

# MORE SAFARIS WITH BWANA GAME



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## EPIGRAPH

“The wildlife resources in Tanzania provide an annual income of thirty million U.S. dollars to the national exchequer, and an income of nine million U.S. dollars as revenue from the leasing companies. Illegal hunting is estimated to be worth fifty million dollars. In the 1990s, exports of 1.68 million birds, 523,000 reptiles, 12,000 mammals and 148,000 amphibians occurred, in addition to an increase in wildlife-related tourism by about 30 percent.”

— [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife\\_of\\_Tanzania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wildlife_of_Tanzania)

## PREFACE

Bwana Hakuna Matata (Master with No Troubles) was among the nicknames bestowed on me by chiefs and elders during the course of my duties as a game warden, provincial game warden, and senior game warden over a period of more than twenty years in Tanzania. I have used a lot of Swahili words in this book, with translations, because I love this Bantu language, which I learned to speak before learning to speak English.

As a youngster at boarding school, I awaited school holidays in eager anticipation, as they meant my mother and I and Alan Tarlton, known as “Uncle Blinkie,” would be going on a snake-hunting safari to the Embu district or the Gedi ruins near Malindi in Kenya. On those safaris, every day was different and worked its magic, bewildering and enchanting me. Alan’s knowledge of nature impressed and influenced me deeply. He seemed to be able to gauge the minds of wild animals.

He wore a big cowboy hat and had a brilliant red bandana around his neck. One day I asked why he always had a revolver strapped to his belt. Putting his arm around my shoulder, he patted the holster that held his .45 Smith and Wesson revolver and advised: “This beauty has saved my life so many times that I could kiss her!” He showed me its revolving magazine full of bullets. “There is no better weapon than a good revolver or pistol, mark my words,” he said as he pushed the .45 back into its holster.

Alan was the person who taught me that hunting and conservation go together—that hunting is a legitimate tool in managing wildlife and that one segment of a conservation ethic is the opportunity to observe and admire all aspects of nature closely. I have been privileged to have had the experience of an outdoor life, during which I must thank the Lord and my guardian angels for protecting me on

several occasions from being killed or mauled by dangerous animals.

They saved me again in a close brush with death after I immigrated to Canada in 1994: During a June 2006 carp fishing trip to Saskatchewan, I had a terrible motor vehicle accident caused by a careless youngster who had had his driver’s license for only two weeks and was driving dangerously fast. He crashed into my boat and vehicle, knocking me unconscious and tossing the vehicle into a swamp, where it landed upside down in three feet of water. Paramedics found me with several cracked vertebrae and a broken collarbone and shoulder blade. One sure appreciates life much more after many weeks in a brace.

With me to Canada came my African journals, photographs, documents, and movies, the materials from which I worked to revisit the events of decades ago and write the stories presented here. Most are from Tanzania. Part one reaches back into the 1950s, part two straddles the boundary between colonial days and independence, and part three portrays the challenge of a difficult antipoaching assignment I undertook. In the course of that work I learned rather more than I wanted to know. But despite everything I saw, my heart and soul will always dwell in Africa.

Those of us lucky enough to have worked there during the colonial era often find ourselves scratching our heads today. Yes, there is now much more sport hunting than there once was. Anyone with decent earnings can go on safari in a dozen countries, although it’s a good idea to make sure of getting all the attendant trophy-importing paperwork right. Permit requirements deriving from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), the U.S. Endangered Species Act, and related laws and regulations can certainly trip up hunters. As a result, we in the sporting fraternity

tend to view these things with rather a jaundiced eye. We see the lawsuits. We see that the regulations often compromise legitimate hunting and intelligent wildlife management.

Yet we also need to look at all this through another lens. The poaching of game and the trade in wildlife take many forms. You have trafficking in exotic pets and plants, trade in bush meat and game hides, medicinal markets for animal parts, and flourishing illegal trade in elephant ivory and rhino horn. Today this trade is a lucrative worldwide criminal enterprise worth billions of dollars a year. In 2002, trafficking in wildlife and wild products was estimated to be the world's second largest form of illegal trade, behind the drug trade. In 2008 it was estimated to be worth up to twenty billion U.S. dollars or more annually, an illicit alternate economy with global forces at work.

Any form of illegal trade is obviously clandestine in nature and therefore tough to quantify. The only records come from enforcement actions, making them strictly partial. Further, the links that connect the wildlife trade to poverty and wealth are intricate. The people involved are by no means necessarily poor, and most of the money involved does not wind up in the hands of poor people.

In some ways the colonial era was a time of blissful innocence. Game was abundant, and a good portion of my work still entailed saving people from individual nuisance animals. The worst problems arising for wildlife had to do with an expanding

human population and an infrastructure that presented growing challenges to the great herds and their predators. Starting in the 1960s, as African countries began to gain independence and tried their hand at the difficult project of becoming nation-states, the ground began shifting under everyone's feet in a massive continent-wide reorganization of power. I did not grasp it very clearly at the time. When reasonably well-structured wildlife management began to give way to bungling and poaching, I initially regarded it just as inefficiency, petty theft, and small-time corruption.

I was wrong. It was the vanguard of a particular new kind of modern-day harm, and I encountered its bow wave. I have written this book to describe how the changes caught me up, how they felt in the bush, and what I was up against; it is an attempt to weave together the logic of pre- and post-independence times.

Yes, international wildlife regulations complicate our lives with customs hassles and litigation. But in the larger scheme of things, such inconveniences to sport hunters are merely collateral damage. Hunting creates a respectable revenue stream but is not a power player. Crime syndicates and black markets trump it every time. Corrupt officials and low-level operatives earn modest payoffs as the frontline troops, while the bigger figures garner millions from stealing a wildlife heritage that properly belongs to us all. Join with me on a safari that starts out in the old Tanganyika and ends up in a whole new world.

# Bachelor Party

## Chapter One



As a young bachelor during the early 1950s, I was stationed in a small town called Morogoro, working as an irrigation technician for the water development department of Tanganyika. We were surveying and constructing one of the first irrigation projects ever undertaken in that country. While there, I met up with a couple of other bachelors, namely Basil Tarr, who worked for the agricultural department, and a local sugar cane farmer named Watson Paul.

Both fellows hailed from South Africa and were keen hunters. Both were also most likable characters. Basil had a huge ginger moustache and always wore a wide-brimmed bush hat, while Watson had a quieter kind of personality. I remember Watson always had a smile. When they discovered I was an outdoorsman, they begged me to take them along on my annual elephant-hunting expedition. Although I was reluctant at first, after weeks of pestering I eventually agreed to take them.

Watson's sugar plantation was in the Kilombero Valley, which was renowned for having big elephants roaming its huge swamps. He assured me he had seen some good bulls enjoying his sweet sugar-cane plants and wanted me to see if

I could help him chase them off. Easier said than done, but I promised to have a go. I knew from a couple of previous hunts in such habitats that hunting these huge beasts in swampy terrain was no easy task and could be very dangerous.

Watson told me the elephants, mainly young bulls, were often accompanied by older bulls, and they raided his fields only after nightfall, retiring to the security of the swamps during the daylight hours. I inquired how he knew there were some bulls carrying heavy ivory, and he said sometimes when there was a full moon he would go out and chase the raiders away by shooting over their heads with a shotgun. He went on to explain that it was easy to see the big fellows through his binoculars, as their tusks were brilliant white.

My mentor Alan Tarlton had often told me that the elephants known to spend much of their lives in swamps like the Sudd or the Bahr el Gazal swamps of the Blue Nile have unusually white tusks as a result of their marshy habitats. I was interested to get a closer look at those big jumbos. So when my annual leave was due, I informed Basil Tarr of my plan to buy my two elephant licenses—at that time one was allowed to shoot two elephants per year—and that he should do likewise. We

told Watson our intentions and asked if we could use his home as our base. Of course, he agreed, insisting that he would supply all our needs as far as food was concerned. We were also going to try to chase the elephants farther afield so that they would not return to eat his cane.

My cook Rashidi Ramazani came along to help with the chores. I also took my faithful servant Salum Kalangula, who had been working with me since I began surveying in 1949. He was a good shot with a rifle. I knew this because I had taught him how to use a gun in case of emergencies while out hunting—all too real emergencies like being gnawed by a leopard or being battered by a buffalo. Salum always carried my first double rifle, a .450/400 made by Wilkinson, the world-renowned sword and razor manufacturers from the United Kingdom.

From past attempts at hunting with friends who had had little experience of hunting dangerous game, I knew what could happen. It is not funny

to be suddenly charged and find that your so-called friends had done a rapid disappearing trick, leaving you alone to face an infuriated beast. But at least I had had a couple of ordinary hunts with both Basil and Watson, and they appeared more reliable than some of my earlier hunting buddies. We would also have a good arsenal. I would be using a double .450 No. 2 made by Gibbs of London, Basil had a .416 Rigby, and Watson had a .577 double.

I chose the two weeks of my annual vacation to coincide with the full moon, mainly because it would give us a good opportunity to watch the fields during the brightest hours of night. This proved to be the good decision. On our first night, the moon was only half full. We saw a few young bulls, but no big ones. Watson said not to worry—we had ample time for the bigger bulls to appear. One, two, three, four nights came and went without our seeing any bulls that we were inclined to shoot. I spent the daytime hours happily occupied fishing for huge catfish and



*Watson Paul, Basil Tarr, and the author's cook Rashidi Ramazani attempt to pass refreshments across a small stream. Note Salum Kalangula holding the author's Wilkinson .450/400, with strict instructions not to get it wet. He didn't let the author down on that occasion, but did later on!*



*The author and friends en route to the big swamp, adjacent to Watson Paul's sugar plantation in the Kilombero Valley. Salum Kalangula is still holding the author's precious double on his head while he "sounds-out" the depth.*



*The author is rescuing his friend Basil Tarr, who suddenly gave a yell and disappeared, only his hat kept afloat. He had stepped into a huge hole left by big, heavy elephants. Everyone had a big laugh after finishing the crossing without further mishap.*

tigerfish, which abounded in the Kilombero River. Basil, being an agricultural fanatic, spent his days out in the fields with Watson.

On the fifth night, the African drums used by Watson's night watchmen to chase away elephants told us that the big pachyderms were entering the cane fields. We scurried into the vehicle and went to check them out. On our arrival, the watchmen pointed to where the animals were feeding. Binoculars revealed that two of the bulls carried good, heavy ivory. It shone white in the moonlight, and I estimated that the largest bull's tusks might weigh over the hundred-pound mark per side.

After watching them for a few minutes, Watson said he meant to shoot his shotgun to chase them away before they destroyed too much

of his cane. At that point the elephants no longer paid any heed to the night watchmen's pounding on drums or banging on *debes* (four-gallon oil or kerosene tins). Not really wanting him to scare the elephants, I watched to see where they entered the swamps once he fired his shells. I counted eleven bulls as orange flames spouted out from both barrels of his 12-bore shotgun. The loud bangs soon had the elephants in full flight, trumpeting as they retreated to their watery sanctuary.

We were up early the next morning. Rashidi and Watson's cook had our breakfast ready, plus sandwiches and flasks of coffee or tea, all packed in our backpacks. As the sun crept over the horizon in the east, we were on our way, excited at the prospect of perhaps catching up to the big

bulls. The watchmen told us that they had heard the elephants' *makelele* (noises) not far away in the *bwarwa* (swamps) just ahead. I climbed a tree for a look but could see no elephants, nor even any of the egrets that usually accompany them. Disappointed, I climbed down and joined the others for a planning session.

First we had to make sure the wind was in our favour. My powder bag, shaken by Salum, told us the wind was not too good. We needed to enter the swamps downwind of the animals, which again was easier said than done. We had to find a pathway made by hippos or elephants before even attempting to make any progress through the matted papyrus and tangled phragmites reeds. Eventually we did find such an entrance with the wind in our favour, but first we needed to ford a small stream. Once across, we were soon following a passage more than likely made by hippos and widened by the passing of the elephants on their nightly errands to their feeding grounds.

By now I was beginning to wonder if I should allow my two buddies to accompany me into what could turn out to be a watery graveyard. We were already up to our waists in smelly water. I told them I wanted to proceed with just Salum and Rashidi. We were not in an enviable position. Our bodies were crawling with leeches that had attached themselves wherever they could find flesh, and we were also being bombarded by millions of mosquitoes. The afflictions were driving Watson and Basil almost insane. To my relief they agreed to stay out of the swamp; I think it was mainly the mosquitoes that helped convince them. I wanted to be alone with my trusty helpers and not worrying about two friends who had never shot an elephant before.

I listened. Before long I picked up the familiar sound of elephant belly rumbles not too

far ahead. With the wind favourable, I proceeded slowly forward, Salum and Rashidi following. The water began to creep higher and higher until it reached my chest. I was worried that if it got any deeper we would have to turn back, but it stayed at that level as we moved deeper into the swamp. By now we heard the splashing and gurgling noises of elephants moving around, and my adrenaline started pumping.

I had never hunted elephants under those conditions. Rashidi shook his head as if to say: I have had enough—let's get out of here. I shook my head too, indicating nothing doing. Salum kept shaking the powder sock. The wind had started to change direction, but as we proceeded we came upon huge patches of papyrus totally flattened by the elephants, which pleased me no end. At least we could see all around us.

Soon I saw the backs of a couple of elephants just ahead, and then some more. The water was touching their bellies, which meant it was too deep for us to go any farther. I saw a big bull and realized he was the one carrying the heaviest pair of tusks. Suddenly their trunks were pointing skyward, which told me they had our scent. I waited until the big bull was about thirty paces away before I raised my rifle. I wanted to drop him in his tracks with a frontal brain shot, but he veered, so I lowered my sights to his engine room and pulled the trigger. The noise of my gun sounded tremendous. The big bull let out a trumpet; then several of his mates bellowed. Goosebumps erupted all over my body.

Before I could put another bullet into his vital parts, he keeled over and sent a wall of water rushing toward us. Just then two more elephants came charging out of the reeds, also pushing waves of the foul-smelling water toward where we were standing. I reloaded but could not get

another shot at the big bull because a smaller bull now stood between us.

The two bulls then stopped in their tracks and, right before our very eyes, began to try to lift up their fallen mate. By lifting him with their tusks and trunks and squeezing him between their bodies, they somehow managed to raise the mortally wounded beast. Eventually they succeeded in getting him to his feet; they then struggled to lead him away. I was reluctant to shoot again as it could cause the others to charge in our direction. I also knew the big bull was dead on his feet from my first bullet, which should have penetrated his heart or lungs.

What happened next makes me wonder how I am in Canada writing this story. The rest of the bulls came charging straight at us, and their leader was the other bull that had good, heavy tusks. I waited until they were about twenty paces away before I brained him. He crumpled

forward and collapsed only a few paces from where I was standing, almost drowning me with his displacement wave. I struggled forward as best I could in the deep water and stood up against his warm, shuddering body while the others rushed past me, trumpeting. All I could think of was that Salum and Rashidi must have been trampled to death.

I hardly dared breathe, and my entire body was shaking. I felt mentally and physically exhausted, my whole body drained of all strength, a feeling I had never experienced before. The thought of having to face Salum's and Rashidi's families did not improve the malaise I was feeling. I was still up to my chest in water, and I could feel the leeches feasting as I shivered from head to foot in shock when suddenly Salum and Rashidi appeared out of nowhere. I thought I was seeing their ghosts. They were so excited to see me alive that they began to clap their hands. They rushed



*This is Watson Paul and the author setting up camp in the Mikumi open hunting area, several years before it became Mikumi National Park.*

up to shake my hand and greet me. I asked them what had happened.

They shamefully admitted that they had fled and had managed to escape the charging elephants by leaving the path we had been following and diving into another channel, which had deeper water. They were able to submerge all but their heads, which meant that the elephants could not smell them as easily, and the reeds closed in behind them. I asked, "*Wapi bunduki yangu?*" (Where is my gun?) Salum had dropped my other gun as he scrambled away. It had slipped from his grip in the panic to escape.

Salum cut off the tail of the downed bull, which was my claim of ownership.

Miraculously, we managed to locate my other double after searching for about an hour. I was highly relieved to find that special double rifle. We waded ashore, happy to be in one piece and relieved to be rid of the sucking, wriggling leeches.

I was anxious to find out from Basil where the first elephant had gone. I did not want to follow a wounded elephant that had two of his buddies helping him along and protecting him. It would be asking for trouble in such a habitat. I also did not have another license as I had already shot the two on my quota.

Basil told me what had happened. He had been up the same tree I had climbed earlier, so



*This is the author next to one of the elephants that was shot by the three hunters—Watson Paul, Basil Tarr, and Eric Balson—the day after they arrived in the Mikumi open hunting area.*



*This was the bachelors' arsenal. Basil Tarr had his .416 Rigby while Watson preferred to use a heavy .577 double. The other two were the author's guns, a .450/400 made by Wilkinson, the renowned sword and razor manufacturers from Great Britain, and his favourite 9.3x64 Mauser. Both were fantastic rifles. The author's .450 No. 2 isn't in the picture.*

he got a good view of the action. The two helper bulls virtually carried their wounded comrade for a couple of hundred paces from where they had picked him up, but he was failing. They eventually gave up the furious struggle to keep him aloft, and they departed deep into the swamp. Salum and I ventured back to the bull, despite all the creepy crawlies, to cut off his tail.

It was well past four o'clock by the time we emerged from the swamp to tell the village headman his people would need to wait to collect their meat until the following day. They would accompany us when we returned to retrieve the tusks, and then it would be their turn to collect their share of the spoils. The villagers would fill their baskets and basins with tons of fresh meat,

which they would carry out of the swamps on their heads.

As we celebrated with a fine South African wine over dinner that evening, we discussed whether to stay at Watson's place and hunt from there for Basil's two elephants or move farther afield. I suggested we move to an area where we could also hunt buffalo and perhaps wildebeest. My "secret" hunting area, then little known, is now Mikumi National Park, one of the best small parks in Tanzania. We decided to try my selected hunting area once we had retrieved the tusks, which would be our primary task for the following day.

We were up bright and early, but the villagers were up even earlier. We could hear them singing and chanting as they filed past Watson's house, making their way to the swamp. He had instructed his night watchmen not to allow anyone near the carcasses until we got there. Dozens of people followed us into the swamp, where the tedious work of removing the tusks began. I left Salum at the second elephant, its tusks below the water from its nosedive after my bullet found its small brain, while Basil and I went deeper into the morass to supervise removal of the larger tusks. These were easier to remove, as the seven-ton jumbo had fallen sideways, with only one tusk under the water.

Sensory overload reigned that morning. The smell of rotting vegetation rose from the water around us, and a memorable stench filled the air once the villagers had attacked and opened up the animals' stomachs. One could hardly hear oneself talk above all the chattering. And then there was the squabbling that occurred when a tasty morsel was removed from the innards. And as for what we saw—it almost defies description. People covered in blood emerged from inside the



*Here's Basil Tarr and the author admiring the big bull elephant that Basil and Watson had just shot. The big old bull carried a marvelous matched pair of tusks, weighing in at eighty pounds a side. Salum is standing beside the author. Basil is holding the author's .450 No. 2, which he borrowed to shoot this elephant.*

stomach cavity carrying the liver; others emerged holding the big heart; and others held sections of intestines. The water around was stained dark red with gallons of blood.

It took about two hours for us to remove the tusks, a beautifully matched pair, which I estimated to be just under the 100-pound mark; they weighed in at 96 pounds each. The smaller tusks were just over the 70-pound mark. I was delighted with my tusks. They would fetch 15 to 20 shillings or more per pound, which in turn would help me pay off the loan on my vehicle.

We left that afternoon to drive to Mikumi, where I knew of a perfect camping site. It was well off the beaten track overlooking a big water

hole used frequently by both elephants and buffaloes. We set up camp, and just as the sun disappeared in the west, a small herd of buffaloes could be seen approaching for a drink. They spent the night in the open ground surrounding the water hole, where it was easy to keep watch for predators.

No sooner had we retired to our mosquito-net-covered camp beds than the croaking of the bullfrogs echoed around the valley. A series of low grunts from deep down in a lion's chest told us *bwana simba* was close-by, which made me feel for my rifle for assurance, although I had done just that before retiring. I had also checked that the magazine held four shells with one up the

breech. But those deep grunts make me want to check again.

On such hunting expeditions I always had my special provision box packed full of condensed milk in cans, plenty of dried fruit, coffee and tea, plus biltong (jerky). If a village was nearby, I would buy or trade for sugar or salt, chickens, eggs, pawpaws, bananas, and sugar cane. These supplements kept me supplied with good nutritious foods.

After our ablutions the next morning and a cup of hot tea, we set out to climb a small hillock nearby. From its summit we had a 360-degree lookout point. No sooner had we raised our field glasses than we spotted a couple of elephants carrying decent ivory. We set out for a big anthill

close to where we had seen the bulls. Reaching it, puffing and panting from the brisk walk, we could see them still feeding on the branches of a tree they had pushed over. The distance was no more than fifty paces, and the wind was perfect, blowing directly into our faces. We decided that the three of us would shoot both elephants: Basil and Paul would shoot the larger one, while I would take out the other. On a count of three our guns roared, and both elephants departed at speed. But they did not travel far before falling, almost in unison.

“Not bad shooting for a couple of novices,” I commented, earning dirty looks from both of them as we walked over to where the dead elephants lay. While it was their first elephant, I had shot



*Here is a fantastic male sitatunga with a trophy set of horns, photographed in the Bangweulu Swamps in Zambia by Ian Manning, who was studying the black lechwe and other species in that area in 1973.*

quite a few of the big fellows before. Salum and Rashidi arrived with broad smiles across their faces to congratulate us. *“Asante sana, bwanas.”* (Thank you very much, gentlemen.)

I told them we would go and pick up some people from the village nearby to help with removing the tusks, for which their reward would be plenty of meat. While they were doing their butchering under the watchful eyes of Salum and Anthony, the three of us went farther afield to try our luck at finding a big buffalo. Basil was the biltong maker, and he really preferred buffalo, whereas I chose eland if I could find one. Rashidi came along so that he could carry

out the task of slaughtering the animal, if we shot one, according to Muslim rites.

We soon found a single old bull that Basil dispatched with a perfect heart shot. After Rashidi had conducted his traditional slaughter, we gutted and quartered the beast and hauled it to camp, where Salum greeted us with a smile. He did not like elephant meat because it had not been slaughtered in the proper way. He knew we had shot a buffalo. Its great horns were easy to see, jutting out over the back of the truck.

*“Asante sana, bwana mkubwas, leo tumbo yangu ta shiba,”* he remarked. (Thank you very



*The three hunters on another hunting trip to the same Mikumi area a couple of months later. One can see that Basil Tarr has grown a big ginger moustache. Salum and Anthony, despite their stern faces, were very happy they were on hand to perform their ritual halal, which enabled them to enjoy the meat. Rashidi used the author's Brownie box camera to take this picture.*



*Kenneth Balson with the author's big, deformed buffalo. This trophy won a gold medal in Budapest at the World Hunting Exhibition in 1971.*

much, gentlemen, today my stomach will be full.) He especially relished the entrails. I never could join in on the African enthusiasm for eating tripe.

Normally, a mature bull buffalo weighs up to 800 kilograms, females slightly less. The highest authentic weight on record, in my experience, was an old bull I had to shoot near Lake Rukwa in Tanzania. Poachers had wounded him, and I put him out of his misery. That bull weighed a massive 918 kilograms. We noted that he had atrophied testicles, presumably the result of being castrated either by another bull or perhaps by a lion or hyenas. He had a narrow boss and cowlike horns with a spread of 53 inches.

Thus our safari to Watson's plantation and Mikumi ended on a triumphant note. We had our four elephants plus a fat buffalo, which Basil soon had out in the sun drying, salted and peppered; he was glad to have biltong in the making. Watson was pleased we had discouraged his marauders, and a lot of others were pleased to take home the meat of four elephants and a buffalo. Nothing was wasted.

For an irrigation technician who liked to hunt, it was a privileged life. Modernization seemed to be progressing well, game was plentiful, regulations governed what could be shot, and the sale of ivory was legal and regulated. We thought this was the natural order of things, and we loved it.

