

The Rifle that Took the Smithsonian's Giant of Kumaon

BY DWIGHT VAN BRUNT

*Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?*
—William Blake, *Songs of Experience*

The yellowed newspaper clippings and fading photographs tell a remarkable story. It was in November, 1967, that David Hasinger, Dr. Karl Jonas and their wives traveled to India to hunt tigers. Beyond the slightest doubt, they were mindful of Jim Corbett's famous adventures, for they had arranged to hunt his Kumaon District in the foothills of the Himalayas bordering Nepal and China. One of the things they probably didn't expect was that they would actually hunt within sight of Corbett's home.

Slated to last 15 days, Hasinger and Jonas were told that only one of them might anticipate a shooting opportunity, yet their hunts were successful beyond measure. Supported by a team that included two experienced professional hunters, 10 elephants and their handlers along with some 40 beaters, they hit it hard. Hunting from elephant-back and waiting on platforms lashed in likely trees, half the hunt passed before a tiger gave either of them a chance.

The Philadelphia story
**Our hunter bags
Biggest tiger ever**

BY RUTH SELTZER
Inquirer Staff Writer

In the big game world's tiger-hunting division, Philadelphia's David J. Hasinger has broken a record. He recently shot a tiger that was the largest ever taken in India. The tiger was measured and weighed by the Forestry and Game Commission of India. It weighed 857 pounds and measured more than 11 feet in length. These statistics were sent to New Delhi and the tiger was officially certified to be the biggest on record. The United States Embassy was notified.

This was David Hasinger's first big-game hunting trip in Asia. He is president of the African Safari Club of Philadelphia. And he is president of Paul & Beskman, Inc. We chatted with the Hasingers, who live in Germantown, soon after their return from their record-breaking tiger hunt. With Dave and Jane Hasinger on their expedition to India went Dr. and Mrs. Karl C. Jonas. This wasn't the first time that the two couples have hunted in far-away places together. In 1966, the Hasingers and the Jonases hunted in Africa.

Dr. Karl Jonas shoots a tiger, too



When they flew to India on their tiger-hunting expedition, they said they'd be lucky if they got one tiger. But they got two. Dr. Jonas shot a tiger on the 8th day — 12th beat. It measured 9 feet, four inches.

Dr. and Mrs. Jonas, who now live in Potomac, Md., moved there a year ago from Philadelphia. Dr. Jonas is chief of surgery of Doctors' Hospital Medical Center in Washington. Mrs. Jonas' father was Dr. W. W. Babcock, of Philadelphia, who was emeritus professor of surgery at Temple University School of Medicine. The Hasingers lived in Villanova.

"Hunting in India is more like Africa than any other place," Jane Hasinger told us. "It's so lonely. It's so hot. It's so far from the moment, it's so hard to get to the place. The hunt took place in the foothills of the Himalayas, 35 miles west of New Delhi, about 100 miles south of the Chinese border. The hunt was led by Shamsher Jung, directed the hunt. He was a good host and an exceptional hunter. He had to be a good hunter for many years."

Mr. and Mrs. David J. Hasinger, of Germantown, Pa., are pictured in North Carolina with their giant tiger. The tiger was shot by Mr. Hasinger on a recent hunting expedition, was officially certified to be the biggest ever shot in India. Mr. Hasinger is president of the African Safari Club of Philadelphia. This was his first tiger. It measured 11 feet, 11 inches.

David Hasinger's Winchester pre-64 Model 70 375 H&H Magnum and a newspaper clipping from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, which featured an article on his hunt in India.

On the eighth day, Dr. Jonas' luck changed. Pressed by the beaters, a tiger came out of the 15-foot-tall grass right at him. His shot was taken at just 12 feet—into the tiger's open mouth—and dropped the big cat in his tracks. Measuring 9 feet,

4 inches, the tiger occasioned a festive celebration with the villagers.

Four days later, Hasinger killed a tiger that would rock the hunting world. The huge cat was said to have "terrorized livestock and residents for a full year."



Dr. Karl Jonas carried this pre-64 Model 70, a Super Grade African chambered in 458 Win. Magnum.



Taxidermist Louis Paul Jonas created this mount of Hasinger's tiger for the Smithsonian.



So terrifying was its appearance that the Smithsonian ordered the taxidermist to close the tiger's mouth.



Today, the tiger is on display in a second story alcove overlooking the museum's mezzanine.



Dave Hasinger's Winchester pre-64 Model 70, chambered in 375 H&H Magnum.

Its great size caused much speculation, but no one dared to dream that it would weigh 857 pounds and measure 11 feet, 1 inch. By comparison, Corbett's famed Bachelor of Powalgarh stretched "10 feet, 7 inches over the curves." The Forestry and Game Commission of India officially certified Hasinger's tiger as the largest on record.

After returning to America, Hasinger contacted the Smithsonian and offered to donate the tiger for permanent display. It was quickly accepted and, in fact, was so highly regarded that legendary taxidermist Louis Paul Jonas came out of retirement to create the mount.

The tiger was originally completed with an open mouth as it sprang toward a frightened chital, but the pose was so terrifying that the Smithsonian directed the mouth to be closed. The Hasinger tiger remains on display at the Smithsonian to this day, although the chital is no longer part of the exhibit.

Sometime later, Hasinger presented his tiger rifle to Dr. Karl Jonas. Both rifles remained in the Jonas family, but are now being offered by Sportsman's Legacy.

The Hasinger rifle is a Winchester pre-64 Model 70 375 H&H Magnum. Made in 1941, it wears a 25-inch barrel and is fitted with a Paul Jaeger detachable side mount and a Lyman aperture sight. Provenance includes a goodly number of newspaper articles, photographs and a certified letter from the Jonas family detailing its history and connection to the Smithsonian tiger. It is available for \$10,000.

The Jonas rifle is also a Winchester pre-64 Model 70. Made in 1957, it's a Super Grade African chambered in 458



The left-hand stock for Dr. Jonas' rifle appears to have been made in the Winchester Custom Shop.

Winchester Magnum. This rifle has what appears to be a left-hand stock made by the Winchester Custom Shop. Sadly, Winchester factory records for most Model 70s were destroyed, so a confirmation of this unique feature is impossible. Provenance includes field photographs of Dr. Jonas with his tiger, although the rifle is not clearly visible. It is available for \$7,500. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

COMPLETE DETAILS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF BOTH RIFLES CAN BE SEEN AT SPORTSMANSLEGACY.COM. IN ADDITION, IMPORTANT FIREARMS FROM WRITERS JACK O'CONNOR, COLONEL CHARLES ASKINS, ROY HUNTINGTON, TOM SIATOS AND TODD SMITH ARE ALSO OFFERED.

NOTE: THE AUTHOR'S FIRST BOOK, *Born a Hunter*, CAN BE ORDERED ONLINE AT SPORTINGCLASSICSSTORE.COM—CLICK ON "BOOKS." OR, CALL (800) 849-1004.