Before Joe could wave me back, the tiger was charging with a roar. Joe jumped out of the tree to back me up

ILLUSTRATED BY
GEORGE GIGUERE

I was in physical agony as I brought the 1928 canvas-top Chevrolet to a screeching, groaning stop. Joe, my long-time shikari (native guide) helped me out of the door with a mother's care and steadied me on the sloshy, red-mud road. He wanted to help me by loading my .423 Mauser, but I've always fitted in the cartridges my way and intended doing it now. Joe watched sympathetically as I clumsily and painfully loaded the weapon with soft-points. Then he carried the rifle as we walked together down the hillside to where the killing had taken place. I knew I was a fool doing this, but I was answering an SOS as well as a personal challenge to myself.

V. E. Day was still a few months off, and I was up in Ootacamund on the Nilgiri hills of southern India staying with my tea-planter friends the Wapshares in their huge bungalow, Rosemount. To me the world was a sorry, painful place, for I was in the throes of rheumatic fever—the result, perhaps, of tramping and sleeping out in these monsoon-harried hills on hunts I started at the age of 14.

I was supposed to rest and take orders from no one but my doctor, Colonel Cox, the district medical officer and head of the Ootacamund hospital. I'd been at Rosemount some weeks, fussed over by the Wapshares while I groaned, fretted, grumbled, and at times hobbled around their garden with the aid of two walking sticks. My old shikari friend Joe, who lived in Ootacamund, came to see me almost daily and kept me posted on all that was going on in the shooting world.

One day Joe came panting up the hill as if he'd run all the way from the village. A tiger had struck over at Andy Corner around midnight, killing 23 sheep from a band a grazier had bedded down there. Andy Corner is about four or five miles away in open hills splashed with sholas (patches of jungle).

"A tiger doesn't behave like that," I exploded at Joe. "Did you see this slaughter yourself?"

He hadn't, but the grazier had come running to him because he was a well-known hunter. "If that man lie, I go break his head," Joe promised.

"Where's the man?" I inquired.

Joe told me the shepherd had got a lift back in a lorry to his dead sheep. Within an hour's time, Joe and I were there too. I was calling myself a fool, yet happy I'd momentarily forgotten my pain.

About 200 yards down the hill, the smell of sheep, blood, and death filled the air. Against all the tenets of medical science, I practically ran the last 50 yards. Coming around a patch of jungle, the sight we saw could only be described by one word: carnage. Scattered every which way were sheep—some alive, some dying, and most of them dead. Upon seeing us, the grazier rushed up and fell weeping at my feet. I got him up and asked him to tell what had happened.

His story was this: He'd grazed his sheep all day and bedded them down at dusk. After his evening meal of rice, he'd gone to sleep in a rude grass shelter not 10 yards from the flock, but awoke around 11 o'clock when he heard a tiger call. He piled logs on the dying fire, smoked a beedie (tobacco rolled in a dry leaf), and feel asleep. He awoke again before long, realizing his sheep were restless. He'd just started speaking to the *(continued on page 153)*

TIGER AT ANDY CORNER

by CYRIL E. HOLLAND

I was fighting a vicious team—the rheumatic fever that racked my body and the great cat haunting the herdsmen

TIGER AT ANDY CORNER

(continued from page 78)

sheep to calm them when suddenly everything broke loose. Sheep were bleating, kicking, and being hurled in all directions. The herder's shout was answered by an angry, deep growl, so he immediately buried his head in his blanket.

The confusion went on for perhaps 10 minutes longer, and he thought he heard the tiger drinking the blood—a fallacy many Indians believe. When it got light, he looked around at the havoc and then ran the five miles to inform Joe. That was all.

As I have said, there were eight or 10 separate sholas in this locality, anywhere from 50 yards to a quarter of a mile apart. They varied from an acre to a square mile in size. I looked at my watch (11:30 a.m.) and asked the

20 or so chattering spectators if they'd beat the sholas for me. They all had urgent business elsewhere, so they said. So I asked Joe how many beaters he could collect in his own village, and he said he could get all I needed.

Telling the grazier we'd be back, we hurried to the car and drove to town. In no time at all I had the old car groaning under the weight of a dozen men and boys—golf caddies, pony men, shopkeeper's assistants, and loafers. We were back within two hours.

As I made plans for the beat, my rheumatism disappeared as if by magic, and I soon had the men lined up for the first drive through a long narrow shola. The boys yelled and beat the tree trunks. Out came wild pigs, sambar deer, and a barking deer or two, but no tiger. After the last beat ended I realized my feet were hurting badly, but somehow I limped the two miles back to the car.

That night I thought of this strange tiger and its unusual behavior. Tigers generally kill only enough to eat, and as a rule prefer a tough young buffalo to a tender sheep. My feet and hands were hurting terribly now. As I soaked them in hot water, wrapped them in flannel, and took aspirins, I cursed all tigers and those who dealt in them, Joe in particular. What my doctor said to me the next day doesn't bear repeating. I rested for the next few days.

One morning about a week after the sheep episode, Joe's wife was at Andy Corner picking mushrooms for me. She came around a bush and there, lying in the sun about 15 yards away, was a very big tiger. She dropped her basket as the beast raised his head and growled, but he didn't follow up his advantage and she ran back to town.

That evening Joe and I were again at the spot. I'd engaged a driver, as I was in no condition to handle the car. We left him parked on the forest road and walked downhill to where Joe's wife had seen the tiger that morning.

We'd been sitting screened for perhaps 30 minutes when we heard a peculiar sound. I looked at Joe. "Barking deer calling," was his explanation. I thought he was wrong, but I had no better explanation and didn't argue.

Nothing happened in the next couple of hours so we returned to the road—to find a very frightened driver. A short while after we'd left the car, he'd walked to the edge of the road to watch some buffaloes grazing on the hillside 200 yards away. These were big, shaggy beasts belonging to a Toda tribe.

The Todas—only 1,000 or so in all—are a pastoral people unlike any other tribes in India. Some think they came here with Alexander the Great, who invaded India. Others say they're remnants of one of the lost tribes of Israel, or ancient Romans who strayed here. No one really knows. The Todas live in families of a dozen or so in a tiny hamlet called a mund and subsist on milk and ghee (clarified butter) obtained from their huge semi-wild buffaloes, which represent their worldly wealth.

This particular mund, near the road,

owned about 20 buffaloes, and as our driver was watching them, an old bull lifted his head, snorted, and stamped his feet. At that the rest of the herd formed a tight circle around him with heads lowered and horns pointing outward. A massive tiger appeared a minute later and made a rush at the cattle, but they wouldn't break formation. Braking his charge a yard away, the giant cat started to circle the little band while they snorted, stamped, and shook their horns.

The driver jumped into the car and honked the horn. Hearing it, Joe had said, "Barking deer calling." The tiger soon gave up and walked away over the brow of the hill opposite.

We took chase in the car and found three sholas on the other side, any of which he might have selected. We skirted around them but found nothing and drove home in the gathering darkness.

Before leaving Joe that night, I told him to send a man to the tiger's range every day to see what fresh news he could gather.

A week later a man from the low country was driving a dozen cattle up from Gudalur, 30 miles away, to the market in Ootacamund. Eight miles from his destination he left the main road and took what he thought was a shorter route, via Andy Corner.

When he got to the sholas at Andy Corner, the native's cattle started around a bend in the road and suddenly came charging back. A tiger bounded after them and quickly brought down a young bull. Then the tiger looked up from the bull and made a bluffing, roaring rush toward the man, who fled back along the road. The person Joe had sent to watch the locality was sitting up on a hill and heard the noise. He hurried into town and reported to Joe, who then came flying up to Rosemount.

I wasn't about to miss a chance like this, so the four of us, including my driver and our informer, hurried back to the spot. We soon found where the dead bull had been dragged downhill, and in about 300 yards located the carcass in some undergrowth. There was no sign of the tiger and no meat had been taken from the kill.

It was 3 p.m., but with so many trees around, it wouldn't take long to put up a machan (platform). Joe and the other two started one in a tree overlooking the kill. There were long, grassy glades all around and the tiger would have a hard time trying to return to the kill unseen.

By 5 p.m., Joe and I were perched up on the platform. The other two were back at the car. I was quite uncomfortable, for the climb up the tree had been cruel to my crippled arms and legs. Once up there, however, I felt I could manage to shoot the tiger if he appeared.

Slowly the dusk fell around us, and a more beautiful place would be hard to imagine. It was chilly, for we were 7,000 feet up. A stiff breeze was blowing, swaying the stout rhododendron trees. A Malabar squirrel, the size of a

house cat, was jumping from tree to tree. Softly came the sound of a Toda herdsman calling to his buffaloes. A jungle cock began to crow his evening serenade. All was at peace, all except my pain-tormented body.

The light turned from orange to dull gray, and then Joe nudged my aching ribs—the tiger was standing in a glade 60 yards downhill. He looked huge, even from this distance, and he was standing broadside, sniffing the ground. I painfully raised the rifle. When the sights settled momentarily behind his shoulder, I touched off.

The tiger swung around, sunk his belly to the ground, and crept a few feet toward the nearest patch of woods. Then he bounded forward and was lost to view. Joe, who had seen dozens of tigers fired at, continued to stare at the spot as if his brain were working out some deep mathematical problem. Then he emphatically said, "Done missed him." I agreed.

I didn't feel like hanging on any longer that evening, so we climbed down and made for the car. The next day Joe went back alone to look; I couldn't walk after my tree-climbing. He found no sign of the tiger and the kill hadn't been touched.

In the next two or three weeks my health got steadily worse until I could hardly move. The tiger made several more kills—a Toda buffalo, sambar deer, a cart bullock, and a wandering pony. Joe came in with the news.

"I can't go now Joe, I just can't," I told him.

"Master getting better first, then shooting him," Joe agreed.

He brought me some tiger fat which I rubbed on my aching joints. The Indians are great believers in this as a cure. I rubbed in medicated oil too, and had two teeth pulled, as it was thought they might be partly responsible. Mostly I cursed my poor lot.

Then came another day. I was snatching a few hours of sleep when I heard a grunt and opened my eyes. A tall Toda—strong, bearded, and dressed in his togalike robes—stood at my bedside. He told me in Tamil that the tiger had killed his best buffalo cow and three calves. He wanted my help.

I called Joe, and within the hour he arrived and helped me get ready. My driver took us down to the Toda mund on the 11th mile of the Ootacamund-Gudalur road. It was now around 2 p.m. The tiger had come to the buffalo kraal at about 6 a.m., after the big bulls of the herd had already gone out to graze.

The kraal was a circular affair about 30 feet in diameter and was made of rocks piled about three feet high. The tiger had jumped into the kraal and killed the calves first. Then he killed the cow when she tried to drive him off. He dragged the cow to the wall and lifted her over the three-foot-high obstacle. She must have weighed 1,000 pounds.

Going downhill, he'd tried to drag the carcass under some exposed tree roots, but it had stuck. Unable to free it, the

tiger had gone off alone into a near-by wood. One look at the locality and I knew he was still there, for the surrounding country was comparatively bare. I felt I had him in the bag.

Joe went off to the hamlet of Pykara to get men to beat and by 4 p.m. we were ready. They were to work toward the next big wood, where the tiger would probably go if disturbed. Stationing myself behind a solitary tree near his expected exit, I made a small screen of leaves. I could rest my rifle against the tree.

The beat commenced with a wild yell, and though only 10 men were taking part, it sounded more like 50. At the first yell a challenging roar went up from the big killer, followed by an immediate hush. Then a man yelled. It sounded like Joe. I'd made him go with the men, much against his wishes; he didn't want to leave me in my present state. There was another yell, and then the tiger walked out 35 yards from me. He stopped, turned his head back toward the beaters.

I rested my .423 against the tree, aimed for his shoulder, and squeezed. He leaped into the air and landed on his side. His feet started working and he began biting at a tussock of grass, then he half-rolled, half-walked down the steep drop into the trees before my swollen hands could load and fire another shot.

I had worked out signals with Joe—a long whistle meant there was nothing to fear, while several short blasts meant they were to hurry out into the open. I gave the hurry signal now. The men responded immediately. But with darkness near, Joe and I soon decided nothing further could be done until the next day.

That night was a disturbed one for me. I knew my physical ability was near the end. And I now had a wounded tiger—possibly the most dangerous thing on earth—to deal with. Slowly the night dragged on as my thoughts, aches, and fever kept me company.

Joe came for me at 8 a.m. and I was as ready as I could be. I had rubber pads inside my shoes to lessen the jar when I walked. My ribs felt as though every one had been broken, and my left hand was swollen until the fingers were rigid.

Joe offered to do what very few men would do—follow the tiger by himself—but I thought we had a better chance together. So we set off for the spot where the beast had disappeared. I gave Joe the .423 and armed myself with my double-barreled 12 gauge shotgun loaded with L.G.'s—the largest-size slugs.

We found blood at once, but no tiger. So I sent Joe up a tree to have a look around. He hadn't climbed 10 feet off the ground when he saw something and came scooting down to tell me. He'd seen a part of a hind leg and tail of the big cat. And, as there was no sign of flies, we supposed the tiger was still alive. The bushes were too thick to fire through, but at any rate we'd located the beast.

I sent Joe up the tree again and he promptly signaled that there was movement; evidently the tiger had heard us. I couldn't see anything from where I stood and I couldn't climb the tree.

Although I couldn't see the tiger lying down, I knew I'd spot him if he stood up. The distance between us was perhaps 15 yards. I glanced back at Joe and he pointed at the gun and then at himself; he wanted to finish the job. But the tiger settled the argument. He was suddenly on his feet with a roar and scrambling up the rough hillside toward me. At that same instant I heard Joe jump down from the tree to come help me.

A few years after this incident, Joe again faced a wounded tiger. He was guiding for a maharaja at the time and somehow got into the same bush with a beast the maharaja had wounded. He's permanently scarred from the experience.

The great striped beast coming for me with murder in his eyes made me forget my pain. I automatically fired into his face. The first barrel blew bits from his head, but I fired the second shot for good measure.

Joe was at my side as the tiger fell dead. He took my empty gun from me and with his arms around my shoulders helped me up the bank. The crowd waiting above ran forward to meet us, and while Joe was telling them what had happened, I went to the car and was driven back to Rosemount.

A few hours later my doctor came to the house and immediately took me to the hospital. By then I couldn't even open my mouth; my jaws were swollen and fixed. I lay in the hospital for nearly three months, fed on milk from a teaspoon, and was discharged on V. E. Day, 30 pounds light.

A few weeks later, on my way to the city of Mysore for a short holiday, I took the car via Andy Corner and halted a moment on the red-mud road. The Toda buffaloes were grazing at peace and a little boy was blissfully managing a flock of sheep. THE END

Hold Onto Your Gun

A commonly held but completely sour notion is that a man shooting a rifle should hold his right thumb along the grip instead of around it.

It's a bum way to hold it, but those citizens who shot the old 1903 Springfield with its very short, low-combed stock had to hold that way—or get their noses bumped by the thumb. It's also possible that with the thumb alongside, a split second can be saved in rapid fire with a bolt-action rifle.

To anchor the thumb firmly around the grip makes for smooth, steady let-off—and for less appreciable recoil. But with thumb alongside, the rifle isn't held as firmly and the trigger isn't controlled as well. Combine this thumb-along-grip hold with a delicate pickle-fork hold on the fore-end, and even a rifle of modest recoil will kick pretty badly because it gets away from the shooter. It may even jump back and knock his teeth out.