

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-11a
Tanganyika Game Ranger

Lake Hotel
Bukoba
Tanganyika
East Africa
27 September 1950

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 18, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In the past, whenever I have heard anyone speak of a Game Ranger, it has always stirred my imagination. Immediately I would visualize a lean, broad-shouldered figure in a buck-skin shirt, a dead shot with rifle or revolver, a staunch enforcer of the law on the frontier, one of Nature's own Noble-men who could walk forty miles a day through the forest, fearlessly running down armed criminals.

Well, I have just finished spending four days with a Tanganyika Game Ranger, and to say that my fond illusion has been shattered would be the all-time ultimate in understatement. During those four days - four of the twelve that I had been saving up since Oxford, to be set aside for pure enjoyment and for forgetting about such things as race-relations and colonial policy for a while - I was ~~never~~ more than 50 yards away from Mr. Bryan Cooper of the Tanganyika Game Department, who is better known as "Walkie-Talkie". And during every blessed minute of those four days, daylight and dark, I hovered on the very brink of homicide.

I first saw Mr. Cooper in his three-ton truck, driving up the road to the District Commissioner's house in Biharamulo. The truck was painted a brilliant green, with silver-gilt trim on top, sides, and wheels, and with a huge silver buffalo head, Coopers perversion of the Territory Game Department emblem, ornamenting the radiator cap. An enormous chrome plated antenna sprouted from the cab, and as the truck passed on the road a full hundred yards away I could clearly hear American boogie-woogie coming in over the short wave. An outside chrome spotlight was perched on the cab above the drivers seat, emphasizing the vehicle's marked resemblance to a Mardi gras float.

The bed of the truck was heaped with tents, oil drums, collapsible motor boats, outboard motors, and camp furniture. The sides of the bed were festooned with coils of rope and wire, canvas waterbags, and sets of entrenching tools. A tarpaulin, green, matching the body paint, was stretched over this heaped cargo, and on top of this sat half a dozen uniformed native game scouts and their calico-clad wives, each scout holding a rifle and wearing the polished brass buffalo-head on the front of his bellboy cap.

I was introduced to Mr. Cooper a few minutes later by the District Commissioner. I had already heard that it was his habit to speak incessantly, so I did not try to push in edgewise anything but a single hello. He started to tell me about his recent troutfishing leave, his motorboats, his last time shooting a leopard, his patent glass trout rod from America. I looked and listened and felt my Nature's Nobleman idea melt away.

He was tall, narrow-shouldered, balding, red-faced, big-footed, and crane-necked. He wore a pair of black mosquito boots which came almost up to his knobby knees, briefly above which hung the full 30 inch skirt of a truly pukka sahib pair of khaki shorts. Four inches higher was the even greater flare of a starched bush jacket, cut on the pattern of an American zoot-suit and spangled at the breast pockets with rows of cartridges in sewn loops.

The Joycian stream-of-consciousness talk continued, its flow so steady and continuous that it insulated him from all possible reply or comment - other than an occasional monosyllabic agreement. He asked if I would like him to take me elephant shooting and I, feeling that I could stomach the chatter, and not then knowing of yet greater vices hidden in the man, accepted.

He unloaded several of the scouts and all the wives, put my kit on his truck, and we hit for the bush.

The first day we drove south to a village where elephants had been seen two days before. His idea was to make inquiries from road-workers and travellers, to see if any spoor had crossed the road itself. He hailed down every truck we passed, and stopped every native we saw walking. Once a passing truck did not instantly respond to his waving arm. This apparently was a terrible breach of manners. He slammed on the brakes, grabbed the rifle I was holding between my knees, sprang out onto the road, and was aiming the rifle in the direction of the offending vehicle when it came to a stop.

This same day he had a row with his houseboy and fired him very dramatically, throwing his terminal pay, a handful of silver shillings, contemptuously onto the ground. The boy kept his dignity, turning his back and walking away. Cooper had to stoop for the coins himself. Then he shouted for an hour or so, bawling out the whole safari.

We camped that night near a small village. I didn't get the relief I had been looking forward to - from the boogie-woogie short wave radio - because as soon as we left the truck he unpackaged and proudly installed under our tent fly a portable battery set, equally loud. It was fantastic: a peaceful evening in the African wilds, radio blaring, Cooper chatting and shooting with his BSA air rifle at doves in a nearby tree, and - wonder of wonders - Cooper shouting at the servants in

Swahili, bawling them out for talking too much.

The dinner was delayed for some reason. Cooper began to shout at the cook, louder. When even that did not hurry things up he jumped up and walked to his camp bed, and took a 9mm Luger pistol from under the pillow. He fired several shots over the cook's head. The food came then, and he laid the pistol on the table, patting the butt whenever a servant approached. He fired it once more, when the fish course was late in coming.

I went to sleep to the drone of his voice. He was telling me that it was almost suicide to try to shoot elephant with a telescopic sight, and that I should throw my scope away and have the biggest possible gold bead and notched rear sights fitted. If it had been any other man I could have told him that I had used the scope enough, on several continents, to know something about it; and that though I would not try to make anyone else use it it was all right for me. But communication between Cooper and the Outside World is in one direction only.

I got up once during the night, and noticed that he had laid the Luger on an ammunition case beside the bed, with the barrel aligned directly at my pillow, and a round in the chamber. I turned the weapon around.

We moved camp the next day, north, Cooper saying that the water holes had dried up and the elephant had had to move on. I grabbed this opportunity to say that I was very discouraged, and willing to give the whole thing up, but he said no. And my real keenness to get an elephant kept me from outrightly demanding that we return to Biharamulo.

On the way Cooper saw a bunch of natives gathered drinking beer in a roadside village. He halted the truck, played his radio for them, exchanged greetings with the headman and, in way of kittenish amusement, sprayed some of the crowd with his flit gun and his pyrene fire extinguisher.

A troop of baboons chose this time and place to move across the road, right in the middle of the village. Cooper grabbed a .303 rifle and several clips of ammunition, and began to send bullets ricocheting along the axis of the road, in between the rows of mud huts. Drunken natives, bullets flying, and confused baboons running across the road in a line, like ducks in a shooting gallery. Out of about fifteen shots, he killed two. I remained in the cab and held my head in my two hands.

On we went, nothing learned about recent elephant spoor, shooting baboons on the way. At the Kagera River ferry, near Bukoba, we found the barge moored to the far side and the crew resting up on the opposite bank. Again Cooper resorted to firearms, firing two shots over their heads, and ragingly taking the number of a truck ahead of us, which had been waiting

for about ten minutes. When the crew came down he screamed for five minutes at them. While they were bringing us across, the tall, good looking African in charge kept staring directly at Cooper's face, his own face a mask of scowling hate.

North of the Kagera we came across fresh spoor, parked the truck, and followed for several miles, finally locating and watching for a while several elephants. But they were on the far side of the river, and no big bulls among them, so we went back to the truck. During the walk back there was a momentary gleam of hope: Cooper tripped on a root, fell forward to the ground. He struck the hard earth face downwards, and I hoped that the fieldglasses suspended in front of his chest would provide enough of an anvil to fracture several ribs. But, after rolling over and moaning for a minute, he got up as good as new. Back in the truck, we were going along the road to check the reported spoor of another herd, when we spotted a hippo in the roadside brush.

Cooper grabbed my rifle and, with no regard for the rule that one should not shoot at other things when near elephants, staged another shooting spree. He emptied my gun without stopping the poor beast, and had to finish it off with his .416, at a range of about fifteen feet. (Tim Harris, D.C. Bukoba, later told me he thought Cooper a "butcher" - a man who just likes to see things fall. I can believe it.) The rest of the day was spent with Cooper ostentatiously distributing hippo meat to the local road-gangs, most of whom, being Moslems, would not touch it. But he was able to bask in a good quantity of Christian and Pagan gratitude.

The next morning, after a big herd, I spored for several hours with Cooper. It was a rare experience. Though I was the one who was supposed to do the shooting he insisted on walking in front of me, just behind the head scout - a really wonderful tracker named Bakari. (It is commonly thought in the District that Bakari is the true secret of all the success Cooper has enjoyed in elephant shooting.) I had to devise an ingenious method of getting round this, and getting up to the front of the party.

I would suddenly jump, point, and pretend to see something in the bush ahead, then run excitedly forward to point it out to Bakari. When I got in front of Cooper I would then stick out my elbows and carry my rifle at a low port to obstruct the trail. I would incline to the right or left whenever he tried to circle past me, blocking him off. In this way I kept behind the tracker where I belonged. In a shooting crisis I wanted to be away from Cooper despite his promise that he would not fire unless we were charged.

He was tired, now. And his rifle was being carried by the last porter in line. I liked this.

We were nearing the herd - we could hear them feeding, breaking down trees - when Cooper began singing, in unsubsided voice, "Oh What a Beautiful Morning". Then we saw a herd of buffalo which he wanted to count, and a herd of impalla, which he wanted the party to stop and admire while he would deliver an impromptu natural history lecture. I said fourletter all impalla and buffalo, and walked on. He sat down to have a cup of tea - and to this happy fact I owe the success of my elephant hunt. When we were 100 yards away from Cooper Bakari and I spotted the herd, crossing our front from right to left in a long column, nearly a hundred of the big animals.

We watched the tusks as they ambled by, waiting for the bigger ones which most often trail up at the rear. I picked out a big bull with ivory thicker than my thigh, took aim between its eye and ear. Cooper by this time had had his tea and was running up the slope towards us. "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" he was yelling; but even had this advice been valid, I should have paid no attention. The shot found the brain and the elephant went down slowly in its tracks. It was a nice bull, with tusks of more than 60 pounds each.

The next day was spent in removing the entire skull, to carry out his idea of cross-sectioning it to show the location of the brain cavity to his elephant-control scouts. This means that the tusks cannot be removed until the tissues in the sheaths decompose and permit withdrawal without chopping the bone. It will be a month before I learn the exact weight of the tusks or have them as a trophy.

The remaining hours for me were ones of sociological observation. On the road back to Biharamulo Cooper kept carrying out, vigorously, his conception of his game-ranger duties. Whenever he saw a native with a muzzle-loading gun he would stop, jerk the weapon from the man's hands, and check to see if it was loaded with the forbidden native-manufactured powder. At the same time the man's powder and bullet pouches would be jerked away and examined by the game scouts. When the frisking was finished the gun would be thrown roughly back into the native's hands and the pouches would be tossed on the ground for him to pick up. He also raided a few villages, going into the huts and looking for illegally-obtained skins and trophies. Cooper also, while we were driving, confided a little of his past history.

He had suffered concussion as a youngster in a motorbike accident, had commanded a company of Kings African Rifles (in garrison and police duty) during the war, and had had a many-months seige of Malta fever. One interesting aspect of his army career was that he had been a stern disciplinarian, so much so that his superiors objected and halted some of his measures. He said that you couldn't afford to be soft with "nigger troops."

As proof of the wisdom of the sterner discipline which he

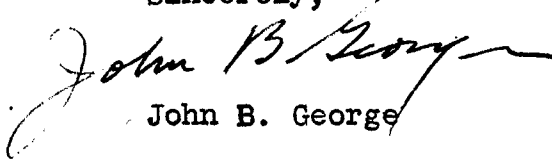
would have maintained, he cited an interesting circumstance: His successor in command, who took over the company when he was invalided out with Malta fever, was murdered and mutilated by mutinous African soldiers.

All of the administrative officials in the area know of the Game Ranger's ways, and most of them predict that he will come to a violent end - a poisoned arrow from a villager or a bullet from one of his own scouts.

For me, in retrospect, the whole affair is a huge belly-laugh - the biggest lump of buffoonery I've witnessed since the War. But I don't think we can disregard the serious effect a few men like Cooper can have in East Africa. A few of his type in India caused a tremendous "Get Out, White Man" movement. There are only a few like Cooper in the whole of East Africa, but a few are enough.

It is likely, I suppose, that the man will be laughed out of Government service, eventually. But he would remain as a farmer, still overlording a large number of Africans. When one considers the Freudian urges that may have enticed Cooper into East Africa, away from London where no human beings would respect or obey him, the poisoned arrow or the scout's bullet seems the best solution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John B. George". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

John B. George

Received New York 10/6/50.