

"EVERYMAN'S DREAM, AN AFRICAN QUEST" Part One

By Vincent R. Lupo

What hunter looking down the barrel of his or her rifle, hasn't at one point or another, envisioned the prey to be an African Lion, or maybe a sleek Leopard. Yes, a dream to be on an African Safari! In my case that dream became a reality in May of 2001. It was then that I left to go on a genuine African Safari. Even the words "African Safari" flooded the mind with visions of tall grass, big-tusked bull Elephants and a pride of roaring Lions with its huge majestic black mane leader standing as the king that he is! Little did I know at that time, that my dream was the beginning of a 13 month quest to complete the challenge of taking the African dangerous game **Big Six**, Elephant, Rhinoceros, Hippopotamus, Cape Buffalo, Lion and Leopard, and was going to lead me through tall swaying brown grass, hundreds of ripping thorn bushes, over rock strewn hills and vertical mountains, into surgery and a 6 day hospital stay to repair a broken ankle and the taking of approximately 35 fantastic African trophies!

On May 9, 2001, I stepped off of a South African Airlines plane, picked up my considerable amount of luggage, thanked God that my rifle case arrived, cleared customs, walked out the secured entrance, and was immediately greeted by the wide spreading arms of the ever smiling Mr. Danie Clifford sr., veteran Professional Hunter and owner of Mahlapholane Safaris. Danie, pronounced Donny, had been awaiting the arrival of my airplane at the bustling Johannesburg International Airport. Donny almost immediately whisked me, my gun case, and my mountain of luggage (on this, my first trip to South Africa and my very first Safari, I had packed everything I could think of and consequently was, shall we say, a tad bit "over" packed!) into one of his right hand drive Land Rovers, and off we drove at what seemed to me to be a rather "brisk" speed, so very typical of South African drivers. About an hour and a half later we drove through the town of Wambath, located in the Northern Province, and a short time later, arrived at the beautiful XXXXX hecter Mahlapholane Safari and Hunting Lodge, my base of operations for the next 3 hunt packed weeks.

On this, and my next two safaris, I took as my primary rifle, a lever action 45-70 Marlin rifle and a fair supply of Garrett Hammerhead Cartridges in 540 grain and 420 grain loads. I had used this rifle and ammunition combination with great success on many other North American hunts and felt confident that this combination could take on whatever Africa had in store for me. One of the first things you do after settling in (unpacking etc.) is to immediately go to a firing range and check that your rifle has not been so mishandled as to warrant it useless! I honestly believe I heard gasps as I took my 45-70-lever action Marlin out of its case. The P.H.'s on this side of the "pond" used primarily double rifles and huge magnum bolt rifles. Too compound the matter, I loaded the rifle with the most unusual cartridges that they had seen, 540 grain, solid cast, Garrett Cartridge Hammerheads. After punching out the center spot 3 times at 100 yards and their examining both the cartridge and the decimated backstop, they concluded that it would do "splendidly". As the days passed, I began to systematically amass a sizable amount of beautiful African plains game, including: Impalas, Blesbuck, Red Hartebeest, Blue Wildebeest, Zebra, Serval, Warthogs, Steenbok, Kudu, Jackal, Common Reedbuck and Black Sable. Then finely came the day when we were going to go after my main quarry, a Cape Buffalo! We hunted hard for him for three days and finely spotted him about 140 yards away. We closed to about 80 yards but the changing wind direction told us that it was now or we would have to try another day! But my time was running out. I took

steady aim as he crossed broadside, left to right, and sent a 540gr Hammerhead into his right shoulder knocking him down, almost immediately he was up, turned and faced me with a look that I shall never forget, and launched himself straight at me. Within seconds he covered about 20 yards when he met a second 540gr Hammerhead hitting him below the chin in the neck area and driving him back on his butt and down for the count! We cautiously approached him, heard his death bellows, whereupon I delivered an "insurance" shot at about 15 yards. He truly was a great "Old Dagga Boy" with hard solid 13-inch bosses and a beautiful set of deep curling horns. My first shot broke both shoulders and exited as did my second shot which exited the rear of the bull. Without a doubt, a truly fantastic experience that I new I would want to repeat! Five months later, in November, I was on another SAA flight headed back to South Africa and beautiful Mahlapholane. On this three-week safari, my main quarry would be another Cape Buffalo and what I hoped would be a beautiful male Leopard. Within a week, my P.H., Donny Clifford, had me using my Hammerhead loaded Marlin to bag a Mountain Reedbuck, great Bushbuck, Warthog, large Waterbuck and a fantastic Livingston Eland. In the beginning of the second week, Donny told me that they had determined that they had spotted a very large male Leopard and that it was now time to go after him. To make a long an interesting story short, the best-prepared plans hardly ever work out and the next thing I know, I am looking down the barrel at a huge male Leopard running straight at me full steam. Despite my best efforts the "only" shot I could get off was when the Leopard was 6 inches "in front" of the muzzle. The 420gr Hammerhead hit him square in the left eye killing him instantly. Needless to say, after we got out of shock, it was high fives and cheers all round! Believe me, that 220lb-charging Leopard took a bunch of years off of my life, or was it the great party that we had at the lodge that night! I was scheduled to go after Cape Buffalo in a couple of days but one of the trackers said that he had seen a huge Waterbuck. I told Donny that I would be interested in taking it if it were larger then the one I had shot earlier. So off we went. Sure enough, the waterbuck was indeed huge! He stood off in some marsh grass broadside at about 100 yards. I sent a 420gr Hammerhead spinning down range for a perfect shoulder shot dropping the huge bull in his tracks. In a matter of moments we began to walk to the dead Waterbuck and the "IT" happened! I slipped in the wet marsh grass and knew almost instantly that I had broken my ankle! 24 hours later I lay on the surgical table at Jacaranda Hospital in Pretoria having a titanium plate with 6 screws installed as a permanent attachment to my ankle! From that point on, I knew that I would always have fun at airports! Six days later I am back at beautiful Mahlapholane, cast pointed straight up into space marking time to my departure date and the end of my second Safari! At this point in time, I had only succeeded in taking 2 (Cape Buffalo and Leopard) of the African Dangerous Game Big Six. But the other 4 (Elephant, Rhino, Hippo and Lion), the Guinness world record, and much more, awaited me on my third but not final Safari!

"EVERYMAN'S DREAM, AN AFRICAN QUEST"

Part Two

By Vincent R. Lupo

On June 11, 2002, 13 months after I had begun my first safari and had taken a fantastic Cape Buffalo, and 7 months after my second safari, when I managed to take a huge male Leopard and break my ankle, I found myself getting off an S.A.A. airplane at Johannesburg Airport, where I was once again greeted by my good friend and veteran Professional Hunter Danie Clifford sr. Over the previous seven months, Donny and I had worked out a plan that would allow me to complete my quest for the African Dangerous Game Big Six over a 4 week Safari. During those fabulous 4 weeks I would have to take an Elephant, a Rhinoceros, a Hippopotamus, and a Lion. None of this would be easy and we knew going into it that it was problematic that we would finish our objective. Each of these 4 fantastic animals is different in temperament, location, size, aggressiveness, behavior, and most of all, what I will call find ability! As before, I would be using my 45-70-lever action Marlin rifle loaded with 540gr Garrett Cartridge Hammerheads for the Elephant, Rhino, and Hippo, and 420gr Hammerheads for the Lion. Ambitious to say the least! But I had every confidence in the folks at Mahlapholane Safaris and in particular my Professional Hunters, the Clifford's, Danie senior and junior. Donny sr. had divided the 4-week safari into 4 separate segments each built around one of the four main animals that we were to hunt. Along the way, they would guide me through the taking of some pretty special plains game trophies, including; 2 Zebra, a large Blue and a huge Black Wildebeest, 2 trophy Oryx one bigger than the other, a large male Baboon, a Common and a White Blesbuck, 2 Warthogs, 3 Springbucks 2 Common and one Black, and the most fantastic trophy bull Nyala that I have ever seen.

First on the list was the African White Rhinoceros. The only way I can describe a Rhino is to compare it to an amour plated tank with 2 fierce horns sticking from the middle of its' 6 foot long head! It is more agile than one would believe and has an acute sense of smell and hearing. Our trackers had indicated that they had located several bulls and that they believed they had put us on the tracks of the largest bull in the area. We followed print and spore for quite some time and finally the trackers who were some distance ahead of us motioned us to come quickly. When I got there they were pointing through some thick bushes down into a small open meadow about 100 yards away and kept gesturing that the Rhino was there. To their amazement and consternation, I saw "nothing"! Now more excited than ever both they and Donny jr. kept pointing down the meadow and for the life of me I could see absolutely NOTHING! Then all of a sudden I saw an ear and a huge Rhinoceros head move not 10 or 12 feet in front of the right bush that I had been looking BETWEEN! Once my knees stopped knocking, I instantly put the crosshairs of my 45-70-Marlin just behind his front left shoulder and let fly with a 540gr Garrett Cartridges Hammerhead. At that short range my aim was absolutely perfect and I immediately followed up with another shoulder shot that had the huge bull swaying from side to side. There was no doubt that he was going to go down. But he began to stagger forward towards a small ravine and I immediately moved to the front of him to try and finish him so that he would not end up in the ravine. It took a side brain shot to place him down and out. What a fantastic Rhino. His horns measured a clean combined 90 inches (the addition of the two bases and the two heights) that made him a solid gold medal Rhino! That night, what a party!

Week two, and hopefully, my Elephant! We got a call that 3 bull Elephants had broken out of

Kruger National Park and had damaged a small village as they cut through it. We managed to get there the next day and after meeting with the villagers we trekked off in the general direction of the bulls. Fortunately, we had hired a micro-light airplane that had taken off and followed the animals' path of destruction. They later landed and gave us a very ruff idea of about where the Elephants were headed. After a long and hard walk through some pretty impressive bush, we closed in on them and saw that one of the bulls was truly exceptional. We realized that with 3 large bull Elephants standing side by side, "life would not be easy". Given the swirling wind, and the high level of sensitivity of Elephants, we could only stalk up to about 60 yards. We could not chance moving in any closer. As the largest bull turned his head to the left, I sent a 540gr Hammerhead slamming into his left side temple followed immediately by a second shot to his rear spine as he fell to his right. The other 2 bulls trumpeted and headed off at a quick pace. We circled to the front of the Elephant were at about 10 feet I placed an insurance frontal brain shot. His large tusk weighed in at 68lbs and his smaller one at 46lbs for a total of 114lbs! We donated about 10 tons of meat to a very happy village that immediately started a huge party!

So far, my luck was holding out, I sorely remember breaking my ankle and ending my second safari well short of my goals. The third week and if all went well, I would get my Lion and at least complete the Big Five! The hunt for the Lion on the open plains was everything you could imagine it to be and then some. The trackers pointed down to dinner plate sized paw prints. I laid a 420 grain 45-70 Garrett Hammerhead Cartridge down alongside of the paw print and it looked like it was a lowly 22 short! I took a picture of it, which's how much it impressed me. In no time at all the trackers had put us within 100 yards of a huge dark mane male Lion feeding on a Blesbuck that he had taken. I was able to stalk to within 60 yards of him and inched up about another 10 yards when I slung a 420gr Hammerhead into his left front shoulder sending him straight up into the air doing a full 180 while airborne. He landed with a roar and took off about 20 yards, turned and charged straight at me causing me to do the only thing I could. I immediately sent another 420gr Hammerhead straight into his brain to the right of his left eye. It knocked him back and bowled him over with his feet straight up in the air. **I had done it, the Big Five with a 45-70 lever- action Marlin rifle loaded with Garrett Cartridges!** You want to talk about party? Man what a party!

Week four and they tell me that they have tracked down a monster of a bull Hippo. We find him alone and feeding alongside of a small lake. Carefully testing the wind, we managed to quietly stalk up to about 5 yards from him. He is facing me broadside with his head to my left. I raised my Marlin loaded with 540gr Hammerheads to place a clean side brain shot, eased the hammer to the full back position, and gently squeezed the trigger. In one single instant I am in trouble up past my ears! In my excitement I had not taken the safety off and the loudest click you have ever heard in your life shattered the morning silence! Instinct took over as I immediately pulled the hammer back and pushed the safety off. But this time I was looking straight between the eyes of an extremely upset bull Hippopotamus who had turned to face and charge me. At less then 10 feet (recorded on video) I slammed a 540gr Garrett Cartridges Hammerhead cleanly between his eyes dropping him instantly in his tracks! I followed almost immediately with an insurance brain shot 2 inches to the right of the first one. I have never met Mr. Garrett, of Garrett Cartridges, but I swear to God if he were there at that moment I would have kissed him! **I HAD DONE IT! THE FIRST MAN IN HISTORY TO TAKE THE AFRICAN DANGEROUS GAME BIG SIX WITH A LEVER ACTION MARLIN RIFLE WITH GARRETT CARTRIDGES 45-70 HAMMERHEADS!** I am awaiting confirmation of that fact from the Guinness World Record Book people. Now do you want to

talk about PARTY!

AFRICAN MORNING

BY

Vincent R. Lupo

"The Dream"

As you begin to stir, your eyes quickly tell you that it is still very dark. You suddenly realize that what has truly broken your restless sleep is a deep, but distant, chest rattling ROAR! It is Simba, Lord of the jungle, leader of his clan, and fearsome protector of his pride. He has chosen this predawn time to announce his presence and to alert every animal that this is his domain!

Well, that was all I needed. It was hard enough leaving the campfire comradery last night, but I turned in a little early because of my PH's (Professional Hunter Danie "Donny" Clifford) statement. He grinned broadly and matter of factly told me that the trackers had picked up the prints of what they said was a "mighty" Simba! Donny quickly flashed a thumbs up gesture and extended his two large hands forming his thumbs and index fingers into a large open circle, saying, "pie plate sized paw tracks, he's the big boy we have been searching for over the last 5 days."

Now I could hear the mighty roar of Simba, the sounds flooding my mind causing images of a large bodied, dark mained, Lion, sitting, head erect, mouth wide apart, huge teeth shining in the moon light. My god, now, at this moment, I began to realize that my dream of taking a great African Lion seemed possible! That all the many days and months of dreaming, and planning for this safari, may in fact, be about to come true.

Thirteen months ago I stepped off of a South African Airlines plane and into the opened arms of a seasoned, long time veteran Professional Hunter, named Danie Clifford. Danie, pronounced Donny, was not only a renowned PH, but also the owner and operator of Mahlapholane Safari and Hunting Lodge, located north of Johannesburg in the Wambath area of the Northern Province of South Africa. A more beautiful lodge or location would be almost impossible to find! Every possible creature comfort and a fantastic staff ready to cater to your every desire. All of that, coupled with an unbelievable view of "real" African scenery, complete with just about every African animal you can imagine, told me that my dream and quest for the African Dangerous Game Big Six was finely and truly beginning. **"The Hunt"**

Well, that was it for sleeping. Those mighty roars trashed any possibility of my falling back to sleep. I jumped up, and for the umpteenth time began to go over "all" of my gear. I started with the clothes I had carefully laid out before turning in: boots, socks, underwear (thermal, June in South Africa is winter and cold, very cold, specialy if you live in Florida), shirt, sweater, jacket, and gloves. Then on to what seemed like a mountain of "equipment" starting with my backpack. Into which I "again" checked, and placed, the following items: emergency "stuff"; whistle (incase I was being eaten by a Lion and wanted to let everyone know that I considered that event to be a "foul play"), butane lighter, med-pack, combination compass, signal mirror, and magnifying glass, lip balm, 10 extra Garrett Cartridges 420grain Hammerhead bullets for my Marlin Brockman 45-70 lever action rifle, lens cleaning cloth,

hard candies, small bottle of water, small camera and extra film, binoculars, sun glasses, and back-up ID papers neatly encased in a zip lock bag.

Then, onto my "real" equipment. I began with my rifle. It is a caliber 45-70, lever action Marlin rifle, tricked out for me by Jim Brockman of Gooding, Utah and loaded with 420 grain Hammerhead Garrett Cartridges produced by Randy Garrett of Chehalis, Washington. As expected, it cycled flawlessly. Its' bore was as clean as I could possibly want it and everything "felt" right about it. I laid it with the backpack and picked up my belt and made sure that my 10 round cartridge holder was filled with the appropriate Hammerheads and that my "last stand knife" was firmly in its' sheath.

Having accomplished all of those tasks, I now was free to dress and head to what I knew would be another great lodge breakfast.

We had almost completed gobbling down our breakfast when the head tracker came running in and had an excited conversation with the PH. Donnie barked, "let's go, they got him tracked out". We grabbed our rifles and gear and out we went. After what seemed like a never ending trek, the head scout tracker raised his arm and gestured with his index finger pointing at what appeared to me to be the most magnificent Lion my mind could possibly conjured up! A huge body, about 600lbs if not more, with a long flowing red-black main! The stuff of dreams! The Lion lorded over a large, partially eaten, male Blesbuck, probably part of his morning meal. Donnie whispered in my ear, "God all mighty, he is huge! We need to sneak up a little closer using that bush as cover. You can nail him from there". We did just that. We hunched over and slithered forward until we made it to the bush. I took up a kneeling stance and clearly saw the Lion standing facing me slightly broadside about 50 yards away. Donnie, using his binoculars, started mumbling something about God awful big and then clearly said, "take up a steady rest and aim carefully, put him down as quickly as you can". I picked up my Marlin, released the cross bolt safety and placed the fire red glowing cross hairs from the Leupold illuminator scope on his left front shoulder. I eased back on the trigger and sent one of Mr. Garrett's 420gr Hammerhead cartridges slamming into exactly where I had aimed. The Lion went straight up into the air making a 180-degree turn while still air born! As soon as his feet touched the ground, he put about 20 yards between him and me, then without warning, he instantly turned around, roared, and came straight at us! Donnie had long ago dropped his binoculars and had his rifle pointing straight at the oncoming Lion. As soon as the Lion reached about 30 yards from me, I did what I had to do, but with great concern. I had his eyes clearly in my glowing sights, and squeezed the trigger, sending a Hammerhead right into his brain, knocking him over with his feet straight up in the air! We cautiously moved forward to my very dead African Lion!

Talk about excitement! We exchanged high fives and bear hugs all way round. The Lion truly was magnificent. He had everything any African hunter could possibly want or dream of! Long, beautiful main, huge body, enormous paws and teeth that sent shivers down your back! He was after all, the senior boss in his territory and carried all of the credentials to prove it! But now his reign was over and shortly there would be new fearsome roars resounding throughout the vast plains. They would announce both the arrival of the new King, and the rising sun of another African Morning!

THE RAGING WATERHORSE

By

Vincent R. Lupo

The Romans named him "Hippopotamus" or Water Horse. They used that word in recognition of its fantastic speed underwater and ON LAND! But the name falls woefully short of a more accurate description. What they should have called him is Death Horse! What appears to be a calm pond, or a peacefully meandering African river, may in fact be a deadly water crossing. Surely, the first thing that comes to your mind is Crocodile! The Crocodile is without a doubt a fearsome prehistoric eating machine. He has rightfully earned that reputation as he almost always attempts to extract his "toll" from anything or anyone on or near his waters.

But what may surprise you is the fact that the Hippopotamus kills more people in Africa than all the other animals combined! Yes, that's right, it's the unseen Hippo resting or cruising under the water or the placid super large, sluggish looking Hippo, calmly grazing on the low grasses at its feet that is the true menace.

For it is the Roman Water Horse, the Hippopotamus, that is the champion African "bringer of death". The Romans should have in deed named him "Death Horse".

Given this horrific African reputation, it is understandable that the Hippo has now been added to the list of African Dangerous Game, moving the big five (Elephant, Rhinoceros, Cape Buffalo, Lion and Leopard) to the BIG SIX!

The Hippo thusly became an intragal part of my dream and my quest to harvest the African Dangerous Game Big Six.

The task of locating a great Hippo now fell to Danie Clifford, veteran African professional hunter, and his crew of native scouts and trackers. Danie, pronounced Donny, is the owner and operator of Mahlapholane Safari and Hunting Lodge, and is truly a storehouse of great African hunting lore and experiences.

In no time at all, Donny was telling me that his scouts had located a massive bull Hippo and we would "have a go at him" in the morning. By now, Donny was well aware of my hunting capabilities, in as much as I had already completed several safaris with him and had harvested about 35 beautiful African animals along with five (5) of the Big Six. So the amount of time he spent with me discussing bullet placement and Hippo characteristics seemed "extra ordinary". It became very clear to me that my PH held the Hippo in high esteem and wanted to ensure a good, safe and successful Hippo hunt. Donny had become accustomed to the bark of my Marlin lever action Garrett Cartridge loaded 45-70 rifle. He had seen the devastation it wrought on both plains game, using 420gr Garrett Hammerheads, and Elephant and Rhino using 540gr Garrett Hammerheads. His advice to me was, "load it with the heavies, we are going after the big boss Hippo".

Morning came slowly and brought with it a classic African June winter chill. Right at 36 degrees. Enough to cause a long, smoky looking tail as you exhaled. We gathered our war party and off we went. The chief scout had already relayed his information to the PH and the trackers. Donny told me that there was a small lake up ahead and around the bend. He hoped

that the boss bull Hippo would be there, and most of all, in a "shootable" location, preferably on land and close by. As we quietly moved forward, and carefully placed our feet in the trackers footprints, we saw the front tracker suddenly freeze in his footsteps. Instantly we all froze.

Slowly, the tracker raised his hand and with his index finger pointed at the bushes in front of him. He then raised his finger to his lips in the universal QUIET sign. We slowly, carefully, and silently moved forward to the trackers front position and there he was! My heart began pounding so fiercely in my chest that I swore it sounded like a drum that would alert the huge Hippo. He was in deed a huge boss bull Hippo, standing alone facing me about 15 feet from the lakes edge, munching head down on some tender grasses. BUT he was also only about 15 feet in front of me!

The PH slowly slid up alongside of me and tapped his finger to the bridge of his nose between his eyes several times. There was no doubt about what he wanted me to do. Nail the big bull between the eyes as his head was down and his attention was on eating. I eased the hammer back from half cock to the full back position and gently squeezed the trigger when the crosshairs of my scope held firmly on a spot between the Hippo's eyes. CLICK! The loudest click I had ever heard in my life sent waves of shivers down my spine. My mind went into "overdrive" trying to analyze what had happened. The stunned look on my PH's face must have mirrored my own as I saw his huge double rifle begin to move up towards his shoulder. But my mind had already told me that I had NOT pushed off the cross bolt safety and the hammer had slammed home on the safety bar. My fingers had already pulled the hammer back and released the safety button and had realigned the rifle so that I now again could take up my sight picture. Only this time the bull was looking straight at me and appeared to be coiling to spring forward into a full charge. But my bullet had already left the barrel hitting the Hippo perfectly between the eyes and dropping him in his own footprints. He no sooner hit the ground than I slammed another 540gr Hammerhead bullet two inches to the left and two inches above the first bullets impact hole. The whole chilling event seemed like hours to me but in reality took seconds.

High fives, great back slapping, with jubilant laughter and celebration as we quickly crossed the 15 feet to my dead Hippo bull. While standing alongside of this magnificent animal, it finely came to me, that after a 13-month quest, I had completed my dream of taking the African Dangerous Game Big Six!

What a great trophy and what a memorable way to conclude my quest!