# The Man-Eating Tigress of Kaligarh

By WILLIAM D. BARR

WHEN OUR TWO FAMILIES started the trip to the VIP hunting grounds in northern India, the greatest hunting adventure of our lives was about to begin. We knew that Very Important Persons—princes, long-gone viceroys, the wealthy and famous from around the world—had used these shooting blocks. Well-to-do hunters were still paying as high as $10,000 for a tiger hunt with deluxe shikari treatment.

We had applied for many of these blocks months in advance, hoping to reserve one for our hunting trip. We would plan and outfit the entire trip ourselves, greatly reducing the costs.

We were two missionary families working in two hospitals in the Punjab region of northern India. Johnny and Maxine Rollins, who grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota, were at Francis Newton Hospital, Ferozepore, Punjab, near the West Pakistan border. He was the hospital administrator, and she was a nurse. Francis Newton is a pioneer United Presbyterian Mission hospital serving people of small towns. (Presently John and other missionaries are operating a new orthopedic hospital in the new nation of Bangladesh.)

The Rollinses and their four children have always been great in competitive sports, and my family and I had often admired their trophy cases packed with awards for tennis, golf, Ping-Pong, bowling, and—since their arrival in India—marksmanship in skeet and pistol shooting. The Rollinses and the Barrs had shared many hunts together in the jungles and had found our families completely compatible.

My wife and I are originally from Dayton, Ohio. I spent eight years as a Presbyterian pastor in Illinois and Wisconsin before being called into the mission field. We volunteered for Brazil, dreaming of becoming bush pilots and working in the interior of that country. But we ended up in evangelistic work in the mud villages that make up a large part of India.

After nine wonderful years in that grassroots church work, I was assigned as chaplain of the Christian Medical College Hospital at Ludhiana, Punjab—my station at the time of our tiger hunt. (I am presently operating a new mission in a tent-and-trailer-camping situation on the Gunflint Trail in the northern-Minnesota wilderness.)

Our five children had grown up to know the thrill of the chase after deer or bear or nilgai, and occasionally they had even encountered cobras and the deadly poisonous small snakes called kraits. On leopard hunts we had shared many a tree with fellow hunters—Indian and American—and were quite accustomed to the smell of the dead cows used as bait. As a family we have found the life of the hunter always fulfilling.

So, after many years of dreaming, we were planning a tiger hunt. It was February 1967, destined to be the Barrs' last year in India. Not yet had the inroads made by poachers, goaded on by great profits paid by foreign fur concerns, caused a ban on all tiger shooting. That happened in 1971.

We had never seen a wild tiger in the jungles. We had never used elephants on a hunt. In fact, we had never ridden an elephant. But we had made wonderful hunts on which as many as 65 beaters joined in the drive, rooting out many types of game, most of which escaped us. Leopards had crossed our paths many times, and my old golden Labrador retriever, after 13 years with us, was killed by a leopard. A cow-lifting leopard had fallen under my gun years before, and another cat had eluded us on more-recent hunts.

But a tiger—that was different game! The king of India's jungles—often called

ILLUSTRATED BY TOM BEECHAM

**Human victim No. 35 had just been killed two miles from our rest house. Suddenly we had the assignment to stop the slaughter**

My heart hammered as the tigress padded silently to the body and grasped it in her jaws. At that moment I fired

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*continued*

the "gentleman" of the jungle—was an adversary we had never faced.

All the plans had been carefully made. Permits had been received and fees paid. I borrowed from my old friend Ernie Campbell of New Delhi a Model 70 Winchester .375 Magnum rifle. The .375 Magnum was the minimum bore permitted in hunting tigers, and rightly so. Too many tigers wounded with lesser guns had turned into man-eaters.

We were planning to visit the famous Jim Corbett National Park near Ramnagar, District Nainital, Uttar Pradesh, in the foothills of the great Himalayas. We wanted a few days of rest before beginning our hunt in an adjoining shooting block. We had reserved a rest house in a remote area of the park quite near our shooting block. That way we would be ready to hunt the day our permit began and would be able to devote two weeks to the job of outsmarting a tiger.

Corbett National Park is a glorious spot near Corbett's famous home base, Nainital. In this area Corbett gained worldwide fame as a great hunter, killing more man-eating leopards and tigers than any other man in history. The legends that have developed around his life continue to grow from this mountain-surrounded animal sanctuary.

Corbett Park's thousands of acres of woodlands and plains support tens of thousands of chital (spotted deer), an elephant herd, and wild boar that are unbelievably swift of foot. Surrounding the park are the shooting blocks that attract big-game hunters from all over the world. Great shikar companies have made their fortunes here.

Circumstances threatened to ruin our hunt of a lifetime before it began. I suffered a coronary attack six months before our hunt was to start. I didn't

Above: skinners remove the hide, a 12-hour job. Below (from left): Johnny Rollins, myself, wildlife warden N. S. Negi with tigress

Above: our rest house in Corbett National Park. Left: I pull man-killer's whiskers after being warned by Indians that they would be stolen for use as poison

Our machan (shooting platform) was 30 feet up in tree near where killer hid partly eaten body

resume work as chaplain of our hospital until one month before our departure date. Our dream seemed shattered. But my health improved quickly, and the type of hunt we'd planned would not be strenuous, so we had hope. Then my internist, who was also a hunter, agreed to let me go since he too had reserved a shooting block in that area and would be nearby in case of trouble.

We had jumped the final hurdle—or so we thought.

While we were en route to the hunt area in two station wagons, the Rollinses' wagon was forced off the road by a convoy of army trucks and wrecked beyond use. Miraculously no one was hurt. That problem was resolved when officials at our sister hospital nearby allowed us to borrow their wagon to make the trip. Nothing could now keep us from a successful hunt!

The trip into the park was exciting in itself—miles and miles of dusty back-country roads; dry, sandy stretches leading to a primitive floating bridge made of boats lashed together; and roadway consisting of reedlike grass arranged on loosely fitted planking.

At Kaligarh, a little village in the foothills of the Himalayas, we were met by N. S. Negi, the assistant wildlife warden of Corbett National Park. It was here that our luck began to change. We gave Mr. Negi a ride into the park, and that little act of friendship was to open the door to the greatest adventure of our lives.

The next day, Monday, found us trying to settle into a very old British-style jungle bungalow that had no running water, no electricity, and no caretaker. We finished a grand lunch, and some of the children went to visit a waterhole nearby while the adults tried to catch a few moments of rest. At that moment a chilling story began to unfold.

A car sped up to the bungalow, and several men stepped out, concern evident on their faces. One of them was Mr. Negi, and he came right to the point.

"We have just received word from woodchoppers nearby," he said, "that one of their crewmen was killed and dragged off by a tigress. The seven remaining workmen ran four miles to my office to beg help. I remembered that you came prepared to shoot a tiger in the adjoining block, and I want to request your help in locating the body and trying to destroy this man-eater."

We rushed to get our guns, our machan (rope platform), nylon rope for lashing the machan in a tree, sleeping bags, water, some food, and our large hunting torches. Mr. Negi added that he had ordered two work elephants to be brought to the death area and that we should plan on using them. He told us where to meet him, and then he was gone.

Johnny and I loaded our gear into my wagon, kissed our wives, and listened patiently to their pleas to be careful. Then we drove to the death area, just two miles from our bungalow, where we made plans to enter the extremely dense jungle on elephant-back. With great difficulty we mounted an elephant known as Mallan Kali (the name sounded like melancholy), stepping on her hind foot, grasping her tail, and clambering aboard the simple howdah (riding platform) on her back. The mahout (elephant keeper) was a drastically bowlegged little man named Inayat Ali, who stood no taller than five feet. He had lived with this elephant for 15 years and was her only master.

Four of us made an attempt to find the body of the slain man, expecting at any minute to face a charge by an enraged tigress. Strangely, the Indians knew —judging solely by the animal's footprints—that it was a female and that it would be 8½ feet long.

We'd had no experience in this type of hunting. We had read and heard of charging tigers leaping up over the head of an elephant and even up over the rear, and so we sat with loaded guns, our hearts pounding, keyed for action.

Our first attempt was a failure. We just couldn't pick up a trail or drag marks, and we soon realized that we didn't know exactly where the man had been killed. We called in the second elephant and the seven remaining woodsmen. The face of each man was a study in terror, but they finally agreed to quickly show us the spot and then dash back to safety. The seven walked along between the two elephants, Johnny Rollins leading the way and carrying his Beretta over-and-under *(continued on page 138)*

Left: one of our hunting elephants and her mahout, Inayat Ali. Above: age and bad teeth turned 8½-foot tigress into murderer

# MAN-EATING TIGRESS

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12-gauge shotgun loaded with rifled slugs.

In a minute we found the slain man's cap. The woodcutters dashed off, and then, with very little difficulty, we followed the drag marks and other sign —blood here, part of a shirt there, grass crushed here, a pool of blood over there. Then I saw the dead man under a heavy bush. Again terror seized us. With the two elephants we circled the man's body and searched the area for hundreds of yards around, trying to flush the tigress.

We decided to set up the machan in a tree near the body. The men quickly lashed the rope bed to branches 30 feet off the ground and camouflaged it carefully. As Johnny and I got set in the machan, the others dragged the partly eaten body of the dead man out in front of us.

A sense of ominousness pervaded the scene and was reflected in the quiet words of Mr. Negi as he rode off:

"Be sure it is the man-eater you shoot. This is a game preserve, and we'll be in serious trouble if you shoot any other."

Then he added, "Do your best to avenge the death of this man."

The next hour is one Johnny and I will never forget. How could we make sure to shoot only the man-eater? The only way to be certain, we concluded, was to wait until the tigress actually started to eat the body before our eyes.

On previous hunts we had always experienced a certain peacefulness while waiting in a machan. That feeling was missing now as we waited in total silence, breathing quietly and being careful not to scratch, sneeze, or cough.

But our attempt to melt totally into the jungle was constantly disturbed by the physical evidence of violence and death before us. This was no cow-lifting leopard. This was not a deer that would speed away if we missed. This was a man-killing tigress that had murdered 35 men in the past few years. Our duty, on behalf of the Indian government, was to try to destroy the murderess.

The always-fascinating sounds of the jungle frustrated our efforts to hear the

killer approaching. Monkeys screamed nearby. A barking deer coughed farther away. Birds screeched and sang all around the area, and then the huge Indian vultures began to arrive, perching in nearby trees to await their turn at the kill. In the midst of all this sat the two of us trying to be silent and motionless, finding our feet and legs gradually falling asleep but unable to rub them or shift them or even talk about them.

We had been in the tree for exactly one hour when the birds stopped singing. The monkeys screamed far off and then fell silent. On that jungle scene descended a silence that only a hunter can appreciate. The queen was paying us a visit.

Not one footfall did we hear. No leaf rustled. No branch swished. The first noise we heard was a snort of disgust as the tigress found that her kill was gone from her hiding place. Then came the longest 15 minutes I've ever experienced. There was total silence. Johnny, facing away from the dead man, and I, facing the corpse with the gun's safety off and my finger ready to curl around the trigger, hardly dared to breathe.

My heart was hammering, and my .375 Magnum was aimed at the body of the man when I caught my first glimpse of the tigress. She walked without a sound directly under our machan. Johnny didn't see her. She carefully approached the body and with unmistakable purpose reached down and grasped it in her powerful jaws.

At that moment I fired. The tigress began to go down, trying to break her fall by throwing out her right foreleg, as I bolted another cartridge home. I shot her a second time. Each bullet went through the heart and lungs, and the bullets exited through the chest about two inches apart. She never roared. She simply lay down, her back legs kicking spasmodically. I was ready to deliver a third shot if she moved to escape.

I felt nothing of the magnum's powerful kick. As the thunderous blasts of the gun subsided, I heard Johnny shouting in my ear: "Don't shoot again! She's dying. You killed a man-eater!"

The jungle rang with our yelling, and a lot of surprised vultures took off from the trees.

Johnny climbed down to make sure the tigress was finished. I covered him carefully from the tree. He threw a stick at the animal, but in the excitement and fear of the moment (he was just 10 feet away from a tigress that had killed and eaten 35 men) the throw was far short, and I couldn't help laughing. His next throw was too far. In desperation, Johnny grabbed the tigress by the tail, all the while saying, "Don't shoot me, Bill—don't shoot me!"

The end had come, and none too soon, for night was falling as night can fall only in an Indian jungle. One minute it is almost full daylight; the next, darkness. We covered both bodies as they lay, side-by-side, the feet of the tigress over the feet of the man. Then we quickly retreated to our jeep, parked on a jungle road 300 yards away.

Then came the work, the sadness of the relatives, the reports to the police and the Forest Department, and the removal of the bodies at night on the back of an elephant. During that last chore I took pictures and held the lanterns while my family and friends did the hard work of loading the 300-pound tigress onto the back of a very unhappy elephant that was held under control by her master, who beat her on the skull with a hammer and constantly shouted, "Sit down! Sit down!"

The next day—thoroughly exhausted and yet elated beyond words—we shared with our cooks the job of skinning the beast. Watching the operation were more than 300 Indians who had come in busloads to see the Kaligarh tigress, which for years had terrorized their days and nights and successfully eluded all the hunters who had tried to destroy her.

There was relief on their faces. But there was another emotion too. As I watched the many who had come to examine her teeth and to stare, I saw a look of reverence. Reverence for a queen who was once regal and aloof in her dealings with man but who, pressured by age and bad teeth, had turned into a murderess. THE END