

THE MAN WHO IS DIRECTING THE U.S. WAR ON BEASTS

Dr. Bell, From His Office in Washington, Moves His Little Army About, Killing a Stock-Slaying Wolf Here, a Bear There and Bobcat or Cougar Somewhere Else



Dr. William B. Bell, Uncle Sam's official hunter.

BY WILLIAM AHERTON DU PUY,

THE arch criminal of the range country," said Dr. W. B. Bell, who is immediately responsible for the work of that army of hunters which the government maintains in constant action from Arkansas to Puget sound, and from Michigan to Lower California, "was the notorious Custer wolf. I am glad to say that I have here in my locker the skin of that outlaw. It cost the government six months of the time of one of its most skillful hunters to finally kill this vicious beast.

"The story of the Custer wolf is one of the most interesting true tales of the wilds that I have ever heard. This creature was a lone timber wolf which ranged the region around about Custer, South Dakota, and preyed upon the livestock of the ranches in a region as big as many a state. In all the history of predatory animals on the range, no creature has ever been known that equaled in viciousness and cleverness this lone wolf. Tonight he might fall upon a herd of cattle in some lonesome detour, dash into them, cut a hamstring here, slash a throat there, maliciously rend and tear every creature that he could reach. In the fierceness of its instincts, the Custer wolf selected from the herds cows heavy with calves and dragged them down that he might gratify his taste for his favorite tidbit. Thus was the damage wrought particularly great, and thus was the cruelty of the creature beyond comparison.

"Listening to the entreaties of the cattlemen of South Dakota, the government sent one of its most experienced and successful hunters, H. P. Williams, into the region ravaged by the Custer wolf, and instructed him to remain there until he had dispatched the animal. Great as was Williams' skill in just this sort of task, it took him six months to accomplish his purpose. The Custer wolf seemed to have a charmed life. Once he actually lay down on a trap set by Williams which was sprung and which pulled a clump of hair from his body but did not hold him. Another trap caught the side of his foot, but he tore loose.

"Williams resorted to every device. Science, co-operating with its practical hunters in the field, has devised a means of producing various scents which catch the sensitive noses of these creatures of the wilds and lead them to destruction. One of these odors placed in the neighborhood of a trap is pretty sure to arrest the attention of the passing wolf, cause him to sniff and paw about and probably get caught in the trap. Another of them is the distinctive odor of the female wolf, which plays the role of the siren singing on the rocks and which may lead this prowler to his destruction. Williams covered his shoes with this strange odor and thus induced the Custer wolf to follow him about, convinced that wily creature that there was a mate for him in the vicinity, and led him even to go so far as to prepare himself a cave against the time when he should capture her.

"It was a strange fact of the wilds that this vicious creature as he prowled about carried with him a peculiar bodyguard of nature. This bodyguard consisted of two coyotes which were always in the offing, were outriders, as might be two destroyers for a battleship. These coyotes never dared approach their master. He would pull down a cow and glut himself with food and they would remain near until he had finished.

"Finally, however, when he was surfeited and went away for a nap the coyotes would help themselves to the abundant food supply which remained. Thus these smaller wolves lived upon the master for years. Always near him, they were his protection because they gave the alarm at the approach of any hunter. A number of times they prevented Williams

from getting a shot at the old outlaw. "At last, while still possessed of the idea of obtaining a mate, created in him by the cleverness of the trapper, the Custer wolf put his foot between two jaws of steel and was caught. So great was his vicious strength, however, that he broke the chain of the trap, but he could not release his foot from its grip. The hunter followed him for miles and finally got a long shot at him which meant his destruction. Dark, incise, quick-acting, fast-talking man was this director of the hunters, a man who seemed to know his game and to be hugely enthusiastic over it. He told me that he grew up as a farmer boy down in Iowa. He had gone to the university of that state, had specialized in zoology, had studied animals from many angles, including investigational work in Italy. Then he became state zoologist in North Dakota, lived for years in the land of the wolves and coyotes, studied the problems of the range, fought the battles from a state standpoint which he had been fighting from a national standpoint since 1916, when he came to Washington, and continued that work for the bureau of biological survey of the department of agriculture.

"How long," I asked, "is the loss suffered by stockmen through the depredations of these predatory animals?" "It is hard to get at the exact figures," said Dr. Bell, "but it is placed somewhere between 20 and 30 million dollars a year. I knew of a wolf in Colorado which took a toll of \$3000 worth of cattle in a single 12-month. In Texas two wolves killed 72 sheep, valued at \$9 each, in a period of two weeks. One wolf in New Mexico killed 25 head of cattle in two months while another was reported by stockmen in the same state to have killed 150 cattle valued at not less than \$5000 during the six months preceding its capture. In Wyoming two male wolves were killed which, during one month, had destroyed 150 sheep and seven colts, while another had chalked up a kill worth \$4500, and yet another had brought down 30 head of cattle in a single spring. Our county agricultural agent in Colville, Utah, reported that wolves had taken 20 per cent of the year's calf crop in that section. He had killed 15 pure-blooded rams in two nights. In Morgan county, Utah, three coyotes killed \$500 worth of sheep in an hour. Near Antonio, Colo., 67 ewes, valued at \$1000, became separated from the rest of the herd and within two days the coyotes had consumed them all. In Arizona one of our hunters followed the trail of a mountain lion, which was later killed, and found the bodies of nine head of cattle which that animal had destroyed.

"After a personal investigation, the president of the State Agricultural

college of New Mexico made an estimate that 25,000 head of cattle, 165,000 sheep and 450 horses were killed annually by predatory animals in that state. These losses amounted to \$2,700,000."

"Which of these animals," I asked, "is the most desperate enemy of man?" "The timber wolf," Dr. Bell replied. "It is individually the most destructive. The coyote, however, is so much more numerous that the sum total of the destruction for which it is responsible is greater than that of the timber wolf. The mountain lion and the bobcat would probably rank next after these.

"The position of the bear with regard to the stock industry of the west is very peculiar. The bear, ordinarily, is satisfied with a diet of nuts, berries, honey and grubs, and prowls about in his good-natured way feeding harmlessly. Then, once in a while, there appears an individual bear which develops into a renegade. Fresh meat from domestic animals is not the normal food of a bear, but it is very easy for him to develop a taste for this food. Once that taste is acquired the bear becomes a destructive outlaw and an enemy to man. Such an individual bear is likely to range about a wilderness, defy the stockmen over a long period of time and do great damage.

"A grizzly bear near Big Piney in

the flesh of cattle and sheep, but he caused panic among them. If he visited a corral where sheep were put away for the night, for instance, he would frighten them to such an extent that they would pile one upon another against the fence upon one side of the corral and those on top would smother those underneath, and hundreds of them would be killed. On another occasion he might scare the sheep so that a whole flock of them would run over a cliff and thus destroy themselves.

"This black bear also had a tooth for the food which sheep herders eat and used to specialize in raiding the camps of these men and helping himself to sides of bacon and other morsels which were to him great delicacies. Few were the sheep herders who would take a chance even when well armed in facing this monster of the forest, and so the government was called upon to send hunters for his destruction.

"H. P. Williams, the same free-loving hunter who had killed the Custer wolf, was sent into Big Piney, and with him went Del Dearth, another man of wide experience.

"This marauding bear had just destroyed a herder's camp when they arrived on his track. Finally they overtook him in a defile of the mountains. The outlaw bear was evi-

markmen that they were, they faced him and pumped lead into him with their automatics as he came on. Williams put three bullets under his ear and Dearth lodged one in his spinal column. So great was the force of the creature that even thus wounded, he came near reaching the hunters before he fell. When they came to examine him they found that he was wounded and lacerated and torn, evidently as a result of a conflict with some other creature of the wilds, probably a great grizzly that was known to live in these mountains. It may have been the anger of his former conflict that made him so bold as to face these hunters and meet his end."

"I suppose different methods are required," I suggested, "for hunting mountain lions and other members of the cat family?"

"Mountain lions," said Dr. Bell, "are usually hunted with dogs. These lions specialize on young colts, and it is the breeders of horses who suffer the greatest damage from their activities. They also destroy many deer. We have special hunters who devote themselves to mountain lions and who develop great skill in taking them. Down in New Mexico we have an old hunter by the name of Ben Lilly, who began his career with taking bears and lions down in

bushes, seized himself a pig, climbed into his tree and settled down to dinner. Waiting in patient observation, the hunter saw this second bobcat, after finishing his meal, practice the same tricks upon the old sow, lead her away from her young, whereupon the first bobcat returned and got himself another pig."

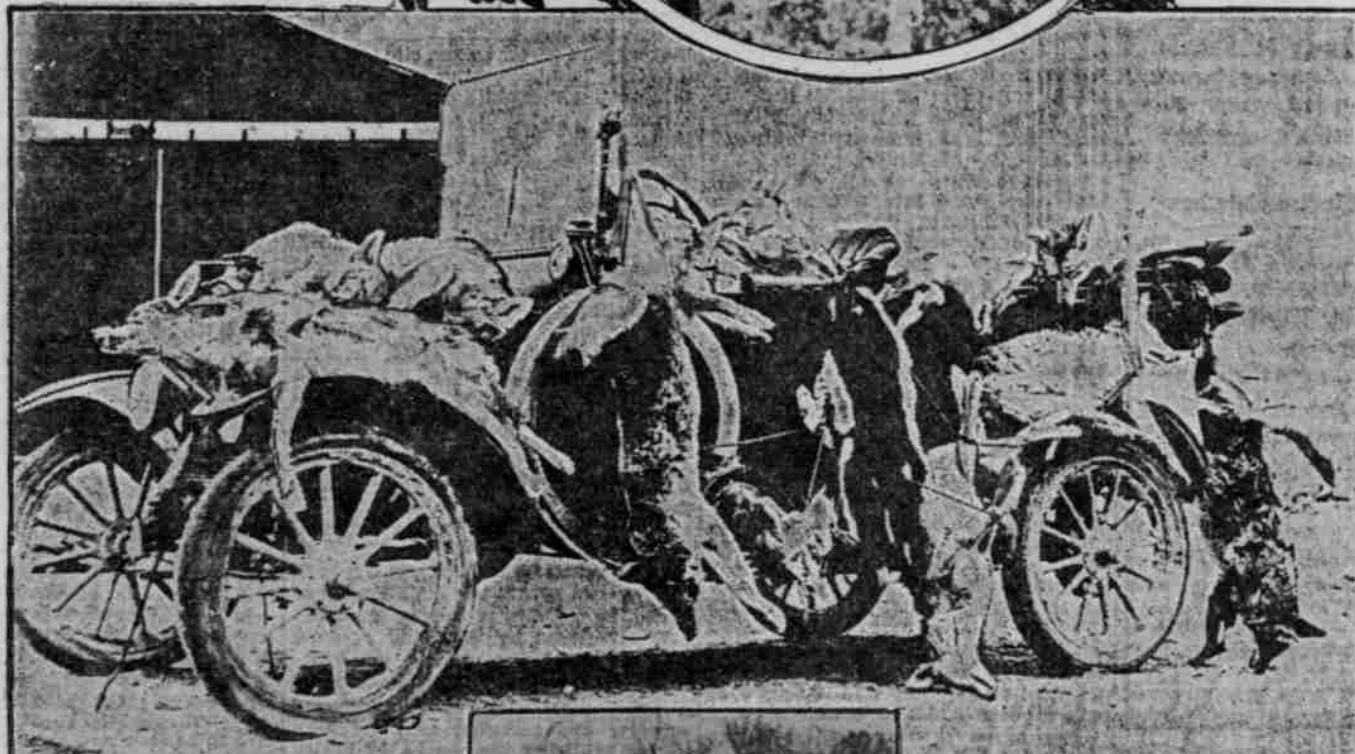
"How large is the force of hunters which the government maintains?" I asked.

"The number is not constant," said Dr. Bell, "but it ranges from 200 to 400 men. It is probably true that so many skilled hunters have never before been recruited into one co-ordinated force. It was back in 1916 that this organization took more definite form than it had known before. In those days hydrophobia was prevalent among the coyotes of the west, and, suffering with it, they came into the settlements and attacked livestock and human beings. The menace became so great as to call attention to the necessity of a more highly organized campaign against these marauders, and the force was built up to its present size.

"At first we went into the west and employed as government hunters the individuals in the various communities who had the greatest reputation along this line. This plan did not get entirely satisfactory results because this employment was based somewhat upon the size of stories that men told of themselves, rather than upon demonstrated success. But when a man became a government hunter he had to prove himself. We accepted no stories of marauders who were mort-



Two timber wolves whose killing days are ended and an old bear with a perverted appetite for the flesh of domestic animals.



An auto loaded with bodies of coyotes killed by government hunters.

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The hunter in winter dress, white so he will fade quickly into the landscape. Wyoming, a huge black bear developed this unusual sort of appetite. Not only would he feed upon

Louisiana. One day, about 20 years ago, he left his home in Louisiana with his rifle and his dogs and never returned. He drifted into the west and there came to be the greatest of the mountain lion killers.

"Even the bobcat, a much smaller creature than the mountain lion, does a great deal of damage and is a predatory animal quite worthy of the steel of the experienced hunter. One of our men has just sent in a story of a bobcat which a farmer had secured in Arkansas which will illustrate a somewhat unusual method of that creature in preying upon the domestic animals. The farmer did not have his gun when he discovered this bobcat. It was perched upon a low limb of a tree and was busily engaged in the process of devouring a bit of its favorite food, a small pig. Nearby the mother of a brood of these pigs was industriously keeping watch over them to protect them from further losses. The bobcat paid no attention to her, but gave itself to the enjoyment of its meal, finished it, and, cat-like, washed its paws and tidied itself up.

"Then it jumped down to the ground and approached the mother of this brood of pigs. She was immediately on the defensive and charged at him viciously. He would avoid her, but played around in front of her in such a way that she followed him further and further away from her pigs. When the distance was sufficiently great to make a raid safe, another bobcat lurched from the

ally wounded but got away. A man's success was measured by the skins or scalps that he delivered. Those hunters who failed to deliver scalps or skins were soon severed from the government payroll. Thus, through the years, we have built up an organization of hunters who demonstrate that they make good. There was probably never a greater group of hunters found together since time began than are today in the service of the United States government.

"There was a trapper by the name of Bakken, for instance, up in Montana, who devised a particularly successful scheme for catching coyotes. Just as game in the desert concentrate at a water hole, so do coyotes tend to gather about a prairie-dog town, because they are very fond of the flesh of these fat little rodents. Bakken worked out a scheme for trapping coyotes around a prairie-dog town. He killed himself some dogs and propped them up in front of holes around the edge of the town. At the approach of each of these holes he would set steel traps, covering them with dirt. Then, knowing the habits of the coyote, he would throw up two fresh lines of dirt which came to a point at the prairie-dog hole. The coyote is shy of fresh dirt, would avoid it and would thus be directed to the point where the traps were set and would be caught. After thus surrounding a prairie-dog town with traps, Bakken would be likely to have several coyotes in the morning."

"Is it the plan of the government," I asked, "to exterminate these varieties of predatory animals?"

"I doubt if we will be able to exterminate them, at least for a long time," said Dr. Bell. "The numbers of coyotes are so great and they are so widely scattered that it will take a long time to reduce them to the point where they are no longer very harmful. We actually got the skins of 30,000 coyotes last year, however, and that is a good many. Altogether, we have killed more than 3500 timber wolves, some 600 mountain lions and nearly 20,000 bobcats and lynxes.

"The killing of these creatures put the government quite effectively in the fur business. During the five years of 1916-20, inclusive, we sold \$240,000 worth of furs, the money reverting into the United States treasury. During those five years we killed altogether about 300,000 predatory animals. We attempted to estimate the value to the stockmen of our work for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1920, and we believe that it aggregated \$6,000,000. During that same year we spent \$300,000, about half of it contributed by the federal government and about half by the states and stockmen's associations. Gradually, we figure, we will exert an increasing influence toward making the task of growing the meat of the nation steadily easier for the man on the range."

Three Faiths Born in India.

Indianapolis News.
India is said to be "the burning heart of Asia." That is to say, it has a genius for religion that is unsurpassed. Of the four great faiths which had their genesis in Asia, three were born in India. It is a land of 147 languages. Some of them are spoken by only a few people, but there are ten of these languages, each of which is spoken by 10,000,000 or more. Of every 100 people in the world, 18 live in India. The latest census of India gives the population as 315,322,327.