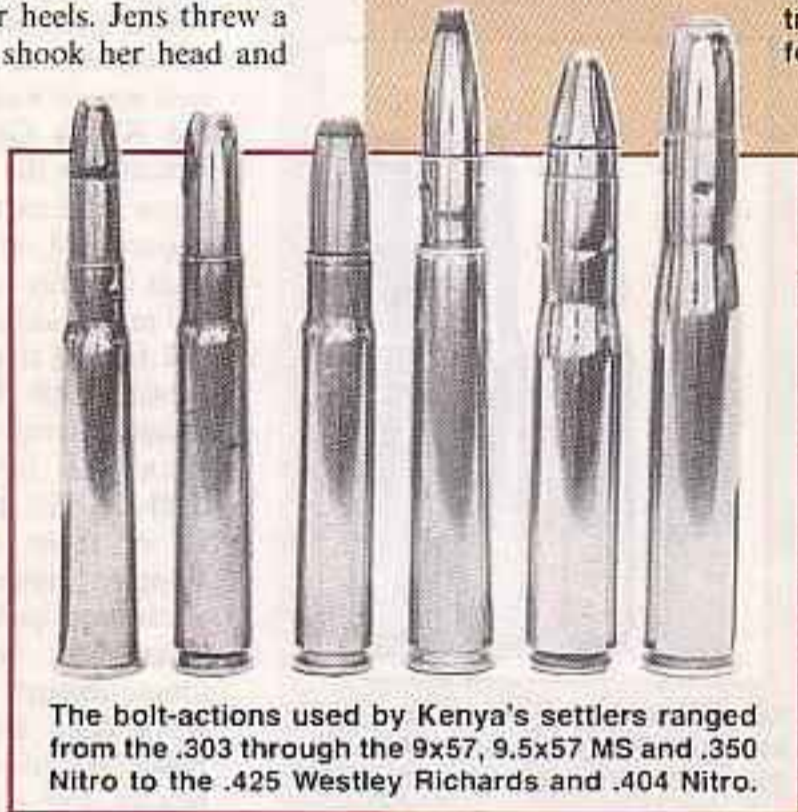
Jens had taken an elephant or two with that 10.75x68 mm, which used a 347-gr. bullet of approx. .423" diameter at about 2200 f.p.s. mv. It was not uncommonly used by African resident hunters, some of whom even liked it. I cannot imagine why, as it was about the most unsatisfactory large game cartridge ever produced, notably lacking in penetration.

The bullet was no doubt a little on the light side for its caliber, but I suspect that a thin and flimsy jacket was its main failing. It has been quite dead for 20 years, and good riddance!

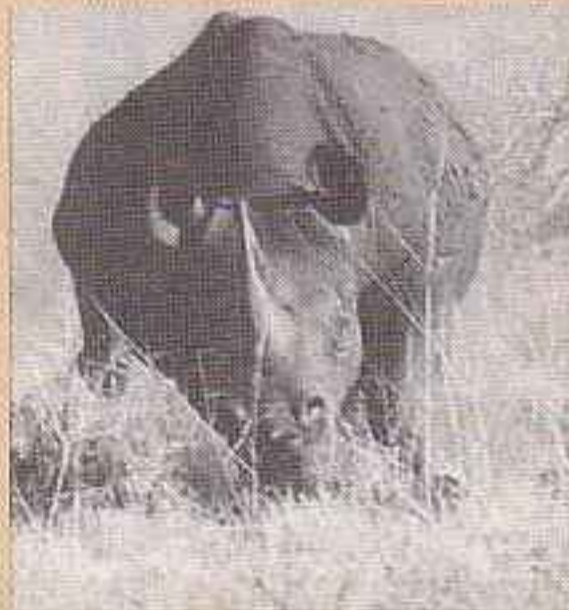
I do not think that Jens Hessel, who later became one of Kenya's top professional hunters, ever used the cartridge again after this episode; while Joe took the .450 and his 9.3x62 mm into Nairobi the very next day and traded them off for a used Winchester Model 70 in .375 H&H. He still has it, and it served



The Kenya Game Department made cartridges of .375 H&H or larger mandatory for game like Cape buffalo and elephant.



The bolt-actions used by Kenya's settlers ranged from the .303 through the 9x57, 9.5x57 MS and .350 Nitro to the .425 Westley Richards and .404 Nitro.



When more than a ton of rhino is on the move, a hunter needs a real stopper round such as the .458 Win. Mag.



The big British magnums were reliable stoppers in their day, but they were discontinued in the 1950s, to be replaced by the .458.



The first Winchester Model 70s to reach Kenya had to be rebbed to stop splitting.

KENYA GUNS and DAYS



The European medium bores like the 9.5x57, 9.3x62 and 10.75x68 have largely been supplanted by the popular .375 H&H.



Smaller numbers like the 6.5x54 MS, 6.5x58 Portuguese, 7x57 and 8x56 MS all were widely favored.

him faithfully for two decades on everything from Thomson's gazelles to lion, buffalo and elephant.

He rather regretted the 9.3 mm, though. It was a standard Fabrique Nationale 1948-sporter on a M98 action, and as such was a direct ancestor of the famous Belgian-made Browning bolt-action rifles that are rapidly becoming collectors' items nowadays.

The 9.3x62 mm was, and is, an excellent medium-bore cartridge, perhaps the most highly regarded of all the commonly available Mauser cartridges by the white settlers of Africa for use on the big stuff. Its 285-gr. .366" diameter roundnose soft-point bullet at a moderate 2360 f.p.s. expanded well but seldom broke up, while the "solid" had a decently thick jacket and penetrated deeply.

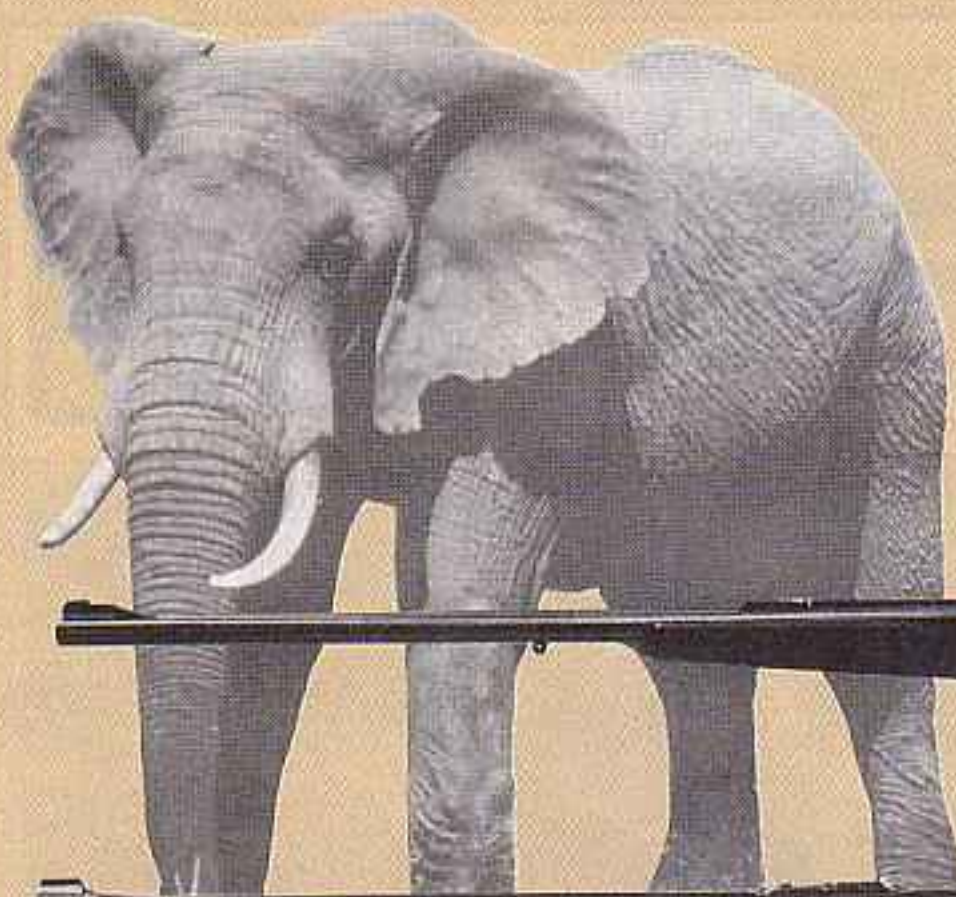
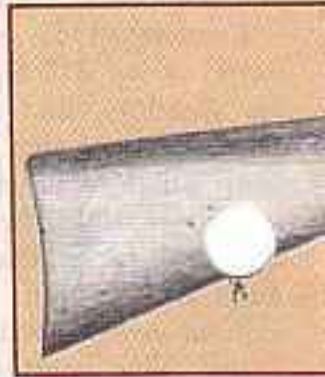
It was a thoroughly dependable cartridge whose performance on buffalo and such approached that of the .375 H&H. This reputation was so well established that when in 1958 the Kenya Game Department decreed that henceforth the .375 Mag. would be the minimum legal cartridge for dangerous game, the department stipulated that experienced resident hunters who had been wont to use the 9.3 mm could continue to do so.

I believe that it would make a superb elk, moose and bear cartridge, having less recoil than the larger-cased .300 to .338 Mags., but all of their close-range stopping power. Ammo could be a problem, as I hear that Norma no longer imports it, though RWS does. Barnes does make .366" diameter bullets in 250 and 300-gr. weights, and cases could likely be made from .30-'06 brass. But I doubt that it would be worth going to all that trouble, at least not for the practical hunter.

It would be simpler for him to settle for that renowned old wildcat, the .35 Whelen, which in Europe would be designated the 9x63 mm, and whose performance in the hunting field would be indistinguishable from that of the Mauser round.

The writings of Ernest Hemingway, Robert

The image of the African rifle is often of expensive British arms like the Purdey double rifle or the Farquharson single-shot rifle.



AMERICAN RIFLEMAN

Ruark and others might leave the impression that the white residents of Africa normally used high-class English rifles such as Holland's .465, Rigby's .416 and .350, or W-stley Richards' .318 in their hunting. With a few exceptions, this was not generally so.

Most of the settlers were not men of affluence, and could by no means afford such firearms, or their expensive ammunition. For the most part they owned just one rifle for all their hunting, and it was usually a Mauser or Mannlicher-Schoenauer. Sporterized .303 Lee-Enfields were also seen, but these were not very common in Kenya as one was required to have a governor's permit to own one.

My father's only rifle during the 1920s and 30s was a 28"-barreled Mauser in 7x57 mm, which he used on all the thin-skinned game, including lion, with great effect, while his hunting partner, Harry Heppes, had a 6.5x58 mm P (originally the Portuguese military cartridge).

Harry's family came from South Africa. They had shipped their ox-wagons to Mombasa and had trekked inland about 1904, while Harry was an infant. But he was raised in the Boer tradition, where a

auer to knock off marauding lions and crop-destroying hippo as late as 1973. That was taking it a little further out of its class than I would care to do.

Nevertheless, I have always had a soft spot for the 6.5 mms. Mostly, I guess, because they are romantic cartridges that figured quite frequently in the adventures of famous hunters early in this century. Men like Blaney Percival, Stigand, Meinertzhagen, and W.D.M. Bell in Africa, and Charles Sheldon and Steffanson in America, used them to bash all manner of beasts, both large and small.

I think that I'll put together a 6.5x57 mm on a 1909 Argentine action I have. It will have a trim and slender stock modelled after that on the original Mauser sporters, but with a higher comb line suited to the 2½X scope I'll have mounted. It will have the front sling swivel on a barrel band, and possibly a set of express sights, just for looks. I am not wild about full-stocked carbines, so it will be a half-stock rifle, most likely with a 22" tube.

I will load it with 140-gr. Hornady bullets at some 2500 - 2600 f.p.s., and will use it to hunt our little Texas Hill Country whitetail. I might even take it to Wyoming



The Mannlicher-Schoenauer carbine, with its butter-knife bolt handle and full-length stock, was a common African arm. One of Aagaard's friends, a rancher, was still using a 6.5 mm MS against lion and hippo a decade ago.

boy was sent out with a rifle and two rounds of ammunition. Failure to bring home either meat or both cartridges resulted in a licking with a hippo-hide "sjambok." A stern schooling indeed, but I have met a hunter or two who would have benefited from it, and Harry became an outstanding shot who represented Kenya at Bisley, and rarely wasted a cartridge.

One of his favorite tricks was to lie patiently waiting on an anthill until he had two gazelles lined up so that he could drop both of them with one shot, which the 6.5 mm's 156-gr. RNSP bullet at 2570 f.p.s. would do handily.

It displayed the remarkable penetration for which it was known even more convincingly on another occasion, when Harry was charged by a rhino while peacefully fishing along the Tana river. He barely had time to unsling the rifle and get off a shot from the hip, braining the beast. Not too bad for a little 6.5 mm soft-nose bullet!

The other .256 (as the English called them), the 6.5x54 mm Mannlicher-Schoenauer was very popular both in the traditional full-stock carbine version, and as a rifle with (I believe) a 23.6" barrel. A rancher friend of mine was still using his rifle-length 6.5 mm Mannlicher-Schoen-

auer to stalk antelope. So what will it do that a 7x57 or 7mm-08 will not do better, or a .257 Roberts just as well? Nothing whatsoever! It will exist simply to delight my heart. Which, upon reflection, is the best of all possible reasons.

The Mannlicher-Schoenauer rifles were finely finished, and with their rotary magazines were remarkably smooth-working. But the bolt handle was too far forward to be reached conveniently with the rifle at the shoulder, and it did not take much grit or dust to tie up their closely fitted actions.

A college friend of mine had a beautiful 6.5 mm M-S carbine that had been customized in Austria. It had the usual double set-trigger, standard open sights, and a scope attached by European quick-detachable claw mounts.

The scope was mounted very high, so that he could peer at the open sights under it through the tunneled mounts. In preparation to using the scope he would press a button under the stock, whereupon the spring-loaded cheek piece would jump up to provide a suitably high comb. Nifty, what?

One day when we were out together Stanley got ready to shoot at an impala, or

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As Finn Aagaard's writing has become familiar to more and more *American Rifleman* readers, we have received an in-

creasing number of letters voicing a common request. The request is that Aagaard's byline appear with greater frequency.

The editors are pleased to announce that Aagaard has joined the *American Rifleman* staff as a Field Editor, and his byline will appear in these pages nearly every month.

Aagaard was a professional hunter in his native Kenya for a decade before emigrating to this country in 1978. His father emigrated to Africa in 1927 to run a coffee plantation, and Aagaard was born in Nairobi five years later.

He was sent off to boarding schools nine months of the year from age six on, then to college in Wales. But, he says, he "couldn't stand the U.K." and returned to attend Egerton Agricultural College in Kenya, 1953-54.

His college days coincided with the Mau Mau uprising, and he served two years as a member of the Police Reserve and then two years as a member of the Kenya Regiment, where he was a member of the shooting team, firing both the Lee-Enfield rifle and the Bren LMG.

After army service, he joined his father in running a ranch at the edge of the "settled area" of the time. Hunting was simply a matter of grabbing a rifle and walking out the door.

He joined with his brother-in-law, Peter Davey, to start Bateleur Safaris in 1967, and was a professional hunter and outfitter until Kenya was closed to hunting in 1977. He met his wife Berit on one safari and "won her on another on a sandy beach of the Athi River by full moon with Kilimanjaro looming over the southern horizon—that's absolutely true!"

Aagaard, wife Berit and their three children now live in the Texas Hill Country where he works as a guide and outfitter. "Our life here," he says, "has many similarities to life on the ranch in Kenya, and I would be happy to live here the rest of my days."



Aagaard's father (r.) and hunting partner Harry Heppes pose at the Aagaard home in Kenya around 1928.

oni or whatever, at fairly long range. He snapped the scope into place, set the trigger, brought the piece to his shoulder, and then realized that he had forgotten to raise the cheek-piece. So he lowered the rifle, and pressed the requisite button.

The slight vibration of the cheek piece springing up into place was enough to jar off the set trigger, and to the considerable consternation of all three of us the piece immediately fired. Whenever I read a rave review about some new and wondrous gadget that is going to revolutionize riflery, I remember Stanley and his marvelous Mannlicher-Schoenauer!

Another schoolmate had an 8x56 mm Mannlicher-Schoenauer—200-gr. bullet, 2200 f.p.s.—the only one that I have ever encountered. To the best of my recollection, it killed the various antelope about as well as anything the rest of us were carrying, though it was obviously no long-range cartridge. Its ballistics are nearly identical to the .35 Rem.

After the 6.5 mm, the most common Mannlicher-Schoenauer chambering was for the 9.5x57 mm cartridge that English settlers tended to refer to, confusingly, as a .375. It employed a 270-gr. bullet at 2150 f.p.s. as loaded by Kynoch (ICI) and fell far short of the .375 H&H Mag. Though it followed, the 9.3x62 mm Mauser was generally held to be the better cartridge. Which it undoubtedly was, for dangerous game at least.

Oddly enough, the only animals I have seen taken with the 9.5 mm were an Axis deer and a Mouflon sheep that a client bagged here in Texas last year. He was using the Hornady 270-gr. spire point loaded to 2150 f.p.s. with 44 gr. of IMR 3031. This bullet smashed through the shoulder joint of the 200-lb. Axis buck, penetrated the chest cavity, and exited without apparently having expanded at all (The buck dropped right there).

Nor did it show any signs of having expanded while travelling all the way through a mouflon from stem to stern. The 235-gr. Speer might be a better bullet in this cartridge, or the 220-gr. Hornady flat-point for use on deer-sized game.

All this matters only to a far-gone enthusiast, as any rational hunter may conclude that the standard .358 Win. is superior in every way! The ballistics of another fairly popular round, the 9x57 mm Mauser—247 grs. at 2310 f.p.s. in a 28½" barrel, according to my 1956 DWM catalog—exactly match those of the .358 Win. I never saw it used on anything, but it had a reputation for being quite effective on lion.

Though visiting American sportsmen almost invariably brought a .30-'06 with them, the cartridge was not much used by the settlers, a matter of availability and

cost, I imagine. The only one that I had any experience with before the early 60s was (again!) a Mannlicher-Schoenauer marked only "7.62x63 mm." Surprisingly enough, I saw very few 8x57 mm Mausers either, though the 8x60 mm was quite common, and well respected.

My very first center-fire rifle was a Mauserwerke type B sporter in that caliber that an uncle had liberated during the Ethiopian campaign in World War II. It had the .318" diameter "Normal" bore, but the only ammunition available for a few years was some Czech stuff clearly marked "8x60S", meant for the larger .323" diameter "S" bore only. It gave no problems in my rifle, but as soon as proper German ammo became available I quit using the "S" stuff.

I used this rifle with great satisfaction from 1948 until 1962, finding its 196-gr. bullet at about 2560 f.p.s. to be absolutely reliable on any of the antelope, including eland bulls that could weigh close on a ton. It was a grand cartridge, but a .30-'06 exactly fills its spot in my battery today!

Egerton Agricultural College, situated close under Kenya's 10,000-ft. high, heavily forested Mau range, was a somewhat unique school at that time. There was a two-bit (by modern standards) shooting affair called the Mau-Mau rebellion going on, and emergency regulations demanded that we carry our firearms with us at all times. Actually, it was mostly so they would not be stolen and get into rebel hands.

I well remember the incredulous outrage of the chemistry professor, who was newly out from England, when he noticed that I was busily cleaning my old 8x60 on the back bench of his lab while he droned on about amino-acids. He was reduced to totally shocked, red-faced, stuttering incoherence, while I merely felt that he was being a trifle unreasonable!

The whole male student body—all 15 of us—were members of the Police Reserve. Whenever a gang of terrorists (or "freedom fighters" if you prefer—they were in fact both) visited our area, John Toft, the local Superintendent of Police, would call us out together with such local farmers as could get away, and we would gleefully drop our studies and go off to harry the "micks" through the Mau forest.

We were a motley crew, and our armament was equally so. Besides the normal hunting rifles, there was a pump action .22 rimfire, a couple of Lee-Enfields, a .22 Hornet, and a Sten gun carried by a regular policeman. One of the more well-to-do farmers favored a double .470.

Handguns were hard to come by. One much-envied fellow had a .45 Colt's New Service revolver, while I had to make do with a .32 Beretta auto. It is probably just as well that I was never called on to actually *do* anything with it! The best weapon for this close range work in thick cover was,

indisputably, Mike Hughes' slide-action 12-ga. Remington riot gun, loaded with the British AAA shell that carried 35 pellets to the ounce. It was quite effective.

The Mau-Mau used many homemade guns constructed from galvanized water pipe with a lock mechanism consisting of a sharpened door-bolt powered by a strip of inner-tube. Having no chambers, they worked best with rimmed cartridges such as shotgun shells or the .303 British.

The shotgun version was as effective as any cylinder-bore single shot scattergun, except that the empty case had to be pried out as there was no extractor, while the .303 bullet tumbled wickedly when fired through a ½" pipe.

They also had sporting rifles and shotguns taken from farm houses, and later acquired a supply of Lanchester 9 mm machine carbines and a few Bren light machine guns by successfully raiding a couple of police stations.

From one gang we recovered a Holland's double 12-ga., a beautiful Mauser .22 rimfire, and a Purdey magazine rifle for the .318 Westley Richards cartridge. A pretty decent battery, no?

Kenya in the old days had its share of characters. One of the more eccentric was old man Jordan, whose hardscrabble ranch lay way down on the Yatta, on the farthest fringes of the so-called "settled area." Back then lions were regarded as mere vermin, cattle-killing nuisances to be exterminated by any means.

All the same, Jordan felt that shooting them in the open with a rifle was not quite cricket. The only sporting way to hunt lions, he maintained, was to drive them into cover, then wade into the thorn brush after them with a double 12-ga., face the inevitable charge like a man, and drop them at one's feet with a load of buckshot.

In truth, a 12-ga. close up, before the shot charge has spread more than a couple of inches, is awesomely lethal. A shotgun is the standard arm for following up wounded leopard, and many like it for wounded lion also. But they always stress that it is essential to let the lion get very close, three or four paces, before firing.

I have never been much of a shotgunner, preferring to collect guineas and spur-fowl for the pot quietly with a .22, rather than with the scattergun. So on the few occasions when I have been involved in this sort of situation, I have in the end always chosen the .458, with which I was thoroughly familiar, rather than a shotgun, with which I am not.

Once when a lightly wounded but very aggrieved lion burst out of a thorn bush in a long, fast bound to my right—he was going for my tracker—I just swung the .458 through him and fired in one continuous movement, shooting by instinct and with no recollection of using the sights. The cat crumpled up in mid-flight—*most* satisfying!

Believe me, there was a goodly portion of luck involved in that shooting, but an even greater factor was that I was totally familiar with the balance and feel of the rifle.

After the 1958 decree regarding minimum calibers, the famous Nairobi gun store, Shaw & Hunter, quickly imported a large batch of Winchester Model 70 bolt guns chambered for the .375 H&H Mag. They sold like hot cakes, and very soon most of my hunting companions had one.

They were good guns, though not as well finished as some pre-'64 Model 70 aficionados would have one believe. In fact, they were quite rough, and mine had to have the feed ramp smoothed before it would function with round-nose soft-points such as the Kynoch 300-gr.

Neither was the stock bedding anything to boast about. The recoil lugs were seldom in firm contact with the wood, and as a consequence every single one of these rifles with which I have been familiar split its stock sooner or later.

So we glued them back together, and cross-bolted them with stove bolts or whatever else we had handy. Later we bedded them in with fiberglass from an auto body repair kit. Then they held!

The .375 H&H quickly became the standard big game cartridge among Kenya's resident hunters. Though popular, the .458 never caught up with it, because of the .375's superior versatility. A lot of chaps, like my partner Joe Cheffings, chose to simplify by having only one big game rifle, a .375 H&H, and using it on everything.

Despite the antipathy of one noted American gun writer for the round—and I suspect that I may have seen a little more game taken with it than he has—Holland's .375 Mag. is a superb cartridge which nothing else can quite match for all-around African use.

Much else changed at around that time. Kynoch (ICI) ceased manufacturing center-fire rifle ammunition, thus practically killing off the whole great array of British sporting cartridges in one fell swoop, except for those few such as the .404 Jeffery that were also manufactured on the continent.

With the exception of the everlasting 7x57 mm and a few others, the old Mauser cartridges also faded from the scene, and were replaced, at least in Kenya, by the .30-'06 and the .270, with the 7 mm Rem. Mag. coming on fast. And I would be very surprised if the .300 Win. Mag. was not quite a popular cartridge among African resident hunters today.

Through a wise choice of birth place, and year, I have had the very good fortune to experience the East African game fields in their heyday, and to have seen how a great variety of cartridges performed on all manner of game.

Thinking back on it, and checking through the hunting journals that I have

kept since 1957, one inescapable fact emerges. It is a damnable heresy, especially coming from a gun writer. Nevertheless, it is true: within reason, *the choice of cartridge is not really all that important.* Whether the gnu was bashed with a 6.5x54 mm, a .30-'06, a 7 mm Mag. or a .375 H&H seldom made any noticeable difference—he would run about as far when shot through the lungs with the one as with the other.

Even today, as it always has been and ever will be, it is not the rifle, or its cartridge, but the competence and skill of the chap using it that brings the game to bag. And here endeth the lesson! ■

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Bench-Rest Rifles

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power for the varmint classes, but the guns must be shot from a conventional pedestal rest with rear sandbag. No return to battery rests are permitted, as are sometimes used in Heavy Bench or Unlimited Classes.

IBS and NBRSA also have competitions for the so-called Hunter Class rifle. Although Hunter Class originated as an idea to encourage off-the-rack rifles, it too has become sophisticated. A top Hunter Class rifle costs nearly as much as a Light Varmint rifle. In Hunter Class the muzzle diameter can be no larger than .835" if the taper were extended to 28", and the rifle must be chambered for a cartridge of 6 mm or larger caliber with powder capacity not less than the .30-30. Scope power is limited to 6X for Hunter Class, and fore-end width on the stock cannot be greater than 2 1/4", compared to 3" for the Varmint Classes.

Hunter rifle matches are fired on a score target with a 1/2" 10-ring at 100 yds., and 1" 10-ring at 200 yds. Clubs not having moving backers for shooting group matches sometimes have Hunter Rifle matches, letting the Light Varmint and Heavy Varmint competitors compete in their own weight class. Both NBRSA and IBS maintain national records for such matches.

Light recoil is deemed essential for an accurate bench-rest rig, because the guns are usually shot with almost no contact, so the rifle can recoil freely on the bags. With the tiny groups commonplace today, few