



CHAPTER 3

FIRST AFRICAN SAFARI IN ZIMBABWE

1993

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THE ROMANCE AND EXCITEMENT of a first safari is ecstatic. For me, it is registered in heartbeats and committed lovingly in the memory with perfect recall. Seldom can one say that the reality exceeds the expectation, but this has been my experience hunting Africa. The wheels of the big jet contacting the African continent was like the closing of an electrical switch and the proverbial light comes on.

Johannesburg, or JoBerg as it is known in its abbreviated form, was tense in 1993. It happened to be the weekend of transition from the Apartheid government to what was hoped to be a more equitable form of government. This new model was to end white rule and usher in representation for the many other ethnic groups that were yearning for more freedom and recognition. The cross-currents of change were very evident, and the resulting tensions which we experienced were palpable.

My wife Sheri accompanied me, and our plan was to lay over a full day before traveling on to Zimbabwe. The first evening was electric as we dined in an international restaurant within the confines of the hotel but close to the airport. The food was unbelievable in proportion and quality.

We had a local contact number given to us by a friend who had a friend. As the residence seemed close to the airport, we rang them up and received a warm welcome with an invitation to be shown around a little. We accepted, and in the early afternoon, an elderly white woman in a small car picked us up at the front door and off we went, in a flurry of grinding gears and happy chatter. She had left her husband at their home, which was to be our first destination. Ivy was not a daughter of Africa. She had married the demure Peter VanVuren as a young woman and, in due course, they made their home in South Africa. Arriving at the outside gate of their home, we were immediately taken aback by the high level of security. That gate was made of steel and hung from large steel posts cemented into the ground. Passing this entrance, we traveled down a narrow lane (perhaps three hundred feet), where we encountered another locked gate. We continued to the garage, which had another robust gate giving entrance to a courtyard. The walls were perhaps twelve to fourteen feet high, adorned on the top with broken glass shards cemented into the masonry. Above the glass was a coil of razor wire with ominous consequences looming for an intruder.

Inside the compound we were greeted by Peter and a small staff of trusted Africans. We had tea and chatted for a time before we made our way to the garden, which was within the enclosure previously described. I waxed philosophical in my own mind, concluding that a city like this had ceased to function according to its charter. Walled cities are largely relics of the Middle Ages, disregarded in the construction of modern civil societies. Here, in the guise of civil society, people built the same walls absent from the city's exteriors around their own individual homes.

As the afternoon passed, shadows cast a pall over my mood and we asked to be taken back to our hotel. Little did I realize that our day was to get much more exciting. We left the compound with Peter and Sheri riding in the back seat and with me next to Ivy in the front. We were not on the road long when Ivy swung

into action and announced that we would be stopping to call on one of her friends on the way back to our hotel. In Ivy's circle of friends, to have visiting Americans was considered social collateral, and she meant to make the best of the opportunity to parade us in front of them. I suggested that perhaps we should not make a stop as it was getting close to sundown and we were still suffering some jet lag. Ivy, however, was insistent that we make this courtesy call on her friend and she would not be persuaded differently. I tried to calm my growing agitation for having allowed myself to be roped into such uncertain circumstances.

It was rush hour, and the traffic of both the pedestrian and vehicular variety was intense. We registered glares from the pedestrians we passed when Ivy suddenly took a turn to the left onto a side road. Vehicle traffic was suddenly absent, and the pedestrian traffic increased as we progressed. Soon, we entered a cul-de-sac full of black people waiting for a train to take them to the homelands surrounding the city. These stations had, for some time, been sites of violence and political agitation. I voiced my concern as Ivy's face comprehended the horror I felt. I suggested that we vacate as fast as possible, as there were torch fires flickering and agitators were gesticulating from several mounted boxes. Ivy made a circular turn and gunned the engine. As we headed out of the cul-de-sac, we began to attract the attention of the crowd. Incredulity and stunned disbelief were registered on the many black faces as the crowd now realized that the enemy was in their camp heretofore unnoticed. Before they had a chance to react en masse to our unwelcome presence, Ivy had accelerated to an unstoppable speed. Looking back toward the crowd as we sped away, I hoped we had just encountered the most dangerous part of the safari.

As we left the dead-end road and again accessed the motorway, Ivy lurched into the traffic without the car's headlights on. The drivers of the cars and trucks that saw our vehicle honked their horns and flashed their lights in protest. Highly agitated, I ordered our escort to activate the lights. The assumption that Ivy would abandon her attempt to call on her friend was an error. We

represented some important form of capital for her, and until she had taken this to the bank (in a metaphorical sense), we were her hostages.

As we approached her friend's flat, we noted that the surrounding flats were shuttered and draperies drawn to shut out the interior lights. I was in a state of controlled agitation and felt challenged to participate in any normal way with our new host. She, too, was in the waning years of her life, and it gave me little comfort to hear her recount the many burglary attempts, stabblings, and other charming things that she had endured as a result of living in this neighborhood. Again, we were treated to tea and the long version of our host's life and times. I became desperate. I faked being ill, and such was the twisting of my values that to do so felt quite natural and virtuous. My alternative was to become overtly unpleasant. Ivy suspected my charade and gave me withering glances indicating she was not ready to relinquish the bragging rights afforded by her American guests. A visit to the bathroom with the charming sounds associated with food poisoning clearly audible through the wall finally convinced her to take us to our hotel. As we left, the demure Peter, like a mouse resigned to his fate after years of mauling and playful torture, took his assigned seat in the back. Ivy was now lost as to her relative location from the airport. I searched the darkened skies and located planes taking off from a distant, well-lighted area and suggested we make our way in that general direction. As we got closer Ivy reoriented herself and eventually deposited us at the entrance of our hotel. Her last request was that we ask the bellboy to help her find her way back toward her home, as it was dark and hard to recognize landmarks. Peter resumed his post in the rear seat as Ivy dumped the clutch and lurched from the curb, disappearing into the night. Perhaps Peter's ancestral cousins, the Vikings, left their homes in small boats and sailed dangerous seas for the sole purpose of escaping such a fate. Or perhaps they just wanted to dumb down the excitement that they experienced around home with a bit of

pillaging and such. After all, who could deny them the tranquility afforded by such outings?

News of that weekend of transition in South Africa served to make our experience even more dramatic. Over two hundred people were killed in the city, which accounted for the wail of sirens that we heard and the ever-present scurry of police and ambulance vehicles. The following morning, we boarded an Air Zimbabwe flight to Harare.

When we arrived in Harare we were met by a tangible change in mood. The locals were happy and smiling, and the chatter in the lobby was light and good-hearted. It was a relief to Sheri and I to wait for some time by our pile of baggage for our contact. After what seemed quite a while, Graham Hingeston of HHK safaris met us and took us to a waiting bush plane where Joe Wright, our pilot, was going over last-minute details. We were informed that there had been a change of plan and we would be hunting the Zambezi Valley instead of Sungway. We had no way of knowing if this was a step forward or otherwise, so we agreed. During the flight we could see little settlements of thatch-roofed huts from the air. The communal lands over which we flew to the northwest were interspersed with some cultivated land. When it gave way to a scene of seemingly endless bush, I felt a thrill.

Arriving at the air strip of Makuti, we were greeted by Andy Kockott, a soft-spoken and accommodating fellow that Sheri and I both liked immediately. He was accompanied by a couple members of his staff, black natives dressed in khaki coveralls. They were nice guys with easy smiles and had the bearing of men that knew their way around in the bush. We took to both, feeling that fate had smiled on us by bringing us to these hunting grounds and the company of these men. On the short trip down off of the escarpment onto the valley floor we observed game in abundance. The remote wildness soothed my nerves and quickened my senses. Turning off of the hard road that led to Chirundu and the bridge crossing into Zambia, we traveled down a gravel road to an

intersecting trail that turned toward the Zambezi River. We marveled at the new odors of flowers, elephant dung, and the pungent potato bush. As we passed under a tree that the baboons used for their night retreat, our nostrils were stung by the nasty smell of their excrement. I had not experienced such a variety of new odors since childhood.

Breaking out of the bush we coasted into the most beautiful camp I could ever imagine, Kockott's camp, on the south bank of the Zambezi River. The lawn was well manicured, the bamboo and grass chalets immaculate. Andy's wife Sharon and the black staff all turned out to greet us. Sharon's presence in the camp was a big plus for both of us. The companionship of another lady, especially one with such a warm, accommodating nature, pleased Sheri enormously.

The sun was setting, and the red glow over the Zambezi River made the hippos and crocs appear as dark silhouettes on the water. Their sounds became the nightly chorus to which we dined and later slept. As we settled into our bed, the sounds of drums from a village across the river added to the plethora of wild animal calls. Lions roared that night confirming that we were indeed in a wild corridor of Africa. Elephants visited the camp during the night, and we noted their presence by the sounds of breaking branches and the low rumble of their digestive systems. Many dreams of my youth were becoming a reality, and the reality was better than the most detailed of those dreams. On the Zambezi River, on our first night in the African bush, the reality of the experience blended with my dreams and I slept a contented sleep.

We were awakened to the many sounds of the African morning and by the soft voice of the tent boy who brought us a tray of hot tea. The hippos were splashing in the river, giving voice to the new dawn. Bird calls dominated the sound waves with a gusto that was all new to our experience. A light breakfast in the beautiful exterior dining area set the mood for a wonderful day.

Loading the Land Cruiser with the appropriate kit, we pulled out of the camp and its lovely setting to our first day of hunt-

ing in the Nyakasanga, an area set apart for the sole purpose of game management and sport hunting. As we passed under the tree where the baboons had spent the night, our nostrils were treated again to the not-so-pleasant odor of their toilet. They were already on the ground some yards from the tree where they had passed the night and were moving away but looking back at us in their furtive way. We checked a salt lick just as the sun was breaking over the horizon. Finding nothing of interest, we continued deeper into the hunting area. The huge herds of impala that began to materialize on both sides of the road defied description. Every ram looked like a trophy to me. Andy gave them a casual glance and shook his head to convey their lack of trophy quality. We had fourteen impalas on our license: six rams and eight females.

We traveled in a huge left-hand arc and found ourselves several miles downriver from camp and near the valley floor where game became even more in evidence. Impalas were everywhere, leaping high and seeming to flow over the ground in waves. Suddenly they would cease to move, and I had to concentrate to pick them out as they froze behind the bush. It seemed like the herd was controlled by a single collective impulse when, as if by cue, the entire bush erupted with action. I found it hard at first to keep my eye on the same animal for any length of time. As we looked over the various groups Andy spotted a worthy target. A ram was standing perhaps one hundred yards straight in front of the vehicle, largely obscured by brush. I was shooting a Colt Sauer in a .375 caliber. Instructed not to aim too far back on the animal, I found the right zone and squeezed a shot off. The animal whirled and tore off through the bush, leaving me in wonderment.

I had been told of the toughness of African game, but I was not prepared for the way in which these animals could soak up the shock of large-caliber bullets and carry on for a time. The trackers leaped from the rear of the cruiser and began scanning the ground for blood. After what seemed like much too long, one of them signaled that he was on the trail of the ram. I was getting that sick

feeling one gets when self-doubt begins to erode the confidence. I began questioning my sight picture, my hold, my squeeze, and my steadiness when the trail became longer than what I considered reasonable. Minutes passed and the tracking progressed. Finally, he was there, lying dead with a perfect shot through the heart/lung area. I began to grasp what makes trackers so essential in Africa. They opened the carcass, pulled out the innards and opened the stomach, dumped the contents on the ground while pushing the tripe back into the abdomen. The realization that the insides of the impala would be eaten was a new experience to Sheri and me. Like any true adventure, there were to be many new realizations in the following days.

Continuing downriver, we spotted another good impala ram in a herd of perhaps fifty animals. His horns stood well above the others and, although the distance was farther than ideal, there was no way to get closer without spooking the whole herd into the thick bush. The shot would have to be taken at nearly three hundred yards. I waited for Andy to approve the shot, then squeezed the trigger. The ram took the bullet in the right spot but spun away without going down until he had run himself out of blood some fifty yards distant. As we approached the site, we observed a female impala standing off to one side looking like she had been hit by the exiting bullet that had killed the ram. She was standing off to the right of the downed ram perhaps one hundred yards. I was anxious to demonstrate to Andy the accuracy of my 500 BPE double rifle, so I hurriedly unzipped it from its soft case and dropped a couple of rounds into the open breech. Taking a sitting position, I quickly dispatched the wounded animal. Andy beamed, saying, "I can't believe how accurate that rifle can shoot." I believe that the romance of the old double infected Andy almost as much as it did me, for every opportunity to use it was taken from then on. The ram turned out to be the largest of the trip and hangs as a memory in our African room to this day. We shot another female impala as we traveled back to camp. Arriving with four animals,

we unloaded them at the skinning hut and then ate a great lunch under the shade of the thatched dining canopy. We had enjoyed a wonderful first morning of hunting along the Zambezi.

I did not realize at the time that Andy was not hunting buffalo, but instead was concentrating on lesser game so as to determine the skill and limits of his new client. Directing the hunt the way he did allowed Andy to apprise both the equipment that I was using and the way I could handle it. That afternoon I killed another impala, bringing the total to five.

Sometime in the first few days of the safari, we were returning to camp in the evening hours when a pair of hyenas crossed the road in front of us. I could not help but notice the sloughing gait of their travel and the ungainly appearance of their movements. The animals were traveling from left to right, and as they gained the ground on the right side of the road, Andy turned the cruiser sharply. Leaving the road and breaking through brush, we headed for a little knoll and stopped abruptly. We had overshot the point where the hyenas had entered the brush, so all the attention of the hunting party was focused to the right side of the vehicle. We were all standing gazing intently into the lower brush-covered ground when one of the hyenas materialized to my view.

He was sitting like a dog in a little opening, looking toward us. When I raised my rifle to shoot, others of the party saw him also and obliged me by ceasing to move about. There was still movement to cope with as I attempted to place the crosshairs of the scope on his center. I was of course shooting without a support, standing with my legs confined by the “headache” rack in front of me and the seat behind. The crosshairs moved across his chest from left to right and then from right to left. As the lateral movement stopped and began to again move right, I squeezed the trigger. At the shot the hyena went down, thrashed around, and attempted to gain its feet, then finally went down again, lying on its side. As we got to the site, we noticed the hyena was still breathing slightly. At a suggestion, a couple of guys began to look for a club

to finish the job. Tallmadge Alexander, an apprentice PH (professional hunter) who was with us, walked over to the prone creature and kicked it in the head. To this indignity the evil-looking beast jumped to its feet and began to move off. Immediately and without instruction I shot it again through the middle as it tore away into a patch of dense brush to our right. I ran as fast as I could to intercept it on the other side, getting there before the hyena did. When it appeared at point-blank range, I put another shot squarely into its chest. It took the bullet and kept its feet for a couple of seconds before collapsing in a heap. All of the chaos had shaken Andy a bit, and as he appeared beside me, he registered both relief and concern as he waved off any more shooting. I lowered my rifle as the trackers extracted the creature from the bush. It was very big as hyenas go, its skull size ranking among the top fifty ever registered in the record books. This fact was not vital to me, but it is customary to establish a numerical value on a taking. I never made an entry for this one, but I am sure that he would still place very high. Back at camp there was a stir among the staff as we unloaded our kill and took pictures in the light of the headlamps of the cruiser. There is a sense of awe and fear by the locals when hyenas are killed, as they are often regarded to have dual identities, witch doctors by day and hyenas by night.

On another outing, our hunting party left the more-traveled track and were off-road in a little clearing when we found our open car surrounded by lions. They were all lying about in the grass, unperturbed, except for a dominant male nervously pacing back and forth behind a screen of bush. The females, many with youngsters, observed us with casual interest, the closest perhaps ten yards away. With a heightened sense of awareness, Andy instructed me to keep my rifle at the ready and keep a close eye on the male, who was becoming increasingly unhappy with our proximity to his pride. He suddenly rushed our vehicle with an intimidatingly grimaced face, his teeth flashing and tail wringing in agitation. I swung the rifle to align with his charge when he slid

to a halt just a few yards forward of our cruiser. For a moment he locked eyes with me, his body crouched low to the ground. The females quietly took in all of this drama without any visible change in their demeanor. The male then aborted his overt aggression, retreating behind the screen of bush where he resumed his loud growling and pacing. Andy quietly found the reverse gear and began a backward retreat while I kept the rifle ready.

Andy and Sharon's children were in boarding school, and they had to travel out of the valley to pick them up for a short recess. We were left in the care of Tallmadge and the camp staff for the day. Tallmadge had just passed his tests to be a professional hunter, so it was with some reservations about the "just passed" part that we set out to hunt cape buffalo.

We cut their tracks early and began following them. The herd was large, and dust hung over the bush through which they traveled. The odor left by their passing was very bovine, a mixture of dung and milk from the lactating cows that reminded me of bringing in dairy cattle to the milking. We followed on the downwind side of the herd, making arcing movements, and attempting to get sight of them in the thick bush. We saw mostly shadows. The faint glimpse of a horn or head kept the adrenaline up in my blood as we searched for a bull. We had a cow on our license, but the presence of young calves made a venture of this type distasteful. Hour after hour we pressed deeper into the bush. Trekking miles into the interior's roadless expanse, we were much farther from the hunting vehicle than was safe given our limited supply of water. The day became extremely hot and I worried about Sheri, who was showing signs of heat exhaustion. Her wedding ring was buried deep into her swollen finger and the puffiness in her face alarmed me. She was not perspiring as I was. To make matters worse, we seemed to constantly bump into elephant cows, unnerving in its own right, but especially so when coupled with their alarmed trumpeting. We had to cut downwind on several occasions to keep from provoking a charge. Hours of this intensity wore on all of us, but we



Albert and cape buffalo (head shot with .500 BPE)

pushed on, depleting our water supply as we went. The trackers were not drinking the water as they were saving it for us. Suddenly, we came up on the herd milling around a muddy water hole at the bottom of a donga. I remember Tallmadge urging me to shoot and, in a trance-like state, I raised my .375 Sauer (which I had taken from Wiro, our tracker) and took aim at a bull quartering away. The double rifle I had been carrying was not the firearm of choice because the buffalo was in excess of fifty yards away. The bullets being carried in the 375 were Barnes solids, and when the 300gr solid hit the bull, he never reacted. The herd hurried for the cover of the bush and the bull I shot was immediately lost to me. The follow-up was miserable. I remember barely being able to walk as we followed a scant blood trail being left as the bull broke from the herd and headed into the densest thorns one can imagine. We caught up to him once, with Tallmadge firing at his retreating form as he thundered forward. The game scout and the trackers did not like the scene and pronounced the hunt over for lack of water and time.

I am confident that the solid that I fired passed forward through his vitals, but with a non-expanding bullet, bringing the hunt to its desired conclusion would have taken possibly hours of tracking.

This was a low of lows for me, and the taste of failure was acidic to my hunting instincts. Sheri looked terrible, and I gave her my complete attention on the trek back. I used the remaining water to trickle down her throat, and I wiped her face and neck with a water-soaked cotton bandana, hoping the evaporation would have a cooling effect. My memory of our return from the bush that day is miles of agony. Our throats began to constrict as thirst took hold of us. Through the fog of our condition I remember breaking out of the brush to a vista of elephant bones. Lying in the center of them was an ivory tusk, which the game scout shouldered.

When we reached the vehicle Sheri and I began the process of rehydrating ourselves. We drank and drank, then drank more. Downing bottles of cold orange juice and chasing them with more water, we were stunned to see the scout and the trackers go for a warm carton of an offensive-looking gruel resembling diluted cream-of-wheat. It was a thick beer, fermented from ground corn. The texture and temperature of the drink was decidedly unappetizing to me. I turned away in disgust and downed another cold orange drink.

That evening, the events of the day were coolly received by Andy. It was obvious that Tallmadge had, in his zeal for a kill on buffalo, failed to properly prepare for the task. In doing so, he had put his charges, who were yet not acclimatized, in a vulnerable and dangerous situation. While there were no reprimands in our presence, I could see by Andy's face that Tallmadge was sure to be severely chastened. Sheri recovered that evening, much to my relief.

The buffalo herd had watered in the heat of the day and then retreated to the bush. We found their tracks close to a small pan, which was losing water to evaporation daily. Although it is usually better to hunt the bachelor groups, the small herd visiting the pan appeared to have several bulls in its company. We began tracking, and after an hour we came up on them standing in loose cover. They saw us and began to move into the tighter bush before we could sort out the bulls or look over the possibilities. Dust hung over the herd

as we skirted the downwind side, and again the distinct bovine odor teased our nostrils as we struggled to keep up with them. The day was hot, and when they reached the security of the tighter bush, they slowed to a more constant walk while occasionally feeding.

We used the same arcing strategy as before, and each time we got close to the herd we looked for the bulls we were certain would be toward the rear. Suddenly, Andy became excited as a bull passed within mere feet of us. I could see that he had very flattish, wide horns. We now hurried forward without concern for the sound of our footfalls, as the noise level of a buffalo herd largely drowns out lesser noises. The shadows moved in the bush to our right as we positioned ourselves to observe them. As we rounded a big patch of scrub mopani, Andy pointed to the large black head of a bull protruding from the bush (different from the one previously mentioned) and instructed me to shoot. We had engaged in a conversation earlier about bullet placement, and he had waved me off of the notion of braining a buffalo. However, on his instructions to shoot the bull standing some twenty paces away, my only target was its big face, framed by the horns that swept first down then up and back. Raising my .500 Black Powder Express, I centered the bead of the front sight squarely in the middle of his forehead. The Holland and Holland double rifle is a glorious combination of balance and beauty, and as I pressed the forward trigger to drop the ornate hammer onto the firing pin it seemed that time suddenly became suspended. Nothing could happen fast enough to bring this scene to the desired conclusion. The rifle roared and the bullet struck the bridge of the bull's nose just below the level of the eyes. When the bull hit the ground, time became normal again. Without instruction my instincts took over and I sprinted to the right of the bush, finding myself staring down on the moaning, prone bull slowly moving his left front leg. Andy appeared at my side asking me to anchor the bull with another shot to the lungs. It seemed excessive as the first bullet had certainly killed instantly. Nonetheless I complied. A stick poked into its eyes brought no

reaction. Until this moment the trackers and scout had been quiet. A mood of celebration quickly swept over the hunting party as the congratulations and hand shaking began. During a subsequent hunt I told Andy (tongue in cheek) that he was one of the most quoted people in the world as he slapped me on the shoulder and declared “that was a brilliant shot,” in his charming Rhodesian white-hunter accent. We spent the next couple of days cleaning up our impala quota by shooting the allotted rams and females.

It was hard to leave the Zambezi Valley and the gorgeous setting of Kockott’s camp. It had proved to exceed all our expectations. We traveled out of the valley on the road by which we had descended. As we topped the escarpment, the air became cooler and less humid, the norm for the remainder of our hunt. The plateau of the midlands was game-rich farmland interspersed with ridges rising some five to six hundred feet above the surrounding country. We arrived at a farmhouse and outbuildings situated on a high hill, where the cool breezes made the living very comfortable. Corn fields that encompassed the lower ground had been cleared from the surrounding bush. Large clearing equipment and farming implements were parked neatly in a row and being prepared for the coming planting season. The affable fellow of slender build who greeted us and made us welcome was Brink Boseman, the landowner and farmer.

We did not hunt the first day at our new location but were treated to an evening meal along with a brief history of the property on which we were to hunt. During the Bush War (1964-1979), the farm was owned and occupied by an older couple of German descent. They had been killed by a raiding party, and for the rest of the war the farm had lain in a state of decay. Brink, being a very progressive and aggressive type, had, by hard work and ingenuity, brought it back to a high standard of productivity.

With local farmers of like mind, Brink committed large portions of his holdings to a game conservancy. The bush separating the cultivated fields was a corridor for plains game. Fences were



Albert and Sheri with bushbuck

used for cattle management but presented no restraint to the free movement of game. This combination of habitat proved to yield good-quality trophies and, as a bonus, bird hunting. Tallmadge Alexander was to be our PH for the remainder of the hunt, and his enthusiasm was infectious.

One night a civet cat meandered onto the track from the bush on the right side. As it walked down the road and entered a grassy area, I squeaked on the back of my hand, imitating the distress cry of a mouse. The cat stopped and looked at the spotlight casting light about it. I pressed the trigger and the cat went down. There was not a lot of drama leading up to shooting the civet. Its very pretty coat, with yellowish and whitish spots and stripes on a black background, made a unique small rug in our home.

A second set of cat's eyes appeared farther down the track on the left side, in the stubble of a maize field. The bright eyes reflecting a kind of yellowish tint, it began to respond to my calling (using the same method I employed on the civet). It began to move closer and, at about one hundred fifty yards out, stopped and sat down on its haunches. Taking careful aim, I fired at its chest below the chin and registered a hit as it went down. The serval cat did not

stay down long. It gained its feet and made for the ridge above the corn field. We tracked it by the blood scattered on the dry stalks but lost it when it climbed the bush-choked and rocky-crowned kopje. I was disheartened by the loss and began to wonder if my rifle was still shooting in line with the scope. During our bird hunt a few days later, a group of black youths pushing the ridge while driving fowl found the cat lying dead, its lovely spotted skin slipping hair, making it impossible to salvage. The spotted serval is, at first glance, very leopard-like in appearance. It is smaller, with the spots of black on yellow not arranged in rosettes but evenly spaced in a singular pattern. A few nights later I called another serval to within forty yards of our cruiser and shot it with a load of SSG from a borrowed shotgun. The cat went down growling and snarling, thrashing about in the brush. I leapt from the hunting car and sprinted to where I could see it facing me in the tangle, and I finished it with another round. We took some video footage and continued to hunt into the night.

Brink had asked us to shoot a female kudu for meat, which we did a couple of hours later. I aimed at her head, and she dropped to the shot, never moving again. Exiting the cruiser, I cut her throat to properly bleed out the carcass, at which point the trackers finished the field prep and loaded her.

One morning a kudu bull was standing quartering on to us with the trunk of a tree covering his shoulder. The horns were deeply curled and quite long with ivory tips at the end of their double spiral. With the crosshairs cutting as close as I dared to the tree trunk, I squeezed off a shot. The bull hunched and sprang to my right, dropping to lower ground and tighter cover, making a follow-up shot all but impossible. This being my first safari, I had accepted the concept of solid steel-jacketed bullet, as they have better penetration through flesh, bone, and brush. The downfall of these bullets is that the lack of expansion offers very little shock to the body of the target. The killing power is, therefore, left to the length of the wound channel and vital placement. In this case

placement of a heart shot was not possible, and the bullet passed through the right lung and exited behind the diaphragm on the left side, making a very marginal wound channel. We found lung blood and saw blood on both sides of the bull's body. Incredibly, he kept going and going without giving me a chance for an anchoring shot. The trackers stayed glued to the spoor as I made big sweeping arcs, occasionally finding the blood trail well ahead of the trackers. When I waved them forward, they would again take up the track and I would arc out in an effort to speed up the tracking. Bubbles in the bright blood proved the right lung had been hit. We tracked the bull for over a mile, and while I was ahead looking for sign the kudu was jumped. He was going strong and Tallmadge was unable to get a shot off before it disappeared over a ridge. Going forward, I would remember that a shooter attempting a lung shot needs the alignment of both lungs for a vital target. I also cannot overstate the toughness of African game.

My mood went from sober to sour when the next couple of days went poorly for me. I missed a nice bushbuck that was standing looking straight at us. I brooded for a time and finally decided to check my rifle against the chance of a misaligned scope. We found that the bullet was hitting about three inches to the right at one hundred yards. After adjusting the alignment, my mood began to improve, as I now had an alibi for missing the bushbuck. The trackers saw my run of bad luck through the prism of their folklore and superstition. They believed that the dollar bill that I was carrying and used to check the margin between the barrel and fore end of my rifle angered the spirits. Apparently, the act of carrying money into the hunting field demonstrated that I could instead buy meat, and therefore the spirits would not give up an animal to my shooting.

Voicing my skepticism about the effectiveness of solid bullets on plains game was met with the phrase "a soft-nosed bullet can't make up for a poorly placed shot." To this quote I withered into submission to the local opinion. The events that followed, however,

forever confirmed I would never allow for a discussion on this subject again. That catalyst came in the form of an encounter with another kudu bull.

He emerged into view from our right, and although traveling at a slow trot, I easily put a bullet close behind his shoulder. He never reacted to the bullet and both Tallmadge and Brink declared the shot a miss. I shot again at the same spot and got the same reaction from my hunting party. Indignantly, I insisted that I was hitting him and shot again. The third shot was no more telling than the first and I fired the fourth (and last) cartridge from my .375 Colt Sauer. The bull's head began to droop, and after walking a few more steps, he collapsed. Upon examining the entry wounds, it was obvious that all four bullets were grouped into an area about the size of a grapefruit. The exit wounds were directly on the opposite side of his body in a similar configuration. Only the blood-letting had finally overwhelmed the bull. Very little blood showed on the ground because he hemorrhaged into his own body cavity. If he had not dropped in full view of us, it might have proved difficult to track him in the tall grass. A single soft-nosed bullet would have made a more defining kill.

The safari was rounded out with good shooting on reedbuck, duiker, oribi, and bushbuck, all shot incidentally without much strategy involved. The last day I shot a zebra with my double rifle, which still amazes me when brought to memory. The animal was standing quartering on and was shot on the point of the left shoulder. At the shot it fell to the ground, dead. The lead bullet passed completely through the solid body and exited the right hip. Zebras are undeniably tough, and seldom would one expect to make an instant kill out of a body shot. The 450gr lead bullet had again proved its lethal effectiveness when shot from a rifle older than one hundred years.

A driven bird hunt had been in the planning for some time. The other farmers in the area rounded up some extra shotguns and some black kids from the local labor villages to serve as beaters. The low ridges adjacent to the farmland held large numbers

of wild fowl. There were guineas in great number, doves and pigeons in abundance, and reasonable numbers of francolin. The party consisted of two clients from America, about ten resident farmers, two professional hunters, and about thirty beaters. The guns took up their positions at the end of the long ridge, in a semicircle. The beaters began to drive from about a mile away, slowly, but definitively, marching toward the waiting guns. The green pigeons came, flying high and fast. Few of them were knocked to the ground from their lofty height. The doves came and the guns fared better. I was satisfied to see them pile up at my feet along with a couple of pigeons, thanks to my attendant Wiro, who cheered the shots he esteemed to be the most sporting. Every once in a while, we could hear the thrum of many wings beating the air and then subside closer to us. This was a sure sign that the guineas were staging ever closer for their final push over us. A few smaller bunches came first, and I managed to knock some of them down, one falling into the water of a small pond nearby. Late doves that heated up the shooting were followed by more guinea fowl. The final flush of perhaps a hundred guineas was something to be remembered. The noise of their wingbeats sounded ever closer when, suddenly, they were on us. Their black silhouettes contrasted against a blue sky. The flock was wide, and guns began popping all along the line. As more birds fell and more birds arrived, I was loading and shooting as fast as I could. The guineas were thumping the ground around me from my own efforts in addition to the guns on both sides of me. Then they were gone, and the guns fell silent except the occasional shot fired at a francolin flushed from the tall grass at the end of the drive. The beaters appeared and began picking up the fallen birds. Two similar drives were executed with similar results, rounding out a hugely successful day. The final count was divided among the youngsters, who made their mothers happy with their share of the bounty.

Andy and Sharon Kockott picked us up and took us to Harare where we enjoyed a pleasant evening and spent the next day shop-

ping downtown Harare. We spent two nights at a John Bull Hotel, where Andy was a welcomed guest without pay. His service record in the Bush War had earned him this privilege, one that extended beyond Zimbabwe to any place where a John Bull Hotel was found in the Commonwealth. We spent the last evening dining at Tiffany's, where the black waiters furnished me with a tie and the band was comprised of white musicians, an irony of sorts it seemed to me. On the long flight home, I remember thinking this trip had, at least for a time, satiated my appetite for a feast long desired. Somehow, I knew that given the chance, Africa would again be a destination.