

Romancing the Long Rifle

by Harald Wolf



The tradition of the long rifle dates well back to the era of the flintlock muzzleloader and has always been connected to extremely precise long shots, demanding utmost marksmanship from the rifleman. The most famous early long rifle, which left its decisive mark in history, was the Pennsylvania, or popularly called Kentucky rifle of the American colonists of the 18th century. While the regular armies of the Independence war still threw erratic pelaton fire over the battle fields, the backwoodsmen of the American militia taught the Brits a bloody lesson about sniping. They hit their men cleanly at previously unheard of distances up to 300 paces, with black powder and patched lead balls. For a long time, people thought they would gain better ballistics with longer barrels, but the main secret of the outstanding precision of the long Pennsylvania rifle, besides the superb marksmanship of the men, who had to rely on their shooting abilities every single day, was the greatly enlarged distance between the open sights, which reveals the slightest error in aiming the gun.

When the world adopted the breach loader and metallic cases a hundred years later, the long rifle was still essential for long precise shooting; receiver- or tang-mounted peep sights even added a great deal to it. Long shots were, of course, required on wide-open plains. For jungle shooting at close quarters in southern Asia and Africa the hunter's armory was backed up by a heavy and handy large bore double rifle. The double, despite its everlasting fame, was by no means a general-purpose gun, it was rather a very specialized weapon to follow up dangerous, or even worse, wounded big game into thick cover. It was meant as an addition to a general purpose, precise shooting rifle. When Mauser brought out their unbeatable Model 98 bolt

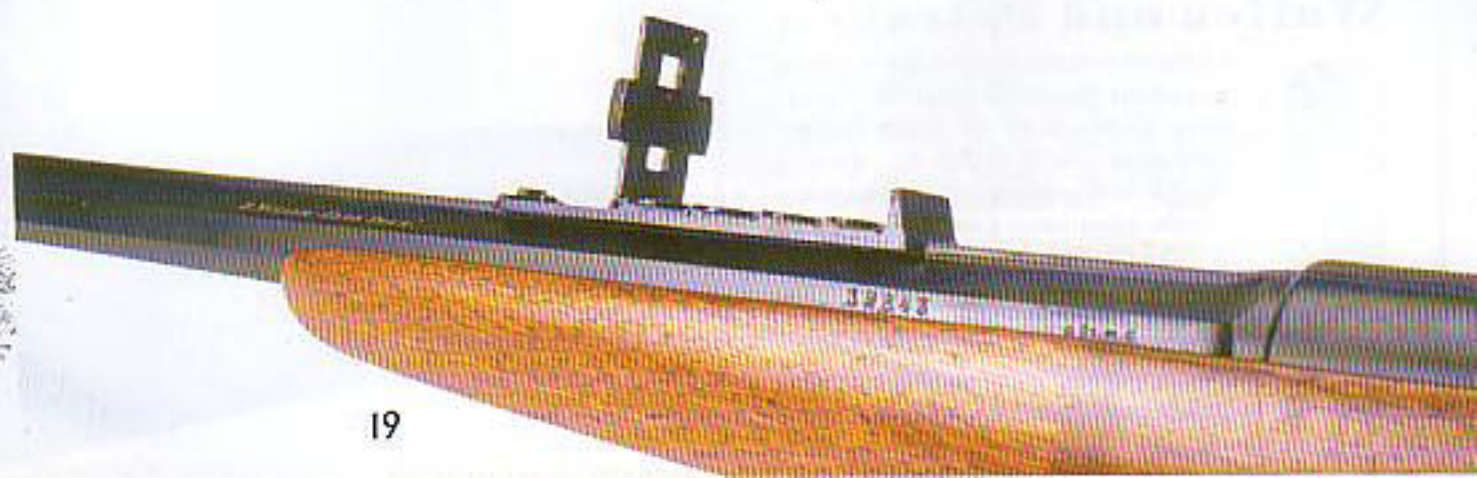
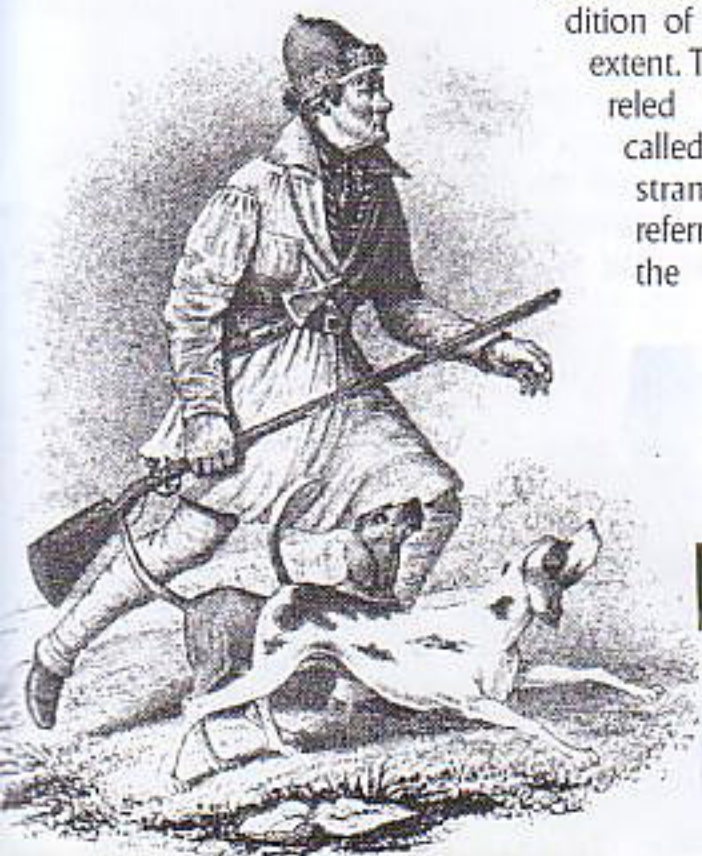
action, they also continued the tradition of the long rifle to some extent. They furnished short barreled and fully stocked, so called "Stutzen" as well, which, strangely enough, was referred to by Americans as the Mannlicher style rifle.

The short Mannlicher or Mauser Stutzen was again a very specialized rifle for mountain hunting in the Austrian Alps, which occasionally involved some serious climbing. Those chamois hunters willingly sacrificed flat trajectory for the handiness and lightness of the Stutzen.

The Mauser long rifle pictured above is a magnificent example of a so called Cape Rifle. It was made around 1904 by the famous Immanuel Meffert of Suhl/Germany for his agent R. Müller of Cape Town/South Africa. It features a heavy octagonal barrel of 33" with integral full-length rib. Typically for a Cape Rifle, it has English express sights up to 500 yards plus a flip-up sliding sight for up to 1,200 yards. The South African settlers strongly believed in these long rifles for hunting open plains, but also wanted a gun that doubled up as a defense arm in case of war, which situation was smoldering at the turn of the 20th century. In my archives I found a funny advertisement of Müller. He was not only representing German firearms and ammunition, he was also the agent of Steinway pianos. An unusual combination indeed: guns & pianos!

This particular Cape Rifle features an odd caliber: 11,2 x 60. It was purchased by a Mr. Evans with buffalo hunting in Bechuanaland in mind. To the utmost horror of his family down in the well settled eastern Cape, this young father decided to hunt dangerous game up in the wild country, which we nowadays call Botswana. One night, he and his friends erected their beds right in the open under a tree, and went to sleep. He suddenly woke up, with goose bumps on his neck, sensing danger, and quickly grabbed his long rifle, but nothing happened, the night was dead still, so he fell asleep again. In the morning, they found fresh tracks of a leopard right between their beds. They had obviously camped under the cat's favorite clawing tree. Next night Evans climbed the tree - the beds were removed, of course - waiting for the leopard to return. It didn't show up, but instead of it, he shot a huge lion with his long rifle.

Long accurate rifles, no matter which action used, were for decades the most popular South African sporting rifles. The advent of the scope changed the picture, because the scope largely eliminated the need for long distance between-the-iron sights for precise shoot-





Crownprince Wilhelm of Prussia and his adjutant Lieutenant von Goßler having a break. In front his plain yet beautiful long Mauser sporter.

ing. The early fragile optical instruments, however, took a good ten years longer to make a break-through in the harsh African bush than in tamed Europe. Now rifle barrels were cut down to 26" and 24", but most rifles were chambered for standard calibers like 7mm Mauser or 8mm Mauser, which didn't require longer tubes.

During the late 1920s and 30s, due to busy developments of new anti-aircraft and anti-tank rifles, slow burning powders became available for the development of magnum sporting calibers as well. To utilize the ballistic potential of these advanced propellants, the long barrel came into demand again. They didn't go as far as to reintroduce 34" musket tubes again, but 26" to 30" length barrels were the standard for high power cartridges. Nowadays, it seems that no sportsman in the entire world can make a living without a whole range of ultra flat shooting magnums, some of which have quite extraordinary designations such as Super Express, Ultra Magnum or Pegasus. At the same time people ask for ridiculously short barrels, but it's a matter of

and greatly increased blast from unburned powder.

I always had the feeling that magnum cartridges are shot so poorly because the shooter is flinching, due rather to the unpleasantly loud muzzle report than to actual recoil - although the so-called rocket-effect of blasted out powder, exploding virtually in front of the muzzle, certainly increases the recoil considerably. To compensate the recoil with a muzzle break isn't a great idea either, at least in my opinion. It badly affects your eardrums and those of your trackers as well, and if you add the length of the break to your barrel, you end up with a long gun, but poor ballistics, again. So, just use your common sense! There is nothing wrong with the recoil of a well-balanced .300 magnum with ballistically sufficient barrel length - the minimum, in my opinion, being 26". On behalf of muzzle breaks, I have a little story on hand: We were hunting the Zambezi valley, and had shot a buffalo cleanly with a good old .404 Jeffery. The death blow had just faded away, when the bush suddenly

parted opposite of us, and out came another PH with his two not too happy looking clients. They had been approaching the same herd, but we had no idea that they were in the vicinity. Bad luck for them, but there were buffalo aplenty in the area, and they got their dagga bulls shortly afterwards. We had an early lunch out in the bush, and they were, of course, invited to join us. Soon we were talking guns. The other PH proudly presented his old fairly battered Parker & Pale .404 Jeffery, which he inherited from his father. His clients had ultra light plastic stocked and frighteningly beefed-up .416 Super magnums, made of stainless steel and fitted with enormous muzzle breaks, obviously designed for .50 Browning machine guns. Now it dawned on me, why they were wearing ear protectors in the bush! They busily recited the marvelous ballistic figures up and down, but couldn't properly defend themselves, when I asked them why, for heaven's sake, they are going through torture to shoot a buffalo at 60 yards? How someone can wear ear protectors in the bush remains a mystery to me.

Nowadays, particularly in Europe, short telescopic bolt actions are in vogue. They may shorten the total length of the rifle up to four inches, without compromising on the barrel length. I personally doubt - backed up by some bad experiences - if they offer the same reliability in the bush as the time proven Mauser 98 action and its thoroughbred offspring. If you must have one, be my guest, but I won't go with you after buffalo and don't even think about lion.

Many people, fired by the gun industry, think that you need an ultra short and handy rifle for shots at running game. They couldn't be more wrong on this issue. Balance is the key to quick action, and every seasoned wing shot knows that a long barreled and well balanced shotgun swings far better than any short one. There is not much of a difference with running shots on big game. Snap shooting in thick jungles is a different story though, but even in the rainforest one doesn't have to go to extremes.

Personal taste is something one shouldn't dispute, but for me, the ethical aspect of a firearm, of any firearm, in fact, is of utmost importance. Someone once told me, deadly seriously, that a gun must have sex appeal, like the silhouette of a beautiful woman. At first, I laughed at him, but thinking twice, I had to admit that he was absolutely right.



Crocodile hunting in the Mannlicher rifle and a

R. Müller

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common sense to realize that large volume magnum shells and short barrels don't mate properly. The outcome would be a rather disappointing fall-off in muzzle velocity, adding negatively to the already very optimistic (?) factory figures. On top of it, you will get a dramatic muzzle flash





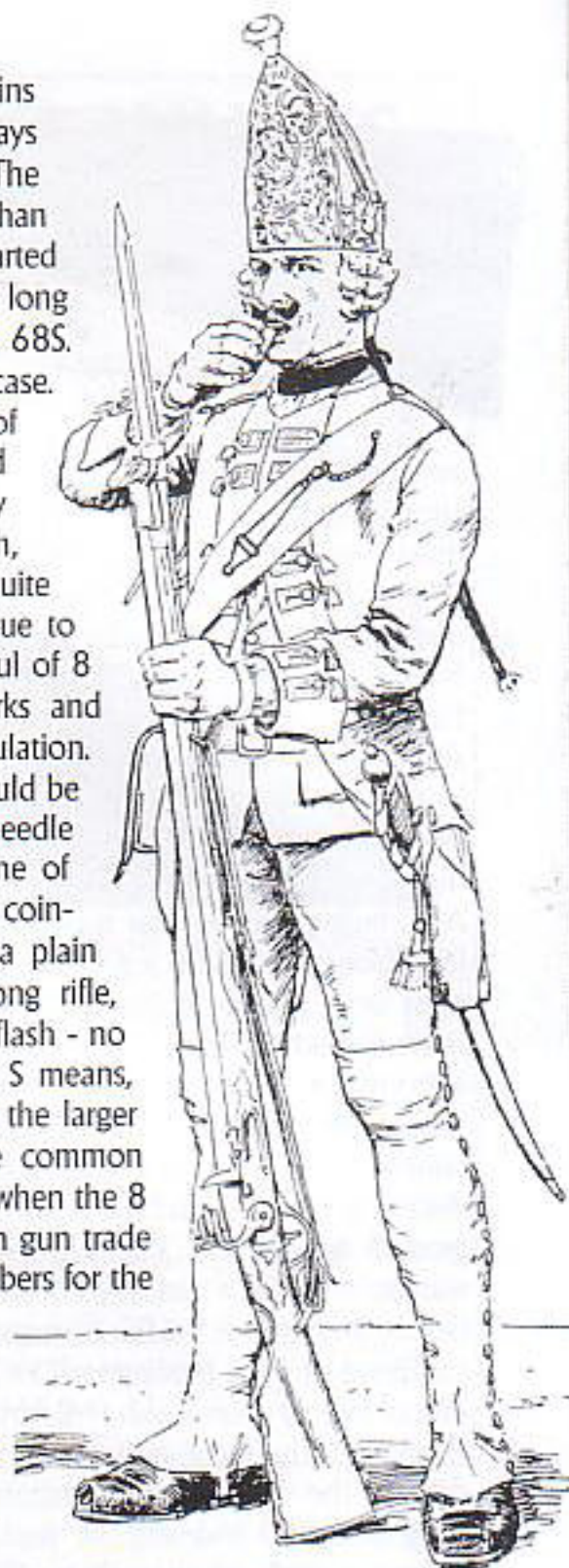
1920s. The gunbearer to the right is holding both extremes, a very short and long Mauser Cape Rifle.

Fancy engravings on too curly wood might be nice add-ons, but the real class of a gun is immediately recognized by its elegant lines. The true connoisseur appreciates the magnificent style and superb handling of such a rifle at first glance. Short stubby guns loose out hopelessly - nothing competes (save women) - with a beautiful gun, and the longer it is, the more elegantly its cut. I am fond of long rifles, and nobody can skunk me out. I'm used to all the bloody jokes on my long rifles by those who think they are very peculiar. The most frequent one when I'm home is the question whether my grandpa served the Old Fritz with the royal guards of the so called "long guys". (A brief lesson in European history: "Old Fritz" was the nickname of King Frederik II of Prussia. Himself a very small and tiny man, he was very fond of his royal guards, hand-picked from the tallest men of the country, thus popularly called the "lange Kerls" - "the long guys".) Well, my ancestors came from Prussia, but unfortunately, none of them passed on a musket to me. Anyway, I do have a distinct foible for elegant long rifles, but as I mentioned before, personal taste is something so private that it shouldn't be debated.

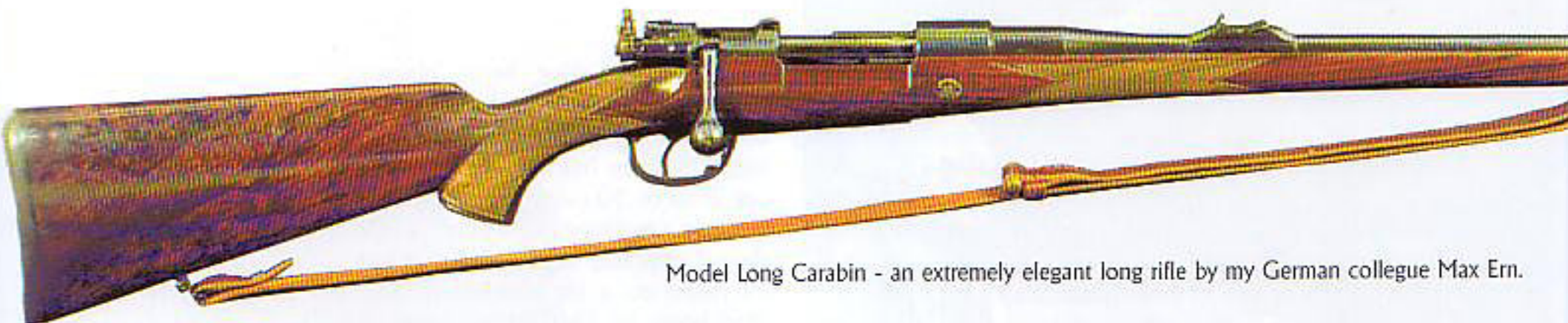
The first real magnum cartridge that captured the market, was the 8 x 60 Magnum Bombe, which is featured in a separate article of this issue. Gerlich's Halger range of magnums, the 7 x 73 vom Hofe and both the 6,5 x 68 and 8 x 68S by RWS were setting the magnum standards in the 1930s, reaching previously unheard of velocities. These high velocity cartridges were all designed for barrel lengths around 28" to 30", they were truly long rifles. The British .300 H&H magnum, or then called Holland .30 Super, couldn't compete at all, as the British Cordite loads hardly delivered any better ballistics than today's .30-06 factory loads.

For hunting heavy plains game and deer hunting, I have always been in favor of the 8mm calibers. The bigger diameter hits them harder than any 7mm or .30 caliber. When I started planning a real long rifle for precise long shots, I obviously went for the 8 x 68S. It's based on a big non-belted case. Most books list 1940 as the year of introduction. However, my friend Jon Speed dug out a RWS factory drawing, dated December 27th, 1937. Christmas 1937 - they had quite a motivated staff in those days! Due to WWII, I presume that only a handful of 8 x 68S rifles by the Mauser Works and Custom Rifle Makers went into circulation. To find an original pre war rifle should be harder than finding the proverbial needle in the haystack. Quite recently, one of those super-rare items popped up coincidentally in my workshop. It was a plain and simple, yet nicely elegant long rifle, sporting a 28" barrel - no muzzle flash - no noticeable recoil! The designation S means, that the 8 x 68 was designed for the larger .323 bullet, instead of the more common .319" projectile. In the late 1930s, when the 8 x 68S was introduced, the German gun trade wanted to standardize all 8mm calibers for the larger S bullet, thus ending the terrible confusion of two different diameters.

The 8 x 68S originally came out with a 185gr H-Mantel bullet, with a sharply pointed copper capped hollow point, which was a rather controversial performer. 15 years after the last world war, when RWS resumed production in the mid 1950s, they continued with the H-Jacket, but soon switched to a more rounded copper cap. Later still, they added a 196gr FMI and a 224gr KS (Cone point soft nose), the latter becoming very popular, and actually the standard load for the 8 x 68S. A lightweight and very fast 180gr cone-point was added to the range in the 1980s. This one was in demand by mountain hunters, although the bullet obviously lacks penetration



The Spaniard Erique del Aguila. I never heard of another elephant hunter using the fast 8 x 68S for this dangerous sport.



Model Long Carabin - an extremely elegant long rifle by my German colleague Max Ern.

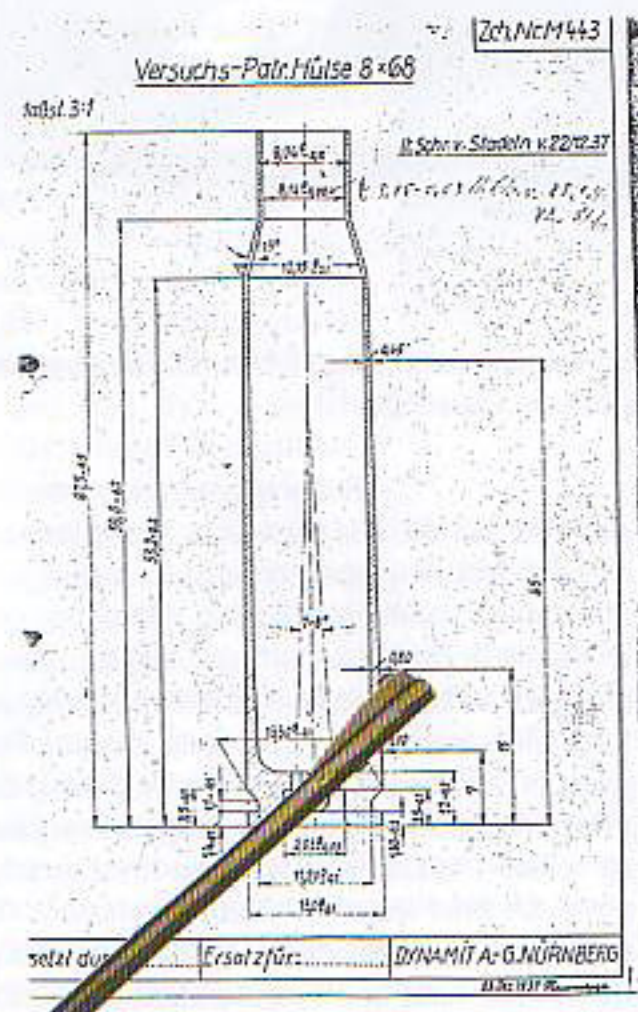
and tends to blow up at shorter distances. I strongly believe that a bullet for heavy game must have good sectional density. Besides RWS, only the Austrian Hirtenberger ammo plant adopted the 8 x 68S and brought out two loads. One with the excellent 200gr Nosler partition and another with the odd ABC bullet, a homogenous gilded metal projectile with a small lead core in the tip. Unfortunately, some European rifles don't digest the Nosler partition very well, and the ABC bullets lack in low trajectory. To cut a long story short, the 8 x 68S has always been a bit sickly on the bullet side. The cartridge never gained any following in North America, although it should be a perfect elk and moose round. Its main stronghold has been confined to Europe. In recent years, sales are declining however, and the 8 x 68S is losing ground against the .300 Weatherby. I also want to mention a curiosity on behalf of RWS factory ammo in 8 x 68S. A cartridge collector friend of mine brought me an old box of official factory ammo with FMJs and electronic primers. The lot # indicated a production date in the 1960s. Unfortunately the only thing I could find out is, that Heym of Germany built a prototype rifle for this ammo. However, I suspect it was a law enforcement long range sniping affair.

In addition to Germany and Austria, the 8 x 68S has always been very popular with French and Spanish sportsmen. I was rather surprised to find it quite popular in South Africa as well. One of our Spanish subscribers sent me some lovely photos of the 1960s. His dad used to hunt around the globe with his 8 x 68S Mauser rifle. He was the only sportsman I ever heard of, using the 8 x 68S with solids on elephant in CAR. I certainly wouldn't do that. My old friend Tony Sanchez, who always has some odd stories from the good old

days on hand, took the late Friedrich Krupp of Krupp Steel on safari in Sudan in the 1950s. Back then, it was the most expensive safari the Sudan had ever seen, but the master of the rings, as he was nicknamed after the three ring logo of Krupp Steel, was not a very talkative man, and the 40 days safari was a rather boring affair. He drove Tony nuts, because whenever he showed him elephant, buffalo and lion, old Krupp was not very interested, but every time they saw a gazelle far away on the horizon, Friedrich Krupp became excited and loaded his long barreled 8 x 68S. It always took him ages to get ready, but each time when a gazelle hit the dust, the old man was delighted and felt like a king.

My decision to chamber my long rifle for the 8 x 68S was clear. However, being unhappy with the factory ammo available, I decided to make my own, as I would be too difficult a customer for someone else's product. I strongly believe that the very best hunting bullet ever designed, was the DWM (Deutsche Waffen- und Munitionsfabriken) Strong Jacket Bullet of the 1930s. (see Hatari Times # 6 on the 9,3 Brenneke and the article on the 8 x 60 Magnum in this issue). Jack Carter of Trophy Bonded Bullets was also intrigued by the DWM design and took a loan based on it as

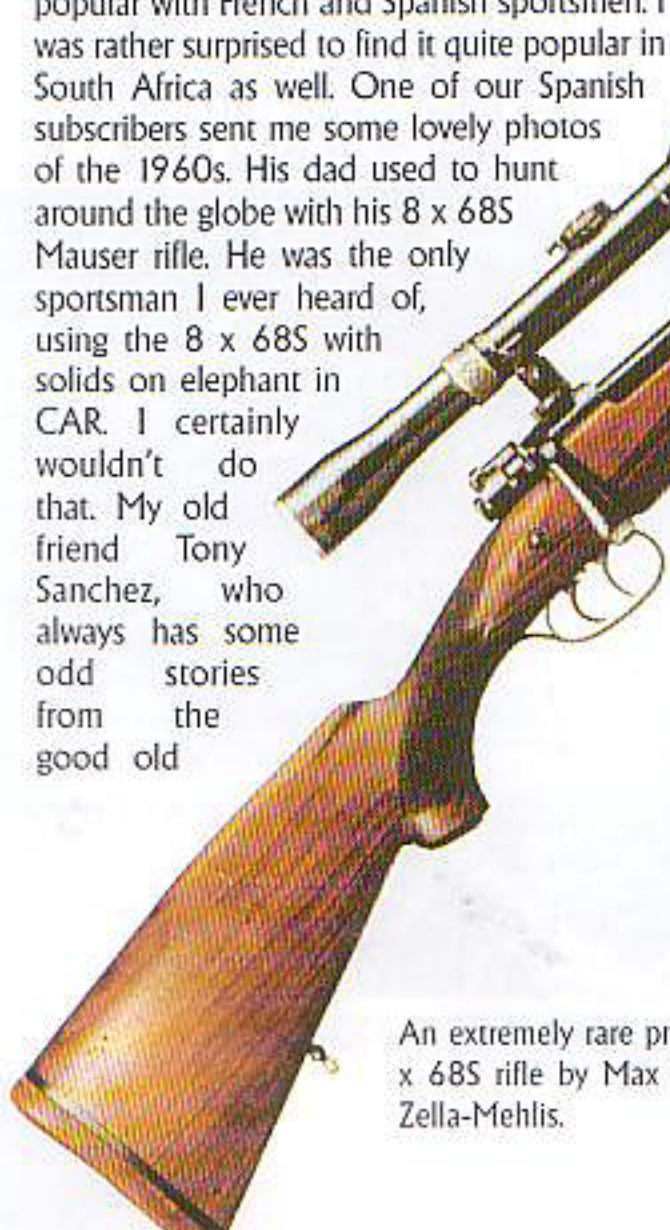
a starter to develop his Bear Claw Bullet. Since they were quite difficult to manufacture. He later simplified his bullets to a solid shank type, not dissimilar to the Hirtenberger ABC, but with a substantially larger lead core. So I reproduced the old magic DWM Strong Jacket and improved it with a bonded lead core. When it comes to hunting bullets, I believe in two things: firstly in conventional lead cores and secondly in heavy for caliber bullet weights. Even a long-range rifle is no exception to this rule of mine. Light bullets might start off with very impressive muzzle velocities, but what you really want, is an aerodynamic bullet of high sectional density to carry the flat trajectory way out to a long range. This is certainly the basic purpose of a long-range rifle, no matter



if we are talking about the continental 8 x 68S or the American .300 Weatherby. By the way, the very popular .300 Winchester, due to its short neck and short overall length, is not really suitable for bullets heavier than 180gr, since the bigger slugs have to be seated very deep, thus reducing powder capacity. I found the best compromise for the 8 x 68S in a 210gr semi pointed Strong Jacket projectile. Incidentally, for the various .300 magnums I prefer a 200gr bullet. If you hunt heavy African plains game, elk and maral stags or bear, you shouldn't go for less lead.

Now, with the ammo question sorted out, I went shopping for a good quality long barrel of 28" or more to squeeze the most out of the 8 x 68S shell. I soon faced problems. None of the barrel factories was able to supply what I wanted. The barrels were either too short, or not available for the 8 x 68S twist rate, which is different to the 8mm Mauser. Or the set up cost for a special length and special contour were truly outrageous, and delivery time wouldn't fit my schedule for my South Africa trip, for which I badly wanted the long rifle.

What now? While filing on a client's rifle I was desperately thinking how to solve the problem. My eyes suddenly caught a



An extremely rare pre-war 8 x 68S rifle by Max Wolf of Zella-Mehlis.



all photos: © H. Wolf/Hatari Verlag

glimpse of a bundle of old Argentine Mauser barrels, the remains of some stripped surplus guns, ready to be dumped. Cursing myself for not thinking about it earlier, I immediately dropped my file and grabbed one of those old barrels with my left hand, and my micro pliers with my right. Yes, it would work to ream out the old caliber 7,63 Argentine and re-rifle the barrel to 8 x 685. The length of 29" would be perfect, and the military step-down contour could be customized on a lathe. So I sent the best barrel to someone who still did traditional cut rifling. Four weeks later, the barrel was fitted to a newly made Dumoulin Mauser action, which has no thumbhole on the side, thus reducing any torque on the action.

Since I wanted at least a four-round magazine capacity, I milled a magazine box from scrap. The problem with powerful calibers - and the 8 x 685 can be termed one, in that the bullet tips in the magazine get hammered by the recoil. The cartridges are smashed against the front wall of the magazine box. Sooner or later the bullet tips are damaged, or get driven deeper into the case, thus increasing the pressure. As with any problem, the Mauser engineers already had a solution to solve the issue 70 years ago. They screwed a vertical rail to the rear left and right inside walls of the box. The extractor recess of every cartridge pushed into the magazine, hooks behind these rails and thus cannot move horizontally. Genius and yet simple! (See my article on the 8 x 60 magnum for an alternative solution). Since I made the magazine box from full steel bar stock, I milled and filed into the steel rather than screwing or soldering on the rails to the side-walls. A brief warning to keen colleagues of the gun making guild: the job is awfully time consuming when filing by hand, and takes a lot of fitting, since the cartridges must have a certain amount of play, or they get jammed and won't feed properly! I've now adapted this rail to any big bore rifle magazine. It takes some filing and joint grease, as I pointed out, but it's definitely worth the effort. Magnum mag-

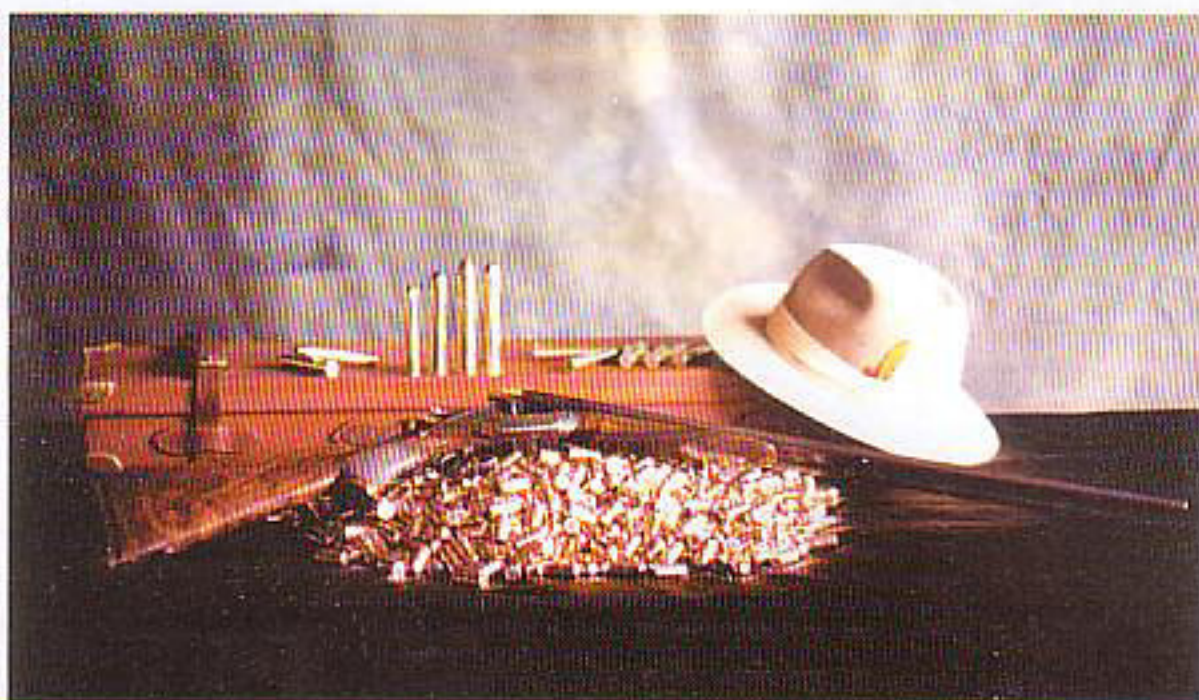
azine boxes made by wire cutting in larger batches would be an easy job.

Since the advent of the German "Jaeger-Rifle", the mother of the Pennsylvania rifle, (which was designed by immigrant German gun makers), every early sniper and sporting rifle featured the German double set trigger. The working principle is the following: if you decide to take a shot, you first pull the rear trigger, thus cocking a spring-loaded leverage. The front trigger will release fire, and can be adjusted safely to an extremely delicate weight of pull, by means of an adjustment screw between both triggers. Well made double set triggers are marvelous - cheaply

done, they are a nightmare. Of course, they are only meant for precise shooting, when you can take your time - then they are unbeatable. This was exactly what I wanted for my long rifle project. In a hurry, you can use the front trigger as a direct trigger, without cocking the system. This, however, requires a quite long and harder pull. The set trigger is therefore not suitable for dangerous game weapons.

To be honest, a long rifle can have some drawbacks. For hunting in thick bush it's as unsuitable as a .470 Nitro double for springbuck hunting on open plains, where you can see as far as tomorrow. And if your mountain hunting involves a lot of serious climbing, you also sacrifice advanced ballistics for a light and handy rifle. However, to be honest, a lot of mountain hunting in central Asia or in the Rockies doesn't require high alpine climbing skills. In many places there are mules and horses obligingly helping to carry the sportsman and his rifle into high country. Traveling around the world by plane

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gun in any way. This is exactly what I did.

The stock was made of hard, but not too fancy Caucasian walnut, in very classic straight lines. The butt-end dimensions were cut to the maximum dimensions of a large Pachmayr old English pad. Due to the elegant lines of my long rifle, the large pad, which transmits any recoil gently to the shoulder, isn't out of proportion at all. Such a large pad looks awkward on any short rifle though.

Although I don't intend to shoot via open sights while hunting, save emergency situations, I mounted iron sight, since a rifle without open sights looks naked and unfinished to me. Unfortunately, I couldn't lay my hands on an original long range sporting

Mauser back sight, so I went for the readily available Martini target sight. It's real fun to shoot at 250 yard targets on the shooting range. I am seriously considering mounting a Rigby type peep sight as well. Now, the choice of the most suitable scope was a tough nut to crack. I finally decided to mount the new Zeiss 5 to 15 power with very fine Plex reticles - a choice, which I certainly didn't regret, although this optical masterpiece was very expensive. For the particular purpose of an ultra precise long rifle, you simply cannot beat that marvelous scope. It was mounted with a quick-detachable common European 900 swivel mount, made of steel, of course.

When I held everything finished in

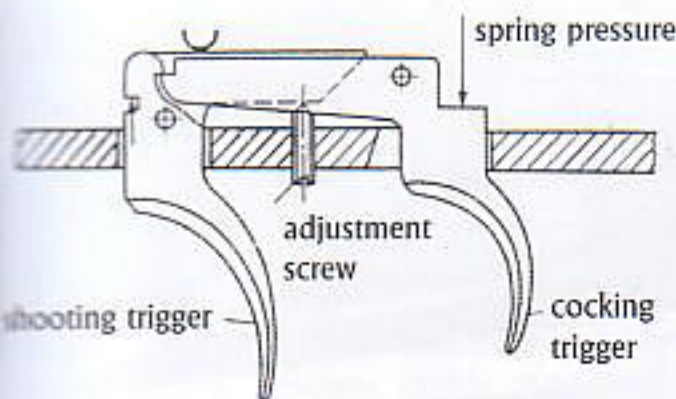
with a long rifle however, is truly awkward, but generations of gun makers already sorted out suitable solutions many years before I started my career. In *Hatari Times*

2 was an item about the detachable stock system designed by the genius Charles Newton. I built my long rifle to this pattern. To those, who joined the *Hatari Times* family after issue # 2: The Newton Buffalo Rifle featured a magazine floor plate with dual purpose, since it also acted as a lever to unscrew

the front receiver screw. On the rear end, the action firmly hooks under a metal tang, inletted into the upper pistol grip.

You can strip down the long rifle to two very convenient length pieces in a minute, without any additional tools and without affecting the accuracy of the





The German Double Set Trigger

my hands, I truly fell in love with my long rifle. Due to the slim and partly fluted barrel, my long rifle isn't heavy at all. The gun balances like a dream, and the long barrel makes it very steady while aiming. There is no undue muzzle blast and no noticeable recoil. You will notice from some of the pictures, that I had to take it on safari without checkering, because I ran out of time. I did the 24 lpi checkering after my return from South Africa.

What more can I say? Oryx, white tailed gnu, springbuck (a black one finally taken in the eastern Cape) and hartebeest were very impressed with my 8 x 685 long rifle, they simply hit the dust and died on the spot. The red hartebeest, I shot with PH - Deon van Dyk in the Natal midlands, makes a special memory. It was a monster bull, which should secure a very high scoring rank in any record book, if I one day care to have it measured. The bull was standing right in the open grassland, at no less than 400 yards, stubbornly glaring at us and totally convinced that we couldn't reach him. Suffice to mention, that he wouldn't allow us to stalk him any closer. Now 400 yards is a distance I normally consider unsporting to shoot at game, but he was just too sure I wouldn't make it, and he was too big a trophy to resist. I took a steady rest on the shooting sticks, took a final deep breath, cocked the set trigger, bang - woop, and the overly confident hartebeest became a converted believer in my concept of the long rifle.

I had more trouble with a blue wildebeest bull, but that was entirely my fault, and not the gun's. I messed things up with my first shot, which hit him a trifle too low and too far back. The bull, which was running with a herd of zebra, was pulled down, but got up again and took off, screened by the striped horses. No doubt, he would have expired after a short time from the terrible wound inflicted by the Strong Jacket, but wildebeest are a tough lot, and to follow up a wounded one can develop into a bloody tiring chase. I also hate to let a wounded animal run for miles in agony. We saw him separating from the zebra herd, still running strongly through the open plains towards very thick bush. We certainly didn't want to comb the thorns for him, so I turned my scope to 15 power and took a steady rest on the three pole shooting sticks. He was running at a slight angle away from me. He was a good 500 yards away and quickly gaining distance. I held high, swung my long rifle, and instinctively touched the set trigger at the right moment. Before the



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echo of the connecting bullet reached our ears, we saw him somersaulting brilliantly in a huge cloud of dust. The vicious 8mm bullet had hit him square on the route of his tail.

On the open plains of Southern Africa, my 8 x 685 long rifle certainly surpassed my wildest expectations. All my fellow hunters and PHs, who couldn't resist teasing me with sarcastic comments about my lovely long rifle, finally had to admit their respect for this unusual, yet very classic rifle.

If I one day, pack my bags to hunt Mongolia or Kazakstan, my long rifle will be my first choice. As a distinct conservative, particularly when it comes to sporting guns and rifles, I might be regarded as an odd character in this world of plastic camouflage stocks and muzzle breaks, but I can tell you something from the bottom of my heart:

My long rifle has sex appeal!

