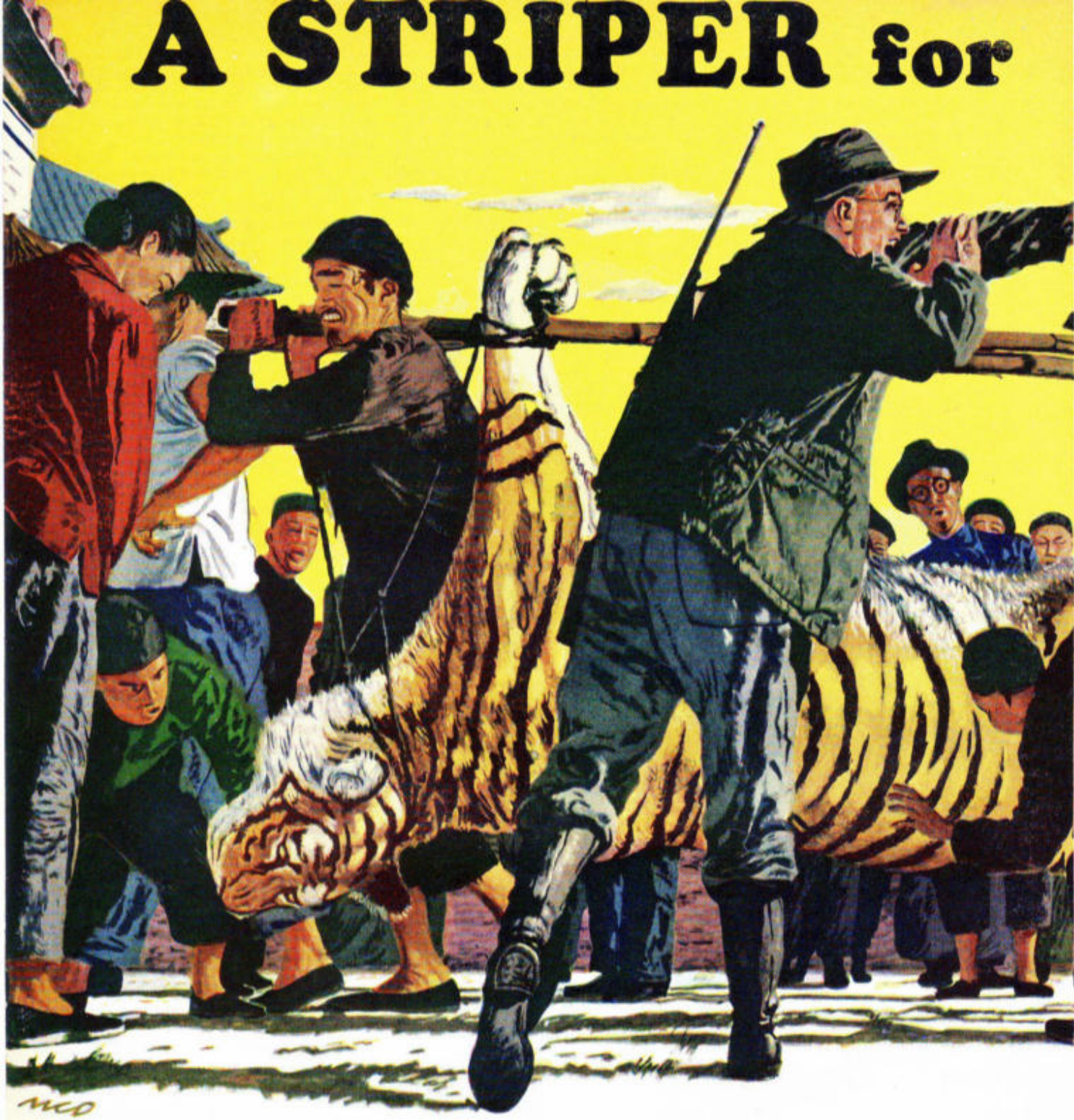
A STRIPER for



by HARRY R. CALDWELL

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN McDERMOTT

All around me was an undertow of terror. Not sudden fright or panic, but something deeper and more moving, like a river of human emotion. I saw it in the faces of the men and women I met in the villages and on the trails; it was in their speech and nervous eyes, as though they expected the monster to appear suddenly and snatch them out of my very presence into some horrible beyond. I talked to the county magistrate in Kutien about it.

"My records show that more than 250 of our people have been killed by this beast," he said. "The damage to livestock is appalling. It will bankrupt our province."

"But what is this terrible creature?" I asked. "The villagers talk of a saber-toothed monster that attacks and disappears with the speed of light. Some swear it's not even flesh and blood, but a phantom tiger begotten by devils."

The magistrate shook his head sadly. "Teacher," he said, "when you have lived long in this land, you will know

the CONSUL

There was a violent rattling at the compound gate. There stood the consul, and I shouted to the gateman to let him come in

that many of us are like children in our concept of the supernatural. I myself am at a loss to explain this evil which has fallen on our people."

Now, there are tigers in China, and vicious ones, but some of the stories he told me made my toenails curl. The man-killer, he said, terrified people not only by its ferocity but by its vast size. He told how it had taken a large heifer out of a pen behind a dwelling one night. When the farm people heard the commotion and went out to investigate, they saw a huge, misshapen beast pick up the heifer, jump straight upward into the starlit night, and disappear into the blackness. The pen was surrounded by a vertical embankment more than twelve feet high, and no tracks were found on the hard ground.

A couple of nights later, another family had just finished its evening meal. The men of the house were sitting around the table, smoking, and a child had fallen asleep with its head against a leg of the table. Everything was normal until something suddenly rushed through the door, upsetting the light and throwing the house into darkness and confusion. The table suddenly flew through the air into the courtyard and the monster left it there, with deep marks in the leg. The child had vanished.

Time and again men tending their herds or walking along the trails between the villages mysteriously disappeared forever, or were found later half devoured by the killer.

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A STRIPER for the CONSUL

(*continued from page 25*)

I was deeply concerned about all these horrible stories, but they really didn't hit home until they began to affect the work I'd come halfway around the world to do. The pastor of one of our local churches, Ling Siong-Daik, came to my house one evening for tea.

"It's disheartening, Caldwell," Ling said. "When we built the church, the response of the natives to our work seemed to indicate we'd make great strides. But then this unearthly creature appeared, killing native after native on their way to church. Our attendence has dropped off to nothing. Unless we end these murders I'm afraid we'll have to abandon the mission."

He could give me no description of the assassin. It struck with terrifying suddenness and was gone again into the night with its victims, and the conflicting reports of the natives made identification an impossibility. Here was something that threatened the very structure of the organization to which I belonged.

"No doubt," I said, more cheerfully than I felt, "we'll find some way to stop this thing. I'll do what I can to help."

I lay awake that night for a long time. Since I refused to subscribe to any belief in demon animals I had to accept the most likely explanation—that one or more man-killing tigers were wreaking havoc among the natives and their stock.

Knowing the probable answer and doing something about it were two different things. Obviously, the man-eater that was terrifying our church members must be hunted down and destroyed. I would undertake to do that, but I'd need help. So next day I went to see the British consul for the region, a bulbous fellow who, as far as I knew, had never been outside the city limits of Foochow during his tour of duty in China.

"Tigers in Fukien?" he snorted. "Only a missionary could dream up such a notion!"

"There has been a frightful loss of life in this province," I said, trying to hold my temper. "And from the widely scattered reports, there must be quite a population of the big cats. If you and the local government will give me a hand. I think we can dispose of the worst killers.

He snorted again.

"Tigers! I don't think you'd know the difference between a tiger and a civet cat if you met them both in the henhouse. No, His Majesty's Government won't help you with your harebrained schemes."

I must have waited a full minute before replying.

"Mr. Price," I said, "I hope your teeth are good."

"Eh?" he grunted. "My teeth? Why?"

"Because," I said, "before long you're going to be eating some mighty tough words."

As I stood on the steps of the consulate, I murmured to myself, "Another challenge." I grinned wryly, for the stair steps of my life had been a series of challenges. Almost from the moment I first opened my eyes in Cleveland, Ohio, on a blustery March day in 1876, I'd spent my life—most of it around Tellico Plains, Tennessee—in bucking obstacles.

The first challenge? I remembered it in vivid detail. I was three years old then, and living in Cleveland, and I wore long, golden curls. One day I had wandered a bit too far from our home to watch the whitecaps playing tag out on the endless water of Lake Erie. Someone lifted me from the ground, and I supposed it was my mother, for that had often happened. But when I found myself being carried around a corner in the wrong direction from home, I twisted and looked into the wrinkled face of a tousle-haired old woman. She could only hobble, so when I screamed she put me down. She fondled my golden curls and spoke in a low voice: "You'd better run home now, little girl, and tell your mother she should remember what happened to young Charlie Ross."

The little Ross boy had been kidnaped and never heard of again.

For years after we moved to Tennessee, my curls plagued my life. The gang, led by my older brother, Ernest, shunned me because I looked like a girl. Being excluded from the gang's wild-bee fighting grieved me most. I wanted a share of the spoils after a nest of bees had been conquered and its sweets handed out. And I wanted to be like my older brothers, Ernest and Will.

That was the second challenge. One afternoon I rushed into the melee, brandishing a straw hat, and fought it out with five bees that had backed Will against a wall. Both my eyes were swollen shut, but the gang voted me in if I could lose my curls and raise the initiation fee of five cents. I did both. Our colored cook cut off my curls, and then paid me a nickel each for two of them.

Then there was the challenge of the old granddaddy coon. Jim Hoyle had

The would-be avengers scattered in wild disorder, many of them carrying the marks of the great cat's claws

tried to catch that particular ringtail for years, but it was Will and Dick Gettys and I who finally jumped him along a small stream in Cleig's Hollow. The hounds were after him in full voice and I ran ahead of my hunting mates in the dark to head the race. So excited that I forgot about the high bluffs along the creek, I crashed headlong over one and landed in a deep pool.

Unhurt but chilled to the bone, I climbed the far bank and raced up the narrow ridge to head the animal off from the deep recesses of Cleig's Hollow, where he had always managed to outwit the pack. After a race that drained all my wind, I got there ahead of the coon and turned him back toward the creek. He swam across and took off into the open country on the other side.

By this time both Will and Dick had caught up. The dogs were tired and the water was cold, so they refused to go into it. Will picked up one of them and threw it in. The dog swam back and climbed ashore, showering us with cold water.

I was already wet and there seemed to be no way to get the pack across but to lead them, so I jumped in again. Frank, one of the older dogs, lunged in after me, swam across, and hit the trail on the opposite shore. One by one the other dogs, unable to resist the music, followed us across. The coon made another circle and once more I tried to turn him, but he got ahead of me and plunged into the tangle of Turtle Pond.

The dogs lost him there, but instead of making his usual safe get-away, the big ringtail for some reason chose to climb a massive poplar tree in the cove. When I got there, the hounds were milling around it, singing excitedly. In the moonlight we could not see the coon up in the tree, but in the very topmost branches was the old nest of a red-tailed hawk. Will worked around until he had the nest between him and the moon, then he stood stock-still while I made a wide circle to a prone treetop on the other side and began crashing through it. Will saw two ears and then a head rise slowly over the rim of the nest between him and the moon.

We took turns swinging the ax. A few hours later when the tree began to "talk," Dick pulled two of the dogs off to one side, and I took a stand downhill from the way the tree would fall.

The coon stuck with the tree until it hit the ground. I met him at the treetop. He wasn't scared in the least. He came at me with a growl and I swung a dogwood cudgel with which I always fought it out with the coons we treed. But the club caught in the tree limbs, my feet went out from under me, and I found myself in a mad tangle of raccoon, hounds, and tree branches. I almost choked one of the hounds to death before I realized it wasn't the coon. But then I got my hands on the furry head, holding it against the ground. Both Will and Dick jumped to my aid, and Dick forced a stick between the ringtail's teeth, tying the jaws tightly with a strand of cord he carried in his pocket. We had the phantom coon that had eluded the best hunters for years, and we brought him home alive.

Even being in Foochow was the result of a challenge. As a young man I had a number of chances to get into professional baseball, but underneath I felt I was slated for more important work. I was sure of it when the call came for me to go to China as a missionary. This was one of the big dares that life had handed me.

And now a most important challenge had come in the form of a killer tiger —or tigers—and a sarcastic British consul. I had to win out, because to lose face in China is bad. Not only would I have to produce tigers, but I'd have to produce them in a dramatic manner, that would convince the natives I was a man to hearken to.

I immediately wrote to my brother Will in New York, asking him to ship me the largest-caliber rifle he could find. But drawing on his experience as a deer and bear hunter in the Adirondacks, Will took it upon himself to fill my order with a .303 Savage, which, he decided, was heavy enough for any game, including the stripers.

Then the story of my appeal to the consul got into the papers, with the result that a group of German hunters came down from Shanghai to hunt the man-eaters. Those worthies obtained from the military authorities an armed guard to accompany them as they rode the mountain trails in sedan chairs, trying to find a tiger.

From what I heard of the expedition, they brought along more beer than ammunition and had a hilarious time of it. At any rate, they didn't kill a tiger, and went back to Shanghai grumbling about the damned missionary who had falsely reported big cats around Kutien.

At the annual mission conference in November, I sought and got an assignment to work at Kutien, far back in the mountains. I could have stayed in Foochow, but for several reasons I preferred the rural work. My rifle had arrived from America, and I hoped for a chance to use it. Besides serving as principal of a boy's school in Kutien, I traveled among the churches in two counties. And there wasn't any doubt about the presence of tigers. In many of the villages there was mourning among those who had lost a member of their family or their life's savings in livestock. And some of the tracks I saw, larger than dinner plates, and claw scratches on trees, higher than I could reach, were evidence that the lau-hu was the central figure in these tragedies.

There was no longer much talk about demons—the attacking cats were much too substantial. One had taken a cow almost out of a farmer's hands. He'd been eating his noonday meal when the big cat charged from a near-by thicket, killing the cow where it stood in the plow yoke, a few yards away.

Another tiger was disturbed in its bed by two deer hunters. The animal leaped at the man nearest him, seized him by the leg, and dragged him into

If you think the wild boar at the right is just another dead animal you are very much mistaken, for Harry R. Caldwell has helped to take it alive in the Cherokee National Forest, Tennessee. He's hogtied it and is holding it down with his knee.

Rugged work? You bet, but nothing compared with some of the challenges that Caldwell faced and overcame in his 44 years as a Methodist missionary in China.

"A Striper for the Consul" is the story of just such a challenge—one that put Caldwell on the spot. He decided that Fukien Province wasn't big enough to hold him and certain man-eating tigers —and thereby hangs the tale.

I remembered how the strange old hag had picked me up, when I was a child

the ravine below. Luckily the hunter succeeded in grasping a small tree, and the tiger released its hold, leaving the native almost paralyzed with pain and shock.

Wherever I went, people were discussing the killings in the hills adjacent to the villages and hamlets. There seemed not one but a hundred of the jungle cats that were taking a toll of human life, so I considered it a simple matter to fill that order for the consul, and incidentally make my job of bringing the Word to these people a thing of momentous import by giving them physical and moral aid, as well as spiritual help.

They needed it, too. In many ways that region, stretching vast distances along the rim of the East China and South China Seas, has been devastated by time. Ancient beyond recorded history, it's a poor land by western standards. For untold generations, men have sapped its soil until the yield became meager by even their own poor standards. The natives are impoverished to a degree that would be incredible to anyone not living with them day after day, year after year. They have few tools for agriculture, no adequate weapons for getting game or for defense against the larger animals.

Along the coast the hills are barren, but deeper in the interior of the province, both flora and fauna are lush and semitropical. The whole country was crudely terraced ages ago by a people who saw the life-giving soil slipping away into the streams. Succeeding generations gradually abandoned the bottom terraces which, with the ravines and hollows below them, reverted to the wild, growing heavy with thickets of low shrubs, bushes, ferns, and sword grass ten feet high—all interwoven with a network of tough rattan vines.

It is through these impenetrable thickets, nestling between the cultivated hills, that the tiger trails run, and from which the big cats stalk forth around dusk to wreak destruction on the villagers and their stock.

Here on these trails I hoped to get my face-saving tiger, as well as help rid the country of some of its wanton killers. And although during the forty-four years I served as a Methodist missionary to the Chinese people, I bagged a total of forty-eight of the big cats, getting that striper for the consul stands out as one of the most dramatic moments of my life.

The hunt really started when I attempted to set up a mission in a certain community. But its elders would not even give me an audience. One attempt after another to soften them was blocked just when it seemed I'd be successful. I knew that the prejudice against me was not personal: It was the same prejudice the villagers had against all foreigners and their works. But disaster can level even prejudice. And disaster came to the community—in the shape of a man-killing tiger.

The elders of the clan appealed for help and I responded eagerly, carrying along my Bible as well as my rifle.

For several days I lived at the home of Ding, the elder who had extended the invitation. The first evening, as we sat at the table, the conversation centered around my rifle, with its little, sharp-pointed cartridges.

"Gun too small to kill the great cat," one of the elders stated.

"It packs a terrible blow," I replied. "Like hitting him with a stone it would take twenty men to lift."

"But our guns are larger," Ding said, "and they do not stop the charge of the lau-hu."

"Let me see yours," I requested.

He put an ancient 12 gauge fowling piece, bound together by wire, into my hands. It was the opportunity I had been waiting for. I explained in language as simple as I knew, the difference in the ballistics of the two guns, and from that point worked into the comparisons between their worship of idols and images and worship of the One God. They listened respectfully; the Chinese are most polite.

"If your gun proves to be as good as you say your religion is," one of the group finally said, "maybe you will be our great teacher. Let us first see what your gun does to the tiger."

Next day I borrowed a goat and two small kids, and placed the latter in a basket covered with cloth. With the basket, and the nanny, I worked my way into tiger territory on the rim of the village. Where two well-beaten cat trails crossed, I tied the goat securely to a stake and hid the basket of kids close by. Then I crouched in the tall grass to wait.

It's impossible to describe the sensations on a long vigil for a tiger. The imaginary stripers one hears and feels and smells in the dank recesses of a lair are worse than meeting a black-and-yellow killer face to face. A hunter never knows at what moment he may find himself stalked. It's dangerous to relax, even a little.

I had followed the first rule of a tiger hunt by staking out a goat in one of the well-worn trails. The big cats seldom attack through thick brush, but follow a pathway as stealthily as a tabby stalking field mice back at home. I had already scouted the trails of this particular area and knew I was safe unless I made some foolish blunder. If a cat came along his jungle beat to find the bleating kids buried in the dense grass behind me, he'd be within twenty yards of my blind before I saw him.

For more than two hours I sat perfectly still, alert to every movement and sound. Nothing broke the tense silence but the rasping call of a bamboo partridge. The tension was so great that the crawling of ants in the dry leaves

sounded like the movement of some large animal through the brush.

There is no way to figure a tiger. I had about given up hope of glimpsing one that afternoon, when the head of a huge striper appeared in the overhanging grass, not more than fifteen yards away. He was moving toward the kids in the basket—intent, alert, and heedless of everything except the bleating of the baby goats. He was a magnificent brute, lithe and sleek, with the sinews rippling like corded cables under his saffron hide.

Realizing that if the tiger saw the movement of my arms and should turn on me he'd cover my carcass like a blanket before I could get my gun up, I very cautiously raised my rifle. At that moment, less than half a hundred yards behind the stalking tom, the edge of the jungle rang with the voices of children out gathering fuel.

The big cat paused and listened for a space. I could have put a bullet through him then, but I held my fire. If I only wounded him, he might crash back along the trail into the middle of the young fuel gatherers, leaving them mangled and broken at the ravine's rim. At that range I didn't see how I could miss, but I didn't dare take a chance.

With a great bound, the cat left his stalk and the sword grass swallowed him. Fearing that the killer might circle back and stalk the children, I jumped out of my blind and ran down the terrace to where I could guard them as they finished picking up sticks and dried grass roots and trudged back to the village.

The next day my cook, Da Da, joined me in the village. Da Da was my long and faithful companion during the years I traveled the back trails of China, and together we learned much about hunting the big cats.

"Master," he suggested, "we should make a study of all the trails around this and adjoining villages, so that when the killer strikes again, we will know his home territory as well as he."

I thought it was a good idea, so we set out to explore all the tangles and jungled ravines around the village. One amazing sign we found was on a lone pine tree standing beside the trail, high up on the mountain. The bark was slashed with fresh marks eleven feet above the ground, giving us some idea of the immense size of the cat. Other trees scattered around the bowl were similarly marked.

It was on this first exploratory trip that I came close to losing my scalp, and gleaned a grain of valuable experience that saved me half a dozen times while I was in the Far East.

I was walking ahead of Da Da, when my eye caught a movement in the brush on the hillside above the trail. I stopped in my tracks, swinging my rifle barrel around for instant action. Two voices—that of my cook and a strange one from the brush—reached me at the same time: "Don't move! Don't move!"

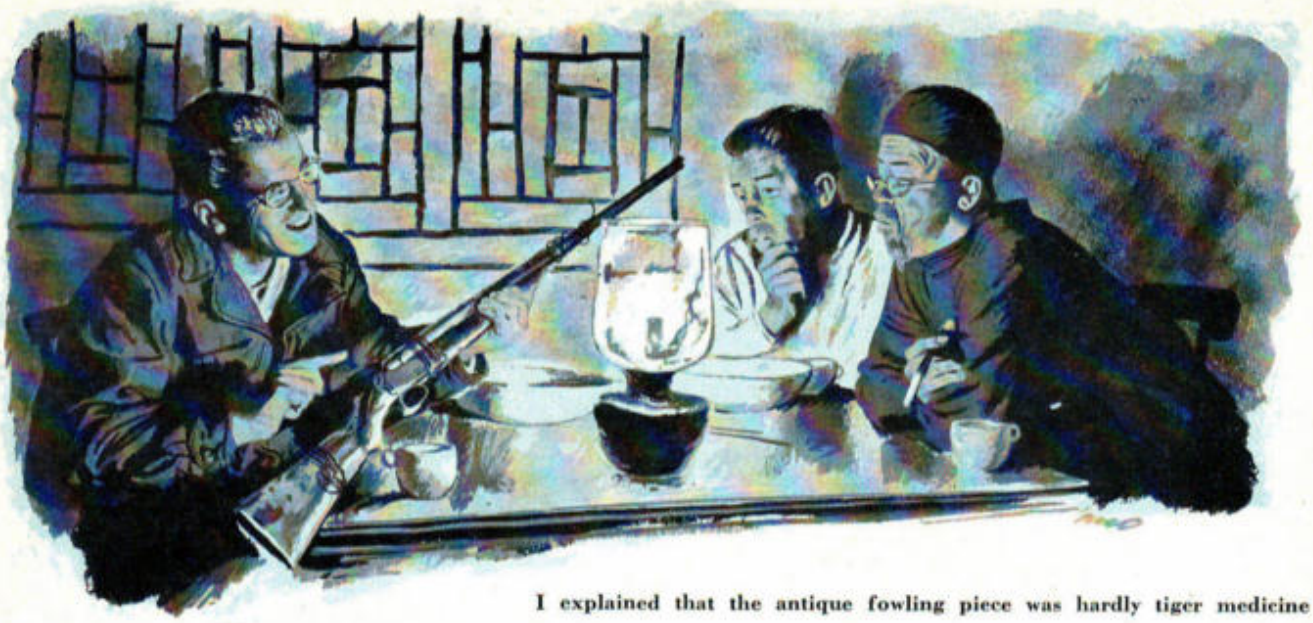
Then, as a native on the hillside scrambled down to where we stood, Da Da showed me a string stretched across the trail at the height of a man's hips.

"Tiger trap!" he said.

The hair-trigger string ran through the brush to a powerful crossbow that threw an arrow when it was tripped. The arrowhead was a steel dart, and just behind it was a cloth or string wrapping, soaked in potent poison that would drop a tiger within a few feet of the set.

Since the few guns in the villages were inadequate for big game, this bow was about the only means the natives

The unfortunate native, dragged into a ravine, grabbed frantically at a tree bough



I explained that the antique fowling piece was hardly tiger medicine

had for doing away with the man-eaters. But I found out that more humans than tigers were killed by trap crossbows. Never again did I travel the dense trails without a long brush of bamboo in my hand, feeling ahead for the string that would send a poisoned dart into my vitals.

Our job of exploration done, Da Da and I settled down to wait for a striper to show itself in one of the villages within the big bowl of mountains. And we didn't have long to relax. A few days later I heard an outcry from a settler's cottage across the creek followed by shouting among the women and children.

Fearing that the tiger had caught another child, I caught up my rifle and tore down the trail toward the disturbance. I arrived out of breath to learn that the victim was only a goat, but the frantic women pleaded with me to overtake and bring back the nanny, whose flesh was worth several dollars.

So I set out to pick up the tiger's trail —a well-defined one in the grass and tall ferns. The fresh marks in the vegetation led diagonally across the hill in the direction of the area where we had seen the marked pine trees, and I hurried as fast as I dared, hoping to overtake the animal when it stopped to feast on its kill before reaching the tangle of the ravine.

For half a mile I followed the trail. It zigzagged through every clump of bushes, and I approached each of them cautiously to keep from bumping heads with disaster. Since the tiger could pass through the brambles much faster than I, he gained a good lead.

I was disappointed that he did not halt in any cover but proceeded right through to a wide basin, densely covered with wild-grape vines and sword grass. I had no doubt that he was in this depression, devouring his goat, but it would have been much too dangerous to try to rout him out alone.

I went back to the village and organized a drive, assigning ten beaters, armed with pike staffs and guns with which to defend themselves, and with gongs and oil tins to make plenty of noise. They stormed into the ravine and I took my stand on an open ridge across which the animal would have to pass to reach his main lair.

The only position of vantage I could find was a wide, flat rock, over which the animal would come if he followed what the beaters assured me was the only trail out of the basin. I had two choices. If I stood on the rock, in the open, the killer would see me and dodge off into the brush before I could get a shot. If I hid behind the rock, he would approach much too close for comfort before I saw him at all.

Just as I took my place behind the boulder, the beaters shouted that they had found the remains of the goat. Seconds later I heard the tiger bounding along the ridge toward my rock. Then there was silence. The seconds turned into minutes as I waited, tight as stretched gut, but the animal did not appear. I figured he might have circled in the brush and was stalking me from behind, so I decided to climb, fast.

When I crawled up the surface of the rock, I saw for the first time that another trail branched off the one I was watching and angled toward the upper end of the basin. There was no doubt that the tiger had taken that pathway to escape and would cross the ridge somewhere above me. If I wanted a shot, I'd have to outrun him to where this branch trail crossed the ridge.

I had moved but a few yards when the killer appeared, not too far above me. He glared at me for a second, then swung quickly and put a pine tree between us. Behind this cover, he began to stalk me. Reaching the base of the pine, the huge striper laid back his ears and crouched for a spring. I threw up my rifle and fired squarely at his face. I couldn't understand how I missed at that distance, but I did and he whirled in the air, bounded once, and was gone. My bullet had struck the side of the tree, blowing out bark and splinters, and I was considerably annoyed at missing, even though I had stopped the charge under conditions that put all the odds in favor of the cat.

The next afternoon word came from a village beyond the big lair that the striped devil had just killed a small boy. Da Da and I hurried across the ridge and staked out a goat. We waited a few yards away, behind a bank of ferns.

It wasn't long before a tom came down the trail to the billy's bleating. As he crouched to spring, I put the .303 into action, but knew instantly that I hadn't hit him. One long, graceful bound carried him out of sight into the jungle.

Two misses in two days! That sort of thing could be serious if one of the big cats caught me in just the right position. Since I estimated that both bullets had hit more than a foot to the right, I rechecked my rifle sights as soon as I got back to the village. They were badly out of line. One of the natives admitted that he had hit the barrel against a wall when he picked up the rifle to look at it. He never knew that his carelessness might have cost me my life.

The tiger didn't show up again for several days. While we waited for him, a runner brought word that General Thomas Holcomb, of the U. S. Marines, was coming to my house for a visit, and I went off to meet him.

While I was gone, the striper was daring enough to invade a near-by settlement in broad daylight. One farmer had seen him duck into the thicket of an isolated ravine with a pig in his mighty maw. A group of villagers decided to rout him out. After making the proper overture to their gods, the men got word from their priest that the "big ruler god," whose frowning image sat in a temple under the hill, assured

success if they wanted a skirmish with the wild tomcat.

Armed with pikes, poles, and guns loaded with slugs and rusty nails, a hundred men deployed themselves for the attack. They drove into the tangle, but the cat wasn't in a running mood. The foray lasted for almost an hour, during which time the hunters suffered more than the tiger. With masterful timing, the striper charged again and again, slashing right and left effectively, and with every roaring assault dampening the ardor of the would-be avengers.

The villagers, their enthusiasm stone cold at last, had retired from the fray, when a hunter from a neighboring hamlet arrived on the scene with a very much repaired double-barreled shotgun, loaded with slugs as long as a man's thumb. Followed by a number of friends, who went along to see the execution, he walked within twenty-five yards of the tiger before he saw it. The hunter fired two shots in rapid succession, one of them evidently creasing the big cat. He roared and charged, so frightening the hunter that the man fell helpless in his tracks.

The tiger swung and charged the nearest native, who was standing on a rise of ground overlooking an irrigation pool. The man tumbled backward and fell into the water, saving his life. The crazed cat then turned and charged a third farmer who stood on the terrace below. The man dropped to his knees and the cat passed clean over him, then turned and bounded into the fringe of sword grass that bordered his lair.

When General Holcomb came back with me next day, the villagers assured us that the striper was still in the tangle where they had last seen him. Tom and I spent the whole morning making a survey of the smaller ravines around the big lair, beating them out with the help of the natives. Satisfying ourselves that no tigers lurked on our flanks or at our rear, we tethered our goat on a barren terrace just before mid afternoon, withdrew some fifteen yards, and concealed ourselves in a clump of bushes.

Our first indication of a stalking jungle tom was the alarm call of a little bird, a bulbul, a few minutes after the goat began to bleat. I had already learned to note carefully the chirps of certain birds whose language always indicates a tiger on the move. Sentries stationed on all sides of a blind are a big help in dealing with an animal that drifts through the jungle as silently as a shadow!

By the disturbed notes of the birds, we followed our tiger along a hidden trail in front of us to a wild pear bush, which soon became literally full of the feathered sentinels, all of them scolding vigorously.

"From where he is now," I whispered, "he can see us."

"Will he charge?" Tom breathed.

"Be ready for anything," I warned.

For five minutes we both sat rigid, waiting for the big cat to spring suddenly out of the undergrowth into our faces. We had both begun to breathe again, when there was a sudden crash to our right. We both whirled, expecting a charge from that direction, but all we could see was grass weaving under the weight of a heavy body. While our attention was focused on this disturbance, there was another crash near the pear bush, accompanied by the cries of a struggling deer.

"Holy cow!" Holcomb gasped.

He jumped out of the blind, with me on his heels, and we sprinted to intercept the tiger before it could reach its lair. But we were not fast enough to get another glimpse of it. The tracks that we found—as plain as a story written in the earth—verified what we already suspected.

There had been *two* cats. The first—and from the size of his pads, he was the killer tom—had stalked within easy striking distance of the goat, then had seen us and crouched, probably trying to decide his next move. A second tiger, responding to the bleating of the goat, had approached along the upper line of terraces, and flushed a number of

As I watched in astonishment the villagers sopped up every drop of blood with rags torn from their clothing

muntjac deer out of the grass. He sprang on one and spooked the others into the very jaws of the first striper. Both had made their kills within a few yards of us and slunk off into the recesses of the ravine, where we dared not follow.

A month after General Holcomb left, the killer renewed his predations with such terrifying results that the elders again sent word to me, requesting that I return to the village immediately. I canceled plans I had made to visit another community. Da Da was away and wouldn't return until late that afternoon. I didn't wait for him, but decided to start across the mountain, carrying the shotgun in order to kill a few pheasants for supper. I left word for Da Da to meet me at the village with my rifle, and walked across the hills to the elder's house, flushing and killing half a dozen cocks along the way.

I expected to find Da Da there when I arrived. Instead, I found excitement in the village. Only an hour before, the tiger had literally taken a goat out of a farmer's hands, while he tugged on the other end of its tether. The big cat hadn't harmed the man, but had bounded off with the billy.

I couldn't afford to let such an opportunity go by. Hoping that Da Da would show any minute, I prepared to go after the big cat without my rifle. Pouring the small pellets of bird shot out of a couple of shells, I melted them down and drained the molten lead into a hollow section of small bamboo. When the lead hardened again, I ripped the bamboo away, sawed the bright lead into slugs, and rounded off the corners by rubbing them together against rough stones. I reloaded the shells with these slugs.

Almost immediately after I had tethered my bait goat the tiger came, stalking along one of the jungle trails to an abandoned terrace that rimmed his lair. In the edge of the brush, not more than fifty yards away, the animal suddenly stopped, as though he sensed something wrong.

For nearly an hour he sat there, too far away for an effective blow by the shotgun, repeatedly putting out his front foot like a huge tabby, as if to move forward, then drawing it back again.

My exciting vigil came to an abrupt end. Suddenly the tiger left his seat and traversed a depression that flanked a barren acre between him and the goat. At the edge of the clearing he bounded forward, streaking across it to the terrace on the other side. Under cover, he made three great leaps that brought him to the foot of the very terrace where I was guarding the goat.

But when he settled for a spring, it was not at the goat but at me!

I had to act fast. Muttering a little prayer that the lead slugs would do the trick, I threw up the gun and blasted the striper full in the face. He sidestepped and crouched again, his yellow eyes burning into mine. I let him have the other barrel. He fell over backward and died on his side, kicking convulsively.

This tiger was a small male with a beautiful coat. I was examining it with some disappointment that it was not the killer I wanted to bring back in triumph to the consul, when the villagers swarmed up the hill, eager to see my kill. They hardly looked at the tiger, though, until every available drop of blood was sopped up with rags torn from clothing. Men and women alike fought for sprigs of blood-stained grass. From Ding, the elder, I learned that the blood of a tiger is highly prized for two purposes. A bit of bloody cloth is worn around the neck of a child as a preventive against the evil spirits that are thought to cause measles and smallpox. And a blood-soaked handkerchief waved in front of an attacking dog will supposedly turn its charge into a full retreat.

When I got to the village Da Da was there, and elated about the tiger I had taken. But since the villagers declared that the man-killer was still in the vicinity, we decided to stay long enough for one more try at it. I was beginning to fear that this was one challenge of my life that I might be unable to overcome. Two challenges, in fact—one from the villagers, who depended on me to rid their community of the killer, and the other from the consul, who no doubt was still talking in his club at Foochow about missionaries who can't tell the difference between tigers and civet cats.

The next morning Da Da and I obtained a goat and tethered it where two trails crossed near a heavily timbered ravine. We had examined this jungle once before and I had a feeling that anyone looking for trouble in a striped coat could find it there. We backed a few yards away from our bait, to the foot of an abandoned terrace, and settled down to wait.

Although tigers seldom leave a well-traveled trail to plow through the jungle, there are exceptions, and one of them brought us a close call.

The first indication we had of the striper's presence was a guttural growl from somewhere very near. I shot a

quick glance at Da Da. He was actually green with fear. The low growl rumbled along the ground again and I bounded to my feet. This time the big cat had approached our goat through a break in the waist-high grass, and was on the terrace above us, not more than a few yards away. He was crouched in the grass, either to hide or for the fatal spring.

I knew better than to try to run or dodge. That was something the big cat was accustomed to, and expected. In such a situation a fast, strong offensive was best. Without even weighing what the results might be, I scrambled up the retaining wall, with my gun in position to shoot at point-blank range. At the most critical moment my toe slipped and I sprawled over the rim of the terrace, right in the face of the crouching tiger. I believe I could have actually reached out and slapped him in the face.

I don't know what it was that cost the big cat his nerve. He'd probably never had a man dive headlong at him before and the sudden commotion may have been more than he could stand. It might have been the white man's smell, since Chinese scholars assured me it would often stop the charge of a tiger that hadn't been wounded. Whatever the reason was, he whirled and sprang into the dense bramble.

With no more than a battered knee from the fall, I tried to follow for a shot, but could not work myself into the right position for a sure poke with the rifle. When I returned to Da Da, we shifted to a new stand near the tethered goat and waited for a long time, but there was no further sight or sound of the tiger.

Bitterly disappointed over our continued failure to get this big cat, we arose to start back. In a dense clump of bramble above us, a lot of little birds were chirping excitedly. Picking up a brickbat from an old grave, I heaved it uphill into the thicket.

I was not only amazed but totally unprepared for the explosion that followed. I couldn't have got more violent action if I had tossed a hand grenade. The whole slope seemed to be covered with one huge tiger, charging down the hill toward us. The striper had gone off somewhere, worked himself up a good mad, and come back to stalk the two strange creatures that had spooked him.

Boiling down the slope, with his head almost touching the ground, the jungle tom did not look in the least like the lithe, nimble creature that he is on level ground or going uphill. Between bounds his back humped up and his legs looked too long.

At the crack of my rifle he bounded high into the air, turned completely over, and bounced against the earth, rolling almost to our feet. I backed off and waited, my rifle ready, but after a few minutes a last convulsive shudder told me the killer was dead.

This was the consul's tiger. After receiving the heartfelt thanks of the villagers, we traveled over the mountains that night to catch an early-morning launch for the river trip to Foochow.

Things could not have worked out better for us. The launch ran aground on a sandbar in the river, and stuck there for three hours until the incoming tide floated it off. All this time the tiger was on the open deck, bloating in the torrid sun. When we arrived in Foochow at noon, the proportions of the jungle tom were more like those of a well-fed horse than of a tiger.

The launch captain landed us at the busy customs jetty. My bearers picked up the cat and started ashore. People began swarming out of the tea hongs, customhouses, and government buildings. I led the way, followed by eight men carrying the man-eater swung between poles. When we reached the top of the hill, near the Foochow Club, thousands of people were following us.

It was possible for only a couple of hundred of them to crowd into the mission compound at one time, so we let them through in groups to look at the tiger. I heard a violent rattling of the compound gate and saw the British consul peering through the uprights. I shouted to the gateman to let him in and he broke through the circle of onlookers with his elbows swinging. He looked down on the great cat, then walked completely around it.

"Mr. Caldwell," he said in awed tones, "I have lived in India and seen many Bengal tigers, but never one nearly as big as this."

"Do you call this a tiger?" I asked, feigning surprise.

"Do I—— Why man, it's the biggest tiger in creation!"

"Just shows," I said, "how a man can be mistaken. I have always been under the impression that these things were civet cats. Back in the hills I have to chase them out of my chicken yard every morning. I thought I'd bring one along to Foochow to let you fellows see what they look like."

That did it. The consul stared at me for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and elbowed his way through the crowd to the gate, which he slammed behind him.

Revenge may be wicked, but it sometimes has a sweet taste. And I date any success I may have had in China as a missionary from that moment on the slope, when I overcame one of the greatest challenges of my life.

THE END

Another episode of Harry R. Caldwell's exciting adventures will appear in an early issue.

The whole slope seemed to be covered with one huge tiger