BY JOE O'MALLEY
as told to Ted Shatto

mountain adventure for an ethiopian ibex

This was no ordinary hunt for a rare trophy. A man was to die in a fall from the heights. And when the chance finally came to shoot, they had to rope the hunter so he could aim into a chasm

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

I threw the hunting magazine on the floor and poured myself another drink. I'd just been reading about how a hunter had secured the first Marco Polo sheep since God-knows-when and how he had endured untold rigors in cold, hunger, fatigue, and other privations while riding and walking over a 20,000-foot pass in the Korakorum Range to get to his quarry. The hunter was Elgin Gates, and everybody who hunted knew about Elgin, the most successful trophy hunter in history and still going strong. "The toughest hunt I've ever done," Gates had said. I cursed for a while and

Joe O'Malley and his guide Nadoo display the first walia buck taken in 37 years.

downed my drink. All the tough hunts seemed to have been done by somebody during the 14 years since the war. During the years I had spent attending med school and building up a practice which was almost immodest.

I had hunted one summer in Tanganyika. It was a wonderful experience, but I did all the things the other dudes do and I returned home feeling somehow cheated. There hadn't been any challenge. It hadn't been tough enough.

A long chain of cigarettes and a few drinks later, I remembered something. I had to look quite a while in the shelves before I found the book I wanted. It was called *The Simien; Its Heights and Abysses* and it gave a factual description of a long hunt in Abyssinia by Maj. H. C. Maydon and Capt. G. Blaine almost 40 years before.

Abyssinia! It's called Ethiopia today. I settled down in my chair and read the whole book. Most of the time my hair was standing on end as the major's laconic account of his adventures in an incredible wonderland of vertical precipices hunting for some animal called a walia ibex underscored. About two in the morning I finished the book. Maydon ended with his usual understatement, "The walia Ibex is one of the world's most difficult hunts."

This was for me.

During the next week I got letters off to the Ethiopian government and to most of the gun editors. All my correspondence finally revealed that the Ethiopian Government did not issue hunting licenses and that most of the gun editors had never heard of a walia ibex. In the late summer of 1960 I met Elgin Gates.

"What do you know about walia ibex?" I asked him.

mountain adventure for an ethiopian ibex

"Only that it's the one ibex I don't have and that it'll be the hardest one to get," he said, "if I ever get a chance to go after it. I've just returned from an Ethiopian hunt and, believe me, it's not quite like anything else I've experienced."

"You've hunted in Ethiopia," I said. "Tell me, what's it like?"

"Rough," said Elgin. "They aren't issuing any hunting licenses and you spend more time waiting on officials than in hunting."

"How did you work it?" I asked. "Did you have an outfitter?"

"That was the easiest part of it," said Gates. "There's a school teacher there who is trying to be an outfitter. Name's Ted Shatto. Old 'Pops'!"

I could sense that some sort of bond had been formed between Elgin and this Shatto fellow.

"He seems to have known Jack O'Connor for a time and Jack put me in touch with him," Gates continued. "I don't quite know how Shatto did it, but a month after my first letter to him I landed in Addis Ababa and a few hours later was granted an audience by the Emperor. Next day we were on our merry way, with my grubby hand holding a mountain nyala license issued specially by the Emperor."

"How did the nyala hunt go?" I asked.

"Lousy," said Gates. "We camped on top of a 14,000-foot mountain and it rained all the time unless it was hailing. And it was cold. Not as cold as Hunza, but somehow I seemed to feel it more. Never saw a shootable bull. I'd hardly got there before I had to go back home. We only hunted four days."

"Sounds like you had outfitter trouble," I said.

"No," said Elgin. "Old Pops is all right. He told me everything would be third class and it was. He told me the hunting would be hard and wet and it was. He told me he'd work his tail off and he damn well did. No, Doctor, I just didn't get a shot."

"Do you think Shatto could help me with a walia ibex hunt?" I asked.

"I don't know, but he could if anybody could. I'll be mad as hell if you get to hunt there before I do. However, the wind blows the way it blows. I wish you luck. And don't forget that this will be harder than any Ovis Poli hunt. You'll be tackling the roughest hunt in the world."

"Take a letter, Mariam," I said next day to my secretary-nurse. "Dear Mr. Shatto: . . ."

Imagine the Simien, a great uptilting of the plateau in northern Ethiopia that juts skyward over 15,000 feet to drop away in the world's highest escarpment, to the depths below where the Takazze River has for aeons cut patiently into the black basalt of the towering massif. The unmatched vertical grandeur of the Simien's precipices is the only home of earth's rarest—and toughest—big game trophy, the walia ibex, a massive wild goat that prefers the upright to the outright. The last official walia ibex were taken by the great British hunters, Major Maydon and Captain Blaine, in the time of your grandfather. That was about 1924.

I didn't have to imagine the Simien. I was there. I'd been there for most of the day as our mounted cavalcade and its attendant pack animals stumbled its slow way along the rude trail that pretended to follow the ridges and avoid the ravines atop the plateau. The engineers who laid out that trail seemed to think that the only way to follow a ridge was to make a two foot wide trailway along the top of each cliff. If there were ravines we didn't cross, they sure weren't visible to me. Of course the ravines here varied from one to two thousand feet deep and would have been considered major canyons anyplace else. Every time I'd get to feeling sorry for myself and want to complain to somebody or other about it, I'd jolt myself back with the thought that I'd asked for a tough hunt and the prelude was just a little rougher than I'd expected. Rough? Hell, I was about finished already and all I'd done had been to ride a mule for eight hours and get dizzy looking over the edges of the silly "little" ravines. I hadn't even wanted to look out over the real abyss at such times as our way permitted a momentary view.

We weren't entirely a mounted cavalcade. Lemma, Shatto's foster-son, had refused a mule back in Debarik in the morning. Refused it on the grounds that it would cost 80¢ and he wanted to save the Old Man's money. He'd been gliding along by my mule for the entire day and I'd long ago caught on to what must have been Shatto's orders to Lemma: "O'Malley's your pigeon. Stick to him all the time and see that he gets into no trouble." Lemma couldn't help the kind of troubles I had. My legs were stiff, my bottom ached, my body was painfully sore. In addition, my sea-level-conditioned lungs and heart were having quite a problem securing and distributing oxygen from the thin air at the 12,000-foot altitude of the trail. Being a doctor, I suppose that I worried about this latter more than a layman, who probably wouldn't know the strains and dangers involved.

About every hundred yards or so Lemma would grab my arm in a friendly grip, flash that array of even white incisors that didn't smile nearly as much as his warm eyes, and say, "Are you all right, sir?" Sure, I was all right. Always all right. Lemma would enlarge the smile and say that it was just a little bit farther. Just a little bit farther, hell! It had been four hours since Lemma and Mike had pointed out the camp, green tents nestling in a green field just across a canyon that probably bottomed out in Central America someplace; four hours and we apparently hadn't gained an inch in that direction. Behind me my hunting companion, Dr. Don Anderson of Panama City, Florida, was having a similar set of problems.

As for Ted Shatto, the Old Boy was with us part of the time, his generous posterior overhanging his mule on both sides while the poor creature staggered along, back bent in a bow under the tonnage of Shatto bulk topside. Every so often Shatto would slide off the mule and—accompanied by Nadoo, a local chief, who had met us along the trail to proclaim that he was the "Protector of the Walia" and would assist us in our quest—go charging up some impossible slope to disappear from sight [*Continued on page* 125]

Mountain Adventure For An Ethiopian Ibex

[*Continued from page 74*]

for a while. Lemma said that they were going just over the ridge to glass the country below for ibex. After half an hour or so, the two of them would catch up with the mule train at a walking speed which was a marvel to me, Nadoo gliding along in that effortless Ethiopian fashion just as Lemma did and Shatto waddling alongside as a living proof that sufficient power can compensate for lack of proper design. They never saw any ibex on these jaunts and Shatto's mule was never glad to see him return.

Even the most spectacular scenery can pall on one after a bit. Especially if one happens to be just about completely fagged out and far more interested in a belt of booze, food, and a warm sack than in scenery. As the afternoon wore on, I found myself reviewing events of the previous week, which hadn't been exactly good. Shatto had written that I would get my walia ibex license upon arrival. Shatto had been misinformed, and one week of my allotted three had been spent in Addis Ababa in seemingly futile applications, supplications, and arguments aimed at securing that all-important piece of paper. Besides Ted and his various channels, the act included the American Museum of Natural History, the American ambassador, a local new friend and hunter named Vida Houdak, and my own persuasive self. It might have been that the Vice Minister of Agriculture just got tired of seeing us around his office, but one day he told me that His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie had given permission for me to shoot one walia ibex for the American Museum of Natural History. Believe me, I was most grateful for His Imperial Majesty's consideration.

Maybe it was a good thing that we utilized that week, for it took me almost that long to get my Weatherby rifle released from customs, where the officials seemed to think that my bringing my rifle was an indication of nefarious designs on things other than ibex. All this happened in November 1961 and was standard operating procedure for the times, far cry from 1964 when the Ethiopian Tourist Organization welcomes foreign hunters—including their firearms, provides them with their hunting licenses, and turns them over to Shatto's outfit for a smoothly run hunt.

Reverie ended abruptly as my mule slipped in the narrowest, rockiest, most dangerous place in the trail. We could only have fallen about 500 feet if we'd left the trail, hardly a bump by Simien standards. My good beast managed to slip to a halt with only two legs over the edge. He wisely lay still awaiting aid, secure in the knowledge that my right leg was pinned beneath him. Lemma had me by the arms almost immediately and soon a couple of mule packers grabbed my mount and pulled and beat him back up to the safety of the trail.

My knee began to radiate sharp pains that for the moment erased my other physical worries. I could feel the swelling commence and I smiled for a moment in the knowledge that I might not be able to walk at all during this hunt.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, we were hit by a driving rain, cold and penetrating. Although my quilted jacket and insulated underclothes were soaked through in a minute, I felt a sudden blinding desire for a raincoat, something to ward off those lashing drops.

"Where are the raincoats?" I shouted to Shatto.

He smiled, for which I could have choked him. "Sorry," he said. "Guess I must have sent them on ahead."

Somehow we arrived at camp after dark and, in some fashion whose details escaped me, Don and I were cleaned, changed, boozed, fed, and ensconced in the warmest, softest sleeping bags anybody ever had. It had been one hell of a day, but now that we were there it seemed well worth it.

I'm not going to talk much about the next week. There was just too much that wasn't good. Before Don and I awakened the next morning Ted had gone down one trail and seen a female ibex. Mike had gone another way and seen three, one a very young male. "This will be good," Ted said. "Just a matter of looking until we find the one you want."

That afternoon Lemma, who was allowed to leave camp only with me or if Ted was with me, came back from a hike to say that he had seen two ibex. He thought they were big enough to shoot and that they were moving downward very slowly and that we might get there in time. We didn't get there in time. We did drop down off the plateau for a few hundred yards on one of the 60 degree slopes which led to the sheer rock walls below. It was here, when we turned to come back up to the top of the plateau, that the awful truth hit me. I couldn't walk back up by myself! Part of it was my knee, sure. But most of it was just a simple inability to get enough oxygen out of the thin air to make myself go. It took us two hours to go 200 yards. Then Shatto produced a rope from somewhere and had the assorted gang with us start pulling. Don and I grabbed hold and were actually pulled back up the trail by 11 men, including Shatto and his boys.

I thought about this humiliating inability all the way back to camp. I thought about it while we sat around the campfire making inroads on the booze supply and I thought about it after the rain came and chased us into our sacks early. I've always figured I was a pretty tough hombre, but the toughest thing I ever had to do was to admit to myself that my kind of toughness wasn't what the Simien demanded; that the one thing needed here was the living-at-high-altitude capacity to extract oxygen from the light air. I didn't have it. I talked to Don in the darkness.

"How do you feel about going down those trails to where the ibex are supposed to be, Don?"

"I feel fine about going down to them," said Don. "It's the coming back that's too much for me. Hell! I can't even get

enough breath here to walk slow on level ground. What about you?"

"I can't do it," I said. "I'm damned well going to stay up on top until somebody locates something to shoot at. I figure I can get back out of there just about one time, and I want that one time to be the payoff."

I hated Ted Shatto at the moment he awakened us before dawn the next morning to cheerfully announce that breakfast was ready and that we would shortly start out to look for ibex. I guess he despised me a short time later when I announced the course of action I had determined for myself.

And that's the way that first week went. Don and I would ride our mules along the top to some place or other and wait while Ted and usually his young son, Mike, and always Nadoo and a bunch of locals went down a trail to look for that big trophy ibex. They didn't ever find one, of course, and I began to be contemptuous of their stories about females and young males and whatever else they saw. Over and over I cursed myself for staying on top and waiting for news of the big one, but I'd learned my limitations and knew exactly how I had to restrain myself in order to have what it would take when the time came for action.

The time for action came on the eighth day. I'd given up. What a wild goose chase this had been! Hell, I hadn't even seen an ibex. This place had me licked and I was ready to admit it. Shatto could damned well have the Simien. In fact, the whole ruddy country. And he knew what he could do with it, although I hadn't mentioned that as yet.

It was nearly noon and I was poking a stick into a smoking campfire and swearing softly to myself. Anderson was sacked out. Don had been pretty sick for a couple of days and needed some rest. Mike was in his tent, cleaning a rifle or something, and Lemma puttered about camp, still keeping an eye on me as though I were a babe. Ted was out; had been out all morning, and was doing whatever it was he did when he was out of camp, which I suspected was running like hell up and down those awful trails and glassing everyplace for ibex. The old bastard would never give up, I knew. How he could keep it up at his age and with all that excess lard I didn't know. I wished to hell I could run up and down those trails. Damn it all! Tomorrow we would pack up and leave.

A man came running over the crest of the little rise nearby and came to the campfire. I looked up and maybe straightened in my safari chair, sensing that something was up even without understanding his muttered "Gaytoich! Tolo bel! Tolo bel!"

Lemma listened to the man and then said, "You must come now, sir. They've found a good walia. We must hurry."

He went to the big tent and took the 300 Weatherby out of its case and filled his pockets with cartridges. For about a minute and a half I continued to sit and poke at the fire, as one in a daze. Then the impact hit me like a blaze of light. I jumped out of the safari chair as though I'd never known about altitude sickness or lame knees. The imminence of action suddenly purged my mind of all the sorry thoughts that had been cluttering it for the past week. I recalled in a flash that Ted had told me earlier that he had about 50 men scouting all the time. Fifty men that I'd never seen, except for the silent Nadoo who came in twice a day to make his report. Fifty men for eight days meant 400 man-days of ibex scouting by tireless, sharp-eyed locals. Damn that Shatto! He didn't have to go out himself at all. Not with that kind of manpower working for him. I could have kissed the Old Goat, except that he wasn't around. I began to wish he were around.

Mike stepped out of the tent that he shared with Pop and Lemma. In one big hand he carrid his father's 270 and in the other an incongruous assortment of bolt, ramrod, and a bottle of powder solvent. He grasped the situation instantly and dove back inside the tent. I could hear sounds of snicking bolt and the rattle of ammunition being pocketed.

Then we were off across the rolling ridge and the plowed field beyond. Three hundred yards of travel brought us to the head of the trail that led down into the frightful abyss of sheer rock walls and wooded ledges below. Somehow I kept thinking the useless thought that if I were to fly for a thousand feet horizontally out over the canyon I could then fall vertically for 8,000 feet before hitting ground in the ruptured terrain below.

"Wait," I gasped. "Have to catch my breath." I'd walked too fast on the trail over the field, that was for sure. Have to take it easy on the down trail.

Five deep breaths later Lemma took me by the arm. "Come on, sir. The walia may go away."

Protest would have been futile. I didn't really want to protest, anyway. We started down, the guide who had brought the news flitting along some yards in front. I slipped and fell, regained my feet, and then stumbled. Suddenly there was a shifting of positions and Mike was walking just in front of me.

"Hold on to my shoulder," he said. I reached and held and then was aware of Lemma holding my other arm from the rear. They went fast, and I kept up regardless of my breath and my red corpuscle count, went fast because I wanted to go fast and because these youngsters had me in such a way that I had to keep up whether I wanted to or not.

The trail led steadily downward, slanting across the 60 degree slope and winding through the tree heather and around outcroppings of tortured basalt. Once we crossed the deep crease of a watercourse and several times descended small places of sheer rock. No matter what the trail, Mike was always there in front with a broad shoulder to clutch and Lemma held me securely from the side or rear.

God! What an ordeal this was for my cardio-vascular system. Well, to hell with my cardio-vascular system. Somewhere this agony would end and at that somewhere there would be a walia ibex and I would shoot it. That was why I had come to Ethiopia and endured all this waiting and fiddling around and altitude and everything else. Damn it! Would we never get there?

Suddenly the tree heather ended. The slope ended. Everything seemed to end in a void, and I knew we were at the top of one of the sheer rock walls that would drop away for 3,000 or 4,000 feet to the next ledge. Beyond that there would be more slope and probably more tree heather before the next drop. I didn't want to look, and threw myself on the ground to pant and wheeze in agony. Nadoo and two others were sitting quietly by the last tree heather. They grinned widely and pointed over the cliff. I shook my head. The damn walia would have to wait until I could breathe.

Mike and Lemma carefully laid down the guns and the small coil of rope that Mike had carried and then crept to the edge to peer over. Nadoo handed over the binoculars that I had given him hours before and the boys took turns looking. Then Mike was leaning over me. One hand was on my shoulder and it seemed to impart a lot of the youngster's strength and calm.

"Take your time," he said. "There's a good male and two females down there. It'll be a hard shot, but you can make it all right. They're in a kind of ravine, so he can't fall off a cliff when you shoot him. But they're taking it easy now, so you have lots of time to get your breath."

The time came when I could hold one hand in front of my face and scarcely detect a tremor. I smiled, recalling that only a few moments before I had been sure that I would never breathe normally again, never be calm and steady again. I crawled to the edge of the cliff and looked over. Scan as I might, I could see nothing. Maybe this was all a cruel hoax.

"Show me, Mike," I said. "I can't see a thing."

Then Mike was on one side of me and Lemma on the other, pointing and whispering. My eyes swept the great face of the escarpment on the opposite side of the canyon, the vast gulf that Maydon had called "The Abyss." From the summit a vertical precipice of basalt a mile long dropped for about 3,000 feet to a series of ledges and steep slopes, at the bottom of which a smaller cliff led to a jumble of slopes and badlands. Beneath it a little river tumbled over endless falls and cascades. To my right the canyon headed in a maze of towering cliffs and the main part of the little river poured over the abyss to drop for 2,500 feet or so in a free fall. The shoulder of the cliff nearest was not so abrupt, and I could see the possibility of its being climbed, or descended, along the many ledges and slopes which continued down to another watercourse that seemed to be almost at my feet. Try as I might, I could see no walia, nor any other living thing.

"There. There!" said Lemma, pointing down. I strained my eyes and leaned out over the void a bit more. I could see nothing.

"You're looking too far," said Mike. "They're right below us. In the rocky stream bed. You could hit them with a rock."

I followed the thousand foot drop below us, straight down to where the watercourse had cut a little V-channel at the foot of the cliff and made what appeared to be almost a small flat in the stream bed. Something moved there. Something the color and apparent size, of a brown mouse. I held my breath. The thing moved again and I could see bits of white where the animal exposed its leg.

"My God!" I said. "Give me the glasses."

The binoculars brought the animal right up to me. I was enraptured with the rich beaver-brown of its coat and the occasional flash of white underparts when it moved a leg. Its neck stretched out as it reached for a tuft of grass and I got a glimpse of ten inch horns. I had never studied an animal from this view before and the perspective didn't fit any previous concepts.

"He doesn't have much horn," I said.

"You're looking at a female," said Mike. "The male and another female are farther up and to the right. There! The male just moved."

The movement was easy to catch, and I felt myself tremble as the big ibex resolved itself into the binocular's field of view. It was like the female, at least from this angle, but it was larger. And the horns! I thrilled to the sight of the massive upthrust of the walia's scimitars and to the graceful curve of their long tips. For a minute I watched, fascinated as never before by any animal. So this was a walia ibex. This was what I had come so far and such a hard way to collect.

But it was moving. "Give me the gun," I said. Lemma silently handed over the Weatherby.

I tried to lie prone, but the slope was so steep I would have slid over the edge. I attempted to sit, and then to kneel, but could not even see the walia from either position. I squirmed and fidgeted, then the awful truth hit me right between the eyes, just as a week before I'd had to accept the fact that I couldn't walk at this altitude. The only way I could shoot that ibex was to stand upon my two legs right at the edge and fire straight down. I sat there and thought about this and the thought itself made my legs weak.

A minute passed. Then another. I don't know whether or not Mike and Lemma understood that they were in the presence of a man wrestling with his own soul. They looked at each other for a bit and seemed to come to some sort of tacit understanding. Lemma asked for the small coil of rope.

"Here, Mike," he said. "Tie one of those knots around the Gaytoich and I'll hold him by that tree."

I stood spellbound as Mike made a big loop around my chest and expertly fashioned a bowline. Lemma wound the rope twice around the trunk of a tree heather and prepared to hold for snubbing. White teeth gleamed through his smile.

"Don't worry, sir," he said, "I can hold you."

I was still wrestling with my soul. I thought of the big kid down the block who had bullied me unmercifully for months until I had at last stood up to him and licked him good. I remembered the thunder of naval gunfire and the insane chattering of Jap machine guns when I waded ashore at Guadalcanal. I remembered a lot of things on a lot of

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war-torn islands, things which I had lived and were better forgotten. I thought about my wife Jean and my boys back in Orlando, who thought that their husband and father was a man. There was only one thing to do.

I could feel the strength flowing back into my legs as I got up. I tried to grin at Mike, who was standing at the cliff's edge nonchalantly holding the 270.

"Will you back me up?" I asked.

"Sure," said Mike.

Carefully feeling the tension of Lemma's rope, I walked to the edge of the precipice and slowly leaned out until I could clearly see the three ibex far below. As I raised the Weatherby, I was aware of Mike standing almost at my side with the 270 ready. I felt the rifle nestle against my shoulder and then the post reticule came to rest on the back of the walia ram a thousand feet below. I tightened my finger on the trigger.

I don't recall the gun going off, but the walia was suddenly smashed to the ground as though by a giant and invisible hand. Then I was lying back on the grass, the Weatherby slipping from my trembling hands and my entire body shaking as though with the ague. I was finished and I knew it. I didn't see Lemma's swift movement, but I felt his arm around my neck and knew that he'd taken my rifle.

As in a dream I watched Mike, still standing there as unconcerned as a statue. He brought his rifle to his shoulder very slowly and I'll swear he leaned out over the cliff and pointed the gun straight down as he got a shot off. With maddening deliberation he eased the bolt back, being careful to catch and pocket the spent cartridge case. Then he raised the 270 and once more leaned out to easily fire again. All the time he was removing this second case and pocketing it he never took his eyes off the ibex far below. For a minute, or maybe it was six minutes, Mike just stood there, totally intent on the scene below. I continued to shake and I could feel Lemma's strong hands holding me as though I were something very special and precious. Thank God for Lemma, I thought. And thank God for Mike. What could I have done without them? Without either of them?

Mike was grinning as he turned to us. "Well, Gaytoich," he said, "I guess you got yourself an ibex."

It was probably an hour before I was able to start back up the trail. It was slow progress and Nadoo and a couple of others helped Mike and Lemma muscle me along. Somebody pointed ahead. A large form bounding down the trail resolved itself into Ted Shatto. The big man looked like an over-stuffed panther that had been crossed with a splayfooted goat, but he moved fast and with sure feet.

We embraced and kissed each other on the cheek. Ted had misty eyes and I realized that I was crying like a baby. I couldn't find words, but Ted kept saying. "I'm glad for you, Joe. I'm damned glad for you."

We sat down and I told my story over and over, one hand running over and over through Lemma's kinky hair and the other reaching out to squeeze Mike now and then, just to be certain that they were both still with me.

Ted sent a man on ahead to get a rule for me. Then he looked at me for a long time. He didn't say anything: just looked at me. I was puzzled for a bit, maybe a little embarrassed. Suddenly I knew that Ted understood everything. Understood how it was that I couldn't run up and down and hunt like he'd wanted me to; understood how it had been with me all the time, how it had been at the time of shooting, and how much effort it had been to do what I had done, and how I felt about Mike and Lemma and the ibex and about Ted and myself. I knew then that this was the most wonderful hunt anybody ever had or was ever going to have.

Maybe two hours later they finished pushing, pulling, hauling, and otherwise aiding me back up that trail to the top of the plateau, where I had to be lifted aboard a waiting mule. Word had traveled fast, and our party included 50 or so locals long before we reached camp. Enthusiasm for my feat was contagious and soon the people began a song and dance. Solo voices proclaiming the prowess of the mighty doctor—me—while the chorus joined in periodically and rhythmically in praise of the slayer of ibex. Also me.

Don Anderson was still sleeping, a rather sick man. Mike fired a shot in the air which, added to the chanting adulation of the locals, soon brought a bleary-eyed face to the tent door.

"What the hell is this?" asked Don. He shook his head a few times while taking it all in. "I don't believe it."

They lifted me off my mule and put me in a camp chair with a bottle of whisky in one hand and a bottle of beer in the other. Everybody talked at once. Some of the locals stopped their singing and dancing to tell people what we Gaytoiches—Lords in Amharic—would do: while a fair share continued to provide background music.

As for me, they tell me that I drank whisky and beer impartially and with no effect whatsoever. That I stood up time and again to wave my arms for the benefit of cheering locals and then sat down to sprawl in total relaxation. I hugged Lemma and I hugged Mike. I hugged Don Anderson and hugged Ted. I hugged all of the camp staff and any agreeable locals. They were all agreeable. All the time, they tell me, I talked and nobody paid any attention to what I said. I guess they understood. Never again would I live at this exalted pitch. I had shot the first walia ibex in 37 years.

Tragedy struck suddenly that afternoon. Nadoo sent a party down the right-hand ridge, which could be descended, to tie ropes on the ibex so it could be hauled up the cliff to the point of shooting. A couple of additional villagers went along just for kicks. Coming back, one of these additionals slipped and fell 2,000 feet to his death. This unfortunate event dampened our high spirits considerably, but it was none of our doing and absolutely beyond our control.

The ibex was a huge male, fat and in prime condition. Shatto judged his weight at 250 pounds. Contrary to the lean skinniness of domestic goats, he was built wide and low, more on the scale of an African buffalo than the usual concept of goat. His horns were a staggering disappointment, measuring a meager 30 inches. One of them was broken at the tip. Ted inspected the annular rings and said that the ibex was 12 years old.

"Damn it, Joe," he said. "You've bagged a mature male old enough to carry record class horns of well over 40 inches. Yet, through some quirk of lean years and dietary deficiency, this ibex has never grown the horns to which his birthright entitled him. You've been cheated."

I guess it's all a part of the game.

My shot had entered the middle of the back, too far to the rear and just behind the vital areas. The 180-grain Hornady bullet had opened perfectly in its peeled-banana fashion to lodge just under the bellyskin. I was pretty proud of that shot, shooting 300 yards almost straight down. Mike's first shot was two inches from mine, and the 130-grain Sierra handload had given identical performance. His second was six inches to the rear of the other two shots.

Ted called us all around and spread out a broad hand. It covered all three bullet holes. "Joe," he said, "you've made probably the finest shot in the history of big game hunting."

"Sure," I said. What a silly thing for Ted to say. I pointed to the two holes made by Mike's shots. "What do you call these? Target practice, maybe?"

—Joe O'Malley and Ted Shatto