



the trail of
**THE BLUE
TIGER**



The enraged beast leaped to its feet and dashed at the fuel gatherers, striking right and left with its great paws.

Even Harry Caldwell, the China missionary who shot like Sergeant York and killed tigers with a .22, met his match in this great blue cat, which seemed to have a sixth sense for traps

by ROY CHAPMAN ANDREWS

Illustrated by Bruce Bomberger

In South China, the weird legends of men and animals come from the people of the hills. They find their way to the coast where their telling often lures men into the jungle of the back country.

I had followed just such a legend to Futsing, the story of a blue tiger. To me it was still not a completely credible legend, though it had been substantiated by friends in both America and China. But still, I told myself as I lay

on my cot that night, I would never really believe a blue tiger existed until I saw one myself.

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted. A shriek pierced the night. There was a snarl, then the agonized, stifled cry of a child. I leaped to my feet. "Good God, Harry, what is it?" Harry Caldwell was already up, jamming cartridges into his rifle. "Tiger, I think. Hurry." (Continued on page 146)

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The Trail of the Blue Tiger

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We ran across the orchard to a hundred yards away. The courtyard swarmed with screaming Chinese. A woman sat cross-legged on the floor rocking back and forth, tearing handfuls of hair out by the roots. "Ai-ya, ai-ya," she wailed. "My baby. The black tiger. It took my baby. Kill it, Shen-shung. Kill the black tiger."

Harry talked rapidly with the terrified natives. "Get lanterns," he shouted. "Come with me."

We dashed out the gate and across the rice dikes, followed by a dozen men. Breathlessly, Harry told me what had happened.

"Family eating—baby playing in the court—suddenly the tiger leaped through the door and grabbed the child. It stood for a moment and then leaped over the wall. There's one chance in a thousand it may drop the baby when it sees the lights—but he would be dead—tiger'll head for the big ravine. Natives call it black, but I'm sure it's the blue devil—that's where it lives. This makes sixteen for it, sixteen people in two years!"

We rushed on in the darkness. For a mile we followed a narrow path beside the rice fields. Where the sword grass shut in like a wall on either side, a bloody rag hung on a thorn bush; a few feet beyond lay a tiny baby's shoe.

Caldwell stopped. "No use going farther. The poor little fellow's done for. We'll have to wait until tomorrow."

We turned back to the village, but not to sleep. The wailing of the family kept the night alive with the sounds of death.

I studied Caldwell curiously, for we had just met, after months of correspondence. Six feet tall, spare and hard as a trained athlete, with a flashing smile that seldom left his face in repose, intensely alive, bursting with enthusiasm. That was the man with whom I had come to hunt the blue tiger. A missionary, too, though he didn't resemble any I had ever seen.

It was Captain Thomas Holcomb of the U. S. Marine Corps, now U. S. Minister to South Africa, who first spoke of him to me at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

"He is an amazing man," Tom said. "An effective missionary, a good amateur naturalist and the finest field rifle shot I've ever seen. I hunted with him. He kills tigers with a .303 Savage rifle. Better get in touch with him if you're going to China."

This was in 1916. I was planning an expedition to the mountains of the Tibetan frontier and Yunnan for the American Museum of Natural History, so I wrote Caldwell at Futsing, China. His reply was vibrant with the personality of the man and told an amazing story.

There was a strange tiger there; not yellow like the ordinary tiger but Maltese blue. Perhaps it was a new species. Why didn't I stop and try to get it on my way to Yunnan?

Letter after letter followed, always full

of accounts of the blue tiger. In spite of what Caldwell said, I didn't believe it was a new species, but rather a melanistic phase of the yellow tiger. Melanism, the opposite of albinism, is an excess of coloring matter in the skin and occurs in many animals. But a blue or black tiger was unknown to the zoological world. Caldwell's word could not be doubted, and the museum authorities agreed that the story certainly should be investigated.

I knew I would have to stop at Futsing. Enthusiastically I talked about it with Dr. William T. Hornaday, then director of the New York Zoological Park, in the Bronx. "Perhaps," I told him, "I can bring it back alive. When it dies, the museum will get the skin and skeleton anyway. Would you be interested?"

Hornaday smiled. "Would I be interested to have the only blue tiger in the world? Don't ask silly questions! I'll get you a trap if you'll try to use it." He did. He had a trap especially made for me. It looked as though it would hold an elephant.

On my way down the China coast I heard much more of Caldwell; everyone seemed to know of him. His exploits were legends among "old hands" in China. A bishop told me how Caldwell had opened to Christian teaching a community of a hundred settlements—more than half a million violently antiforeign Chinese—by killing a man-eating tiger that had been ravaging their villages.

That was the opening wedge. Before long, other villages had asked his help, and his fame had spread. But it was not only for the killing of tigers. Because of his reputation for courage, honesty and fair dealing, he sometimes had acted as middleman in settling disputes, and once had saved a village from terrible slaughter by going alone to a bandit camp and persuading the chief to take his men back to the hills. The chief had been misinformed, he told them; the money they had demanded to ransom the village was not there, and he offered himself as hostage until his words were proved.

I thought of these things as I sat in the tent looking at Caldwell. Harry turned around.

"It was in that ravine," he said, "that I killed my first tiger. I used buckshot, but believe me, I'll never try that again. She was a big tigress and had eaten a boy the day before. The elders asked me to rid them of her, but the bearer with my load and rifle hadn't arrived and, like a fool, I went out with only my shotgun. I'd never seen a tiger in the wild, and had no idea how hard they are to kill. It seemed to me that buckshot at close range would be all right."

"I staked a goat on an abandoned terrace and sat down behind some bushes off to one side. The tigress came out almost immediately on a grass-covered dike about a hundred yards away, but she seemed to suspect danger. For more than an hour she crouched there just like a great tabby cat, sometimes pushing one foot forward as though about to move, but each time drawing it back again. She looked awfully big and I wished I hadn't come, but I couldn't get out except by passing right below her. There was a confounded brain-fever bird on a tree

above me, and it kept giving that rising, breathless call that drives people crazy. It got on my nerves so I could hardly keep from screaming.

"Finally, the tigress got up and circled to reach a small path—they'll never attack through unbroken tangle if they can get to a trail. She had to cross a small bare space—it was only about twenty yards—but apparently she didn't like being in the open. She flattened just like a snake, her chin and throat touching the ground, and slithered along with no body motion except for a quivering of her shoulders and hips. Yet she went awfully fast. As soon as she was in cover again, she made three flying leaps up the narrow terraces toward the goat. The last one brought her face to face with me about twelve feet away. She stood there, snarling. Her yellow and black head looked big as a haystack, and her eyes simply blazed. I let her have both barrels in the face and neck.

"I thought the buckshot would be in an almost solid mass at that range, and would knock her cold, but she only slipped backward off the terrace and didn't fall. Blood streamed over her head, and she shook it out of her eyes and then slowly walked off into a patch of sword grass. I was scared, for I didn't have any more buckshot cartridges—only No. 4 shot. So I sat tight for half an hour, and then worked up the hill through the bush and back to the village.

"The bearer was there with my rifle when I arrived, but it was almost dark and I didn't dare go out that evening. Next day I followed the blood trail with the natives and found her dead nearly half a mile away. Her whole face and neck were full of buckshot, most of which were flattened against the heavy bones. I think she bled to death.

"When the Chinese brought her back to the village, the mother of the boy she had eaten began beating her with a stick, screaming curses. I kept only the skin for myself, and gave the body to the village elders. But shotguns are out for me, I don't mind telling you. That one experience was enough."

"I should think it would be, but," I laughed, "I believe the 22 Hi-Power you've got is just about as bad. It's plain damned foolishness to use that little bullet, if you don't mind my saying so. It hasn't enough weight or shocking power for dangerous game."

Caldwell smiled. "That's what a lot of people say. I killed eight or ten tigers with the .303, and, though it was grand, but the first time I ever fired this rifle I killed a tiger. You ought to have seen what that tiny bullet did to him. He was a big tiger, too—a man-eater that had killed several people in this very village. I staked a goat, as usual, but instead of coming out where I thought he would, the tiger appeared on a barren ridge more than a hundred yards away. It was already half dark, and I couldn't see plainly through the sights, so I walked into the open and moved up. The tiger saw me instantly, of course, and stood there swishing his tail with ears laid flat against his head. I expected him to charge at any moment, but I had to keep on

going until I was close enough to shoot in the bad light. If I had turned back then, he'd have come for me. Finally I was only thirty yards away. So I too dark to pick any vital spot, so I just fired at the body. The beast lunged into the air, twisted and came down dead as a herring. The bullet had caught him behind the ribs and went through the stomach. His intestines were messed up as though they'd been put through a sausage grinder. He had just eaten a dog and the stomach was full of meat."

"Well," I told him, "next time you use a .22 you probably won't be here to tell about it, unless you hit it in the head or neck. You don't realize that you were extraordinarily lucky. You say your bullet went through the stomach which was full of dog. To my mind what happened was this: the high-velocity bullet striking that extended stomach set up a terrific gas explosion which ruptured the intestines. That was what killed your tiger. I've shot woodchucks with a hard-nose .22 Hi-Power bullet, and they just blow up if I get them through the body when the stomach is packed with food; if it's empty, I lose my 'chuck.'"

Caldwell remained unconvinced. "Maybe you're right. But," he grinned, "next time I won't shoot him in the stomach. I'll hit him in the head."

But the night's experience had made me eager to hear more about the murderous blue tiger and I prodded Harry.

"I've seen it twice," he said. "The first time it wasn't twenty yards from me, but I had only a shotgun. I came on it suddenly, lying right in the path in the sun like a great Maltese cat. While I was watching, it got up slowly and stood for a moment in the trail, then turned around three times. I thought it was going to lie down again, but it stretched, humped its back, and jumped into the bushes. I had a perfect view: could have hit it with a stone. It's really beautiful. The ground color of its body is Maltese, changing into light blue on the lower sides and belly. The stripes are black and well defined like those on a yellow tiger."

"The second time was last year, and I had it absolutely cold in the sights of my rifle, but I didn't dare shoot. I had staked a goat in an open space near the lair, and saw the blue tiger creeping up, but from the other side of the ravine. I was just going to fire when I realized it was stalking two boys asleep under an old dike right below it. If I had wounded the beast, it would have certainly rolled down on the boys. I couldn't chance it, so I stood up and yelled. It turned about facing me, snarled and then walked slowly into the grass."

That was the animal we were going to track; the daring, cunning and lucky blue, which had twice eluded Caldwell. But we weren't to set out until mid-afternoon. The baby was so small, Harry explained, that it wasn't a big meal for the tiger, and by evening it would be looking for something else, we hoped.

So when the sun rose in a hot red ball over the hills, and the village started to life, Caldwell and I pulled the tent flaps and slept. At noon we were up, and be-

fore 3 o'clock were on our way through the rice fields, dragging two reluctant goats, a mother and her kid. At the entrance to a narrow ravine, Caldwell halted.

"This is where the blue tiger lives and I'll bet it's home. We'll tie the goats in this little open space and get behind those bushes."

"But," I protested, "it'll be right in our laps when it comes out!"

"Can't be helped. There isn't any other spot. I know this lair like the palm of my hand. There's where I killed my first tiger with the shotgun, right on that terrace."

We crouched behind a clump of bushes, half buried in sword grass. Fifteen feet away, the goats bleated incessantly; otherwise there wasn't a sound in the lair. A sweet stench of rotting flesh drifted out of the tunnel's mouth. It nauseated me; Harry wrinkled his nose in disgust. For three hours we sat. I watched the shadows steal slowly down the ravine and reach a lone palm tree on the opposite side. My watch said half past 6; that meant another hour of waiting, not more, for night comes swiftly in those South China hills.

Just as I was about to shift my cramped body, I heard the faint crunching sound of a stone rolled under a heavy weight. The mother goat bleated in terror, tugging frantically at her rope. Harry's shoulder touched mine. "It's coming," he breathed.

Suddenly all hell broke loose on the opposite hill. Shouts and yells, beating of pans, stones rolling down the slope. A small army of woodcutters swarmed over the crest on to the trail. The noise was to frighten tigers. They did a good job for, with a rumbling growl, the blue tiger turned back into the depths of his lair. There it was. I had only one fleeting glimpse, but I saw it was really blue. I

got to my feet and stood silently for a long moment just looking at the Chinese. Then I let loose. At the end of my spectacular oration, Harry rolled his eyes and pronounced a fervent "amen."

We were disappointed, but Caldwell explained that the blue tiger would turn up again. "It operates in about three of four villages, here and on the other side of the mountain, but seldom stays more than a day or two in any one place."

We had to wait only a day when a breathless Chinese arrived from a village four miles away.

"The black tiger came right into the street," he shouted at us, "and grabbed a dog. It threw him over its shoulder like a sack of rice and ran off to the hills. Everyone followed, yelling and beating pans and just inside the grass, on an old dike, it dropped the dog. He's there; we found him."

Caldwell was electrified. "This time we'll get it alive, Roy. If a tiger hasn't finished its kill, it will always come back after dark."

We hurried to the village. Dozens of excited men wanted to show us the dog, but Caldwell selected only two and told the others to make a cage of heavy bamboo trunks.

"We'll catch the black tiger for you tonight," he said. "I speak the truth." They looked dubious, but examined my trap with enormous interest. I clamped the vises on the springs, screwed them down and set it.

We found the dog lying beside a tree on a terrace about five feet wide, just above the open rice fields. His skull was crushed, probably from the first blow of the tiger's paw, but only teeth marks showed on the body. "It couldn't be better," Harry said. We buried the trap on the terrace and fastened the dog to the tree with heavy wire.

We slept that night in the village.



"In future, just worry about the slippers. I'll get my own pipe."

After sunrise, at least fifty men, women and boys accompanied us to the trap, bearing a cage strong enough to hold a gorilla. Harry and I halted the crowd a hundred yards away, and approached the terrace, rifles ready. Silence.

"What's wrong, Roy? He ought to be raising Cain."

Foot by foot we crept forward, but not a sound broke the stillness of the jungle. At last we could see the trap. No tiger—and the dog was gone! We stared in dumb amazement.

"It just can't be," Harry said. But it was, all too plainly. The blue tiger had approached from above, as we expected, dropped its forefeet on the terrace, reached over and lifted our securely wired dog from the tree as though he had been tied with string. Then it had eaten him comfortably on the upper dike a few feet away. The claw marks were within, an inch of the trap pan. Just one inch more and we'd have had it!

The villagers crowded about like a jury to examine the evidence. Collectively they shook their heads and old Wang, elder of the village, delivered the verdict.

"Some years ago, Sheng, our villager, as you well know, killed his father. He was given the 'Death of a Thousand Cuts,' but nothing was done by our people to atone for his crime. The gods were offended. Now they have sent this black beast to harass our dwelling place. It is not a common tiger. No one can trap or kill an Evil Spirit."

Harry and I walked back to camp saying little. We had lost face with the villagers. Harry thought of its effect on his missionary work: I was thinking of what a sensation the blue tiger would have caused in New York. To make it worse, a runner waited at the village with a cable from Dr. Hornaday, "How about the blue tiger?" it read. "When may we expect him?"

Three days later, the tiger killed again seven miles from our camp. It had been asleep on a grass-covered terrace when a dozen fuel gatherers disturbed it. The enraged beast leaped to its feet and dashed into the group, striking right and left with its great paws. One man's skull was crushed; another's head ripped half off his shoulders; a third landed ten feet away on a lower dike with a broken neck. Then the tiger leaped to an abandoned

terrace, stood for a moment, turned and slunk off into the grass. It made no attempt to drag off any of its victims; apparently the killing was out of sheer bad temper at being disturbed.

When word reached us at 3 o'clock, Caldwell and I almost ran the seven miles. "It's sure to return this afternoon," Harry said. "We've got to get there before it comes."

For two wretched hours we sat in the broiling sun, crouched behind a bush near the terrace where the man had been killed. God, it was hot! The thermometer had registered plus 106 degrees in the shade when we left, and the humidity must have been 80 per cent. I didn't feel at all well. Jagged black patches darted before my eyes and violent nausea doubled me up in uncontrollable spasms of retching and coughing. Every time I went into my act, the sounds whacked back like rifle shots in the stillness of the jungle. Of course, that ruined our chance again. Just as night was closing in, the vague outline of the blue tiger showed against a background of feathery bamboo on the opposite slope, but before either of us could shoot, it faded from sight like a black ghost. "The Great Invisible," I remarked, sadly. "That's what he ought to be called."

My heatstroke was a bad one, and for a week I lay in camp under a tree, racked with fever, headache and nausea. Finally, I had to leave for Hong Kong to outfit for a year's expedition along the Tibetan frontier, but ten days of Caldwell's vacation still remained. He stayed on for another go at the Great Invisible and it very nearly cost him his life. I've set down the story just as he told it to me later.

"A few days after you left," he said, "the blue tiger did something I wouldn't have believed possible. It jumped into a cowpen beside a house, killed a yearling heifer and leaped out with the dead animal in its mouth. The farmer and his wife saw the whole performance. I measured the fence; it was twelve feet high. My Chinese hunter, Da Da, and I found the remains of the heifer only half eaten about two miles away. The carcass was in a bad place, a very bad place. Four or five trails led to a little open space in thick jungle where the heifer lay, and

the only way we could see it was by sitting in one of the paths. We didn't dare touch it.

"I said to Da Da, 'I don't like this at all. You know a tiger always moves along a trail if he can. It might come down this one.'"

"Da Da looked about, 'But, Sheng-shung, with all the wide world, and all these other paths, why should it come this way?'"

"I still didn't like it, but there was no other spot. We'd been watching about an hour, and the sun was bright, when I thought I heard the low rumble of thunder. Da Da heard it, too, and we both looked at the sky; there wasn't a cloud. Then the rumble came again and this time it ended in a snarl. The blue tiger was right behind us in the grass! I knew it was close enough to spring, too, else it wouldn't have growled. We couldn't see the beast, but I was sure any sudden move would bring it on us. There was just one thing to do; take it by surprise. All tigers are afraid of the human voice—it is about the only thing they are afraid of. I twisted around very, very slowly and the tiger snarled again. I suppose it didn't spring because it was completely taken aback to find us there. Suddenly, I yelled and leaped straight at it, but caught my foot in a vine and sprawled on my face, arms outstretched. This, you'll hardly believe, Roy, but it's true: *my left hand actually slipped the tiger on its nose!* The beast went right over backward, whirled, and in one jump disappeared in the grass.

"I never was so scared in my life; I couldn't have fired even if I hadn't dropped the rifle. Da Da and I stood there shaking for a time, and then both of us got awfully sick. We could hardly walk back to the village."

That was the last time either Caldwell or I hunted the blue tiger. After his vacation, he went up the Min River to a mission station at Yeping, and although he returned to Fusing from time to time and killed other tigers, he never saw the blue devil again. But the Great Invisible, or another blue like it, still exists. Caldwell, recently returned to this country, brought with him reports from the natives that a giant blue tiger is again terrorizing villagers in the South China hills.—Roy Chapman Andrews