

*It was immediately evident to Da Silva that Mamede's Cogswell & Harrison double rifle had undergone re-blueing. What he didn't know, yet, was the extraordinary story that resulted in the re-blueing.*

# The Lord Selborne Double

By PH Joe Da Silva

*I've been a firearms dealer in Cape Town, South Africa for over 27 years. Since the beginning I've had a passion for double rifles – especially English doubles, and I've always dreamed of owning one of my own.*

I've shot, and hunted with, many doubles, up to the .600. My favorites are the .470 and the .500/.416. Naturally, I've dealt with many a double in the trade. The rifle I remember most clearly is the one I foolishly let slip through my fingers; maybe the time wasn't right. A gentleman came in with a cased .470 Jeffery and the appropriate ammo. He wanted to sell it. He'd inherited it from his brother, but didn't have any use for it.

The double was in perfect condition. There was not a mark or scratch to be seen and even the leather had that new smell.

The seller mentioned that only 12 rounds had been fired. I said I was interested and would like to fire a couple rounds at the range. I did this the same day, a Saturday.

After shooting it at the range, we sat down to discuss an asking price. The gentleman mentioned R15,000 (US\$3,150 in 1993). At that time, this was a great deal of money for me. R15,000 would have bought ten X Rossi .38 Special revolvers, representing important stock for my business and also more profit for me. I offered the seller R12,000 but he declined it, saying that he would get back to me. Of

course, he never did.

Two months later, I heard the double had been sold for his price. It was resold again for R50,000 and then, within a year, it fetched R140,000! What a fool I'd been and what a lesson I'd learned.

Some 16 years later I received a call from Adelino Serras Pires, one of the pioneers in the African safari industry and the author of *Winds of Havoc*. When Adelino mentioned that a very good friend had an English double for sale, my ears pricked up in an instant.

The person in question was Sérgio Pais Mamede. He'd been a professional hunter up to the early 1970s in Mozambique in *Coutada 16*. Adelino said he was holding Sérgio's Cogswell & Harrison in his hands and that it felt very heavy. Did I know anyone who would be interested in buying it? I can remember shouting, "YES! YES! Tell me more!" Adelino told me that the seller also had the ammunition - 450/400 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>". When I said I wanted the rifle, Adelino was surprised, saying that he didn't know I was interested in English doubles.

Remembering the expensive Jeffery lesson, I spoke with Sérgio who told me

at length about his double. I knew straight away I wanted to buy it and asked what he wanted for it. He was unsure, advising me to come see him to discuss the matter in person.

I had to contain my growing excitement for a month as Sérgio had other commitments. During those four weeks, I spent all the time I could spare researching the double rifle. I contacted Cogswell & Harrison over the Internet, asking them to give a ballpark price if the double was in good condition. They weren't very helpful, saying I should consult a gunsmith with knowledge of these types of firearms. Well, there are only a handful of such people in South Africa and most of them would have grabbed the rifle in a flash before I could have even examined it. I was not about to make the same stupid mistake again.

What Cogswell & Harrison would offer, when provided with the serial number, was a Certificate of Origin giving the date when the rifle was completed and the full original records from the archive section for that year; the name of the first purchaser; and the price paid for the rifle. This is one of the oldest firearms companies in the world, with records



*Da Silva was glad that the seller of the 13-lb English double rifle also had the ammunition to go with it: 450/400 3/4".*

going back over 240 years.

I asked if they had any secondhand or new leather cases for the double, as Sérgio mentioned that the case was no longer available. I didn't receive any response, which I found a little strange. I waited for a solid month in ever-growing anticipation for my day to meet Sérgio and examine the rifle.

The day finally dawned and I was on my way. Adelino collected me at the airport. At rising 82, he is still sharp and very fit. Off to Sergio's home, dining together before settling down to talk doubles. The anticipation was killing me throughout lunch. I kept wondering if Sérgio was going to accept the offer I had in mind.

Two hours later, we entered Sérgio's

study where he showed me the double. It was great being able to finally handle that 13-pound beauty. It was immediately apparent that the firearm had been re-blued. What was not so quickly evident was the extraordinary story that resulted in the re-bluing. As Sérgio started recounting it, I knew I was onto something special and that the 1993 Jeffery fiasco was about to be overridden by an exceptional find.

Sérgio's father, Orlando, was from a great pioneering family in Mozambique. Between the two World Wars, they'd helped found and develop out of pristine bush and under very tough conditions what became the small town of Mapai, on the Limpopo River, close to the northern reaches of South Africa's Kruger National Park. The settlement's name was inspired by the family surname Pais Mamede.

Hunting was a natural part of daily life and Sérgio's father became an accomplished big-game hunter. He regularly hosted special guests such as General Jan Smuts who hunted a great deal with him in the vast open country of Mozambique with its then flourishing wildlife populations. As Sérgio began sharing the unique story behind the double rifle, my eyes wandered along the walls of his study with their historic photographs of that time.

When Sérgio was only eight years old, he remembered his dad taking the heavy double out on hunts. Nobody was allowed to touch it, let alone fire it, without Orlando's express approval. The Pais Mamedes hunted most of the time with .375 H&H and .458 Winchester Magnum rifles, but when the heat was on Orlando would bring the double as backup gun.

Something very odd then happened to Orlando's double. It started with a buffalo hunt. Sérgio and his father were both using their bolt-action rifles. One of the trackers acted as gunbearer and had been instructed to carry the double just in case. Father and son were successful in hunting three buffalo that day. The vehicle had been parked quite some distance from where they'd decided to skin all three, the process lasting until late into the night. Sérgio, in the meantime, set off to fetch the vehicle. When he returned, all the meat was loaded onto the jeep and the entire group headed back to the farmhouse, the staff already excited at the prospect of a feast.

This is when the story takes a strange turn. Some three years later, Sérgio and his father were hosting clients who'd come to hunt two elephant and three buffalo.

While packing the vehicle and organizing the necessary equipment and firearms, Orlando asked where his double was. Sérgio was unable to help, as he hadn't seen it for a long time. He'd presumed his father had

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locked it up, as was his custom.

All hell then erupted as Orlando barked orders and everybody, be they kitchen staff, trackers or drivers, had to pitch in and pretty well tear the place apart in the search of the missing rifle. It was pandemonium. Sérgio simply couldn't figure out how his father hadn't seen to the safe storage of the double at the time.

Suddenly, a very short chap, one of the family's best trackers, spoke up. He said he seemed to remember leaving the double under the big baobab tree near where father and son had shot the three buffalo three years previously and where everyone had worked until late into the night skinning.

Well, it was like a series of hand grenades going off as Orlando angrily ordered his son and the tracker to drive out that second and see if his most valuable firearm was still under the baobab. Out into the wilds Sérgio and the tracker went, making for the landmark baobab, not daring to even think what would happen if the rifle had since disappeared.

To the utter astonishment of both men, there it was, lying at the foot of one of the massive baobab roots, in a somewhat

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sheltered position, exactly where the tracker had left it. After three years in the open where it could so easily have been destroyed under the weight of the big game that roamed or by the elements alone, the rifle was still in remarkably good shape. Nothing that a little re-blueing couldn't fix! That the rifle hadn't been touched also proved how remote and uninhabited the area was at the time.

I listened, looked, asked questions, and turned the double over and over in my hands, shouldering it and feeling it every which way before making my bid. Sérgio accepted my offer on the spot. I felt quite light-headed with relief – at last I'd been able to fulfill my ambition to own a British double rifle.

My relief and genuine delight turned into outright elation when Cogswell & Harrison sent me the Certificate of Origin, revealing the provenance of the rifle. It had been completed on 18 January 1905 and customized for none other than William Waldegrave Palmer, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Selborne KG, GCMG, PC, who took delivery of the rifle on 27 April 1905.

That was the year Lord Selborne succeeded Lord Milner as High Commissioner of South Africa and Governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies. He'd just

completed his term as First Lord of the Admiralty before assuming this new office in May 1905 in Pretoria!

Lord Selborne had a very distinguished political career, retiring as High Commissioner on the eve of the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. He'd come to South Africa at a time when memories of the ruinous Anglo-Boer War were still raw. Such was his character and attitude that he came to be known as “the Peacemaker,” earning the genuine respect and affection of the Boer people. My double rifle can rightly be classed as an item of true Africana significance because of the Selborne provenance. The Jeffery disappointment seemed nothing, now that I understood just what a treasure I had acquired.

The Selborne double, very tastefully engraved by the way, has a hammerless action and was fitted with the Cogswell & Harrison assisted opening and ejector mechanism, known as the Avant Tout. It has top lever opening and automatic top safety, the barrels being 23½ inches and made of fine English steel. They are designed for 60-grain to 400-grain bullets, the barrels

weighing 7 lb 11 oz, the total weight of the double being 13 lb on the nose. The rifle, covered by a three-year warranty, cost Lord Selborne 41 guineas, a sizeable amount of money at the time.

When I received the Certificate of Origin, it was dated 21 April 2009 – 104 years and five days after Lord Selborne took possession of his custom-built double rifle.

I now finally have my double rifle, a truly historic firearm. I'm planning my next big-game hunt, and this firearm will be my backup. Adelino called me the other day and asked if I would consider parting with this new treasure. I replied that everything is for sale – at a price.

In closing, I was intrigued when Adelino mentioned that he'd attended Selborne School in the then Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia in 1940 and 1941. This link with the Selborne legacy and my eventual owning of this historic rifle made my day.

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