When the light went on again, we saw the wounded leopard snarling defiance and dragging himself toward us with his front paws

TIGER...and the Unexpected

Had we waited 20 days for nothing? Where were the big cats? The answer came suddenly and with a vengeance

By RICHARD S. SMITH

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ONLY AN HOUR before, the jungle had been hot and bright; now it was cold and dark and damp as a cave. The blackness had come as quickly as turning out a light. The sun dropped out of sight suddenly, as though in a great rush to leave India and warm the other side of the earth. The cold dampness, however, came as a gradual thing that crept through the air and invaded our clothing, our skin, and even our bones.

There were four of us huddled together on a 6 x 8-foot platform 12 feet above the ground in the fork of a giant timru tree. We had been warned not to move, but it was impossible not to shiver in the cold wind. We were not permitted to talk, whisper, smoke, cough, or clear our throats. Somewhere out in the thick bush was a tiger, and we were waiting for hunger to drive him back to his meal.

Five hours passed and I ached in every muscle. The discomfort was bad enough for me, but for my companion, Richard Hankel, it was torture. A resident of Kenilworth, a suburb of Chicago, and owner of the Hankel Printing Company in Chicago, he had just celebrated his 75th birthday. Years ago, on the African plains, a wounded Cape buffalo took him apart with one bone-crushing charge, and Hankel's right hip is now made of steel. Merely walking slowly, with a pair of aluminum canes, is an effort for him. Sitting on a tree platform, his metal hip turning to ice, is an agony. Only his

Hankel, right, admires leopard held by shikari Charles Thomas

Hankel climbs ladder as Prince Hira issues orders

TIGER ...and the Unexpected

continued

Dr. Riba, right, who got a tiger earlier, congratulates Hankel on his trophy

determination to kill a tiger, his fortitude, and much grinding of teeth held him motionless.

The two others in the machan with Hankel and myself were Charles Thomas, a shikari, and his son. Thomas, an Indian, is a professional guide now, but formerly he worked as a game-control agent for the Indian government. In that capacity, he shot about 50 man-eating tigers and 100 leopards. Albert, Thomas's son, was there to shine a light on the tiger when and if he appeared.

At 2 a.m., Charles Thomas placed his hand on Hankel's shoulder to signal that the tiger was moving. Hankel and I heard nothing except the bark of a deer in the distance and the call of a stag. Thomas has extraordinary ears tuned to jungle sounds. Then a twig snapped and we heard a low growl.

Beneath us was the half-eaten carcass of a buffalo calf the tiger had killed two nights before. If the tiger began feeding again and we heard the crunch of bones, Albert would switch on the light and Hankel would have a few seconds to get off a shot.

There was a rustling in the dry grass and the sound of tearing flesh. I felt a sudden chill and began to tremble a little at the thought of being so close to an uncaged animal capable of killing a man with one swipe of its paw or a single crunch of its jaws. Our 12-foot height was no absolute safeguard. The big Indian cats cannot climb trees, but they can leap 20 feet into the air.

In a few moments, the tiger would have removed enough flesh to bare the buffalo's bones. The soft, rich

marrow, so pleasing to a tiger's taste, would help to make him oblivious to the light just long enough for the hunter to take aim and shoot. The tearing of flesh was more rapid and the tiger's hungry growls were terrifying. Only a few seconds now . . . but the moment never came.

I sneezed. It was impossible to control. I held my breath and clenched my fists and clutched my nose until I thought I would tear it off. But pressure had been building up for a long time and it finally let go in an explosion of air and moisture.

The tiger roared his astonishment at the sound, and Albert clicked on the light. With one huge leap, the cat vanished into the bush, giving us only a glimpse of striped hindquarters and tail.

The moment for which we had been silent and motionless so long had gone with a sneeze. But no one made a sound.

Finally, I said, "Sorry. I couldn't help it."

"Forget it," Hankel said. "I know you couldn't help it."

But that didn't make me feel any better. We had spent three consecutive nights in the machan waiting for the tiger to return to his kill. Three times Hankel had scaled the shaky bamboo ladder, one painful step at a time, with his almost useless legs. It took him nearly half an hour to do it each time. Add this to the fact that we had waited 10 days for the tiger to make this kill. Now we would have to start all over again. It was anybody's guess how long it would take before he, or another tiger, killed again.

We waited until dawn before leaving the machan. Hankel and the shikaris were silent during the jeep ride back to camp, and I could sense their feeling of defeat. This was the 13th day of our hunt, and Hankel's tiger was still as far away from his trophy room as it was the day we left Chicago.

The other hunter in our party, Dr. Leander Riba, a prominent Chicago urologist and a professor at Northwestern University as well as attending surgeon at Passavant Memorial Hospital, had quite different luck. Dr. Riba, at 65, still has legs as sturdy as a boxer's and is capable of climbing into a machan with the agility of a teen-ager. But he shot his tiger on the ground without walking more than a few feet.

It was pure luck. It was so easy, in fact, that Dr. Riba was disappointed, even though his 10-foot three-inch male was well above average in size. We had gone out to the Kolsa block, a 30-square-mile jungle area near the village of Chanda and about 450 miles northeast of Bombay, to stake out some buffalo baits. On the jeep ride back to our base camp, the driver suddenly slammed on the brakes, and I looked down the road to see what he was staring at. It was nearly dark, but enough light remained to see a huge tiger sitting on the shoulder of the road not more than 100 yards away and staring at us with fierce, yellow eyes.

The driver slowly eased the jeep down the road until we were within 50 yards of the tiger. Then the big cat began looking at the jungle to the right and left as if trying to decide in which direction to run.

"Now," whispered the driver, and Dr. Riba stepped slowly and cautiously out of the jeep. It is illegal to shoot from a car. The tiger rose on all fours, growled once, and made a move in our direction. Then he changed his mind and began loping across the road. Dr. Riba, also a veteran African hunter, fired his Winchester Model 70 once and put a .375 Magnum bullet in the animal's neck, just ahead of the shoulder. Thomas *(continued on page 120)*

Getting set for long wait in machan

Chicago hunter's tiger was very large and about 12 years old

Vultures swarm over remains of Dr. Riba's skinned tiger

TIGER — AND UNEXPECTED

(continued from page 47)

followed him up with a shot behind the shoulder with his .470 Holland and Holland double, and the tiger somersaulted into the bush at the side of the road. Before either man could fire again, the cat was up and running into the thickets. We could hear him in there, moaning softly and then growling fiercely. But it was dark now—the sun had dropped like a stone—and only a fool pursues a wounded tiger after dark.

"He'll keep until morning," Thomas said. "Either of those shots will kill him, but we can't go in there now."

Next morning we found the tiger about 100 feet off the road. He was stone dead and had been for hours. We loaded the 400-pound carcass on the jeep and drove it back to camp to be skinned. After it was, it took a swarm of vultures only 23 minutes to transform the remains into a pile of bones. Then the crows descended to eat what morsels the vultures had left, and that night the jackals crept in and devoured most of the bones. Dr. Riba's disappointment over such an easy kill is readily understandable when you realize he had paid more than $2,000 to travel halfway around the world and another $1,750 for a permit. Now he was finished. His license was filled, except for a leopard, which he wasn't too interested in getting. So it was one down for Riba and one to go for Hankel, whose trophy seemed more unobtainable as the days went by.

I was not there to hunt, nor was Jack Lieb, a motion-picture producer from Chicago. We were there to record the hunt in words and on film. I'm in public relations in Chicago and hoped to write a magazine story about the hunt (this is it). The film was to be made for private showings to Hankel's friends and business associates.

Our shikar was arranged by Hunters & Hunters headquartered in Bombay. Principal owner of the outfit is a slight, 35-year-old Indian prince whose late father was the Maharajah of Baria. His full name and title is His Royal Highness Prince Hira Ranjit Singh Chauhan. For obvious reasons, he prefers to be called simply Prince Hira. Although he presently receives only 7½ percent of the income his father got before the Indian states were united, his palace, located about 700 miles from our camp, is a three-story mansion that contains, among other things, 10 bedroom suites. It is cared for by 35 servants, most of whom have been with the family for 20 years. Prince Hira runs a shikar outfit purely as a hobby. He is one of the country's finest tiger hunters, having shot and killed his first when he was 12. He is a rather short, thin man with a small mustache, and he usually wears a green leather baseball cap. He does not look at all like a tiger hunter, but after spending a few days in camp with him, we were convinced he knew exactly what he was doing.

Our base outside the forest village of Kolsa was a former wayside guesthouse set back about 100 feet from the road. To the rear, and on both sides, was thick bamboo jungle. To the front and across the road were barren rice fields, dry as a desert in the February drought. We stayed in the guesthouse, which consisted of two bedrooms, a dining room, kitchen, a huge front porch, and a latrine flushed by dousing it with a bucket of water. It was primitive but comfortable. The food was fine, if you like goat meat covered with curry sauce that scalds your mouth and feels like a lighted match when it hits your stomach lining.

Camp life during most of our stay from February 10 to March 6, 1964, can be described in one word—waiting. You wait for a tiger, any tiger, to locate and kill one of the numerous buffalo baits staked out in the jungle. This can be a matter of hours or, as in Hankel's case, weeks. A tiger is a comparatively poor hunter, relying principally on hearing and vision to locate his prey. Because the staked-out buffaloes graze noislessly and the jungle is thick, a tiger must almost stub his toe on one before he finds it.

So we read and played cards and drank iced lemon drinks and hot tea and waited. Each morning the baits were checked, and each morning for 13 days the shikaris returned shaking their heads. No kill. Then we had a kill, but I sneezed in the machan and the waiting began all over again.

Prince Hira, meanwhile, entertained us with stories of man-eaters killed in past years near our camp.

"A man-eater is not a usual thing," he explained. "Normally, a tiger will avoid man and rarely turns on him for food. But an old tiger, one that has lost the speed he needs to catch his normal food, may do so. A crippled tiger, wounded by man or porcupine quills, may also turn to human prey. Sometimes it will be an accident, usually due to the tiger's rather poor sense of smell."

He went on to tell us that once, in the Kolsa block, a native woman was out near the edge of the jungle picking berries in late afternoon. It was cool, and she was wearing a dark shawl over her shoulders. While she was stooping to gather berries, a tiger saw her from the bush. Crouching in the low thickets with the shawl over her shoulders, she probably appeared to the tiger to be a wild pig. He leaped on her, carried her off into the jungle, and ate her. Once a tiger has tasted human flesh, nothing else seems to satisfy him, and this particular animal killed 34 human beings before he was finally hunted down and shot by a government agent.

Prince Hira also told us of the Chanda man-eater, a young tiger that turned to human flesh after having been caught in a net. Periodically, the natives, who are not permitted to carry guns, will drive game toward a huge net held by another group. They usually catch a few deer or a wild boar, which they kill with spears, but this time they caught a tiger. Instead of

killing the tiger with their spears, they merely wounded him, and the tiger carried off one of the men. A few days later that tiger walked boldly into their village and carried off a small child. Later he killed and ate 20 people in other villages nearby. While a normal tiger will shun humans, a man-eater will seek them out. And they develop superior cunning.

The tiger tales were interesting, but we listened to them with mixed emotions. I was impatient because, as yet, there was no story to write. Jack Lieb had no photographs other than some stills of Dr. Riba's dead tiger and a few hundred feet of movie film taken as background. Hankel, of course, was disturbed at not getting a shot, and his legs were bothering him as a result of three cold nights in a machan. There was other game to be shot—wild boar, sloth bear, blue bull, and jungle fowl—but he wasn't interested. Getting a tiger was his only goal.

On the morning of the 20th day, he called Prince Hira out on the porch for a conference. "I'm 75 years old," Hankel said. "I have hunted all my life and have shot elephants, lions, leopards, Cape buffaloes, Kodiak, grizzly and polar bears as well as lesser game. But I've never shot a tiger, and the way things seem to be going right now there isn't a tiger in India that won't outlive me. We've been here for 20 days and nights and I have yet to fire a gun. Where are all the tigers?"

The prince stroked his mustache for a moment before he replied. "I think Africa has spoiled you," he said. "The hunting is different there. You can look out on the plains and see animals in herds. In this part of India, it is all jungle and you seldom see anything. You say you are only interested in a tiger, and I have guaranteed that you will get one. But we can't go looking for one. We must wait for one to come to us. Until a tiger comes to a bait, we have no idea where they are. We must wait."

Right then, as if on cue, the jeep came roaring into the driveway with Charles Thomas at the wheel. Another shikari was standing in the back waving his arms wildly and shouting. They drove up to the porch and had an excited, five-minute talk with the prince. Finally, the prince interpreted for us. Early that morning, a tiger had walked boldly into the village of Mul and killed a three-day-old calf. As he was dragging it through the streets, the villagers tried to chase him away with clubs and spears. The tiger dropped the calf, charged his tormentors, and they ran. Fortunately, the tiger never completed his charge, apparently being more interested in getting back to the calf and eating it.

Here was the first sign, the beginning of a nuisance animal. He had placed his paw on the first rung of the ladder to man-eating. The pug marks in the village streets and the description of him indicated an old tiger. As yet, he had killed no natives, but it would probably be just a matter of time before man would be the only food he could catch.

"He must be killed," the prince said. "We can either call in a government agent or go after him ourselves. But he'll be difficult. He's old and smart."

"Sounds O.K. to me," Hankel said. "But keep in mind that I can't do much walking."

"That won't be necessary," the prince assured him. "We'll bait him as we did the others and you can shoot from a blind. However, there are no large trees near the village, so the blind will have to be constructed on the ground."

"In other words," said Hankel, "he could get at me as easily as I could get at him."

"Exactly," the Prince replied, "but you'll have a back-up gun in the blind so there won't be too much danger. Remember that you will get off the first shot. It must be a vital one, or at least enough to slow him down so you and your back-up gun can finish him. If the first shot is not good, he may charge the blind. A tiger coming directly at you provides a rather small target."

Author with a jungle fowl for the pot

"Let's give it a try," said Hankel.

This time, however, the procedure would be slightly different. Instead of waiting for the tiger to kill the bait and then sitting over the kill, we would station ourselves near the live bait and, if possible, shoot the tiger before he killed it.

The tiger had entered the village of Mul from the jungle area to the east, so that was where our blind was constructed. We would hide behind a few poles placed upright in the ground and covered with branches. To our rear was the high bamboo fence of a village corral. A canvas chair was placed in the blind for Hankel and a small buffalo calf was tied to a stake about 30 feet from the blind.

We entered the blind just before dark for another night of forced silence. In this blind, however, we were well hidden and could move about so long as the movement was slow and created no noise.

Again, the sun sank suddenly and

cold dampness invaded the blind. After the fourth hour, I dozed and dreamed of hot coffee, a cigarette, and a roaring fire. Then I felt someone shaking me gently and squeezing my arm. I woke up and listened but heard nothing. I peered through an opening in the blind but could see nothing except the buffalo calf grazing silently on dry grass in the dim light of a slim moon. Then the calf lifted its head and looked toward the jungle. Apparently he heard or saw something, because he began to move about nervously and strain at his rope. Then I made out a dark form moving slowly toward the calf. The buffalo saw it too and began to bawl frantically. At this moment, a cloud crossed the moon and everything vanished into darkness.

The buffalo was howling horribly now, and then we heard a terrible roar. The cloud passed and we saw a tremendous cat with his rear paws on the ground and his front paws on the buffalo's back. His jaws were clamped on the top of the buffalo's neck and we heard a snap as the neck broke. The buffalo flopped loosely to the ground. Then the light went on, and in a single second I saw the tiger, striped and beautiful, with his front legs wrapped around the buffalo's back and his jaws squeezing rivers of blood from its neck. A gun went off in my ear—Hankel's .375 Magnum Winchester, Model 70. It sounded like an 88 mm. cannon. The muzzle blast, a ring of bright flame in the darkness, blinded me. Two more deafening blasts burst from Charles Thomas's .470 double rifle, and the night was silent again.

The light played about the dead buffalo as I blinked away the sparks of flame that had blinded me. But there was no tiger—only the blood-streaked buffalo lying a few yards away.

"The tiger," I said. "Where is he?"

"He ran off to the right," Hankel answered.

"Did you hit him?" I asked, almost afraid of the answer.

"He was hit in the neck," Thomas replied. "Mr. Hankel hit him good. I am not sure about my shots. He was running very fast."

"What do we do now?" I said.

"We wait until it is light," said Thomas. "In the meantime, be very quiet. He may not be far away and may only be wounded."

We settled into uncomfortable silence. I hardly breathed. We were on the ground, separated from a possibly wounded tiger by a few leaves and branches. Where was he? Was he crawling up to our blind? Why didn't he make some noise?

About two hours later, I heard a growl. The hair on the back of my neck bristled and something turned upside down in the bottom of my stomach. The growl was so close it sounded as though it were inside the blind. The moon was free of clouds again and cast some light on the ground around us. Near the dead buffalo there was the silhouette of a cat. It seemed smaller than the first I had seen, but I assumed it was the tiger, probably crouching low in pain. The beam from the light picked out a pair of green eyes, flashing teeth, and a spotted face. A leopard was trying to steal from the tiger's kill. Hankel's .375 went off next to my ear again and the cat slumped. The shot burst into his hindquarters and he roared in agony. He came crawling toward the light, snarling defiance.

"Shoot him again," I shouted.

No shot came, and I could hear Hankel and Thomas fumbling with their guns. A bolt clicked. Nervous fingers were trying to chamber a shell.

"Turn out the light," Thomas whispered.

The light went out. Frankly, I felt better with the light on, because at least I could see the leopard coming toward us. But this is not the way you play the game. The leopard can see the light too, and that is what he tries to get at.

The light went on again in a few seconds and revealed the wounded leopard, slumped down on his hindquarters, still pulling himself forward toward our blind with his front paws. He was only about 10 feet away.

"Somebody shoot," I pleaded.

Hankel squeezed off another shot and got him in the chest. He fell but continued to snarl at us. Another shot, and he lay deathly still.

When the sun came up I saw that Hankel was somewhat pale. Even the dark-skinned Thomas was several shades lighter. Later, I was told my face was the color of newly fallen snow.

"For the first time in my life, I forgot to bring extra shells," Thomas said.

It was fully light when we started out of the blind. Following the blood spoor, we found the tiger about 100 feet away, almost in the jungle. He had crawled the distance with a .375 in his neck and a .470 in his stomach. Thomas's other shot had missed.

The tiger measured 10 feet eight inches between pegs driven at the tip of his nose and the tip of his tail. His age was estimated at 12 years, which is close to ancient for the jungle cats. Obviously, he was too old to catch his regular prey and had turned to the only source of food available to him—the slow, lumbering cattle in the village.

I was still a bit shaky when we arrived back at camp, and later, while we sat on the veranda gulping lemon drinks, a horrible thought hit me.

"Hankel," I said, "I was just thinking. When the leopard was coming toward our blind, you were the only one with shells. Suppose you had had a heart attack at that moment. What do you think would have happened?"

"Well," he said, "I guess our wives would be widows now." THE END

Wetting Worm Bedding

To keep your worms fresh and lively, scatter a few ice cubes over the bedding in your bait box. Water from the slowly melting ice will filter through it, supplying the required moisture.—*Victor H. Lamoy.*