

IMW-26
The Kingdom of Toro

The Mountains of the Moon Hotel
Fort Portal, Uganda
August 12, 1962

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

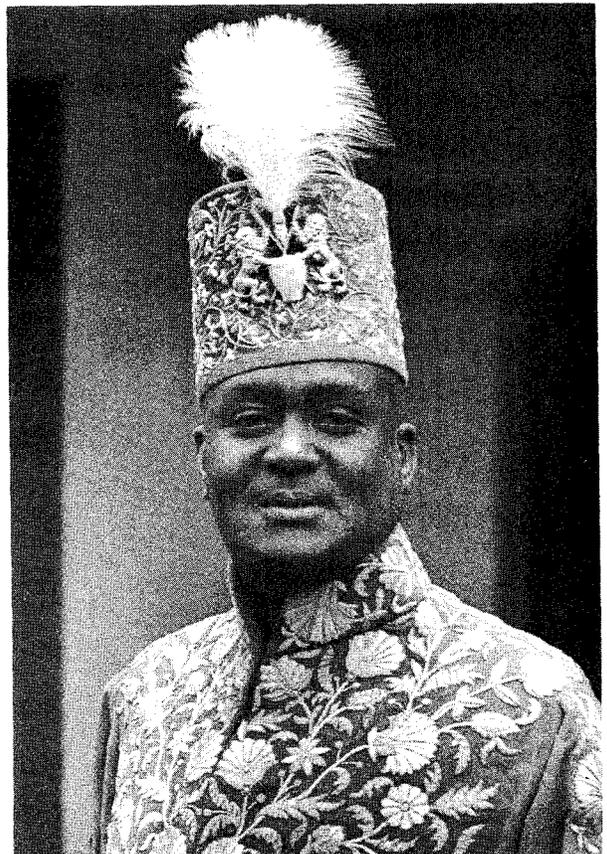
Fort Portal lies on the eastern flank of the Ruwenzori, Ptolemy's Lunae Montes finis orientalis. Although rarely seen at this time of year, one senses the fantastic world of bogs, moss and tree heaths just beyond the haze. Fort Portal is a small town and the headquarters of the Kingdom of Toro, one of the four treaty states in Uganda with an hereditary ruler.

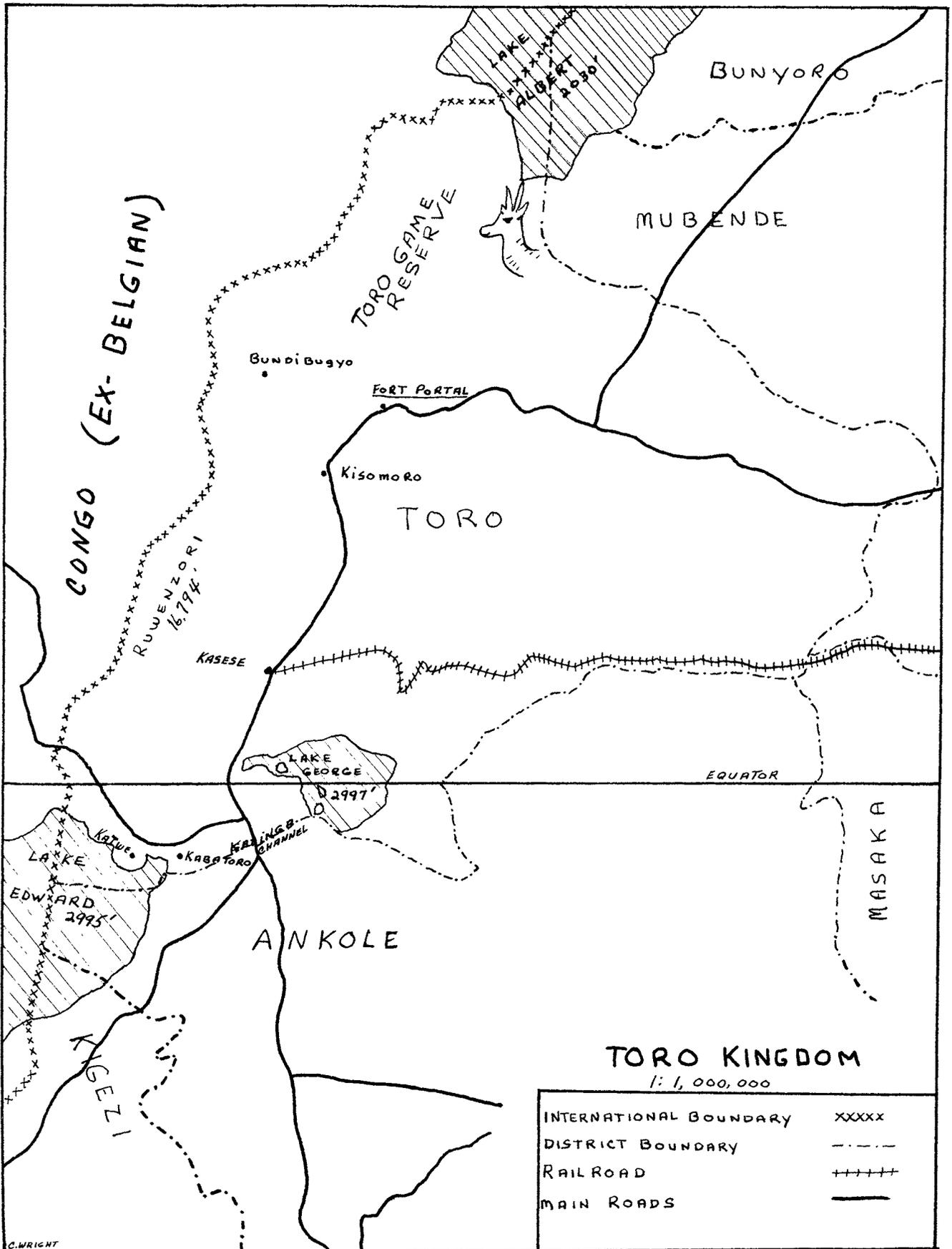
The present ruling house of Toro derived from another of the treaty states, Bunyoro. In 1830 one of Bunyoro's principal chiefs, Kaboyo, revolted and founded Toro. It was not until 1894, however, when Bunyoro was subdued by the British that Kasagama, one of Kaboyo's successors, finally won his independence. Soon after he wrote to the Church Missionary Society: "Sirs, here is a very great need for ladies to come and teach our ladies," and in no time at all they did come, cycling through elephant grass in their long skirts.

The Omukama

Kasagama was a model convert. He went to church every day, helped build the new church with his own hands, and even played football with his people, though followed about the field by an attendant with an umbrella and another with a chair. Kasagama lived until 1928 when he was succeeded by his son, George David Kamurasi Rukidi, the present Omukama.

Some people feel Toro has changed little since Kasagama's time. Ruth Fisher, one of the early missionaries, wrote in 1900: "The fault of the women is their inherent laziness; the generality of them desire nothing so much as to sit still and do absolutely nothing....They are so fond of begging, begging, begging: but when you suggest their working, off they go and you never see them again." Lugard had little more to say of their men, "a poor-spirited, defenceless lot, the spirit crushed out of them by years of tyranny".





C. WRIGHT

Well-wishers of the Toro hope (without, perhaps, too much confidence) that recent development will kindle a new spirit amongst them.

The Toro are not the only inhabitants, however. They number only 200,000 or slightly more than half the total population of 380,000. Two smaller tribes, the Konjo (115,000) and the Amba (35,000), account for most of the rest. The former inhabit the slopes of the Ruwenzori and the latter live in the Semliki Valley near Bundibugyo. There are also a small tribe of Bahima pastoralists, the Buktuku, from the flats near Lake Edward, and numerous migrant laborers, most of whom are Bakiga from Kigezi.

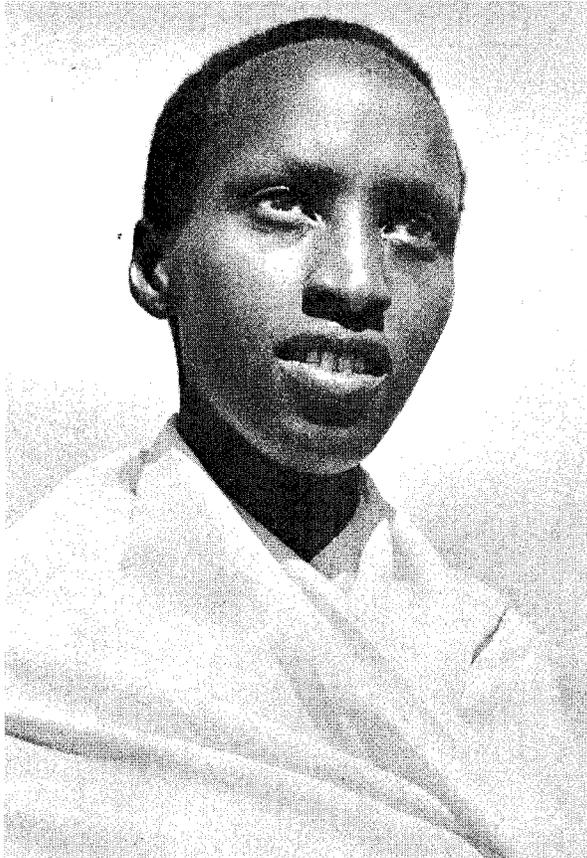
Finally, Toro is the only part of Uganda where there is a settled group of white farmers, some of whom have been here since the twenties. Most of them are tea planters who live near Fort Portal. In general their relations with Africans are good and improving, although not as good as many of the settlers like to claim. At virtually all the gatherings we attended, however, white and black mingled freely, and there is none of the blind racism one occasionally encounters in other parts of East Africa.

Most of the European settlers are old-timers who have wandered about Uganda for years. We met one, Banduki Gunn (banduki is Swahili for gun), who was for years an ivory hunter and who has only recently settled down to the comparatively quiet life of a tea planter. A few days ago he settled a strike among his Bakiga workers by telling them he was on strike and wouldn't talk to them. They returned to work the next day.

It was Banduki Gunn who presented Queen Elizabeth National Park with a pair of magnificent tusks, each weighing over 145 pounds. The story goes that after numerous drinks he and a friend, Squash Lemon (who is said to have killed 25 elephant in 45 minutes), went hunting together. When they came upon the tusker, each invited the other to shoot with the result that both shot at the same time. To this day no one knows whose bullet killed him. Anyway there was a strong suspicion the animal was shot in a park and, as the Game Department was breathing heavily down their necks, the ivory was hastily donated to the National Parks in memory of one of its former directors.

The Europeans of Fort Portal are on unusually good terms with Toro leaders. As a result we heard little fear that their land would be taken away from them after independence or that any obstacles would be put in their way. On the contrary, people seemed optimistic. Although many of the old barriers have only recently broken down, race relations in Toro have established a pattern that other parts of multi-racial Africa would do well to emulate.

Unfortunately, relations between the African tribes are not as good. In this sphere Toro follows the common pattern in East Africa in that tribal relations are more often motivated by suspicion and distrust than by friendship. Tension is mounting daily between the Konjo and the Amba on the one hand and the Toro on the other. According to one prominent anthropologist, however, this has not always been so. Less than ten years ago she wrote: "Characteristic of the situation is the lack of enmity of the Amba towards the Toro. The admiration



A Bahima girl. The traditionally cattle-owning Bahima share the wealth and aristocracy of socially conscious Toro society with the royal Bito clan.

they express for Toro superiority in education and civilization seems something like that felt in many parts of Africa for British civilization in the first years of contact between black and white."

Today things are quite different. The Amba and the Konjo have had enough of Toro rule. While the British remained to administer an impartial justice, they were content under Toro domination, but with independence only a few months away, they have increased their demands for a separate administrative district to be called Ruwenzuru. They fear what is going to happen when the restraining British hand is withdrawn. The result: in Amba and Konjo areas arson and crop slashing has become common. A company of special police have had to be posted to Bundibugyo to prevent violence to Toro chiefs. In general lawlessness is increasing, and many think

they are on the verge of revolt.

There are other reasons too. Economically both tribes are more vigorous than the Toro, and they are developing at a faster rate. For example, the Amba traditionally lived entirely by subsistence agriculture. In 1900 they accepted the suzerainty of the Omukama, and in 1908 they were given their own county, Bwamba. A poll tax was levied in 1919, coffee introduced in 1920, and a road from Fort Portal to Bundibugyo constructed in 1938. Bwamba is very fertile and today the Amba are getting increasingly wealthy from their two main cash crops, coffee and cotton.

A similar growth, although not as spectacular, has taken place among the Konjo. It is estimated that although together they number only 45% of the population, they produce over 60% of the wealth of the District. In spite of this, they reason, there hasn't been a single Amba county chief and few sub-chiefs. Their tax money is spent in and around Fort Portal, and they receive less than their share of services and capital development.

Most of the people I've talked to feel that although there is truth in this argument, it is inevitable that richer areas must help the poorer ones to develop, and that the creation of a new district is no solution. They feel the problem is largely the result of rabble-rousing among irresponsible elements within the two tribes. The matter was brought to a head a short time ago when seven Konjo

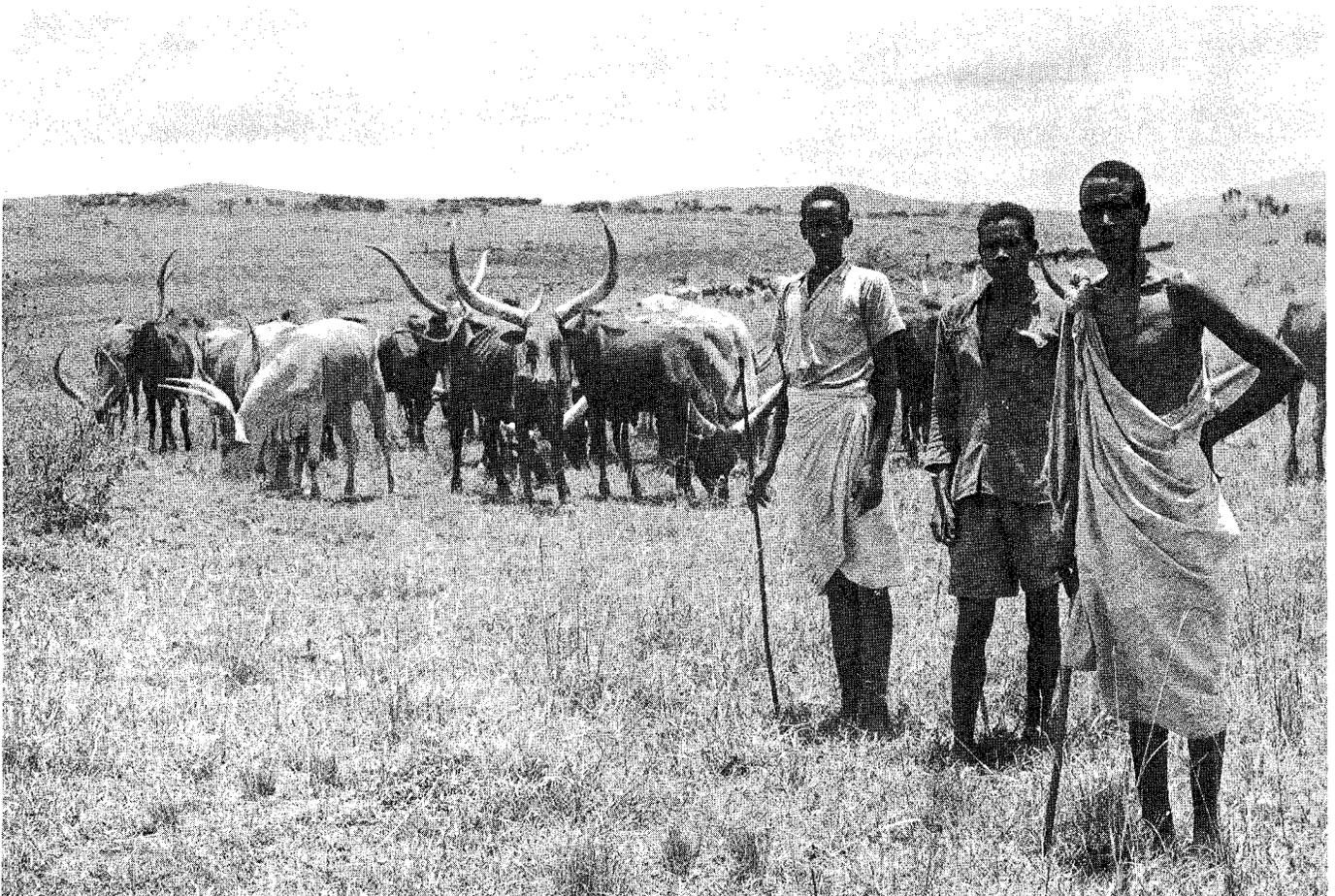
and Amba members of the Rukurato (Toro Parliament), in which they are fully represented, walked out in support of the secession demand. Presently preparations are going ahead for by-elections to fill the vacancies but there is considerable opposition to this among the Konjo and Amba.

No doubt irresponsible elements have pushed the secession demands, but there is just enough local dissatisfaction to make it an explosive issue. Although there is little chance all their demands will be met, a lasting solution will call for certain concessions. As the DC told us, "We've contained them for the time being, but for how long we don't know."

Individual Toro don't like to speak of this problem. When pressed, however, they always refer to the Amba and Konjo as ingrates who don't even appreciate what has been done for them. "Why, we have given them the best roads in the Kingdom," the Speaker of the Rukurato told me. "They have better hospitals and schools, so how can they complain about their treatment. The whole thing eludes me." Nevertheless, I couldn't help feeling that he, as most of the other Toro I spoke to, was not entirely convinced by his own arguments.

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There is plenty of extra land in Toro. Some of the Ruanda refugees have already been settled here.



On the other hand Toro is intensely proud of its status as a Kingdom with a special treaty relationship with Great Britain. Ever since the first agreement was signed with Owen in 1894, they have been determined negotiators for increased local powers. Their special relationship with the Protectorate Government was set out in the 1900 Agreement, and they have consistently reaffirmed their separateness from the rest of Uganda. As with most of the country, Toro has been particularly sensitive about falling under the domination of the better-educated Baganda whom they distrust and dislike. They are also intensely jealous that the Kingdom of Buganda, because of its size, wealth and the skill of its statesmen, has managed to get and maintain a position as favored Kingdom. Many of their specific demands have followed Buganda's successes in the same field.

Their aim, however, has not been entirely for the purpose of keeping up with the Joneses. As a tribe with a fairly well developed political system, they don't want to lose their identity and sacrifice their valued customs to, what is to them, an entirely alien nationalism. They have their Omukama, their Prime Minister (whose title was recently changed from the Luganda Katikiro to the Toro Omuhikirwa), their Rukurato and even a Council of Ministers. A few Toro still see no reason to go beyond their narrow loyalty to the tribe, although the majority are convinced Toro can exist only as an integral part of Uganda, albeit with a strong guarantee of specific local prerogatives.

In fact Toro has not been terribly successful in its long quest. Although the new Agreement has not yet been published, its general lines are known. Constitutionally after independence Toro will have total control over only:

- 1) its own domestic institutions (i.e., ruler, regents, succession);
- 2) the make-up and procedure of the Rukurato;
- 3) its Council of Ministers; and
- 4) the establishment and functions of its Public Service Commission.

Perhaps more significantly, it will not have control over the following matters:

- 1) the functions of its Government and authorities;
- 2) financial control;
- 3) the public services; and
- 4) responsibility for public order.

In reality they seem to have earned little save guarantees concerning their traditional institutions. Still, although they don't have ultimate control over their own functions, it will be the Toro Government that carries them out. Nevertheless, they did achieve, along with Ankole, Buganda, Bunyoro and Busoga, their main objective, a federal relationship with the rest of Uganda. It is generally assumed that this will allow their institutions sufficient protection from an unsympathetic Central Government, but how absolute the constitutional provisions will prove to be in practice remains to be seen.

On one of our last days in Fort Portal the District Commissioner, Mike Purcell, took us around the northern end of the Ruwenzori and down a precipitous mountain road (with different hours for 'up' and 'down' traffic) to Bundibugyo and the Semliki Valley. The Ruwenzori rains drain into the Semliki, thence into Lake Albert and the Nile.

As we rounded one of the bends with a steep mountain slope above us and a sharp drop below, we could just make out the thin meandering line of the Semliki River which at that point forms the Uganda-Congo border. We laboriously worked our way down to the hot and steaming valley. Soon, we entered a finger of the great Ituri Forest, dark and dank and, according to reports, teeming with life of all kinds from orchids and lianas to giant genets.

There are pygmies too, the most commercialized bunch of buffoons I have ever seen. Few of the genuine Ituri pygmies remain; they seem to prefer the more remote regions of the forest on the Congo side. But there are some, and there are even more who claim to be but aren't. Small size is a great economic advantage at Bundibugyo, and so the offspring of pygmy-Amba (themselves small of stature) unions are well-suited to pass themselves off as pygmies. It's often difficult to tell the difference, especially when they slouch. We even saw one eager-beaver stumbling about on his knees. We spotted him for what he was.

In spite of their commercialism, or perhaps because of it,

A real pygmy (I think).



they are one of the happiest groups we've met. They crowd around cars demanding 'centis' and tobacco, and with their earnings they buy bhang (a stimulant similar to tobacco), their great weakness. Since they live in the recesses of the forest, they don't cultivate. What they need they buy or, more likely, steal from their neighbors, the Amba.

They wanted to sell us an assortment of things from pipes to bows and arrows (with arrowheads made from tin cans). Because we looked but didn't buy, Kitty gave them a few cigarettes, indeed more than she had planned. The moment she withdrew the package from her purse a prehensile hand reached in and snapped it up.

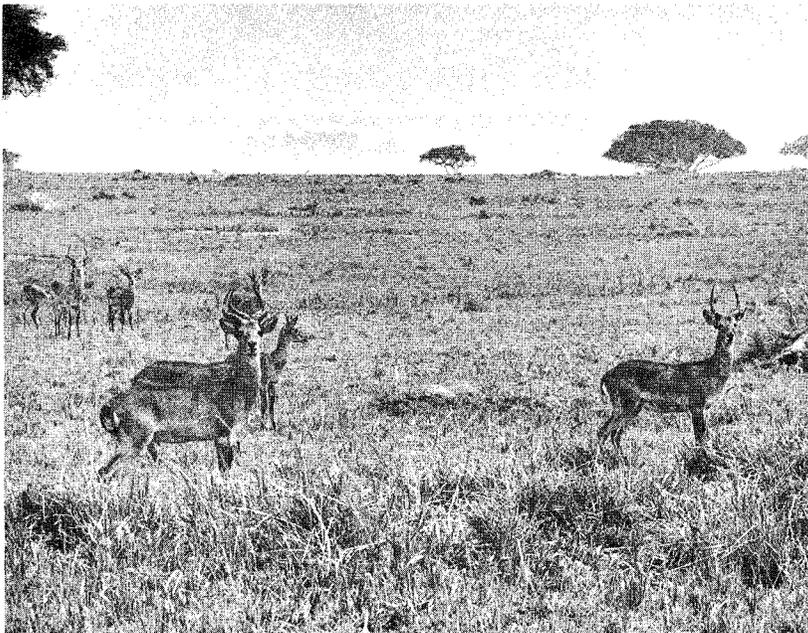
In the Semliki Valley everything grows abundantly, for the fertility of the soil is prodigious. There is no poverty here, only primitiveness.

We left the Semliki and returned up the narrow winding road. Half way back we turned off to visit Helmut Buechner in the Toro Game Reserve who is investigating territorial behavior in the Uganda Kob, an antelope similar to the impala. Dr. Buechner, from Washington State University, first came to Uganda as a Fulbright scholar six years ago.

Although other African antelopes exhibit territoriality, the behavioral pattern of the kob is unique. Individual male kob defend specific areas for mating. Ten or fifteen of these territories, each the size of a small house, are usually sited on a ridge or knoll, and one can easily be recognized by a central area of closely cropped grass with its borders clearly marked by longer grass. Whenever another male kob nears or crosses the boundary, he is challenged by the holder.

This tends to be a ritualized display of horn thumping, but real fights do occur especially when the intruder wants to dispossess the owner.

Uganda Kob (on the left).



Females, however, are free to come and go and to choose their mates. Dr. Buechner rarely observed breeding outside of the territories in the Toro Game Reserve, although the phenomenon of territoriality is unknown in most populations of Uganda Kob elsewhere. This he attributes to the high population density of kobs in Toro, and he considers territoriality a mechanism which ensures a vigorous population and promotes flow of the best character-

istics from the stronger kob who manage to earn and hold a breeding area to their offspring.

Dr. Buechner took us to one of these territories. As we drove across the plain, we approached a number of kob and saw what he had meant. The finest males with graceful lyrate horns held the field. Smaller, less impressive males milled around, a safe distance away. Two or three females were lying down in the central area.

As we drove closer, we accidentally displaced a handsome buck from his area and he promptly ran onto a neighbor's territory.

"See, there goes the defender to push him out," said Dr. Buechner. A healthy fight developed and we easily heard, practically felt, the sound of horns cracking against each other. It lasted for two or three moments. Then a third male approached the fighting couple and pushed between them.

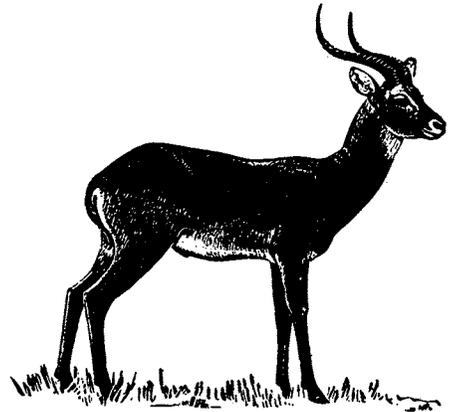
"This rarely happens. The third buck is breaking up the fight because it got too serious. See, now he's chasing the loser off."

Indeed the poor loser, who happened to be the original holder, ran off ignominiously with his tail between his legs, pursued by his assailant and the third buck. Soon the two returned to their territories, started grazing, and everything was back to normal. The whole incident took place in less than five minutes. As we drove back to Fort Portal we felt it would be a long time before we saw anything quite as impressive as that.

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In conclusion, it appears that tribalism is the most potent political force in Toro today. One can even go further than that and say it is the most potent political force in Uganda. Although neither good nor bad in itself, it tends to have a divisive influence in Uganda by encouraging separatist tendencies. Since outright secession is obviously unacceptable, on economic grounds alone, Uganda's solution to what is, in effect, the problem of tribalism has been decentralization of power to those areas where tribal feelings run particularly high while retaining unity through a federal form of government.

The divisive influence of tribalism in Uganda has led some observers to fear that it may become "another Congo". This seems unrealistic to me. The major factors influencing the Congo situation hardly exist and seem unlikely to develop in present-day Uganda. Nevertheless, general distrust based on a narrow tribalism, if unlikely to erupt in widespread violence, is equally unlikely to be forgotten or modified for a long, long time.



Uganda Kob (*Adenota kob thomasi*)

When it became clear the restraining influence of British rule was to be withdrawn, there were a large number of demands for local autonomy from tribes which were previously considered largely happy with their lot. In this respect the Amba and Konjo example fits into the same pattern as Toro's increasingly loud requests for local power.

What has been a surprise to many is that some of these demands are being met. At a time when centralization seems to be the trend in most of the rest of Africa, it is strange that Uganda should choose decentralization. (As has Kenya, but it remains to be seen how much of "regionalism" will remain after the next constitutional conference when, presumably, its independence constitution will be drafted.) The explanation is that the pressures are too great to ignore, for the moment.

After independence, however, the situation may change. As far as the kingdoms are concerned, the new constitution will have their rights well entrenched. Any amendment to a kingdom's constitution must originate in its own legislature and be approved by two-thirds of the members of both that legislature and the National Assembly. Nevertheless, constitutional provisions haven't always been sufficient when a determined government is opposed to them. It's too early to predict what the Government's policy will be.

For the present, Toro is in a strong position.

Sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright

(Photos on pages 1, 4, and 5 courtesy Uganda Department of Information. Line drawing on page 9 courtesy Ruth Yudelowitz.)

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