

GORILLA

A hunt for the most powerful and interesting of all the big apes

By COMMANDER ATTILIO GATTI

"SUDDENLY an immense gorilla stepped into the path and, clutching one of the women, bore her off in spite of her screams and struggles. . . . A few days afterward, however, she returned to her home . . . and related that the gorilla had forced her to submit to his desire, but had not otherwise injured her." Thus wrote Du Chaillu, the eminent African traveler, in his book *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa* (1861). He also stated: "The male gorilla is literally the king of the African forest . . . if the hunter fires and misses, the gorilla at once rushes upon him; and this onset no man can withstand."

Explorers, naturalists and travelers have vied with one another in relating "believe it or not" stories of the extraordinary ferocity, intelligence and powerfulness of these huge apes, with whom scientists assure us a close relationship and much similarity. Exaggerations, inventions or reality that they may be, one often hears tales, even in Africa, of native women being carried away in the hairy arms of the great gorilla; of robust men killed by a single punch, or their bones crushed by a bite; of guns bent double, and of huge pythons suffocated by a single squeeze.

The seven expeditions which I had led into Africa had taken me into most of its notable districts and afforded an opportunity of first-hand familiarity with most of its marvelous big-game creatures, its natives and its various hazards. I had become, in a certain sense, blasé to the spectacular and romantic attitude which the novice feels towards adventure on the great Dark Continent.

I had always wanted to visit the mountainous jungles of the Kivu District in the Belgian Congo, where the gorilla makes its home. Permission to kill one of these creatures is exceedingly difficult to obtain—probably more difficult than for any other animal on the face of the earth. There are only a very few in the world today who have been accorded this privilege. It also means a certain risk, even in the most fortunate case; because if you are attacked by a big horde, and have killed the one for which you have a permit, you cannot shoot even in self-defense. This is the strict demand of the Belgian authorities and the promise you must make. To break this promise means a fine of 20,000 francs and immediate expulsion from the Congo or imprisonment.

It is easy to understand, therefore, how delighted and thrilled I was when the Belgian Government, which had so generously assisted my expedition during

its undertakings in other sections of their territory, conceded to me the privilege of going into the forbidden Kivu District with a permit to kill one gorilla for the Museum of the Royal University in Florence, Italy. (Later they granted me a permit to take a second one, for the Johannesburg Museum of South Africa.) This gave me the long-awaited opportunity of personally putting to a test the bad reputation of these man-like creatures and of satisfying my curiosity regarding their intimate lives.

Among other things I planned to make an estimate of the number of gorillas now living in the restricted Kivu District. While at Bukavu I made a careful study of the official records of the Belgian authorities who have had well-established control over the section since 1919. One of the first facts which I learned from these records is that they list two white men (an American and a Belgian) and twenty-two natives who have been killed by gorillas, and several more who were wounded by them during this twelve-year period. It is also more than likely that these records do not include all of the casualties; and the fact that the natives have not been permitted to hunt them and very few permits have been issued to white men during this period lends even more weight to the figures and the evidence that the gorilla is a genuinely dangerous creature.

It is a long trek into the home of the gorilla. From Elizabethville, the "Pearl of the Congo," we journeyed three days to Bukama by motor-car. There a boat, put at our disposal by the Railway des Grands Lacs, was awaiting to carry us up the beautiful Lualaba River.

FOR a wonderful week we glided through a grandiose savage country. Numerous bands of elephants and buffaloes and occasionally lions were seen along the river's edge, where they had come to drink; unlimited herds of Lechwe antelope grazed along the shore by the thousands; islands of aquatic birds of many varieties were continually rising ahead of our little steamer and circling in an almost unending concert of cries.

We landed at Kabalo, and another day's journey overland brought us to the pretty town of Albertville on the shores of Lake Tanganyika; two more days by boat took us to Uvira on the opposite side. Thence a road which scales twenty chains of mountains and rises to an elevation of about 5,000 feet within forty miles brought us to Costermansville, on the edge of Lake Kivu. Here one has a feeling of being very far away from

equatorial Africa. The atmosphere is clear and cool and fresh, and the panorama of mountain beauty strongly reminded one of the loveliest scenery of Switzerland or of the Italian lakes. And from here it is but twenty miles to the beginning of that mysterious forest which spreads for hundreds of miles and in one restricted section of which lives N'gagi, the gorilla.

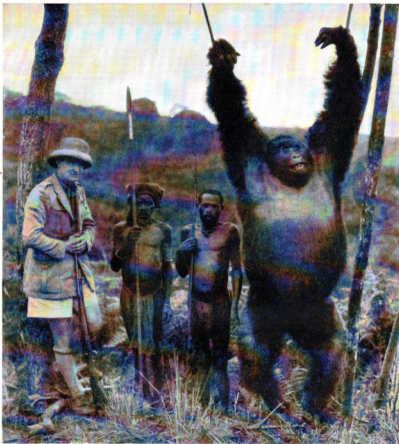
There was a pleasant feeling of satisfaction and impending excitement as our safari reached Tchibinda, a small Mambuti pygmy village which gave the name to that part of the forest where the gorilla enjoys an almost undisputed reign. A runner had preceded our arrival, and we were welcomed by Sultani Kascula, chief of the Mambuti pygmies, who came out with a dozen or more of his tribesmen to escort us to a comfortable camping place.

THE Sultani Kascula was a funny little old man, with two mischievous eyes, a short pointed beard and a great big upturned nose which he scratched solemnly in his most critical moments. He looked with a scornful smile at our carriers, who hurriedly finished their work and begged to be paid so that they could leave immediately and get far away from the haunts of N'gagi before darkness came. They were terrified even by the distant cry of these creatures during the night.

The Mambuti pygmies are the only natives living close to the Tchibinda Forest who dare to penetrate it and who know everything that is to be known about the life, habits and hiding places of the great gorilla. They are small in stature yet intrepid hunters by instinct and choice. In hand-to-hand combat, armed only with their miserable, rudimentary spears, their tribal pride of accomplishment has been to slay the great gorilla, which weighs three to five times as much as themselves.

Today, however, the only opportunity that the Mambuti pygmies have of indulging in their favorite sport of hunting N'gagi is when one of the fortunate white men arrives with a much coveted permit to collect the rare prey for some museum. Such an occasion is a time for celebration for these little black hunters, without whom there can be no success.

The greatest gorilla guide among all the Mambuti is the funny little Sultani Kascula. Probably no one alive today knows more about these creatures. He even keeps track of the births, the sicknesses and the history of almost every band of the animals. He knows their favorite feeding places, their inaccessible



Commander Gatti, his pygmy guides and the giant of the Tchibinda Forest

shelters, and their every trait and whim. Without Kasciula neither I nor my predecessors would have been successful in our quest for the *N'gagi*, and would have wandered blindly into grave risks during our almost hopeless quest.

I had followed a good many native guides in a good many varieties of African country, and I thought I had become a fairly good judge of a human's ability to endure on the trail. No one—not even the rankiest novice—would ever have picked Kasciula for a race-horse. His legs seemed abnormally short; in fact, he seemed to lack all of the characteristics of a good trailman. Yet what a chase he led me through the mountain jungles of his terrible forest! Climbing steep cliffs, to which the thorns and

vines and undergrowth cling in an unending tangle; sometimes crawling, monkey-fashion, at about a yard above the ground and sinking knee-deep into a veritable mattress of small plants and branches of sprawling brush, and sometimes completely disappearing into a slimy, muddy-bottomed pit. There is no "fun" in hunting gorillas, to say the least.

AT length, however, Kasciula stopped and started to scratch his funny flat nose. Then he pointed to a path in the thicket. From his long speech, full of verbal clinkings and grustings, I understood only the words "*N'gagi*" (gorilla) and "*Jeo*" (today), two of the ten words of the Mambuti language which I had previously learned for this occa-

sion. I guessed that he wanted to let me know that the gorillas had passed there that same morning.

"*Masuri cabiasa!* (Very good!)" I answered, using 20 per cent of my Mambuti vocabulary and motioning for him to proceed. At the same time, I loaded my rifle.

A little farther on, in a small muddy opening in the jungle, my miniature black guide made another halt beside two holes in the earth. They were very fresh foot-prints, twice as big and four times as deep as those which were left by my own good-sized boots. These tremendous tracks awed me, yet Kasciula gave them but a brief appraising glance. Then on he went.

Soon we came to a colossal tree, in the

entanglement at the base of which my little guide found one of the primitive, cave-like "huts" of the great apes. The signs around it showed plainly that it had been occupied within the past few hours.

The hut had been constructed by removing the inner vines and limbs, and the floor was composed of trampled grass, leaves and sticks. It really appeared quite comfortable. From inside it was possible to peer in all directions through the walls of tangled vines, though from the outside it was quite impossible to see what was inside. Were it not for the monster tracks around the place, it would be quite easy to convince a non-suspecting novice that one of these shelters had been the abode of some primitive jungle native. There are several races of humans on the face of the earth who do not build much better huts.

It was evident that this particular hut was the resting place of a very large male, no doubt the leader of a band, and that he had been using it frequently with his family. When disturbed, the gorilla builds a new nest, in a different place every night. But when unmolested, he generally returns to spend the night (or frequently at least) in a favorite place. At each visit, he does a little extra fixing up.

The females and young, on the other hand, climb up into the branches of a big tree when there is some serious danger around and build less pretentious nests where they will be less apt to be molested by prowlers of the jungle.

Baby gorillas weigh only about four to five pounds when born, and develop rather slowly. At four to five years of age they weigh only forty to fifty pounds. At eight years they weigh around one hundred and thirty pounds. It is claimed by the natives that they reach puberty at about thirteen or fourteen years of age. They develop to a maximum weight of not less than five hundred pounds!

We were quite certain that the particular gorilla which we were tracking was a very large one, though it was most discouraging to me to follow him through such a tangle of jungle. There was seldom a spot where I could have seen him (on the ground) at more than a few yards' distance. I knew that these creatures were wise and might move on just out of sight ahead of us for days. I had been told that if bothered too much they would lie in ambush until we were right upon them, and make such a sudden attack that effective use of a rifle would be very difficult. In fact, this is the surest method of getting a big one. You just follow them doggedly, until their patience is played out, and the big leader attacks you. The younger ones follow behind, to assist if necessary. The females with babies remain a safer distance away and scream encouragement.

Kasciula's little, short legs had just about worn out my long ones, and I was on the verge of not caring particularly whether we found any gorillas or not. Suddenly I was startled by hearing a sound that seemed like the voice of a huge waterfall, accompanied by the sharp cracking of enormous branches. I was not certain, though I guessed that

it was a band of gorillas forcing their way hurriedly through the brush.

Unconsciously I stopped in my tracks, at the same time pulling my rifle up into position for instant use. I glanced at Kasciula. He was scratching his funny big nose, and a faint smile on his face told me more than any words he could have spoken.

"Inyapi? (How many?)" I queried.
"N'gugi. Indio Moosi. Cusi, (Gorillas. King. Ten.," he replied.

How he knew there were ten of them will probably always be a mystery to me;



The skull of the gorilla



Opened to show size of brain

but, as I later learned, his estimate was correct. Possibly he had previously counted the different tracks. I don't know. But he was right.

On he hurried, but not directly toward the sound. He went at right angles to the sound for a distance, then circled as though to get ahead of them. Excitedly we pushed our way down into the valley again, through the thorns and entanglements which had almost torn the clothes and hide off my body.

THEN that nerve-chilling sound again as the band made another hasty dash to get away from us. Nor could I definitely tell from just which direction it came, or whether it was very close or a considerable distance away. But Kasciula seemed to know all about it, and I left entire judgment to him. In hunting lions, elephants and most other

big game, I had learned to use my own judgment—but this was certainly something new and quite different to me.

Again we repeated the hasty detouring program. But still we did not see the creatures.

About four in the afternoon it began to rain. Immediately one of the band of pygmies that followed close behind us came forward. After fixing a peculiarly carved bone and wood horn to the point of his spear, he raised it aloft and began speaking to the clouds: "Saranga, Saranga, take away the clouds; let the poor Mambuts hunt the gorilla; the flesh of which is so good for their belly!"

But this invocation (the translation of which I learned later) did not have the desired effect. Soon the storm broke upon us. We were compelled to make our way back to camp, where I arrived completely disillusioned, miserably tired, famished, soaking wet and with no faith whatever in that "Saranga, god of the rain" stuff.

The following day, almost at the exact spot where the rain had interrupted our seemingly hopeless quest, we picked up the trail again. I had been walking for over an hour, without recognizing a single footprint and only trying to keep up the pace set by those little, short legs of the tireless Kasciula, when I saw him suddenly grasp his spear and point forward as though something dangerous was close at hand.

Almost instantly there followed an indescribable, nerve-racking howl that split the silence of the jungle like a cannon shot. It seemed to be a combination of the roar of a lion, the pitiful wowl of a dog in agony and the cry of a mortally wounded man. Never, in all Africa, had I ever before heard such an awesome and startling cry. It bespoke rage, fury, power and danger. Immediately afterward it was followed by eight or ten other yells of a similar character. They seemed to be all around us and quite close.

I TRIED to swing my rifle, but almost every way I turned the barrel struck brush or vines. I could see but a very short distance in any direction. It was not a particularly comfortable feeling. I glanced at Kasciula. He was calmly scratching his funny flat nose!

Then silence once again—the profound, hostile, almost tangible silence of the jungle that somehow warns one against intrusion. No one moved. With rifle ready, I strained every nerve to catch the faintest sound. I had a feeling that a dozen pairs of fiendish, half-human eyes were glowering at me through the jungle tangle, and I must confess a feeling of unsafety as I thought of the possibility of a huge pair of powerful, hairy arms reaching silently out to drag me into the thickets in which I was standing neck-deep. A strong, acrid odor began to reach my nostrils, which I immediately guessed was from the excited creatures and which assured me that they were close at hand.

After what seemed hours of silent waiting, I heard a stick crack. My heart gave a jump. Then another crack. I glanced at Kasciula. He motioned to indicate that the (Continued on page 66)

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gorillas were going away. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Soon they were all gone. We relaxed—at least I did. Then on we went, after them again. From valley to valley, from summit to summit. All day long we trailed them. The creatures seemed to be leading us through the thickest and most difficult sections of their entire range. Kasciula followed doggedly—and I struggled to keep as close behind him as possible. How the rest of the pygmies kept track of us I don't understand, for we saw them but occasionally. Yet whenever we stopped—and these times were entirely too seldom to suit me—they were always right behind us.

It was now apparently a case of our endeavoring to outlast the gorillas; and when we occasionally got close to them, they showed evidence of becoming overly vexed at our pursuit. Just what would happen when they actually decided to make a stand and fight it out with us, I tried very hard to imagine.

Several times during the afternoon I found myself within a comparatively short distance of the gorillas, and on rare occasions I was able to get a glimpse of all or part of them. They were nearly always traveling on all fours, and I could recognize the long black hair on their arms and legs and the short grayish hair on their backs. There were five females, a young one and four enormous males. Whenever we got close to them, the males advanced slightly toward us with a very aggressive air and yelled their uncanny howl of defiance, while the others moved on. Then the males would retreat, though slowly and always looking back as if half inclined to charge. I had several good chances to shoot the biggest male, evidently the chief of the band. He was always the first to advance and the last to retreat.

Kasciula and his men urged me to bring the hunt to an end. The little chief told me a long tale, during which I was able to catch enough words and gestures to understand the general outline of the story. It seemed that he knew this particular gorilla and that it was a bad actor. One day not very long before, a party of his men was in the forest, and this same big male hurled itself upon them, killing two of them before they could retreat. The others fled, and upon being pursued they tried to stop the beast with their spears. One of the spears struck the gorilla in the chest, and howling furiously it disappeared. This was the first time that any of them had seen him ~~sink~~ that occasion.

But it was not merely to shoot one of these giant apes that I had come to the Kivu District. I wanted to learn as much as I could about them. My confidence in Kasciula had increased to the point where I felt he could locate this band almost any day. I couldn't resist the thrill of spend-

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utter dismay the empty cartridge would not come out! Some piece of dirt or particle of jungle vegetation had been forced into the chamber with the shell, and the ejector would not extract it! Nervously I fumbled in my pocket for a small knife to pry out the empty.

The other three gorillas, a half-grown male and two big females, had stopped quite suddenly when they saw their leader fall. But they showed no signs of retreat.

EVERYBODY is interested in elephants. "BULLS—GOOD AND BAD," by F. B. Kelley, will be published in November. Mr. Kelley knows these big beasts and tells a most interesting story of his experiences.

Standing waist-deep in the tangle of brush, they were glowering at me with a maddened aspect on their grotesque faces and bellowing unholy howls in a manner that assured me they needed but the slightest encouragement to continue the charge. One false move on my part might prove disastrous.

Behind me was the steep precipice. Kasziula and his pygmies were somewhere below me. I could not see them, nor hear them. Del Grande was several hundred yards away.

Nervously I struggled to extract the stuck shell, making as little movement as I possibly could and trying at the same time to watch the three big creatures that at any moment might plunge forward to annihilate me completely. Then out slipped the empty shell! I dropped the knife and quickly threw in another cartridge.

I was privileged to shoot just one more gorilla—though there were three of them facing me. If one charged, no doubt all would. I had made a faithful promise to the Belgian authorities. They had been so kind and so generous in assisting my expedition in every way that I did not, under any circumstances, want to abuse the

BEFORE this issue is off the press there will probably be a new trapshooting champion. Horace Lytle of the *Field & Stream* staff will write up the Grand American Handicap for the November issue.

privilege which had been granted me. Yet I am every bit as fond of my own life as any one possibly could be!

My eyes moved nervously from one of those grotesque faces and great hairy bodies to another. A dozen leaps would put them right upon me. Even if I should decide to break my sportsman's promise and shoot them all, it would be almost out of the question to shoot rapidly enough to stop the three of them before they could cover the short distance which separated us.

I made a movement to attempt to back down the precipice which I had recently climbed. Just at that moment, however, the largest and nearest female let out one of its beastly yowls and came toward me. Barely taking time to raise the gun to my shoulder, I fired at her, feeling quite confident that I was facing the end of all my adventures. Instantly, however, she lurched to one side with an

unusually loud howl, turned with astonishing swiftness and went plunging away. The others followed close behind her. Instinctively I fired my rifle into the air, then quickly reloaded the magazine and stood listening.

Two or three minutes of silence assured me that the gorillas had actually retreated. I relaxed. Then I thought of the monstrous specimen which lay in the brush not more than seven paces in front of me. I could just see the silver-gray hair of his back.

Next I was startled by a movement right behind me. Glancing around, I saw the funny little face of Kasziula just emerging through the undergrowth. He was smiling. He was still grasping his spear, in readiness for action. Probably he had been there all the time. Then I heard the voices of the natives just below, and from farther down in the valley came the welcome shout of my good friend Del Grande.

I moved up to where Kasziula was admiring the giant gorilla. Soon the rest arrived, and there were jubilant dancing and shouting. Enthusiastically they yelled my praises, and as loudly cursed the dead ape. They wanted to skin and eat the animal at once, pointing to the hairless scar on his chest which had been made by a native spear the day he had murdered two of their tribesmen.

THE "Narrowest Escape" story for November is entitled "BEARS ALWAYS RUN." Sometimes they run away from a man, and sometimes they run toward him.

He was a monster. According to our measurements, he stood 6 feet 9 inches high; 8 feet 9 inches from the bottom of his feet to the tips of his uplifted hands; 5 feet 6 inches around the waist, and his great biceps measured 1 foot 6 inches around.

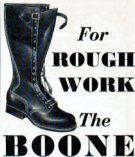
Before we removed the skin or undertook to prepare the skeleton and principal organs for transportation to the museum, we rigged a tripod of small trees on which to weigh him. The weight was 482 pounds!

It was well into the night before our task was completed. Then Kasziula divided the meat scrupulously among his subjects, and as scrupulously chose the biggest and best part for himself. They gathered banana leaves in which to wrap the meat that was to be carried back to the village for the grand feast on the following day.

We were a long way from camp—tired and hungry. The gorilla meat had a pink and rather appetizing appearance, looking very much like the breast part of an antelope. Half seriously, I suggested to Kasziula that he build a fire and roast some of the meat for us. I had some salt with me.

He scratched his funny flat nose, laughed and shouted some words that set the pygmies excitedly to work building the necessary fire. In less than an hour, during which we enjoyed a much needed rest, that little chief of Mambuti pygmies set before us as delicious a roast as I have ever tasted. They watched us rather curiously, evidently pleased. Probably never before had they witnessed white people indulge in the ancestral taste of the Mambuti.

But I don't blame them for liking it. Nor do I blame them for their deep-rooted interest in hunting the gorilla. It had provided me with one of the most thrilling episodes in all my African adventures.



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