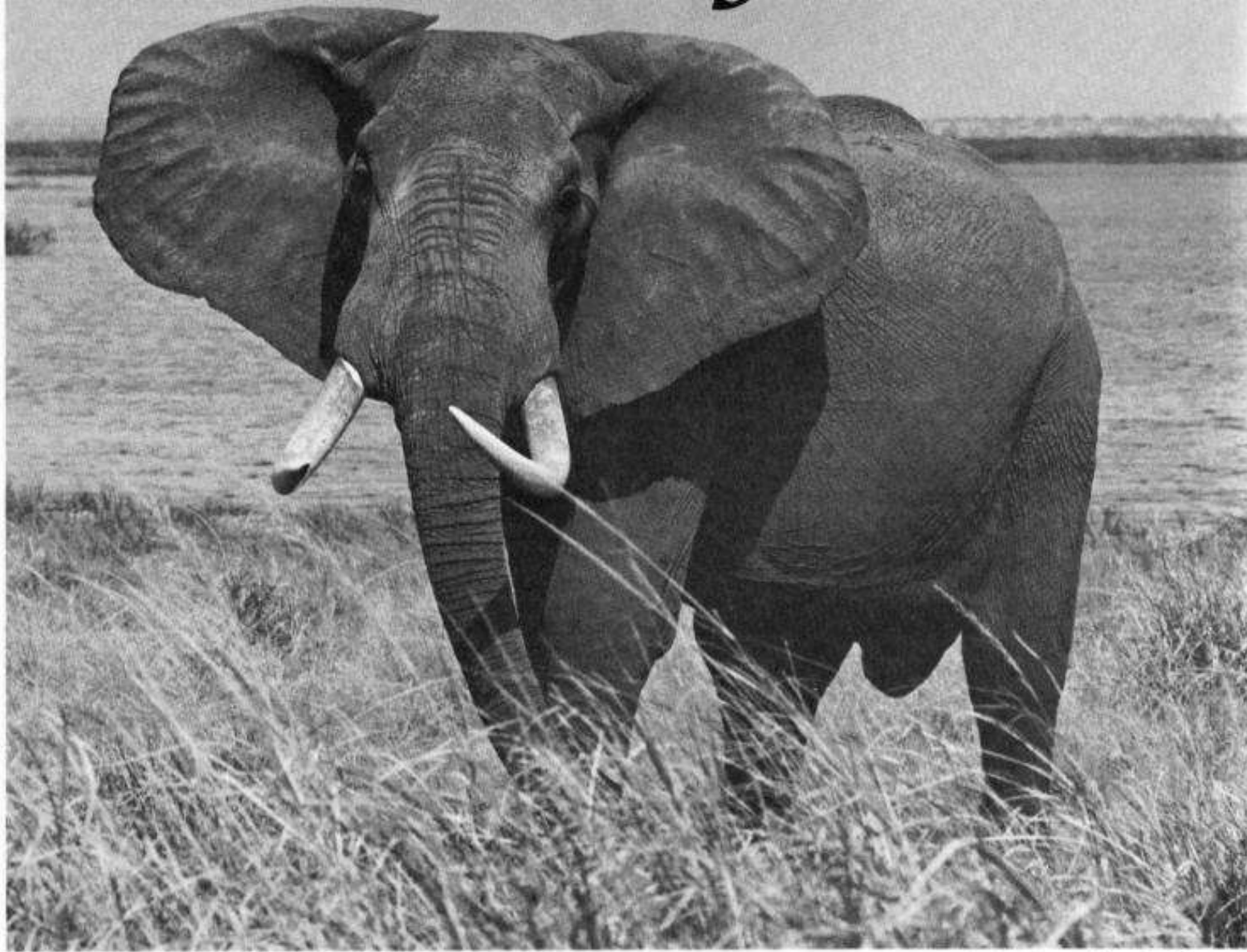


Karamojo Bell



Bell made his living by flirting with danger. He stalked into flea-spotting range of bull elephants and shot them with a 7x57.

Who Was This Man And What Made Him One

By Jack Lott

Scene—The Karamojo District, East Africa, circa 1905:

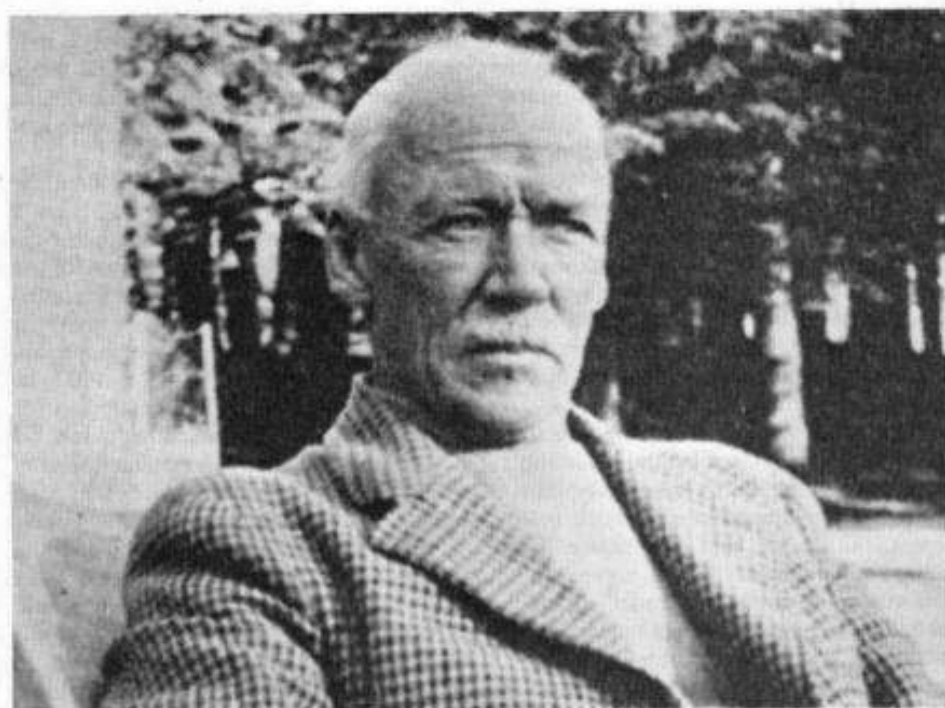
A naked Karamajong warrior carrying two spears climbs the inclined, broken, upper trunk of a big tree which leans against the tall stump. From this vantage point on the edge of the flood plain's tall grass, the Karamajong scans the elephant grass and breaks into a grin. Signaled by the grin, the tall, blonde, athletic Scot, clad in khaki running shorts and a short-sleeved shirt, leans his little .275 Rigby-Mausier against the tree and climbs up. Bell knows the grin means "atome"

(elephant). His view is a vast panorama of elephant grass stretching seemingly to the blue Ethiopian plateau 60 miles north. Fourteen grey arched masses are visible above the grass — three in a group, the rest spread out.

Bell decides to tackle the trio first, then to hunt the others individually if their teeth warrant it. The tusks are not visible in the tall grass. A quick check of his rifle tells Bell what he already knows but habitually verified — the magazine contains five gleaming rounds of DWM 7x57, 173 gr. "solids," plus another which he reinserts "up the spout." Bell and Pyjale (the warrior) slip into the sea of grass, moving quickly through the trails of last

night's herds. When within 100 yards of the three bulls, Bell watches for a rising head and tusks. The ivory remains concealed from view, so Bell decides that in view of obvious signs of age, the three bulls will average a good weight of ivory. He selects the farthest of the trio first. He is now 60 yards off, the others standing broadside — the nearest partly covering the other. Bell plants his feet solidly, aims his Rigby at the far bull, and watches for his head to move up and broadside for the side brain shot. The head heaves upwards, presenting a quartering shot from the rear — too uncertain! Bell is all discipline and will not take chances. Everything must be just right. He doesn't see the target as a

- The Man Behind The Legend



Born the son of a Scottish merchant in 1880, Bell was a man of many talents. He was a seaman, gunsmith, soldier, prospector and author, but he is best remembered as Africa's greatest elephant hunter and the first white man to hunt in the Karamojo area.

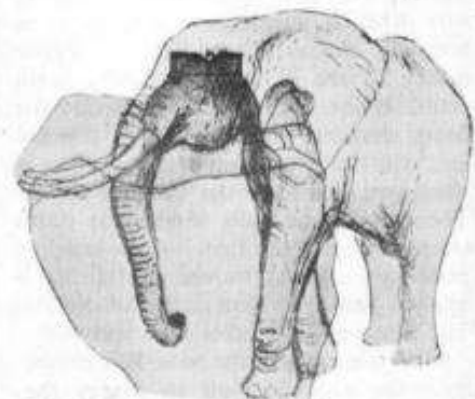
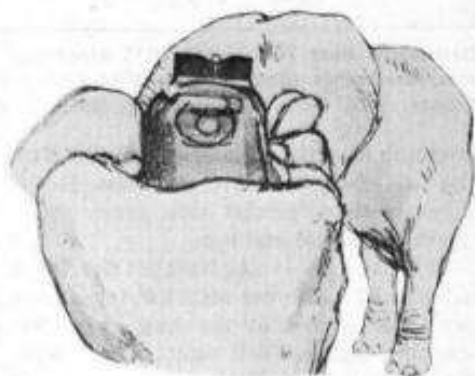
Of Africa's Greatest Hunters?

normal hunter does — a spot on the outside — but in his mind's eye visualizes the loaf-of-bread-sized brain suspended in a transparent skull, aiming with both eyes open. Bell knows that a spot on the outside is a good aiming point for but one angle and range.

The other two browse toward the farther bull and the hunters close in a bit more. As the farther bull's head swings perfectly into position, Bell is solidly into his aiming stance, but the head swings away too quickly. For two minutes, this game of watching and aiming tantalizes the anxious brain and taut muscles, but they refuse to disobey the master behind the blue eyes. Now the huge head levels

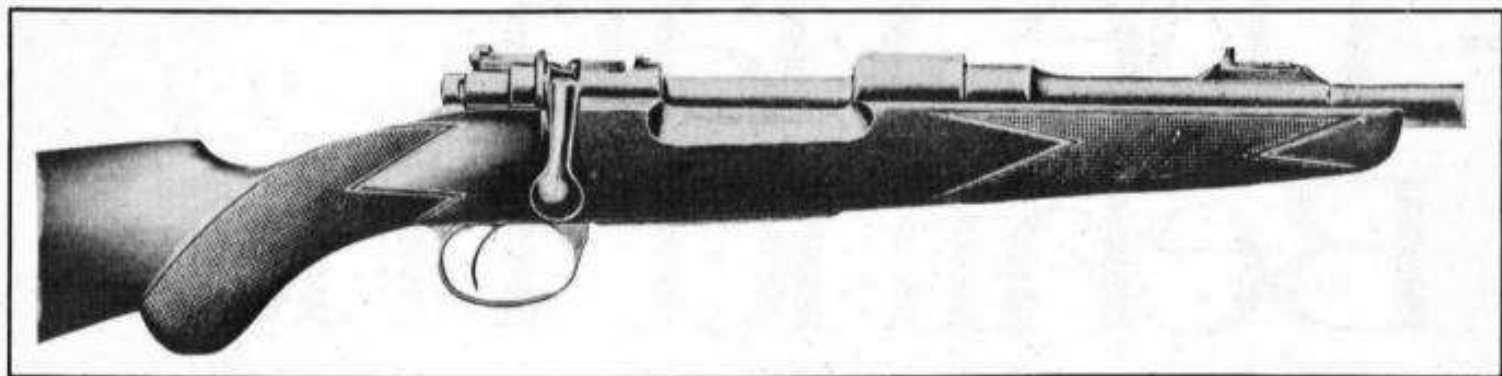
and comes around, pausing for an instant. The blue eyes aim unblinking down the barrel, the ivory front bead nestling precisely in the wide "V" above a platinum centerline. The Rigby cracks sharply and the bull disappears. At the shot, the closest bull turns towards the hunter, who has reloaded in the firing position as if the bolt was driven by a cam-operated automaton. This bull drops to the frontal brain shot — between and slightly above the eyes — the "bullseye" being a four-inch square. In falling, the second bull exposes the third

After patiently stalking an elephant in tall grass, Bell would set up an adjustable tripod and use it as a shooting stand.



Bell always aimed with both eyes open so the elephant's entire head was visible, enabling him to anticipate head movement.





Photos by author

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standing broadside, staring at the flank of the first, bulging above the grass. He is taken with a precise side brain shot, between earhole and eye.

It looks easy — like Nureyev dancing a solo or El Cordobes maneuvering a toro with his capote at the bull fight. No exciting charges. Bell wants it that way. Besides, his 7mm Rigby is to a stopping rifle what a surgeon's scalpel is to a butcher's cleaver! First, Bell and Pyjale hasten to see if they were really brain shots. If the hind legs don't betray the death shudder, the beast is only stunned and will rise quickly and escape. This is when you administer the "coup de grace." The two closest bulls shudder as death takes over, but the first — in a kneeling position — hasn't moved. A finisher is applied broadside, but it is unnecessary. The whole episode takes eight seconds!

As Pyjale cuts off the tails, Bell climbs upon the kneeling bull to survey the surrounding scene. The strong veld wind has absorbed the sound of the shots, and the spread-out herd is grazing contentedly.

Bell now examines the ivory of the fallen. Good stuff — all carrying two teeth, from 50 to 80 pounds each. Now a quick downwind move to position them right for the nearest lone bull. This bull is confronted at 15 yards, then dropped with a frontal brain shot. Mounting the head via the trunk, Bell can feel the diminishing heart beats through the soles of his shoes. From his elephantine perch, he sees the others moving off.

If they are alarmed, they will head for the Murua Akipi flats, a waterless thornbush desert, with no inducement to stop for 40 to 50 miles. Bell decides to race the elephants to dry bush, to cut them off before they exit the grass. To do so, he and Pyjale leave the tall grass and run on game trails through the thornbush. The elephants bear down on one exit as the running pair close. The herd pours through the gap at eight miles per hour, and Bell and Pyjale arrive at the tail of the procession, nearly dead beat and sweat-wrung-out, almost to the point of dehydration. What to do? They won't stop now, but one bull might pause to defecate.

Quitting now is unthinkable, but the ivory is vanishing rapidly in the blazing midday sun. The wind has dropped. The parade of pachyderms heads for the peak of Murua Akipi.

For two hours, the dogged pair hang on the heels of the migrating herd, which displays no panic — only a single-minded compulsion to move on. Pyjale spots a pathway through the thorn paralleling the herd and sprints marvellously away, past the defile of elephant, to reveal himself to the lead bulls. Bell, meanwhile, has closed the gap with the tail of the column. As the lead bull swings his head towards Pyjale, he is crumpled by Bell's little Rigby in an angling shot rearwards to the brain. The herd spills in all directions, startled by the shot and the fall of their leader.

The nearest bull to Bell turns towards him, then drops from a frontal brain shot. Two more bulls nearby take body shots, but a third is missed when a head intervenes, taking the shot non-vitally. This one is finished before he can escape, then Bell rushes towards the leader to make sure he is dead. He is suspiciously immobile, and Bell motions to Pyjale to spear him in the heart with his long Karamajong spear. The tails of the fallen are removed, but now to find and finish the two that took body shots. Bell finds one standing weakly and swaying. A 7mm bullet finds his brain. As Pyjale removes his tail, a great crash is heard nearby as the second body-shot elephant drops.

Huge relief, combined with a crushing awareness of fatigue, blot out the euphoria of the chase, and the pair rest awhile in the shade to partake of sour milk from the calabash. It is too late now to hunt the survivors and reach camp before dark. The tails are slung on poles, and they hit the trail for camp, driven by the thought of 18 prime tusks waiting for collection and visions of food, drink and rest.

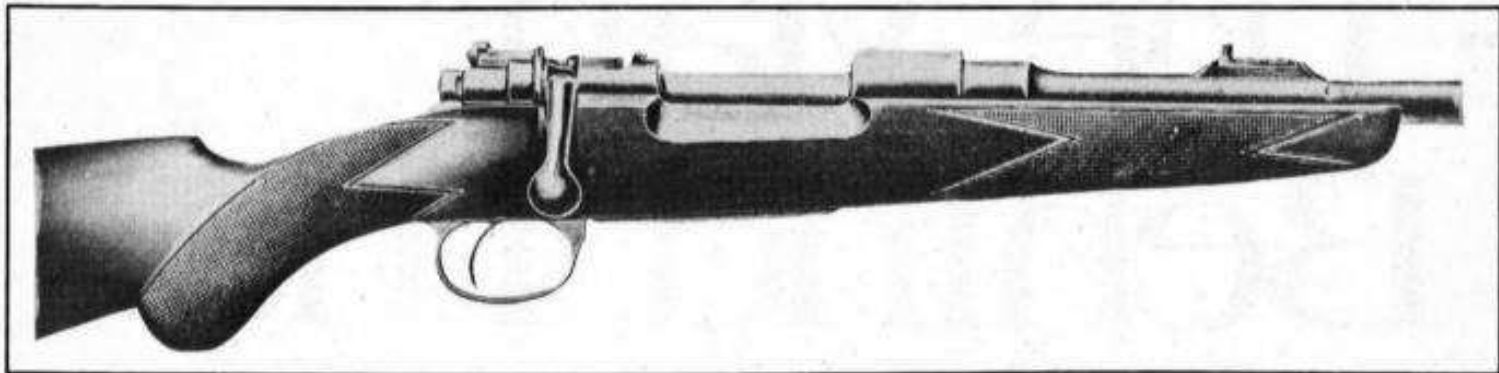
Walter Dalrymple Maitland Bell, better known as "Karamajo" Bell, was born in 1880 in Scotland near Edinburgh, the son of a self-made upper-middle-class merchant. Bell combined a superior intelligence with a strong physique, plus a self-discipline topped with daring courage.

After saying that other men also share these qualities, there is something uniquely Bell which gave him greatness and attracts us to him. It is surely true that this partly derives from his being an archetypical pioneer of a common heritage that carved out the British Empire and made the American Republic, for Bell was also a North American pioneer in the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897.

Before reaching 21 Bell had sailed the seas as an apprentice seaman, been a professional hunter and prospector in Canada, a professional lion hunter for the Kenya-Uganda Railway, and a mounted scout in the Boer War. Bell had sought the career of an ivory hunter since boyhood, and after the Boer War in 1902 he returned home to seek family support for this scheme. Having proved his manhood before reaching 21, he was deemed worthy of backing. Bell had become friendly with the great Scottish gunmaker Daniel Fraser of Edinburgh, who taught young Bell the intricacies of riflemaking and shooting. In fact, Bell became a practical gunsmith, carrying a supply of files and other tools for field repairs and sight modifications to suit him. Bell helped Fraser to regulate and sight some of the big double express rifles from his shooting bench.

Quoting from "Bell of Africa": "But it was no joke firing the heavier bores such as .500 or .577 from a gunmaker's rest. The whole punch of the infernal artillery piece expended itself against the leaning body of the firer — all in cold blood, mind you — so that one felt that one's whole skeleton would fall asunder. I took a strong dislike to these mighty pieces, although admiring their craftsmanship . . . He (Fraser) often rated me for flinching during the process of putting me through it."

This revealing statement is essential to understanding Bell's loathing of big bore rifles and his preference for the smaller calibers. Bell proved he could do with medium-caliber rifles what the "pukka sahibs" did with their heavy doubles — providing he didn't have to stop a charge. There are a lot of caveats that go with Bell's choice of rifles for heavy, dangerous



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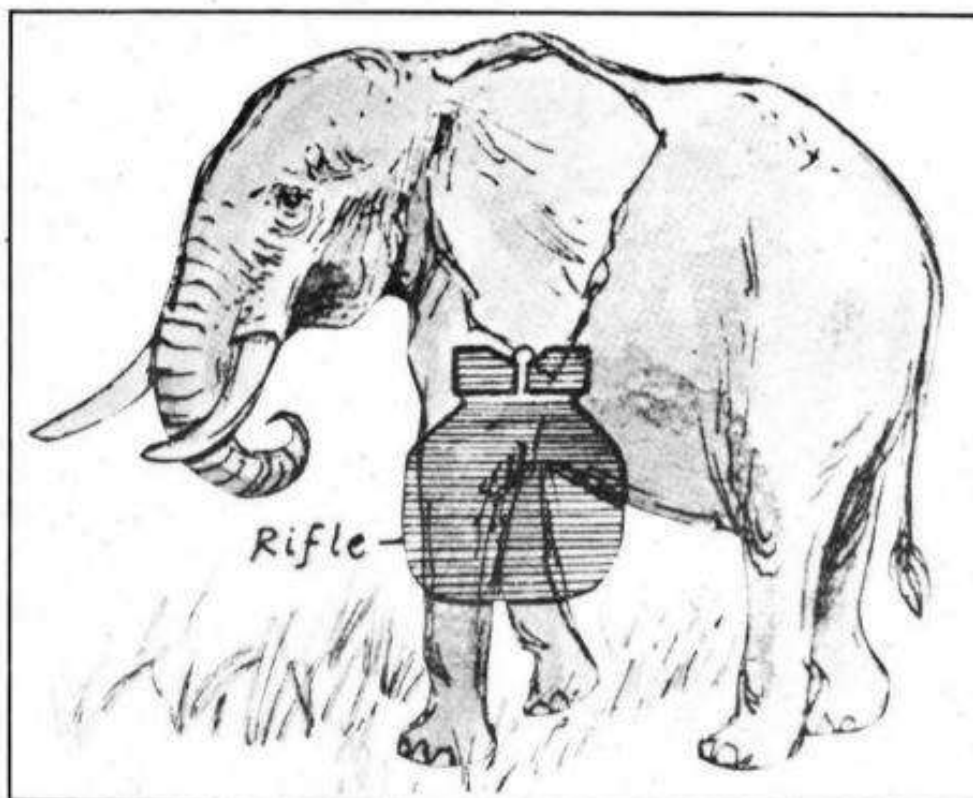
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When elephants were grazing on an open plain, Bell often could not stalk close enough (within 75 yards) for a brain shot. Rather than taking a chance on spooking the herd or misplacing a brain shot, Bell would use the heart shot at these longer distances.

game, which from trying to emulate his feats has cost not a few white and black men their lives!

First comes the blunt truth that there was only one "Karamojo" Bell, the man, and now the legend, who dwells wherever riflemen discuss rifles and calibers for big game, tropical hunters or not. Bell was something more than the first white man to hunt Karamojo. To the wild Karamajong tribesmen he was "Longellynyung" (Red Man) from his sunburned fair skin. He ruled supreme north of the Turkwell river, unconquered no-man's land, because he earned the respect and friendship of its fierce tribes, and because nobody wanted to challenge him badly enough to be the first to die by a bullet from his 7.63 "broomhandle" Mauser pistol.

Although famous for his Karamojo exploits, Bell did not confine his ivory hunting to Karamojo. He also hunted Kenya, Ethiopia, the Lado Enclave, Uganda, Belgian Congo, French Congo, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Chad and the Ubangi-Chari.

His best month produced 44 bulls, killed in three consecutive days.

His most pleasant memory? When a companion, after watching him run down and kill "six large bulls out of six in long grass in midday, in as many minutes, shouted 'Well Bell, I'm damned!'"

Bell wore out 24 pairs of boots per year, and estimated he walked and ran 73 miles for each elephant he shot, or some 75,000 miles! The yield from his five best safaris brought \$141,635 — this in days when that



Bell killed elephant with (l. to r.): .303 British Mark VI, 7x57 (his favorite cartridge), 6.5x54, and .318 Westley Richards.

was a real fortune!

Bell did not use his .275 (7x57) Rigby-Mauser for all his 1011 elephant, as is commonly believed, but rather a bit over 700. On his first safari he used a .303 Lee-Netford sporter with 215-grain roundnose cupro-nickel "solids," killing 63 bulls with an average tusk weight of 53 pounds. His famous .275 Rigby was the first rifle custom-made for Bell.

Later he bought a 6.5x54 Mannlicher-Schoenauer with which he killed some elephant, until noting that the thin 160-grain solids would bend on heavy bone.

He also tried a Fraser .450/400 double and a .416 Rigby, but disliked both.

Contrary to legend, Bell was not 100% sold on his 7mm Rigby because, he wrote, "In this connection the otherwise incomparable 7 millimeter bullet came under suspicion in my mind. There began to arise those times when one felt everything was all right and yet a failure was registered. I began to use a .318 (.330" dia.) bullet of 250 grains with long parallel sides for those slanting-through-the-neck shots. At once the inexplicable misses ceased."

From a 1924 letter to the great Scottish hunter Dennis D. Lyell: "The best bag I ever made in one day was when using a .318. I had 35 cartridges with me and I killed 19 bulls. I had eight misfires and two or three left over at the end."

To Bell's list of 1011 elephant, he added 600-700 buffalo, 63 black rhino, 3 white rhino, 25 lion, 16 leopard, and countless zebra and antelope, mostly taken with "solids" by brain or raking shots. Bell's enormous bag, taken almost entirely with medium-calibers, under tough, foot-slogging conditions in all kinds of weather puts him, if not at the top of the list of Africa's all-time 10 greatest hunters, certainly among the first five.

In 1914, Bell was in the French Congo when he received a letter informing him that World War I had begun. Immediately assembling his ivory and gear, he sold it in Bangui and embarked for England to join the Royal Flying Corps, receiving the Military Cross from General Smuts for aerial intelligence in East Africa. Transferring to Europe to follow his profession of hunting — this time German Albatrosses and Halberstadts — Major W.D.M. Bell, M.C., won a bar for being a good fighter pilot, as victims of his twin Vickers learned.

Is Bell relevant to today's youth? The day of the ivory hunter is done, but so is Kit Carson's. And the most ardent admirer of Columbus cannot rediscover America. Bell was a patriot, serving his nation in three wars (W.W.II in the Home Guard). He was a great rifleman and fine sailor, sailing his racing yacht "Trenchermer" in many races. He was a great stalker of Highland stags and a rifle experimenter almost to the end. He was a fine author and artist with a delightful dry humor and ability to enable us to share his adventures in his books, *Wanderings of an Elephant Hunter* (1923), *Karamojo Safari* (1949), and *Bell of Africa* (1961).

"Karamojo" Bell died in 1954 on his Highland estate "Corriemoillie," purchased with ivory money.

If his qualities ever become obsolete, it will be a world far worse than Orwell's "1984." Townsend Whelen's epitaph is uniquely appropriate. "The sailor was home from the sea; the hunter home from the hill." ■