



PART I

Kilimanjaro

This rifle does its name justice.

by Jameson Parker



Kilimanjaro! THERE ARE FEW WORDS more evocative of adventure than Kilimanjaro, the name of Africa's highest mountain, the place Hemingway said was the Maasai's "House of God." It is an inspired choice of name for a custom rifle company, conjuring up images of black-maned lions, Cape buffalo with their arrogant, baleful stare, the graceful grand jeté of the gazelles, wall tents under the shade of fever trees, wood smoke and whisky, and above all, the glorious freedom and excitement of the hunt.

If hunting is, as José Ortega y Gasset expressed it, a desire to get away from the modern world and give yourself the pleasure "...of being Paleolithic," it seems to me self-defeating to get too high-tech about the thing. Yes, the cell phone and the medi-vac helicopter are better than dying of gangrene and self-loathing in the shadow of the snows of Kilimanjaro, but beyond that, let's not throw the baby out with the bathwater and start using predator drones to bag our eland.

Erik Eike, President and founder of Kilimanjaro Rifles, understands the romance of hunting. Other rifle companies focus exclusively on Super-Improved-Screaming-Meemies that drive 250-plus-grain bullets out at well over 3000 feet-per-second with enough foot-pounds of energy to kill a tyrannosaurus rex at distances formally limited to intercontinental ballistic missiles. Kilimanjaro can and will make your rifle in any caliber you wish, including the latest and greatest wildcat, but there is also an emphasis on the old-fashioned that really appeals to me. Want to hunt with the kind of lever-action Teddy Roosevelt might have carried? They make one. Want to hunt with something really old-fashioned, like a Sharps, or a Schuetzen, or maybe a blunderbuss? Look no further. (If you do go hunting with a blunderbuss, please send me an account of your adventures care of this magazine.)

In keeping with this attitude, there is also an emphasis on the kind of aesthetic appeal that no synthetic stock can ever achieve. Don't misunderstand: I like synthetic stocks and admire the benefits they can provide—and Kilimanjaro makes one called the Jaguar—but I would never hang one on the wall.

Which brings me to the stocks Kilimanjaro makes. A beautifully



figured piece of walnut is the single most aesthetically appealing part of a fine rifle. Engraving and gold inlays can add a lot of bling, but all the bling in the world won't transform a sow's ear.

Kilimanjaro starts with beautiful Turkish walnut and then offers upgrades so beautiful they can break a man's heart, but they take things a step further.

Most laminated stocks look, at best, like office furniture of the Bauhaus school. Kilimanjaro has a proprietary process they call Stealth Lamination, which is the hottest thing since sliced bread. It provides all the benefits of lamination (the greatest possible strength and stability of any stock material) without sacrificing the beauty of the walnut. They accomplish this by cutting the wood in half along its thickness, reversing the halves, and then bonding them together under pressure, thereby reorienting the grain while preserving—or even enhancing—the beauty of the wood. Not only does this provide greater strength and stability than an un-laminated piece of walnut, but Kilimanjaro also claims it renders the stock impervious to the warping effects of temperature and moisture.

(Apparently one writer tested their claim by submersing a stock in a bathtub for a long time without changing the point of impact. Since I do not wish to have Erik Eike and large lawyers with no necks hammering on my door, I will take their word for it.)

Eric Eike founded Kilimanjaro Rifles in 2009, but the company



has been around under different names and different ownership for many years. When the economic troubles of 2008 came crashing down on all of us, Eike stepped in and bought the company he admired and set about retooling it (you should pardon the expression) and actually expanding it. It was a courageous move in troubled times.

Putting aside their historical recreations and the lever action, the company offers three custom models, the flagship Kilimanjaro, the Serengeti and the synthetic Jaguar, but don't confuse this with production rifle making. You can order a rifle with one of their proprietary actions and their barrel of choice (Lilja) or you can have your rifle made around virtually any action and barrel. You can go with their SereKote ceramic metal coating, or you can choose whatever finish works for you. In fact, the last item on each price list reads, "Anything your heart desires. Price on request."

As an example of their understanding of the romance of hunting and their ability to make virtually anything you can dream of, consider this:

I spent much of my childhood in Germany, and it was there that I first encountered hunting and hunters. As a result, I have a weakness for all things Germanic, from

firearms to beer to Heidi Klum. Erik Eike somehow discovered this and sent me two rifles for testing tailored to my sentimental memories and inclinations. Both were in old-fashioned calibers, one the 9.3x62mm made famous by Mauser back in 1905 and—according to the late Finn Aagaard—more popular among resident African hunters than any other cartridge for over half a century. The other rifle was chambered in the stately and dignified .300 H&H, the first of the .300 magnums, introduced by Holland & Holland in 1925. And both rifles came with the so-called Mannlicher (or full) stock.

Just looking at those rifles transported me back to the wooded hills above the Rhine River valley. I had a mental image of myself in Lederhosen and a Tyrolean hat with a badger's brush in the hatband, but if it meant I could own either one of those magnificent beauties I would happily hunt in fishnet stockings and a sequined dress, weather permitting.

And how did they shoot? Keep your subscription up; I'll write about them in the next issue. ☉