

George 'iNyathi' Rushby

by **BWANA ASKARI** illustration **ALAN WALKER**

*The remarkable life of an ivory poacher,
game warden and lion hunter*

AS A TEENAGER, I read George Rushby's biography *The Hunter is Death* by TV Bulpin and Rushby's own book *No More the Tusker*. Today, one doesn't often read of Rushby, but his story is well worth telling for his amazing life and especially for his war with the notorious Njombe man-eating lions.

Born in 1900, George Gilman Rushby attended Rugby school in England, and served as a very young pilot for the Royal Flying Corps during World War I. During his early years, among other jobs, he worked as a motorcycle mechanic, a professional boxer and a barman. He moved to Africa in 1922 where he became an ivory poacher before going on to own a coffee plantation. He was also a gold prospector, a game ranger, forestry conservation officer, problem animal control officer, and finally Deputy Game Warden for the whole of Tanganyika (now Tanzania).

Rushby traversed the entire length of Lake Nyasa, some 500 kilometres, by canoe. He walked clear through Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) all the way to the Congo; hunted elephant through the Congo to Leopoldville and then on,

almost to the mouth of the great Congo River. He twice contracted the potentially deadly Blackwater Fever and survived. He poached elephant for their ivory in Northern Rhodesia, the Congo and the upper Nile area of the Sudan, regarding elephant hunting purely as a business – a means of making a living. During the war, Rushby served as a Captain in the King's African Rifles, operating in the North African desert.

Deciding to settle down and farm coffee, Rushby somewhat reluctantly established himself as a 'white hunter' in



Rushby greets an old friend; behind him is his hunting vehicle, typical of that era.



George, on the left of centre, with some truly magnificent tusks; the other man remains unidentified.

order to pay off the huge costs of buying and developing the coffee plantation. However, George was never really happy guiding wealthy clients on trophy hunting safaris. He then initiated and managed Tanganyika's first rainbow trout project. Later, he joined the country's Forestry Department, proclaiming the urgent need for the native people to conserve their natural forests. In 1938, he transferred to the Game Department as Ranger for the Eastern Province of Tanganyika, and it was during this period that the terrible saga of the Njombe man-eating lions prevailed. Thereafter, George was appointed as Deputy Game Warden for the whole of Tanganyika, a position based in Arusha – one of the gateways to the East African safari business at that time.

I WAS INTERESTED to learn that, for hunting lions, Rushby favoured the 9.3x74R over the standard government-issue .404 (perhaps, when facing charging cats, he preferred this fast-handling double's facility for delivering a rapid follow-up shot, rather than the .404's slower bolt action). However, for elephant hunting, he used a British-made .577NE double, probably because he'd experienced one really bad elephant incident during his ivory hunting days. Rushby was given the name "iNyathi" by the Africans who said he was far more dangerous than any buffalo in the long grass.

In 1932, the head warden of Tanganyika appointed Rushby to manage wildlife in the southern highlands – a vast area comprising savannah, thorn-veld, lake areas and mountains through which the Great North Road wound. It was here that the Njombe man-eating lions started their predation upon humans. The well-known tale of the man-eaters of Tsavo almost pales into insignificance when compared to that of the Njombe man-eating lions.

Upon his arrival at Njombe, Rushby was briefed in some detail by the District Commissioner, Mr Wenban-Smith. A number of attempts to shoot these marauding lions had

already been made – unsuccessfully – by a few brave local men. After carefully listening to the stories of these failed attempts, Rushby set out north of Njombe to a number of small villages and mission stations where most of the man-eating had taken place and was still occurring. Rushby patrolled the district for some two weeks, day and night, to

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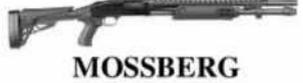
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learn what he could of these elusive killers. Nothing came of this excursion; meanwhile the attacks continued.

During this time, Rushby had stopped off at a number of villages, asking the help of locals in his quest to gather information which would enable him to hunt down these lions. However, he found that even his local game scouts were dead against discussing the lion situation with anyone. Sensing their fear, Rushby perceived that their refusal to cooperate was due to the ancient African belief that humans can transmogrify into animals and vice versa, much like the ancient European belief in lycanthropy, only the African conviction was that such situations were controlled by an *mganga* (witchdoctor). Rushby knew the only way to get past this deadlock was to show the local tribespeople, particularly his own game scouts whose support he sorely needed, that these lions were not supernatural beings and could be shot and destroyed like any other wild animal. He thought long and hard how best to approach the situation, as these were no ordinary lions.

Consequently, Rushby acquired 20 gun traps which he set up in what he considered key locations, some even baited with human remains from recent attacks, to tempt the lions into these death traps. The traps, with the 'bait' regularly renewed, were left in place for nigh on six months, and in all that time not one was triggered.

RUSHBY NEXT TRIED the age old Indian *machan* hunting contrivance – essentially a wooden platform built high in a tree, on which one can sit up at night, waiting for the big cats to be attracted to a bait arranged on the ground close by. After spending fruitless nights sitting thus in wait, he deemed this method a waste of time. He then tried the pit method of enticing the lions – a hole in the ground in which he would sit all night waiting, covered by just a tarpaulin with a small opening at one end, and once again having left

human remains beside the hole. This of course was much more dangerous, as the lions, if drawn to it, would be virtually within arms' length of him. During these attempts, when he did hear and see any approaching movement, obviously he didn't wait to identify the beast, but fired at it immediately. This resulted in his killing two hyenas, one leopard, one domestic pig, one jackal and one goat, but no lions.

Rushby estimated that there were about 15 lions making up this



Rushby concluded that the only way to engage the man-eaters was to relentlessly track them down on foot until he had shot them all.

pride of man-eaters. Eventually he concluded that despite his previous failed attempts, the only way to engage them was to relentlessly track them down on foot until he had shot them all. Accordingly, on being informed of an attack at a nearby village, he set up camp nearby, and that very night the lions killed a woman in the village. At first light, he and two native trackers took up the spoor of these lions and after a number of hours caught up with them. He fired at a lioness, wounding her, and finally killed her with a head shot. At long last, the first of the Njombe man-eaters had been destroyed.

After this success, whenever called to an attack site, Rushby and his game scouts, who were now less fearful of the witchcraft element, adhered persistently to the method of following up the tracks, and by May 1947 a total of ten of the man-eaters had been eliminated

from this infamous pride. Another major breakthrough came when Rushby and Jumapili, one of his game scouts, after searching for eight days, found fresh lion tracks. On successfully closing with their quarry, Rushby killed the dominant male that had held this pride together for so long, while Jumapili simultaneously shot and killed a lioness accompanying the male. The frequency of attacks on the native villages was now much diminished, and after a further two lionesses had been

shot and killed, the reports of attacks on the tribespeople finally ended. All this took place over a 15-year period during which the Njombe man-eaters killed and ate between 1 000 and 1 500 people.

This puts into perspective the huge difference between the ravages of the man-eaters of Tsavo (Kenya) and those of the man-eaters of Njombe (Tanganyika), and illustrates the extreme efforts made over so extended a period by George Rushby and his game scouts.

Rushby retired from service in 1956. He moved back to the Njombe district where he again established a coffee plantation, and was also one of the first people in the country to grow tea as a major crop. As the years passed, he perceived of the political changes taking root within the country, and sold up, moving to Simonstown in the Cape, where he lived in a cottage high on a hill overlooking the Naval Base. Here, Bulpin interviewed him and wrote his biography, and Rushby himself wrote *No More the Tusker*, which told of his hunting experiences.

George Rushby died in 1969, and his youngest son Henry scattered his ashes at the southernmost tip of Africa where the Atlantic and Indian oceans meet.

My grateful thanks go to George Rushby's eldest son, George "Mike" Rushby, who now lives in Australia, and who greatly assisted me in my research of his father's extraordinary life story. ■