



The flashlight's beam caught the killer charging, trunk extended, ears wide.



Death Of a Rogue

The mimeographed notice described him as "a male elephant of pinkish color" and didn't even mention his record of fifty killings. There was more to his story than that

by **Dr. Robert A. Killebrew**
as told to **Ray Franklin Kauffman**

It reminded me of one of our own post-office notices that are headed **WANTED—For Murder**, that mimeographed sheet on the station wall at Domahani, India, but it didn't have a photograph with a number, or list the culprit's crimes—more than fifty killings. The sheet read:

PROCLAMATION

- Elephant Preservation Act (Bengal Amendment)
1. A wild solitary elephant is visiting Tondoo and Basmandanga tea gardens and creating panic amongst the garden labourers by entering their lines at night and causing considerable damage to Indian cornfields and destroying some houses in coolie lines.
 2. Description of elephant:
 - (a) A male elephant with tusks of about 4' in length, of pinkish colour on the head and chest.
 - (b) Height: 10'4".
 - (c) Girth of front legs: 5'2" (approximately).
 - (d) Girth of hind legs: 5'1".

Anyone who kills the animal will be rewarded with two tusks of the elephant. The nearest Forest Officer should be at once intimated of the destruction of the elephant.

This order will remain in force up to 31-10-45.

(Signed) **R. S. Krishnaswamy**
Deputy Commissioner
Jalpaiguri

Death of a Rogue

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And the view of the northern Bengal plains from the station window was not unlike parts of our own prairies, but here the cultivated section runs abruptly into the Jalpaiguri jungle, reaching along the foot of the Himalayan wall, and in the bright heat of the dry monsoon, Mount Everest itself can be seen hanging over it like a mirage in the sky.

The section coolies were unloading our jeep and trailer and Mr. Gibbs, our host, was telling us gloomily that our chances to get a shot at the rogue looked dim. He hadn't been reported for more than a month when he had charged into a gang of forest coolies, pushed over a tree where one had taken refuge and trampled him into pulp. "The trail's cold but you can have a go at it tomorrow if you like. And tonight," he added cheerfully, "you're all set to bag a tiger. I staked out two kills last night and the marshes are built."

W. H. Gibbs was an official of the Burma Assam Railway. I had met him in Calcutta, where I was stationed as a lieutenant commander, at an officers' tea. Gibbs was liaison between the British and our own transportation people. He was an expert hunter and a crack shot with a room full of trophies at his Domanahani home as evidence.

We talked hunting. My own experience with big game had been one only deer, medium, and one only black bear, very small. When Gibbs asked me up-Domanahani, just below Jalpaiguri, is about 350 miles north of Calcutta the

Darjeeling line—and told me there was a chance at a rogue elephant as well as tigers, I spent most of my energy and all my ingenuity wrangling two weeks' leave. I took along two chiefs: Arenson, machinist, and Phillips, photographer. Neither had hunted before, but they were available and, with the uncanny ability of chiefs to procure whatever is needed, would be useful.

There is no elephant shooting permitted in India except for an officially declared rogue. Indian elephants have smaller ears, lighter tusks and sparser hair than the African species. They prefer the comparative coolness and darkness of swamp and jungle and seldom come out in open country. Because they do not breed too prolifically in captivity, the wild elephants are a source of wealth essential to the economic life of India. They are the road builders, the jungle clearers, the loggers.

Most rogues are the old bulls who eventually lose the fight for the herd to the younger and stronger. Usually, when the younger bulls are driven off, they hang around the fringes of the herd until they can induce a young female to follow. Then they settle down to standard wild-elephant behavior and do no damage.

Emotionally, an elephant is so constituted that he is unable to live alone and if the defeated bull is not successful in finding female companionship he becomes frustrated, possibly insane, and a menace to property. Seldom do they intentionally kill man.

The government, upon receiving satisfactory evidence of a lone bull's depredations from forest guards and planters, will proclaim the animal a rogue. But the proclamation is good only for six months

and then, if not killed, he must be re-declared a rogue. This gives the animal a fair chance to pick up a mate and go about his business of producing more elephants for India.

The elephant we were after had been proclaimed a rogue for six years. The shortage of elephant hunters and ammunition due to the war had prolonged his life but it also made him a killer. He had been shot with every available type of weapon in hands of planters and forest guards, including shotguns with buck-shot. The many torturing wounds and the sting of shot turned the blind destruction in his frustrated mind into an active hatred of men; he would kill by intent, singling out one of a running group, and it gave him a cunning. He knew the smell of gunpowder and was wary, and he knew the ways of trackers.

He was born about 1910, a husky bull calf three feet high, blinking into the filtered light of the jungle on unsteady legs, like any other calf except his body was marked with ugly, pink blotches. He was part albino. This freak discoloration in some way enraged his sire, who with one terrific blow smashed the bull calf out of his sight, leaving him stunned and bleeding, his skull warped, his lower jaw broken.

But in some way he escaped the fringe of alert predators and tottered after the herd to his mother. His broken, bleeding mouth was able to take nourishment. During the suckling period his jaw healed. Although the right side of his lower jaw was six inches lower than the left, teeth formed in such a way that he was able to eat normally, and grow in pace with other calves. He could butt and tug-of-war with his trunk with the best of his age.

Then his young tusks protruded, turning slightly inward from his misshapen skull. When he was a powerful prime bull more than ten feet high and weighing five tons, the long tusks had bowed inward so far that they overlapped the trunk. The tusks were not only useless for fighting but an actual handicap. His fate was sealed. At the prime of his life he was driven off by the old bull. No female followed. No female ever followed.

He was a freak despised by his own kind. A huge frustrated beast, he swayed through the jungle alone, conscious of his great power, pushing over trees, trampling and belovling his frustration, venting his wrath on the jungle itself, forever denied the joys of mating and the companionship of the herd.

Then reports began filtering in: a bullock cart of maize was upset on the highway. The driver, fortunately, escaped. Later, others were not so lucky. A motor-car traveling toward Janti found a lone bull elevating, oddly marked, blocking the road. There were many more. In 1939 he was proclaimed a rogue for the first time.

Even with discouraging lack of recent reports I was anxious to see if we couldn't pick up his trail. Although the dry monsoon was only two weeks old, already the ground, except in a few depressions, was baked hard. The rogue's last killing was in the fire lane near the jungle village where Gibbs had already arranged the tiger shoot. It was as good a place to start as any.

We drove up over forty miles of good black-top highway to a small village and then turned up a cart track through the fire lane. It was only a few minutes' walk back into the jungle to the scene of the kills, two small bullocks. The animals had been covered with brush to hide them from the vultures. The bearers removed the brush and we climbed up onto the *machan*, a shooting platform in a tree about twenty feet from the ground. Tiger hunting I thought was easy. But in a minute, with the stench of the carcasses strong enough to make one gag, and countless insects, all of which bit, I changed my mind. The heat was terrific and the darkness brought little relief.

For hours we lay prone, motionless. Tiger rifles, double-barreled .375 Mannlicher equipped with a four-cell flashlight mounted on the barrel above the line of sight, and activated by a trigger under the barrels, were held ready. We started at every new jungle noise in that symphony of sound—the droning of insects, the cry of a nightjar, the rustling of small furtive creatures.

At last there was the rending of flesh. I got ready. Then I remembered Gibbs' instructions: "Wait till you hear the bones crunch unless you're after jackals."

Another interminable time passed in that hot, stench-filled, insect-droning blackness. Then a sudden jungle silence. The jackals ceased tearing at the carcasses. The gunbearer touched my arm. A minute later I heard the crunching of bones. I pulled the trigger switch. A big tiger was over the kill. For perhaps a second he crouched frozen, looking into the bright beam of light. Then, muscles

rippling along his back, he turned. I fired. In one effortless, magnificent leap he was gone.

It was, I guessed, a clean miss. My own eyes had not adjusted quickly enough to that sudden glare of light. . . .

By day we tracked the rogue, working roads and fire lanes, talking through our interpreter with Gurkha forest guards, woodcutters and villagers.

"Yes, sahib, the killer passed here. I will show you." And they would show us the tree a foot in diameter which had been pushed over. Close by there'd be a dead coolie.

But the fifth day, deeper in the jungle, we met a Gurkha forest guard and his wife. Their station, surrounded by a deep moat eight feet wide, was partially wrecked. Only yesterday the rogue had jumped this supposedly elephantproof ditch, ate up their garden and then started to take their house apart. The Gurkha had poked his shotgun out of the window and shot the brute in the face, a blow only slightly more painful than a mahout's pike. Luckily he had turned and jumped back over the moat.

The trail was fresher now—the dung, the bent elephant grass and bush, the huge tracks in a soft marshy area. "Up close now," the trackers would say. "Look behind, sahib, he does not like to be followed." Then the track made a series of circles and we knew that the rogue knew. With more caution we moved. The trackers looking aloft for the wind's direction. He was moving back toward the Janti highway, near the fire lane where we hunted tiger. At dusk the trackers said we were not two hours behind. That night we drove back to Domahani encouraged.

But in the morning the trail entered a small stream and no tracks lay beyond. We worked both banks, moving upstream. There was no sign of the rogue. We back-tracked, worked downstream and a day was lost before we discovered where the elephant left the bank.

Again we lost the trail—in a clearing on hard ground under short, sun-scorched grass. Beyond, the jungle was sparse and when the trail was picked up again, the sign was old. It led to a swift, cold-water stream bordered with swamp reed. There were no signs that the reeds had been disturbed. The trackers shook their heads. That type of reed, they explained, springs upright only a few hours after an animal has passed through.

We tracked futilely up and down the banks, then beat about the jungle on both sides for days. No sign of the rogue. Then we started all over again along the broad path of rumor, talking with the villagers and the forest guards.

Two more days and my leave was up. Gibbs consoled us some with a drink and told me that if I hadn't used up the time on that bloody old rogue I would have been rewarded with a handsome tiger or two. He suggested we have one more go at tigers and put out the kills tonight, so we could spend the next night on the *machan*. So far I had managed to kill one half-grown male tiger to add to my list of big game.

Chief Aronson agreed to go along to help stake out the kills and the inter-

preter to make the arrangements for the animals with the villagers. We loaded the jeep with the .375 tiger rifles. Aronson drove. The interpreter sat in back. Just as we pulled away, Gibbs stopped us. "You might take this along." He handed me the double-barreled .475. "Just in case." We went on up the familiar Janti highway.

When it enters the jungle it is a lonely road without the little roadside huts and the crisscrossing cart tracks that lead off the field and to the little clustered, thatched houses of the Bengalese. The road is on a high grade above the flat land to prevent flooding in the wet monsoon.

The headlights were picking up the bright orange eyes of nightjars on the paving and the red eyes of small jungle creatures scurrying to the ditch. Then they swept the jungle wall at the curve ahead.

Suddenly Aronson jammed on the brakes. Ahead in the road was an elephant, huge, pink-splotted, long tusks bowed in. He was monstrous on the high grade of the road.

"Shoot! Shoot! It's the rogue!" The interpreter was jumping all over the back seat.

"Drive closer," I said, picking up the elephant gun.

"Not me," said Aronson. "Not a chance."

The rogue stood glaring into the lights.

"Shoot! Shoot!" The interpreter was standing up now.

"Damn it, get closer." My hands were sticky with sweat. I was afraid of that thing looming up out of the night.

"I'll turn around and back up toward him," said Aronson. "Then if he charges I can step on the gas." Aronson backed around. With the headlights pointed homeward, I couldn't see the elephant although there was still a trace of light in the sky. I switched on the light on the gun. The road was empty.

"He's gone," I cried. "Damn it, now he's gone."

For a minute we sat there arguing. Aronson suggested that maybe it wasn't the rogue. The interpreter shouted, "Yes, rogue. Why you no shoot?"

"Hell, it was too far."

Then from the side of the road a soft, squishy sound came, repeated slowly, regularly. Suddenly the tempo increased. Water splashed close to the road. Then the high-pitched, ear-splitting trumpet-overwhelming in its intensity. I turned, fumbling for the flashlight trigger. In the beam of light was the killer charging, trunk extended, ears wide. I fired at the base of the trunk. He turned his face, went down on one knee. I was conscious of Aronson jerking at the trigger of his tiger rifle. But he never shot.

For a second I thought I had him. He got up, broadside. I shot for the ear and then behind the shoulder, instinctively, forgetting that an elephant's heart isn't behind the shoulder. He stumbled once again, then retreated noisily through the jungle.

I scrambled down the road embankment. There was blood on the swamp

grass where he was stopped—just fifteen steps from the jeep.

We raced back to Domahani.

"We got him!" I shouted. "Four times at least than fifty feet away."

Gibbs wasn't reassuring. "If the vital spots are hit," he explained, "he drops dead. Otherwise an elephant usually recovers, meaner and more cunning than ever."

An elephant's skull is twelve inches thick. One vulnerable spot is where the trunk enters the head. Here the bone is three or four inches thick and vulnerable to a .475. The other is the ear. The heart is forward, protected by the two forelegs. The other organs apparently are little affected by a .475 slug.

We reconstructed (and confirmed later) how cleverly the elephant had stalked us, circling in the jungle and coming out beside the jeep, picking his ground carefully. The unavoidable narrow strip of shallow, swampy water along the road ditch had probably saved our lives. We had heard him just in time.

At dawn I left with two trackers.

The first of the trail was a broad path through low jungle, like following the track of a heavy tank. Then the trail became more tortuous. The killer was taking the easier way to avoid the trees—more normal elephant behavior. We walked fast for several hours.

Suddenly the head tracker stopped, pointing at the trail ahead. The jungle was silent, asleep in the midday heat. The tracker turned, held his hands a foot apart and then brought them slowly together. Then I saw it—ahead there were no more spider webs across the trail! Blood on the grass was fresh. "Watch behind you," the tracker gestured, and the game of hide and seek continued. I kept thinking about the awful noise of that trumpet.

Then there was the sound of running water and the trail entered the swift-moving stream lined with the springy swamp reed.

We waded up the stream, watching the bank. The water was waist-deep in places and deliciously cold.

The tracker grabbed my arm and pointed. Large clumps of grass and weeds, freshly pulled, were floating down. Again the trackers pointed into their mouths and shook their heads. But it was late, too late to go on. My watch said 3 o'clock. We would have to hurry to get out of the jungle by dark. And just upstream the rogue, hurt and mad, was ripping out tufts of grass and throwing them insanely into the stream.

We cut across a fire lane and hurried back to the road. But before we reached Domahani it was after dark and Gibbs was starting out after us.

I told the story and Gibbs questioned the trackers. He was puzzled at the elephant's behavior but encouraged about our chances to get him. He concluded that the rogue in some way was badly hurt. Trailing on foot would be too dangerous and to close in on a wounded killer in a dense cover might be fatal. We would use elephants. He would send the trackers in to watch the rogue's movements until elephants could be brought up. This would take some time.

I wired Calcutta for an extended leave and got it.

It was two days before the elephants had made the thirty miles from their plantation to where the Janti highway crossed the stream. The trackers reported that the rogue was still in the vicinity of the big, task-sized tree. This time all hands would go.

Phillips with his camera climbed up behind me. The mahout sat forward with his iron bar and bush knife. Gibbs and Arenson mounted the other elephant. I took the right bank, Gibbs the left and we worked upstream.

This time the rogue's tracks moved aimlessly, without sense, meandering. There was little blood now, but he was resting frequently. In an hour or two we should be on him. Just after noon high cumulus clouds mushroomed over the jungle, and Gibbs was worried. An hour later a thunderous cloudburst dumped inches of water. Then it settled down to good hard rain. In an hour it had obliterated all signs of the rogue. The low places were already a morass. We thrashed about in the rain, circling, crisscrossing. At 5 o'clock Gibbs gave the sign to turn back.

We left the stream, paralleling it through sparser jungle, the elephants abreast keeping within fifty yards of each other. Just before dark, when I could see the high road grade ahead, my elephant started to tremble, shaking so violently that I had to hang on by tucking my feet under the straps.

Limping toward us was the killer. He came slowly. The mahout began beating the elephant on the head with the iron bar and she quieted. The killer came straight toward our elephant, either unaware of our presence or in a last desperate bid for the friendship of his own kind. He limped slowly on, inviting death. It was like a surrender. There was

plenty of time. I aimed carefully, squeezing the trigger. The rogue dropped. Then all hands fired. Gibbs rode up and fired again into the brain at close range. Even then he motioned us back and to stay mounted. Gibbs approached cautiously on foot. The rogue was dead.

For the moment I forgot his sins. The end had come so undramatically. The killer lay inert in the rain-soaked jungle, flat-sided with hunger. My shot from the jeep aimed for the ear had shattered one of the large teeth and loosened another in the upper jaw. He had been unable to eat. It was a wound from which he could not recover. In another day or two he would have starved to death.

Forest officials were called to identify the rogue, native witnesses to testify to his sins. It was when the skull was fleshed that Gibbs could actually reconstruct the rogue's early life.

The reward? The tusks?

The skull was buried in the ground—tusks out—for the ants and termites. When I was back in the States, Gibbs wrote me about their cure. Every day a coolie had worked the tusks back and forth and at last they were twisted loose—beautiful ivory, worth twenty rupees a pound. Each tusk weighed fifty-five pounds and was seven feet long out of the skull. He would ship them out to me, but they must be cleared with the Jalpaiguri officials. And then there was the customs—the export duty. Also there were the Calcutta people who said that it should be cleared with New Delhi—

It's been going on for four years now. The tusks are still in India and I suspect that they will emerge from their protective wrapping of red tape in the form of bracelets, filigree ornaments, carved Buddhas and miniature animals seen in the better shops of Calcutta or New Delhi or Bombay.—Dr. Robert A. Killebrew and Ray Franklin Kauffman



Dr. Killebrew and his partly-pink elephant. Note light-colored patch near neck.