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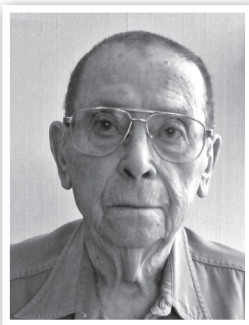
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- **Cover:** Krieghoff was ahead of their time when they built the semi-automatic Sempert 7 Suhl Automat in 1938. The lock-work was built into a closed housing and the falling block locking mechanism was big and strong for an 8x57IS calibre. This gas-driven sealed action frame prevented moisture and dirt from getting into the mechanical system of the rifle during hunting. The control curve was implemented to make the repeating stroke as short as possible. This made it possible for Krieghoff to shorten the overall length of the rifle without affecting the standard barrel length. The rifle's magazine was attached to the left side of the action housing, making it easy to change. Only 40 of these rifles were built, of which two are in Krieghoff's possession. Hendrik Frühauf is the proud owner of this particular rifle.
- **Cover photograph:** Yolandé van der Merwe
- **Cover design:** Nadia du Plessis





IVAN DE KLASZ

# First elephant a pygmy

*Shortly after I started my first job as an oil geologist in Gabon, I received my new rifle and resident big game license. Having shot a bushpig (also known as a red river hog), I longed to try it on real big game. I have seen elephant tracks during my short bush excursions, not very far from Port Gentil where*

*I lived. Still, I first had to equip myself for this as much as my expatriate salary permitted. I did not want to wait too long.*

The opportunity came when I met a chap named Stanislas (Stanis) in the staff mess. He was opening cutlines for geophysical prospecting on the Cap Lopez peninsula on which Port Gentil was also situated. Cap Lopez can be found on detailed African maps, just south of the Equator. It was named after the 15th-century Portuguese explorer, Lope Gonsalvez, who travelled along Africa's west coast. Cap Lopez was more of an island than a peninsula, demarcating north and south by two branches of the Ogooue (or Ogowe) river delta, which reaches the Atlantic at this point.

I told Stanis about my new rifle and went to fetch it from my nearby lodgings. En-route back to my new friend, I told the barman to bring us two more drinks.

Stanis liked my rifle. He has used a rather crudely built company-issued military rifle, transformed into a 10.75 x 68 calibre to provide food for the local employees. "My chaps are low on meat rations. It may be a good idea to go out next weekend to see whether we could get some meat for them, preferably an elephant. Do you have transport?" Stanis ventured.



The author with the pygmy elephant he shot in Gabon.

As I did not have a car at the time, Stanis told me not to worry. The southern end of the island was not far. He offered to reserve a guest room in the mess for Friday night and get the cassava for his workers on Saturday so we could go hunting early on Sunday morning.

We started long before sunrise, which is more or less at the same time all year round, being so close to the Equator.

Leaving the Land Rover at the end of a cutline in the forest, we set off, looking for tracks. After a while, we saw the first signs of a small herd of *assalas*, crossing the cutline. They are also called pygmy\* elephants (*Loxodonta pumilio*) by some zoologists and differ from the bigger forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*).

We started to follow the tracks, which looked relatively fresh, into the forest. The forest soon transformed itself into a swamp, with the base of the trees knee-deep in water. The animals stirred up the mud, so they were easy to follow. We arrived at a somewhat drier area with high grass and a papyrus belt, indicating a tunnel in the undergrowth where the beasts entered another swamp.

Stanis whispered: "I'll go ahead. If I see one and shoot, we have to get out very quickly if they come out this side. We cannot play around."

We entered the papyrus tunnel and soon came across an elephant in the water, then another. The elephants were very close. Stanis shot at the nearest one, which went down. "Out! Quickly! They are coming," he shouted. We were hardly out of the tunnel when the rest of the elephant stormed past us. I shot the one nearest to me but was obviously too slow as it continued to run with the rest of the herd without any sign of being hit. "Where did you aim?" asked Stanis. "I hoped in the head, but from that distance, and as they were running, I cannot tell," I answered. "From so close up, you must have hit it somewhere, so let us follow the herd, he replied.

We followed the stampeding herd. A few hundred meters further, one of the tracks separated from the rest to my immense relief. "This must be the one you hit. It must be hurting badly if it separated so quickly from the herd. This is a good sign. Let us stay on the track," said Stanis.

A few hundred meters away, Stanis spotted high above the ground, some clear, rosy and bubbly spots of blood on some leaves. "This is lung blood. We shall get it," he

declared. I came to the same conclusion as I remembered the characteristic signs of lung blood from hunts in my youth.

Shortly after, we spotted the elephant facing away from us at an angle. "Get to that tree and aim well behind the ear," Stanis whispered. "If it does not fall, I'll shoot too," I remembered the place of an elephant's brain from my lectures about hunts in the tropics. The elephant was about 40 meters ahead of me. I aimed, carefully, one hand on the tree trunk and very slowly squeezed the trigger. The elephant's hind legs started to buckle underneath him, followed by the rest of his body.

I was elated. I finally was a big game African hunter! Stanis shook my hand enthusiastically before making arrangements for his staff to start cutting up the two carcasses. They now had enough meat to smoke and last them for quite a while. Stanis had to supervise the process, so he arranged for one of his guys to drive me back to Port Gentil.

The bull's tusks were tiny, as with most *assalas*, but I still have them.

As for Stanis, he tragically came to his end a few years later.

Over a weekend, a wild bushfire menaced a temporary oil pipeline to a storage reservoir near Port Gentil. It was difficult to find his local crew to help on a Sunday, so he jumped on a bulldozer and tried to push a sand wall

against the reservoir to protect it. At one point, the bulldozer nicked the pipeline, and as the crude contained a lot of gas, it exploded.

Trying to save his machinery, Stanis got severely burned. Being the tough man he was, he drove himself in his Land Rover to hospital, where he collapsed. The experienced military doctor and our company's doctor did what they could with their meagre local means. No medevac jets existed in those days. The company arranged with the airline, serving the French-speaking West African colonies to deviate from the Congo Brazzaville the next day to pick Stanis up. He was flown to a hospital in the south of France, specializing in burns victims. Sadly, Stanis did not make it and passed away in hospital in his wife's arms...

\*The pygmy elephant was discovered early in the last century and was first thought to be a separate African elephant species, *Loxodonta pumilio*. However, after some genetic testing, scientists came to the consensus that the pygmy elephant is a morph (small type) of African forest elephant and its demure size is due to environmental conditions. Similar, the Desert African elephant, with its taller legs and bigger feet, is considered a morph of the African savanna elephant adapted to the desert conditions that the population occupies.  
- Dr Jeanetta Selier (Pr.Sci.Nat), co-editor, African Outfitter.



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