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Six-Gun Improvements and the Berns-Martin Speed Holster

By ELMER KEITH

ANY Colt or Smith & Wesson fixed-sight revolver can be easily target sighted. With the Colt Single Action and new service guns it is necessary to make a band-type front sight for best results. Of course a higher standard front sight can be fitted, but it is not as good as a band front sight with separate blade. The Colt Official Police has a front sight like that of the fixed-sighted Smith & Wesson guns. This type of sight has a fairly broad base, then is cut away about half way up to form the blade or front sight proper. Such sights, both Colt and Smith & Wesson, may be easily changed by cutting off the front blade down to this wider base, then milling a slot the full length of the base and fitting a blade front sight of any desired height, width or shape. This blade may be anchored with either a pin or a screw, the latter being the more convenient, as it facilitates the changing of blades when necessary.

Blades may be made sloping down from front to rear so that they will not catch in quick-draw work, or they may be made of the Call type with gold bead, and in any width to suit the shooter. They may also be made adjustable for elevation for the target shooter. I have used a 1917 model Smith & Wesson that H. W. Bradley of Salmon, Idaho, fitted thus with adjustable front sight.

For fitting an adjustable rear sight, there are a great many arrangements, both good and bad. The top of the frame may be milled out and a rear sight like the Smith & Wesson target fitted, though this type of target rear sight is very susceptible to damage in carrying or in severe usage. The best and cheapest target rear sight I know of is the Colt .22 Automatic sight dovetailed into the rear end of the revolver frame. With the sighting notch cut out to correctly conform with the front sight, this makes an excellent combination and is very strong and dur-

able. This type of sight can also be cut off up to the top of the dovetail and another base welded on with an extension, thus setting the sight proper about 1/2 inch to the rear, just out of the way of the hammer. This gains 1/2 inch in sight radius. The front sight may be made with the blade having its highest or sighting portion as far forward as possible, and so gain another 1/4 inch in sight radius. I used for some time a 1917 Smith & Wesson revolver sighted as above, with excellent results, doing some of my best long range shooting with it.

Two other ways of gaining sight radius are by flat-topping and extending the frame back about 1/4 inch, or welding on an extended sight base. Frames may be either blued or case hardened in colors; H. W. Bradley employs the latter method, which I really believe is the better. I believe O'Meara usually blues his frames after flat-topping. There is a lot to this flat-topping. Properly done it adds materially to the efficiency of the gun. I have seen several frames that were not properly flat-topped, the barrel threads having been burned so that the barrels had to be sweated in the frames. Such a job is no good. Bradley recently turned out the best flat-top S. A. job I have ever seen, the threads not hurt in the least.

Both Colt and Smith & Wesson double action heavy caliber guns may be easily converted into really efficient pocket guns, or so-called Detective Specials. With the Smith & Wesson the barrel should not be cut off shorter than just flush with the forward end of the ejector latch; then a band front sight can be made up and the lower

part of the band cut away so it will fit just above the ejector latch. It can then be both sweated and pinned to the barrel and make a very neat, strong job. Either the standard fixed sight can be used on the rear, or one of the special rear sights. The Smith & Wesson will be found a very good fit for most average size hands. The Colt New Service will be found ideal for men with extremely large hands, and can be cut off to the ejector rod, making a very short gun. If such guns are to be used only double action, as McGivern uses them, then the hammer spur can well be cut off, leaving nothing to catch in the pocket or on the clothing.

Many men have extremely long fingers, and have trouble getting their fingers into the trigger guard as quickly as they should under stress of excitement, or in extreme speed tests. For such the best and only cure is to cut out the front portion of the trigger guard, so that there is nothing in the way to prevent the trigger finger from finding the trigger in the least possible time. Berns cuts out his slip gun trigger guard this way, as does FitzGerald of Colt's. Newman often cut his trigger guards away entirely on his slip guns. Newman's pocket guns were a pair of 2 1/2-inch .45 Colt slip guns. He habitually carried these guns in his front trousers pockets.

The base pin of the S. A. Colt can be improved by making a new one of tool steel with a large head that is easily grasped for removal. Also the base pin catch as regularly furnished on S. A. Colt guns is totally inadequate for heavy caliber guns with full loads, and will nearly always fail to hold

the base pin in place under extreme recoil. There are several methods of curing this trouble. A longer and stiffer spring may be used, which often does the trick. The old screw-type base pin catch is better. The best base-pin catches I have ever used



MODEL 1917 S. & W. FITTED WITH ADJUSTABLE TARGET SIGHTS BY W. H. BRADLEY

were designed by Harold Croft, in two general types. One is a lever fitted into the front of the frame, that locks crosswise of the base pin. This has a small spring plunger, fitted at my suggestion and similar to the old Sharps, to hold the lever in place. The other catch that Croft designed is much more simple, more easily fitted, and to my notion is the best of them all. The hole through which the regular spring screw type of catch is fitted is drilled out slightly larger, and a pin with a small lever at the right-hand end is fitted in this hole. The pin is cut away at one point, so that when the lever is turned up, the base pin can be removed or slid back into place. When the lever is turned down, the round body of the pin locks tight in the corresponding cut in the base pin. There is also a small pin on the inside of the lever at the bottom, that locks in a small hole on the side of the frame, when the lever is turned down. I shot over 500 of the very heaviest black-powder .45 Colt loads through one of Croft's guns so equipped, and there was never the slightest sign of loosening of the base pin.

Croft and Sedgley designed a main spring similar in shape to the one employed in the Colt Officers' Model. This spring speeds up the action somewhat, and has never given the least trouble. However, I do not believe it will stand as much abuse as the Newman spring. The latter is slower, but is unbreakable: it cocks very

softly and easily, and is always sufficiently strong to fire the primers, and with the minimum of jar.

When frames are flat-topped and extended, or just an extended rear sight base is added, then the top of the hammer is cut off to allow the hammer to go in under the extension. This also lightens the hammer jar and speeds up the action. Hammer spurs can be cut off and welded on in a lower position, and the general contour of the thumb-piece altered to conform to the general design of the Bisley thumb-piece. The Bisley thumb-piece is by all odds the nicest and best hammer spur of all, though one has either to remodel a Bisley or wreck one to get the thumb-piece to weld on to the S. A. hammer. Hammers are carefully

rehardened after this work is done.

Single Action guns may be quickly converted into slip guns by the removal of the trigger and the addition of the Newman slip hammer and main spring. If it is desired to lighten the regular S. A. mainspring, this may be easily done by loosening the mainspring screw and putting a leather shim under the lower end of the spring, below the screw, and then tightening the screw. Any desired stiffness can be secured by the use of shims of different thickness.

Single Action Colts may be made safe with six cartridges in the cylinder by the addition of another bolt cut on the cylinder so that the cylinder can be locked between chambers. Croft designed and had fitted

in a Single Action a loose firing pin, entirely separate and detached from the hammer. This enables him to further lighten the hammer, and does away with any possibility of the firing pin hole in the recoil shield enlarging; and it is also an improvement on the recoil shield or plate. Bradley has now gone a step further and made up a rebounding firing pin for the S. A., similar to that in the .45 Colt Automatic. The pin being itself shorter than the distance between hammer face and primer, the gun is absolutely safe with all six chambers loaded. The hammer is best carried right down on the frame, and no amount of pounding on the hammer will fire the gun. A spring holds the firing pin back to receive the hammer blow, the pin being driven



TWO .38 COLT LIGHTNING MODELS. UPPER ONE WITH GRIP CHANGED BY BRADLEY



SINGLE ACTION FLAT TOP WITH REBOUNDBING FIRING PIN, SPECIAL BASE PIN, AND GRIP SIMILAR TO CROFT GRIP EXCEPT CUT DOWN TO FIT A SMALL HAND. BASE PIN CATCH NOT YET FITTED. WORK DONE BY BRADLEY



A CUT-DOWN MODEL 1917 S. & W. REVOLVER



LATEST DESIGN OF
BERN'S-MARTIN
HOLSTER

forward like a bullet and continuing to move after the hammer has come to rest against the frame. The momentum of the firing pin explodes the primer. I believe this is one of the greatest improvements recently made in the S. A. Colt.

The safety and half-cock notches should be cut off the Single Action hammer before it is re-casehardened. These are not necessary, and cause much trouble when the gun falls into the hands of a novice or someone not familiar with the S. A. Of course if the gun be a slip gun, these notches make no difference.

Anyone interested in the Single Action Colt should read Mr. Hathaway's article in *THE AMERICAN RIFLEMAN* of April, 1927. For the benefit of those who have not a copy of this issue, I will briefly cover some of the more important changes to hammer, bolt, and bolt-and-trigger spring as described by him. First, take the hammer. The little sharp-cornered pin that times the release of the cylinder bolt is usually furnished about twice as long as necessary, and thus causes the bolt prong to be sprung in twice as far as necessary. This sometimes causes the bolt prong to break, especially in very cold weather. Grind this pin down, perfectly flat and parallel with the surface of the hammer from which it projects. Grind it off about

half way down to the hammer, or until the remaining portion of the pin is equal in thickness to the bolt prong that it actuates. Care should be taken not to alter the slope of the pin as that would change the timing of the bolt. Next, take the bolt. Determine first if the bolt is drawn down farther than necessary to release the cylinder when the cocking operation is commenced. If so, then the end of the bolt prong that works in conjunction with the above-mentioned pin on the side of the hammer, should be carefully dressed off, a little at a time until the bolt is just drawn down flush with the frame, thus greatly lessening the amount of bending imposed on the bolt spring. Next, take a small, round jeweler's, or so-called "needle," file, and round out the end of the square dividing cut that separates the two prongs of the bolt. Breakage usually occurs where the operating prong joins the main body of the bolt. Rounding out this sharp inside corner greatly lessens the liability of breakage. Next take the bolt-and-trigger spring. The bolt spring, or shorter prong of this spring, is where the grief usually occurs if at all. This bolt half should be tapered from the base out to the tip, where it bears on the bolt, such tapering to be in the thickness of the spring, and not in the width. If this is done carefully there is mighty little possibility of a bolt spring ever breaking. Pay no attention to the slight upturn at the end of the spring, and file just as if the spring were flat, removing the upturned tip. This spring should be tapered to about half its thickness on the extreme tip, and should be an even, gradual taper from full thickness at the base, to the tip. It is very important to file lengthwise of all springs so that no scratches will result across their surfaces that might in time form cracks. Personally, about the only trouble I have ever had with S. A. parts breaking has been with the bolt and the bolt spring, and this in extreme cold weather in Montana before I learned to properly alter these parts. At that, I have never had more than two of each part to break, and none since I began altering them. The hand should be cut off until it just does turn the cylinder into place, and no more, when the hammer is pulled all the way back. If it tends to turn the cylinder past center, then it is very hard on the bolt and bolt cuts in the cylinder, and also

on the hand itself. If all the moving parts in the action are carefully hand-polished, the smoothness of the action can be improved very much. The S. A. Colt is not obsolete, and I doubt if it ever will be.

Most double action Colt and Smith & Wesson guns are very carefully fitted and finished inside, and there is seldom any work necessary on their actions, except adjusting trigger pulls and the lightening of the Colt double action mainsprings for extreme rapid-fire double action work. I believe Ed McGivern of Montana uses all Colt double actions with the mainsprings as issued, and he shoots double action altogether for fast aerial or group shooting. He has followed this trick in exhibition shooting as well as practical self-defense work, for a good many years, and no doubt his trigger fingers are very well developed, and a little difference in the weight of the D. A. pull does not apparently bother him in the least.

Although I have used a six gun practically all my life, I had never until recently attempted aerial shooting or any double action shooting except the occasional bust-



IN ACTION
THE HOLSTER

ing of a beer bottle thrown up by some cow-puncher friend, and a little fast hip shooting from an old rod-ejector D.-A. Colt. I have known that McGivern could make six hits on fairly large tin cans thrown up by an assistant, using a .38 Special O. M. Colt. I have often heard men say that it couldn't be done, but for my part I know McGivern would never have claimed to do this stunt unless he had actually done it, and done it many times at that, as he is always very conservative in reporting his work. Also, John Newman managed to fire six shots from a slip gun at a can thrown up around 18 or 20 feet in the air, making four or five hits, I have forgotten which. Through the kindness of a gun crank friend I had the opportunity to try this stunt myself with a new .38-44 Smith & Wesson, with various loads. I started in a few days before Christmas, and though I was able to get off only one shot at the beginning, and quite often missed that one shot, I soon worked up until I was making two, and often three, hits. I threw a gallon

can up left handed, and fired right handed. I practiced quite a bit, snapping on empty cases. By Christmas I had made five hits once, and once had put all six shots through a can before it came down to the level of the gun. This with Standard Western full-power loads in the .38 Special. I managed to make four and five hits quite often after a little more practice, also the same number with the Western Super Police loads, which have a little more recoil, which slows one up. I tried two different Officers' Model Colts, but found the mainsprings too strong to make more than four hits. I guess my finger isn't as strong as

McGivern's. I need about 20 years more practice. With the Smith & Wesson I found that I could turn the mainspring tension screw out three to four full turns and still fire the cartridges. This is a great help to a fellow with a weak trigger finger, raised on the Single Action. I tried a box of Remington Kleanbore .38 Short Colt cartridges with outside lubricated bullets, in the same .38-44, with the net result that

caliber, with the mainsprings lightened as much as possible; the new K-22 Smith & Wesson, and the new Colt Ace. I do not like the Smith & Wesson .22-22. It is so light, especially in the barrel, that it feels much like a fly rod in the hand. The Colt Woodsman is very much the same.

Personally I prefer the Government model Colt automatic to any and all other automatics. The Ace, the Super .38, and

the .45 will make a most excellent outfit for the users of automatic pistols. The Super .38 and the .45 could be greatly improved by fitting them with higher, adjustable sights. The later issues of the Super .38 came out with wide front and rear Patridge type sights, which are a great improvement over the older sights. Of course sights of any design can be easily fitted to these guns, and when this is done it is much easier to do the fine shooting with them that they are really capable of doing. O'Meara, Jas. V. Howe and Bradley are equipped to do any of the remodeling jobs I have mentioned.

The Croft No. 3 grip is the only one that is

any improvement over the standard S. A., and then only for slow fire. This is a most excellent grip for any deliberate shooting. The hammer must have a base welded on like that of the Bisley to fill the cut in the high back strap when this grip is used.

Six-gun grips can be changed to almost any desired shape and size. This is accomplished by cutting off, welding, and bending the straps to any desired shape. Of course the straps of the S. A. and the first model of Colt D. A. guns are the easiest of all to alter, but other guns may be changed if necessary. An example of this is illustrated in a first model Colt, a



HOW THE BERN'S-MARTIN HOLSTER IS WORN

my last five strings of six shots each were all hits on the gallon cans. Of course these little loads had no recoil at all and enabled one to stay on the can much more easily. I am going to try this stunt with the slip gun next, and then try it on smaller objects. This shows what progress even a S. A. man can make in a short time and with only 300 rounds of ammunition. The Colt mainspring could be cut down so it would still fire the primer and greatly speed up the action for fast work.

When beginning this sort of work I believe the best guns would be the new Colt Officers' Model and Official Police in .22

.38 or so called "Lightning" model, altered by Bradley. The original and improved grips are shown for comparison.

Many grips can be completely and easily changed by restocking with larger grips of wood or ivory. In wood, only Circassian walnut should be used. It is hard enough to take the checking properly, and thus make a good job, and one that will last. To my mind, nothing equals good, full, elephant ivory grips, with the right or left grip (depending upon which hand the gun is used in) carved in relief. Such carving fills out the hollow of the hand and affords a very secure hold. Even plain uncarved ivory has a sticky feel when any appreciable pressure is applied, and is not slippery like pearl or hard rubber. Any design, almost, can be employed, such as an American eagle, Mexican eagle, ox head, buffalo, Indian head or eagle head. I recently saw a friend's .44 S. & W. fitted with carved ivory depicting a full African lion and it made a very fine and beautiful grip. Ivory gradually colors with age, like an old meerschaum pipe, which adds greatly to its natural grain and beauty.

* * * * *

When a sailor, and especially one who has been a member of the Navy Rifle Team for a good many years, gets marooned for shore duty on the coast of Alaska for any length of time, he is apt to think things, and has plenty of time for so doing. Then when said sailor gets a chance again to associate with his old cronies, he is apt to put some of his thoughts into action.

Such is the case with one J. E. Berns, not unknown to these columns, or to Camp Perry. It so happened that friend Berns got marooned in Alaska with a 7½ inch S. A. Colt slip gun, and no proper way of carrying his artillery. Berns found that when he packed this long gun in an ordinary open-top holster, it projected down his leg quite far, and was apt to get into the snow he was wading through. He also found that this longer gun was much slower to get into action from the holster, as it required raising quite high to clear the holster. Still, he liked this long gun, especially for game shooting, and set to work to devise some sort of holster in which he could carry it rather high when hunting on foot, and in which it would also be well hidden under the coat in street attire, and still be easily and quickly accessible from this high-belt position. Being a fine target shot and used to having his sights smoked black to prevent reflection and glare, Mr. Berns also wanted a holster that would carry the gun without rubbing the soot from the sights.

While at the job Mr. Berns decided to include several other important features in the new holster design. The photos tell how well he succeeded. In this work he

was fortunate in having the assistance of Mr. Martin, also of the Navy Rifle Team, who is not only an excellent shot, but a very skilful leather worker as well.

I had the pleasure of trying out the first two of these holsters that were made, and found that for a long-barreled six-gun, if not for any six-gun, and for a right or left-hand draw from the hip, this was the fastest rig I had ever encountered. This is the only belt holster that I know of that permits the wearer to get his gun quickly from the high-belt position on the right or left side, and it does not make any difference what the length of the barrel may be. Of course when the gun is worn under a coat, the cross-draw holster and a short gun are a faster combination; but many officers prefer a gun on the right hip, especially in warm weather when the coat is worn unbuttoned, as the right hip position is not so conspicuous.

For the peace officer's use this holster has many good points. The housing, that completely covers the trigger guard, absolutely prevents the gun from being pulled out by anyone from behind. There is a sole-leather shoulder fitted snugly to the muzzle, which holds the gun tight in connection with this trigger-guard housing. The holster is fitted with a block of sole leather or plastic wood under the trigger guard. A belt locks this securely to the back portion of the spring, which is much like the spring of the shoulder holster. Leather stops are fitted on each side of the belt, preventing the holster from sliding during the draw. No leg strap or tie string is needed on this holster, unless one is breaking saddle broncos, when of course he must needs tie his gun down to prevent the hammer spur from striking his elbow. I have had this occur while riding hard bucking horses.

One can get a gun from this holster from many positions in which it would be extremely awkward to draw with any regular open-top holster; while sitting in a car seat, for example, or at a table. This outfit is much faster, especially for a long gun, than any other in existence today. With a shoulder holster one is compelled to change or shift his grip on the gun after drawing, before he can shoot. This is not necessary with the cross-draw and regular hip holsters, but the gun must be drawn up clear of the leather before it can be poked ahead at the target, and fired. With this Berns-Martin Speed Holster all that is necessary is to jerk the gun out of the holster straight ahead toward the object, firing as the wrist snaps the gun up into line. With a little practice in gripping the gun the same each time, it can be drawn and fired, and a hit recorded on the man target at 10 yards, in ¼ second or less if the hand is on the gun at the start; and in ½ second or less if the hand is a foot or more above the gun.

When one is facing the target or adversary, he can make a hit quicker from this type of holster than from a cross-draw holster. For one thing, the gun is jerked straight toward the target, while the cross draw necessitates either turning the whole body sideways to the target, or else stopping the swing of the gun and arm at the right instant to line it up with the mark. I do not believe there is any method of packing a gun that is as fast to get into action with as a holster hung low on the right leg, if the gun hand is away from the gun at the start of the draw. Of course, this applies to wearing the gun openly without a coat. When covered by a coat, then I believe the cross draw is the faster, as the left hand can be used to pull the coat out of the way at the same instant that the right hand goes for the gun. The coat must be worn partly buttoned, though, or the gun will show. This speed holster is less conspicuous than a cross-draw holster, and the coat can be left open if the gun belt is also used for a waist belt.

This Berns-Martin holster is the only one I have ever seen that does not in any way cause wear to the front sight of the gun. Even shoulder holsters wear the front sight, as this sight takes all the pressure when the gun is jerked out. This wear soon changes the elevation, to say nothing of rounding off the corners of the sight. With the new holster, no leather comes into contact with the sights. This is a great boon to the target puncher, as he can blacken his sights at home, put on his coat, and go to the range with the perfect assurance that the sights will still be blacked when he is ready to fire his string. These holsters can be made either right or left hand.

Martin uses only fine bridle leather in the manufacture of his holsters, doing all the sewing by hand with heavy thread. He does a most excellent job of fitting the holster to the gun. The fit of the gun in this holster is very important, and only the gun for which the holster was originally made should be used in it. Martin only makes up these outfits together that is, belt and holster complete, so as to insure the holster working properly. Belt stops must be sewn on each side of the holster to prevent the latter's tipping in drawing, and to insure its remaining in one fixed position on the belt. In the place of the belt stops, cartridge loops can be fitted on each side of the holster, if desired. Martin usually stains and polishes the leather to a rich dark russet color.

The cylinder clasp or spring holds the gun very securely. The holster can be inverted and shaken without the gun coming out, yet the gun can be drawn instantly. This is very important for an

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AUSTRIAN GUN CRAFT

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and artistic decoration, Austria reigns supreme.

In order to illustrate this contention, the pictures of a few arms may serve. All of the pictures of rifles represent arms made to special order as regards caliber, dimensions, and finish. For rifles and shotguns, very little "drop" is my specification key word; for pistols I invariably prefer the "Oriental" form of grip, meaning an obtuse angle between barrel and stock. The decorations in most instances are in the form of oak leaves and some French or English style of scroll engraving, but there are very few game scenes. The latter are beautiful, but the true relief work is so very expensive when performed by a real artist that so far I refrained from making myself a present of a rifle decorated in this manner.

My favorite arm is shown by Figure 1. It is an over-and-under double rifle for the 6.6/70-mm. cartridge, with about 2,100 f. s. velocity and some 1,500 f. p. energy. It is good enough for deer, but is principally intended for the chamois (Alpine mountain goat), and has barrels of about 22 inches. The two barrels are octagon in shape, and of Antinit steel. The matted rib, connecting piece, and locking teeth are milled out of one piece of steel. Not being a friend of hammerless arms, I had the rifle equipped with two rebounding hammer locks of watchlike precision. The stock, which reaches to the muzzle, is of inimitable Styrian walnut, embellished with staghorn ornaments. The rifle is superbly accurate.

Figure 2 shows a single-shot falling block rifle with Antinit steel barrel, equipped with a 3/8-inch matted rib. The action is of English tool steel, demountable without the aid of tools, every part polished and checkered, the outside decorated with oak leaves and gold-inlaid acorns. It is a take-down, and shoots the 8.7-mm. Manlicher cartridge, which is unequaled for penetration. As regards accuracy, it equals the over-and-under just described.

The next cut, Figure 3, is of a four-barrel combination gun which Mr. Rosenberg, in his article appearing in the December, 1931, issue, called a "monstrosity." Two shotgun barrels on top, two rifle barrels underneath, the latter performing remarkably well at a distance of 50 yards. The gun is intended for small game only, taking the .410 shot and Austrian Hornet rifle cartridges.

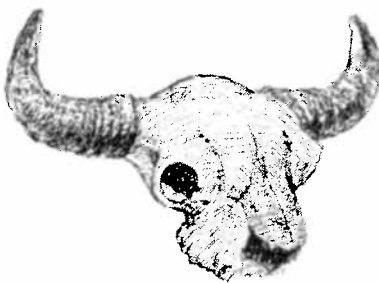
The next in line, Figures 4 and 5, represents a concession to modern times by a sportsman who believes that high-powered bolt-action rifles belong to the soldiers, and that their use on game is not good

sportsmanship. The rifle shown is the well-known Manlicher-Schoenauer, the only bolt-action gun, except the Model 88 straight-pull Manlicher, which is not monstrous in appearance. The barrel is of Antinit steel, with a 3/8-inch matted rib. The bolt handle is duted, with knob in the form of an acorn, action richly hand engraved and gold inlaid. The rifle shoots the normal M.S. 6 3/4-mm. cartridge, and is equipped with a Bailie-Grohman adjustable peep sight.

A fine target pistol (Figure 6) for the Austrian Hornet cartridge concludes the show. It is a little gem in appearance, shape and performance, has an octagon Antinit steel barrel with matted top, the action is of the falling-block type, actuated by a concealed lever. A protected precision bead and micrometer notch sight permit of accurate aiming. The arm is richly engraved and gold inlaid, and demountable by hand, without tools.

Most all of the rifle and gun fiends, like myself, who do not consider their arm just a murder tool, uninteresting in itself like a plumber's monkey wrench, all familiar with the German and English sporting weapons; therefore I refrain from sending pictures of those that I own. Everybody can easily make comparisons as regards form and general appearance, but only those who own high-grade Austrian arms will realize the full extent of their excellence.

Apart from firearms, Austria harbors several real artists in the line of knitemaking. The greatest of them all, Professor Bluemelhuber, can be called the only remaining authority on steel carving. The knife called the "Emssteiner hunting knife" (carved handle shown in Figure 7) is made of one piece of rustless "precious" steel. What this means can only be realized by examining the illustration, and in particular the hollow handle. Before releasing the weapon, the maker "tested" it. With one blow of a heavy mallet he drove the point through a sheet of steel 1/8 of an inch thick, without damaging the point. From the master's own statement I understand that several months are required to produce such a knife. In consequence the price of about \$700 is not unreasonable.



Knives and other edge weapons of distinction and excellence are also produced by Johann Springer's Erben, in Vienna.

A peculiar custom of the old-time European gentleman must be mentioned in order that the shapes of the hunting knives, or rather short hunting swords, may be understood. It is not gentleman-like to carry tools. An ax or hatchet is considered a tool, and in consequence no gentleman will carry one. Therefore, the heavy hunting knife, or Atandhauer (Figure 8) must perform the duty of the small ax. The narrow-bladed "stag catchers" (handle shown in Figure 9) are used to give the *coup de grace* to a wounded stag or deer, because a gentleman should not shoot any game that has been brought down by a shot.

THE BERNS MARTIN HOLSTER

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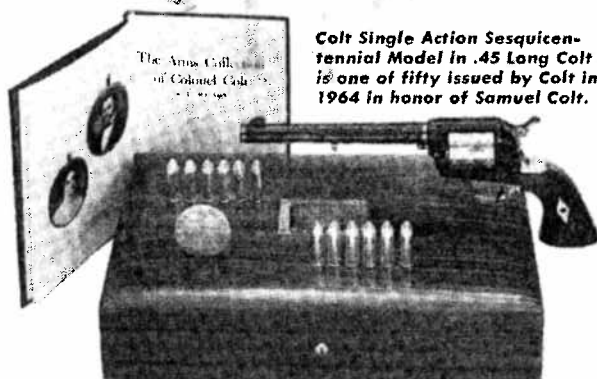
officer's use, as he may lose his footing when running, or be knocked off his feet or rolled over in a scrimmage. Nearly all other belt quick-draw holsters will allow the gun to fall out in such circumstances, unless it is fitted very tight and a leg strap used.

This holster can be fastened to the front of the car seat near the leg, or on the dash or the steering wheel of the car, for quick use. A banker or storekeeper can fasten it just under the counter in any position, and know that he can get his gun instantly if necessary. Such an arrangement is very much better than having the gun in a drawer, or on a shelf where it may be knocked off, and where it is out of reach.

I can see more possibilities and advantages in this holster than in any other I have ever used. It protects the gun perfectly, yet the gun is always accessible. This is the lightest belt and holster combination I have ever seen to be made of such thoroughly strong and durable materials. The inside of the spring is carefully lined with leather, which prevents it from wearing the bluing off the gun. One must see and use this outfit to really appreciate its worth.

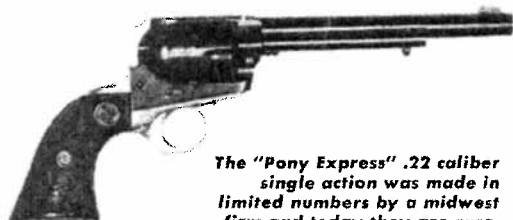
Berns and Martin have decided not to patent this holster, but anyone wishing to have such an outfit made up for him can write J. E. Berns, 1003 Sixth St., Bremerton, Wash. All outfits made up will have a safety strap as in the illustration, with a strong, durable glove fastener, for use when the gun will not be needed instantly, or when riding. Once unsnapped, this safety strap does not in any way interfere with a quick draw. I take my hat off to Berns and Martin for having produced the fastest, lightest, and most practical belt holster in existence.

PART I OF III

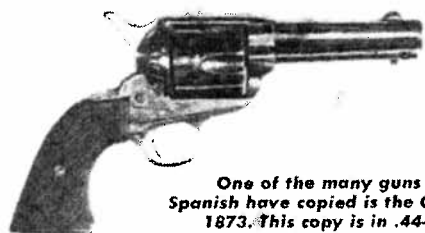


Colt Single Action Sesquicentennial Model in .45 Long Colt is one of fifty issued by Colt in 1964 in honor of Samuel Colt.

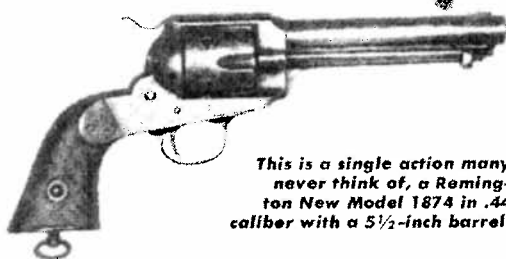
THE



The "Pony Express" .22 caliber single action was made in limited numbers by a midwest firm and today they are rare.



One of the many guns the Spanish have copied is the Colt 1873. This copy is in .44-40, 4-inch barrel and wood grips.



This is a single action many never think of, a Remington New Model 1874 in .44 caliber with a 5 1/2-inch barrel.

Starting back in 1836, Col. Sam Colt designed better even than he knew when he produced the Patterson Colt, then the Walker, next the Dragoons and later the 1851 Navy, 1860 .44 Army and the many smaller models, ending with the old Peacemaker .45. These guns and the later Rugers are the best pointing of any handguns ever made. They are better for hitting in hip shooting, shooting after dark or any instinctive fast work with a sixgun, due to the shape and angle of their grip to frame and barrel.

No gun is any faster to draw and hit with for the first shot than the Colt and Ruger single actions. For me, at least, they are the fastest of all guns for quick draw out of a holster or from a belt clip for the first shot. These guns point naturally if the eyes are focused on the target and enough practice has been employed. One soon learns to throw a slug anywhere he wants it at close range.

The single action can be fired effectively with more parts removed than any other sixgun. It is the favorite where gunsmiths are fewest. As long as you have a hammer and main spring, hand and hand spring and a bolt and bolt half of that spring you can fire a single-action Colt effectively.

John Newman, noted exhibition shooter, had two .45 Colt single actions converted to pocket-size slip-hammer guns, without even including triggers in the mechanism. His mainsprings were made up from two opposing corset springs. He removed the regular hammer spurs, replacing them with short, stubby slip spurs. He did very effective work with his .45 Colts so worked over. He carried the two .45 2-inch barrel slip guns in his front pants pockets. When expecting trouble, he usually had one hand in a pocket, holding one of these stubby .45s. No smart hold-up artists wanted anything to do with him. He could make three hits on a can tossed up in the air with one of those stubby .45s.

No other gun is quite as reliable, day in and day out and year after year, as a properly remodeled .45 slip-hammer single action.

I played with slip guns for a couple of years and then found out it required a hard grip and that you could not do good shooting with both trigger gun and slip guns. So, with a great many guns to test, I finally dropped the use of the slip gun. You could get off accurate shots with it once the proper grip was mastered, the same as the trigger gun. Still, the two types of gun and technique did not mix.

When the internal parts of a single-action Colt are properly polished and worked over, it is a very reliable gun and seldom, if ever, gets out of order. I have covered this work in many articles. The stud that actuates the bolt should be ground down flat on the hammer until just enough is left to catch the bolt arm and thus avoid excessive

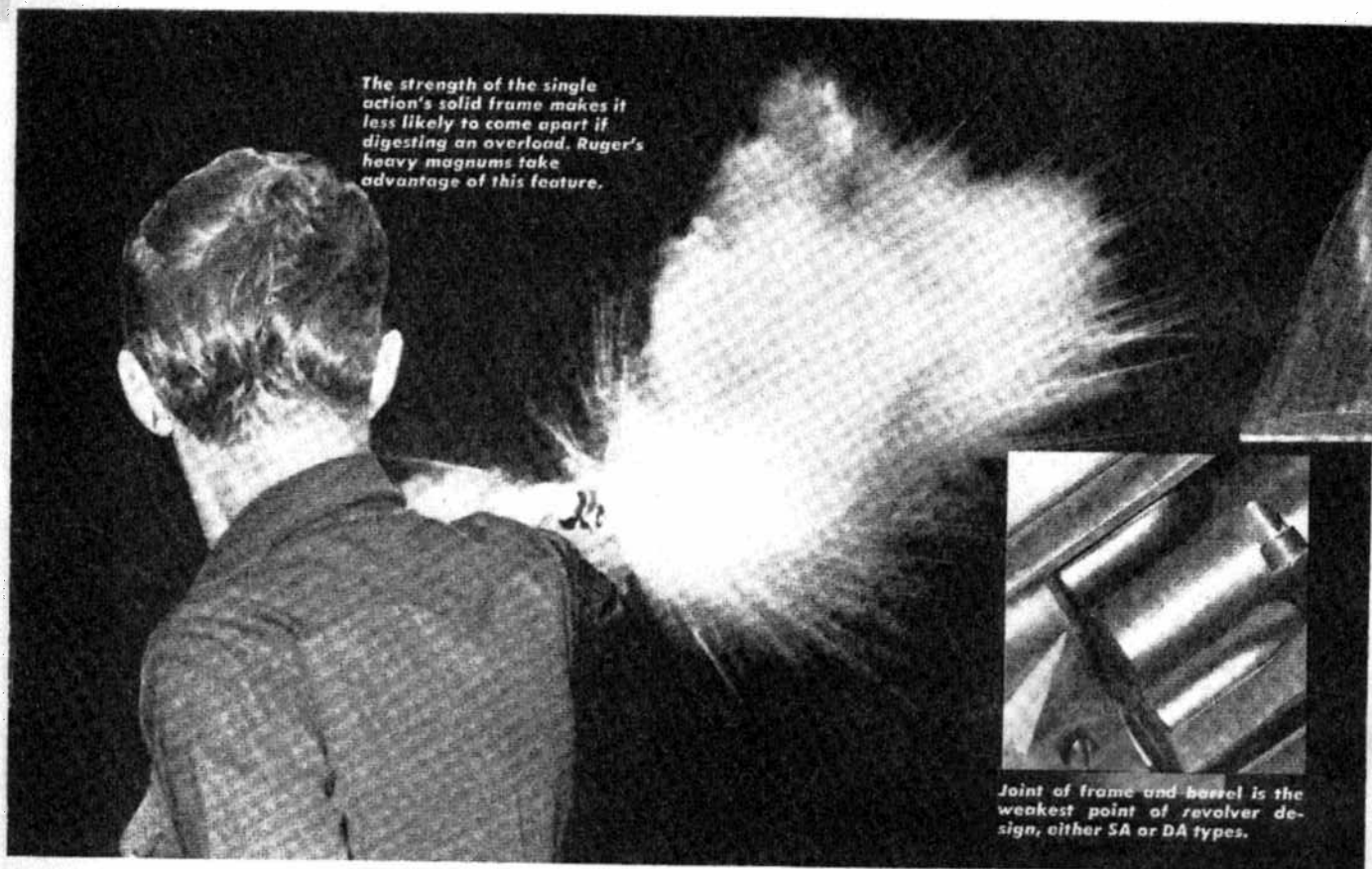
Beginning a three-part series on single actions, double actions and automatics by possibly the world's greatest practical expert on handguns...

SINGLE ACTION!

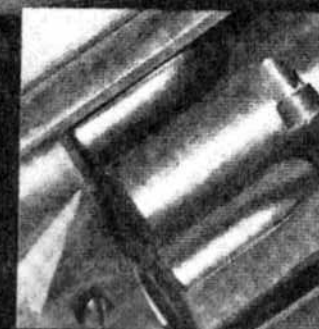
by Elmer Keith Shooting Editor



THE SINGLE ACTION!



The strength of the single action's solid frame makes it less likely to come apart if digesting an overload. Ruger's heavy magnums take advantage of this feature.



Joint of frame and barrel is the weakest point of revolver design, either SA or DA types.

springing of the arms to cam over this stud. The bolt arms should be tapered to prevent fracture and the trigger and bolt spring should also be tapered toward their tips. Then, the cut between the two limbs should be rounded to prevent breakage.

With the fine Ruger single actions nothing of this sort is necessary. Years ago, R.F. Sedgley of Philadelphia and Herb Bradley, late of Salmon, Idaho, fitted coil springs throughout in SA Colts. They were then almost unbreakable and very reliable.

Ruger went Colt, Sedgley and Bradley one better by designing one of the most foolproof single actions ever produced. It will stand more snapping, more abuse and more heavy loads than any other sixgun ever produced. It is today our finest single action. I watched a Ruger Single Six on an electric machine that cocked and snapped that little gun continuously through six days and nights of an NRA Convention and it was still in good shooting order at the end of that period.

When fitted with proper target sights like the late Dragoon Ruger .44 Magnum and the Combination .22 LR and

.22 Magnum, these guns are usually just as accurate as any other pistol.

I worked with Bill Ruger in the design of these fine guns and they have won most quick-draw contests. Further, the Dragoon Ruger .44 Magnum will take more heavy hand loads by actual test than any sixgun made and still be in accurate, and perfect working order. Properly tuned up, a good single action with target sights in .44 Special, .41 Magnum or .44 Magnum is just as accurate as any other gun made in cylinder persuasion.

So much for the attributes of the single actions, now let us look at their faults. With all the old Colts having the firing pin integral with the hammer and even the later separate firing pins first brought out by Herb Bradley and later by Ruger, only five cartridges could be carried in the gun safely unless you used one of Captain Hardy's holsters. Captain Hardy designed a small strip of leather just the width of the hammer, sewed to the top front of his open top holster and with a hole in it for the firing pin of the SA Colt to rest in. With this rig you could carry six rounds in the chambers safely, as you simply let

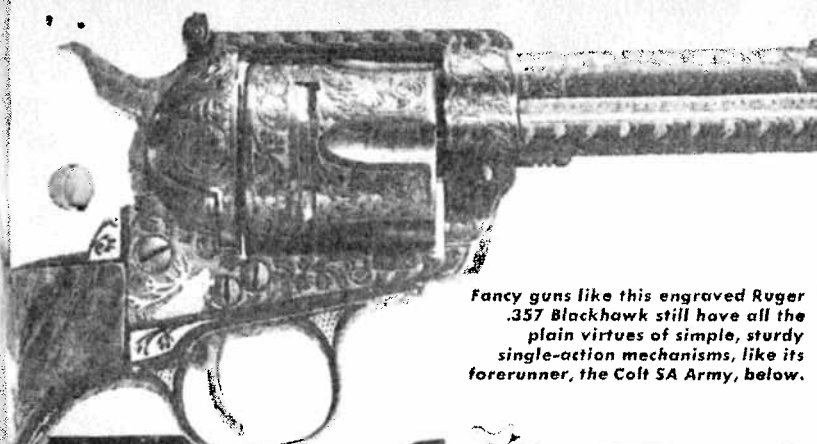
the hammer down with its firing pin through the hole in this narrow strap.

It was and is a better system than any thing over the top of the hammer spur as the gun has to be partly cocked to clear the holster. I still have one of the rigs Captain Hardy made for me many years ago. I have known several men who carried six rounds in their Colt single actions and when they hung a heavy stirrup up on the saddle horn to cinch their horses, the damn stirrup slipped and came down on the hammer spur of their guns, shooting them through the leg.

The single action is slow to unload the empties and slow to reload as compared with a modern double-action gun or the fast clip-loading of an automatic. Just the same, I saw Thell Reed do a mighty fast job of unloading empties and refilling his .45 single-action Colts. The single action is fast enough for any repeat shots with heavy cartridges. You cock the gun as it raises in your hand in recoil and with any practice at all, the gun recoils and throws the hammer spur right under your thumb.

I don't go with this old saw that you have to hit with a lot of fast, small-

GUNS & AMMO



Fancy guns like this engraved Ruger .357 Blackhawk still have all the plain virtues of simple, sturdy single-action mechanisms, like its forerunner, the Colt SA Army, below.

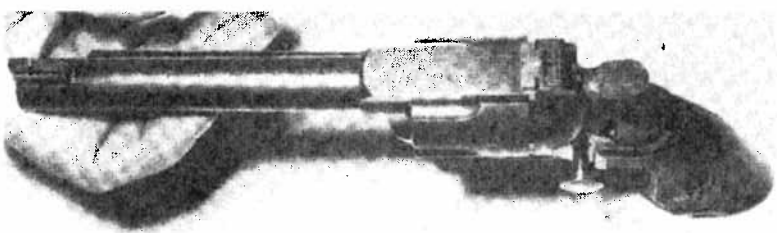


Keith's sizeable collection of single actions includes some he has owned since WWI era.



Shape of grip lets big-bore single action ride up easily, with no discomfort and easy recocking on repeat shots.

Flat-top Colt long-range single-action with its 3-leaf rear sight, was made for Keith by Colt before WWII, still is very accurate.



caliber bullets. Connect properly with one heavy slug and the job is done. I do not care for any gun that requires three or four fast hits to accomplish the purpose of one heavy slug.

The single action has the most comfortable grip of any handgun for use with heavy loads, as the sloping grip simply rolls up in the crotch of the hand, thus cushioning recoil and placing the hammer spur right under the thumb for the next shot. The solid frame of the single action will take more abuse and heavy loads than will any swing-cylinder sixgun.

The weakest part of a sixgun for handling pressures is the rear end of the barrel cone where it projects through the frame and the next is the cylinder walls themselves, necessarily rather thin. The Ruger Dragoon, however, with its unfluted heavy cylinder is adequate for any permissible heavy load in .44 Magnum. The Ruger also has very little of the thin rear end of barrel projecting through frame which was a weakness of the old Colts.

I wore a Colt single action with the same regularity as my pants for 30 years and slept with it inside my sleep-

ing bag in bear country and it never let me down.

Back in the late Twenties, Harold Croft and I designed many improvements for the Colt single action. These included a flat-top extended-frame de-



Keith and exhibition shooter, Thell Reed, easily bridge the generation gap with interest in and ability with SA's.

sign with a better base-pin catch, target sights and lightened hammer, as well as an improved main spring. These fine guns were and are just as accurate as any sixgun ever made. Later, Bill Ruger

adopted most of their improvements along with his greatly improved and unbreakable action parts.

In the late 1880s Colt brought out a fine flat-top target SA Army and also a flat-top Target Bisley. I never had any use for the Bisley because it pointed too low for any fast work, but they did have a superbly shaped hammer and a wide trigger. Recently, Colt has again brought out a fine flat-top target SA Army, the finest gun Colt ever produced in a sixgun, to my notion, and greatly in demand today. The frame, however, is too small and light for the .44 Magnum and the .44 Special with heavy loads or the .45 Colt is its limit.

Ruger, in his Dragoon, has produced a fine gun. Stronger in every way, with nearly unbreakable parts and capable of handling the .44 Magnum full loads longer without breakage or repairs than any other sixgun. He also adopted most of our early improvements and we added some more, including the Colt Dragoon grip. Today, the Ruger Dragoon and the late flat-top single-action Colts are our finest single-action revolvers. Next month we will take up the double action.

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GUN NOTES



By Elmer Keith, Executive Editor

EDITOR'S NOTE:

This issue concludes Elmer's article on "Saddle Gun Packing." In this month's installment, he discusses his preferred methods of packing rifles and handguns for sporting or law enforcement uses.

Early on, I learned the northwest position, used by about all Montanans at that time. That method was to sling the rifle on the rear or left side. Run the forward scabbard strap through the fork on the saddle and the rear scabbard strap can be run through a rear latigo keeper or a loop tied in the cantle string. This position allows the rifle to be carried, sights up, along the barrel of a horse. If he goes down for some reason, or is floundering through a bog hole, the rifle is out of the way of his feet

and is least apt to be damaged. If it is a gentle horse, the rifle can be slung under the stirrup leather; but if the horse is a bronc or riding rough country, I like to slip the scabbard between the stirrup leathers. Thus your weight on the stirrup also holds the rifle in one position. You can ride a hard bucking horse and still keep your rifle in place. It does not pound the horse and when you jump off you can quickly reach your rifle. Also, you can draw it easily while still in the saddle. No other position suits me, or most of the old-timers I know. The rifle is best protected in this position if a horse goes down. When you get off a horse and tie him up or drop the reins, always take your rifle with you, as the horse may want to roll and get that sweaty saddle off his back with disastrous results to the rifle.

Horses are also prone to rub against
continued on page 12



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GUNNOTES

continued from page 10

trees, or other horses, when tied up and this can also ruin a good rifle. Back in the early Fifties the president of the NRA asked me to design what I considered the best possible saddle scabbard for the Boyl outfit, which I did. Heavy saddle skirting leather was used for a full-length case with a heavy fleece lining throughout. A heavy zipper around the butt end of the scabbard keeps the rifle completely encased and protected come rain or snow. My scabbard is now made only by Milt Sparks of Idaho City, Idaho. You can carry a fine rifle in this scabbard and keep it in perfect shape and in a rain or snow storm you can pull the zipper around the butt and have a clean rifle and scope. I have found nothing on the market to equal it, and my son Ted and I used it every fall we were on a horse. This scabbard and the northwest position is well illustrated in some of my books, namely the 1965 edition of *Guns & Ammo for Big Game Hunting* and in my latest, *Hell, I was There!* and has been in quite a few of my old articles.

Next, let us look at carrying the sixgun on a horse. The best possible outfit is a good gun belt and holster. My old batwing chaps have a small ring in one of the conchos and I used to have a small snap in the bottom of the holster. With the gun belt in a comfortable position. I would snap the snap in the ring on the concho and the gun was tied down and in perfect position when needed. I used only tight holsters so the gun required a jerk to free it. This saved my life a couple of times with wild brones and mean cattle. I used to punch a couple of holes through the gun holster below the triggerguard and then run a buckskin thong through and tie it to give the exact tension on the gun that I wanted. That was before I designed No. 120 and No. 34 holsters for the George Lawrence Co. and I had them made with a glove fastener and a long safety strap to go over the gun. The strap is long enough so that it can be folded back under the gun belt if quick use of the gun is needed. When riding a bronc or fishing, the strap ensures that the gun stays put where you want it. Today we mostly ride gas burners and short guns are in order so they won't project down in the car seat and raise your belt.

Milt Sparks and I redesigned Hank Sloan's old FBI holster by tipping the gun butt forward and eliminating the closed bottom that only caught leaves and dirt and made the holster longer. Sloan's loose fillet below the triggerguard can be pushed in for any desired tension and locked by the big lock screw, which ensures any tension you want on the gun with no safety straps needed. I remember the old holsters made by the late Capt. A.H. Hardy. I have one he made for me for a 4¼-inch Single Action Colt. In the top front of the holster he sewed a narrow strap of light leather just wide enough to go in the cut of the

Colt frame for the hammer. Then a small hole was cut in the strap, through which you could let the hammer down with the firing pin. In this way the firing pin rested through the small strip of leather and could not reach the primer, so you could carry six rounds safely in the old gun. When you drew the gun, the first movement backward to cock the gun also cleared the firing pin from the strap so it could be used in quick-draw hip shooting, as well as holding the gun in the scabbard even on a bucking horse. Capt. Hardy and his daughter used to do the real shooting for the movies from the sideline while the hero pulled off impossible stunts with his sixguns.

Shoulder holsters are needed today if you pack a long-barreled gun in a car, as the long guns are in the way and very uncomfortable in any kind of belt rig. On horseback, I don't like a shoulder holster but used to carry an extra gun in one when hunting cow thieves in my earlier days. I remember once a bronc busted off down a steep mountain with me and the extra gun



flew out of the shoulder holster and I spent over two hours riding up and down the trail before I found my extra gun in the sagebrush. Some shoulder holsters I have seen have too heavy of a retaining spring and two men and a donkey are required to pull the gun. These are not for me and I have used George Lawrence shoulder holsters mostly. A gun can be concealed well in a good shoulder holster and the gun also has complete protection. Shoulder holsters are comfortable when riding in a car. When transportation was largely hay burners you could carry anything from a four- to a 7½-inch barreled gun on a gun-belt, but now the horse days involve long guns except for pack trips in the high country or isolated ranches throughout the country. In the old days I never knew any cowpokes who carried their guns halfway down their legs as presently seen in so many movies. John Wayne carried a six-gun as most of us did, and it's still the best for gunbelt holsters. Crossdraw is something else and many of the old timers liked a gun in a crossdraw holster, particularly if they were roping heavy cattle. I used to slide my gun around to the left side when doing heavy roping, so the rope would not snag the gun.

John Emmett Berns and I designed the upsidedown shoulder holster for short guns. It is very fast for a shoulder holster as the gun butt is in position to grasp and a quick draw is possible. It is one of the best methods for concealing a short gun

continued on page 16

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GUNNOTES

continued from page 12

and still have it instantly available. This method is especially popular with two- and three-inch barreled revolvers.

Quick draw artists have their own designs of holsters best suited to the individual draws they use, but I am not going to get into their designs. Most of them shoot as the gun clears the holster and I was taught a different method, namely to draw and throw the gun at the target and fire as my arms straighten out with the gun on target. It is the one and only method I have ever found that I could hit with every time! Only the shots that hit are the ones that count. I demonstrated it at Ogden Arsenal twice before most of the officers there and placed six shots from a 1917 S&W under the spread of my hand in the silhouette target at 15 yards—not seven yards, from which most quick draw shooting is fired.

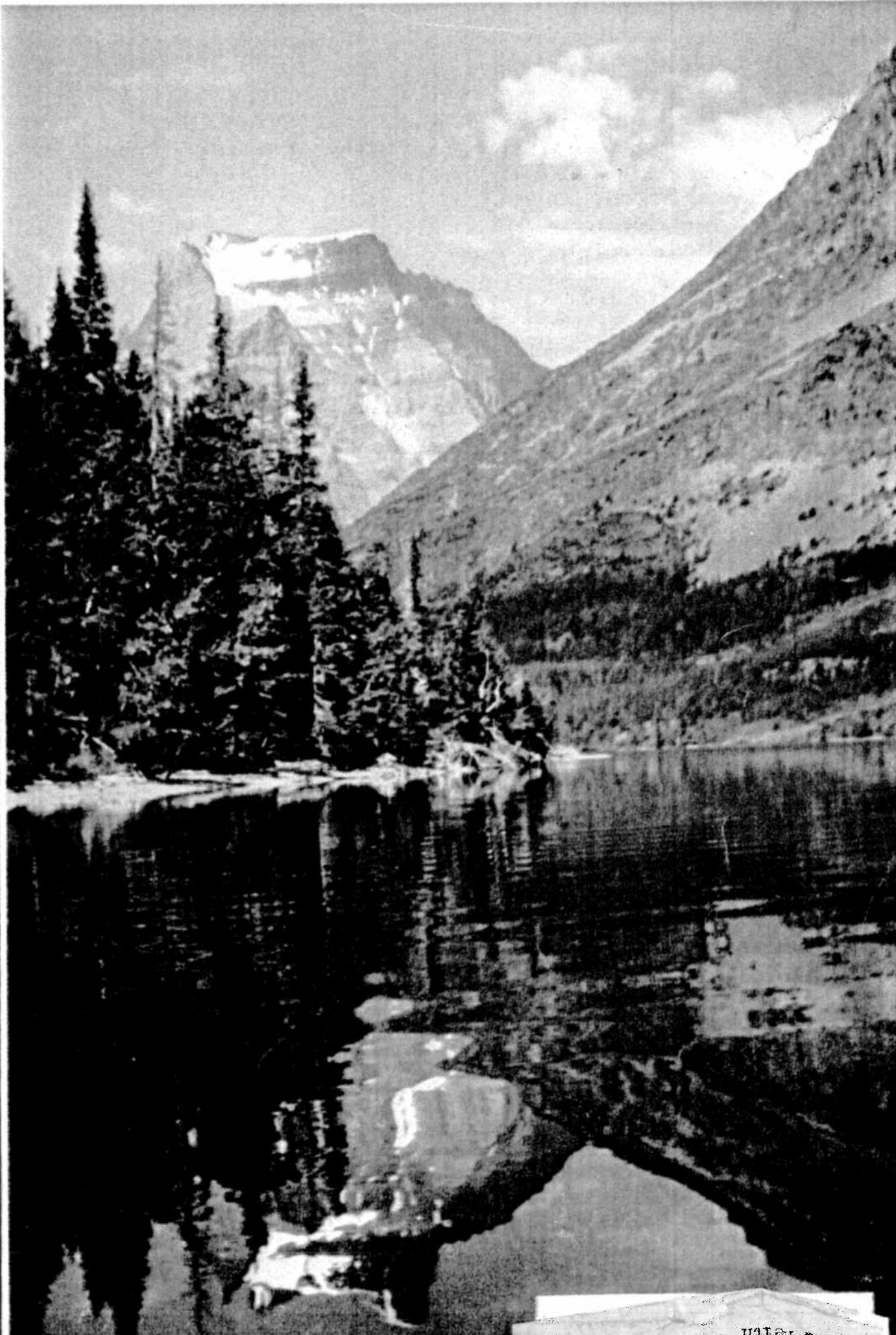
The fastest gun rig of all, for me at least, is the Jesse Thompson swivel rig. On Single Action Colts, the hammer screw projects about 1/4 inch on the left side and has a big head about a half inch or more in diameter and this fits in under the fingers of a belt clip riveted solidly to the gun belt. You simply wipe the gun toward the target and fire as your arm straightens out. It is a quarter second or faster draw and Bill Jordan depicts it in his excellent book, *No Second Place Winner*. I also saw a picture of a Texas Ranger carrying such a rig back in the 1880s. The rig was known as the "Bridgeport" patented device.

They are by far the fastest of all for me but offer no protection whatsoever for the gun. You can spin it around on the gun belt and a gun will conform to any position you get into, even sitting in a car seat. If the chips were down I would take it and my old John Newman 4 1/4-inch .45 Colt Single Action or my Roosevelt .44 Special custom Colt Single Action in preference to any other gun, or holster rig.

Always carry an empty chamber and five rounds in the old Colt Single Action and the old model Ruger Super Blackhawk, and be safe. Five rounds is enough to settle any gunfight if you are planted, and you will have plenty of time to reload. Three friends of mine have shot themselves through the leg by carrying six rounds in the old Single Action when they hung a heavy stirrup on the saddle horn while saddling a horse. When each heaved up on the cinch latigo to tighten the cinch on the nag, the stirrup fell down on the hammer spur and fired the gun. Another friend in Montana had a .45 Single Action fully loaded in the back seat of his car and he and his wife were riding in the front seat. They hit a heavy bump in the road, and the gun pounced forward and hit something on the hammer spur. The .45 slug went through the seat back and killed his wife. So beware of carrying six rounds in the old guns unless you are expecting to need them in a gunfight.

FEBRUARY
1953

AMERICAN RIFLEMAN





Keith demonstrates a quick draw from the Berns-Martin upside-down or Lightning shoulder holster. Holster is designed for short-barrel guns

GUN RIGS

Only Elmer Keith could give us this survey of the belt-and-holster combinations that are, and have been, used for totin' sixguns



By Elmer Keith

MANY methods have been used to carry pistols during the last 150 years. The long, cumbersome, flintlock martial pistols of the eighteenth century were usually carried, in pairs, in a sash around the waist or in holsters strapped to the fork of the saddle. Short pistols of that era were often carried in waistcoat pockets, in milady's muff, or in a sash.

With the advent of the percussion cap, many so-called 'pocket' pistols were produced and sold, usually in pairs, some of which were small and easily carried in pockets. The Philadelphia derringers, which could be carried easily in vest pockets, became almost a trademark of gamblers.

With the coming of the Mexican War the value of the newly-perfected revolver led to the production of good belt holsters as well as saddle holsters for the long heavy Walker Colts that weighed over four pounds each. The Civil War produced an ever-increasing demand for Colt and other makes of percussion revolvers. These proved so

valuable that all cavalry troops were equipped with them as well as with sabers and carbines.

Cavalry holsters of the Civil War period were made in many types. Some officers clung to twin holsters strapped to the fork of the saddle, but continued fighting soon showed the need of belt holsters. The men of these troops usually carried their revolvers on either hip with the butts to the front.

In this position a cavalryman could reach a pistol with either hand in case the other was engaged with saber or bridle reins, or in case he was wounded in one hand or arm.

The California gold rush and the settling of Texas, with their demands for weapon readiness, led to the open-top holsters for belt use and quick-draw hip shooting. Maj. R. E. Stratton, who served with the 1st Texas regiment with Lee in Virginia, and later with the famous Texas Rangers, knew most of the best gun fighters of the time and fought and worked with

them. He wrote me numerous lengthy letters on the subject of sidearms and holsters. He also sold me his one remaining engraved .36 Navy Colt, the mate to which he lost, along with his left arm, in a gun fight in Cheyenne.

The Texas trail drives after the Civil War created further demand for sixguns and good holsters. Over much of the West the sixgun was the only law. Every conceivable type of holster was evolved and used to find the best and the fastest gun rig for the man whose life might depend on his ability to draw and shoot on a second's notice.

Many of those old boys were faster and better shots than some writers would have us believe, though they never did some of the crazy, impossible shooting that fiction writers and the movies attribute to them. As a class, however, the men who settled the western United States were among the fastest and deadliest gun fighters who ever lived. An uncle of mine served under Quantrill at one time and saw service with the James and

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Elmer Keith shown wearing right hand
hip-draw holster in lower position

Younger boys on the southern side of the fence. I still remember as a boy seeing Frank James start the horse races at Carrollton, Missouri.

Today about the only class of men who are good at quick draw are law-enforcement officers, plus a few scattered individuals over the country. Some present-day experts may be even faster and better shots and have better guns, but the fact remains that the old boys of the late 19th century were good, and some were exceptionally fast and accurate with their sixguns.

Probably ninety-five percent of the old boys carried their guns in open-top belt holsters. The best of them preferred a minimum of leather and weight in the holster and belt, preferring more loops for ammunition to a huge Mexican-type holster with needless extra leather. The best hip shots used holsters which left both trigger guard and hammer above the holster and, usually, the grip of the gun above the top level of the gun belt. The butt was tipped forward, whether the gun was worn with butt to front or rear, to facilitate a smooth, even draw. No "faster" holster has ever been evolved.

Some old-timers preferred the cross-draw holster and wore their guns on either side of the belt buckle, much as the pockets are placed on pants. The gun butt sloped to the center for either right- or left-hand draw. This,

one of the "fastest" of gun holsters, is well adapted to plainclothes use, where the coat conceals the gun yet leaves it instantly available.*

I remember when most peace officers used a gun belt and either cross-draw or side-draw holsters. Today, most officers in plain clothes use the holster on their waist belt, some preferring the hip draw and some the cross draw.

The high position with the holster on the waist belt offers better concealment of a heavy gun under the coat, but it is not as fast as the lower position with the holster on a gun belt. For the cow puncher, rancher, or peace officer working open ranch country nothing is better than the lower gun

* Some states require a license to carry a firearm concealed. See "The Gun Law Problem", page 16.

position. The officer or plain man in the city must have a concealed weapon or be uniformed.

Some plainclothes men like to draw, while others find the cross best. The cross draw has its advantage when riding in a car or when one may be driving the car and a prisoner with him, in which case the gun is best on his left side, away from the prisoner. Of the two high positions I find the cross draw faster.

All holsters should be made with belt loops that fit the belt exactly so that they will stay in any position around the waist or gun belt. There is no more comfortable way to carry a heavy gun and a box or nearly a heavy sixgun ammunition than in a belt holster and a belt of about one and a half inches width. It is the outfit of the rider. The holster tips the butt of the gun forward, which speeds up the draw and keeps the gun barrel almost horizontal when one is on a horse, due to the knees being forward when mounted.

If the old cavalry position is used, with the butt to the rear and barrels sloping to the rear, the gun or guns can be reached easily with either hand. I know some good officers who use such a position.

The uniformed officer is limited to the Sam Browne belt and either a cross-draw or hip-draw holster. I have always felt that a Sam Browne holster is a crude, cumbersome affair, far from the best way of packing a gun for port or speed. However, it does draw faster than most concealment holsters and it is probably the best for the outside of a coat. A good grade of light skirting or double clap of 2 1/2 inches width in the section of the coat and money-belt makes much lighter and more comfortable than the heavy harness-like Browne. One can carry a considerable amount of ammunition in the gun.

The shoulder holster provides a concealed position for the gun when one wears a coat. The gun is readily accessible from a spring shoulder holster, which is comfortable even with a heavy gun. But with a spring shoulder



Colt Single Action concealed
a slip hammer gun. Trigger
is removed and hammer
is fired. Gun is fired by
falling as thumb slips c

holster the draw is never as fast as with a conventional shoulder holster, for the reason that the grip on the gun must be shifted slightly as it comes out of the holster. If a spring shoulder holster were designed to give one an easy, full grip on the gun *before* the draw, then it would be very fast.

The Berns-Martin upside-down or Lightning shoulder holster for short two-inch barrel guns is a 'fast' outfit and one can get the gun with either hand from this excellent holster. It's a peach for detectives and plainclothesmen using short, light guns.

The Berns-Martin holster is also fast for belt use, particularly for those wanting to carry a long-barrelled gun concealed. It is a spring clip holster which opens down the front. One merely rocks the butt of the gun forward to clear the holster, then flips up the muzzle for the shot. It is one of the fastest of all holsters used on the belt.

Many hide-out positions and holsters have been devised for light, short guns. An old outlaw I knew in Montana had a lemon-squeezer Smith & Wesson in a small holster inside the right front of his waistband, the loop extending outside and over the waist belt. C. O. Maxwell used such an outfit for years, but with a heavier gun. The George Lawrence Company of Portland, Oregon, now makes such a holster for 2-inch barrelled guns. Another old gun fighter I knew (like most of them, long gone to a fairer land) used a right hip-pocket holster for a $4\frac{3}{4}$ -inch .45 single action, with butt of the gun forward. Very fast with that outfit, he was deadly accurate at hip shooting ranges, and in his time shot himself out of several bad scrapes.

Men differ greatly in body shape and in preference of gun position and holsters. What suits one man may be slow for another, and uncomfortable as well. I have noticed over the years that big, heavy men usually favor cross-draw holsters. Thin men are more apt to favor the hip draw or waistband draw than the cross draw.

John Newman packed a couple of 2-inch barrelled .45 single-action Colt slip guns in his front pants pockets, and usually had a gun in one hand or the other when expecting trouble. He had his suits made roomy, with big, strong front pockets so that in a pinch he could simply shoot through his pockets and get the job done with the least fuss and loss of time.

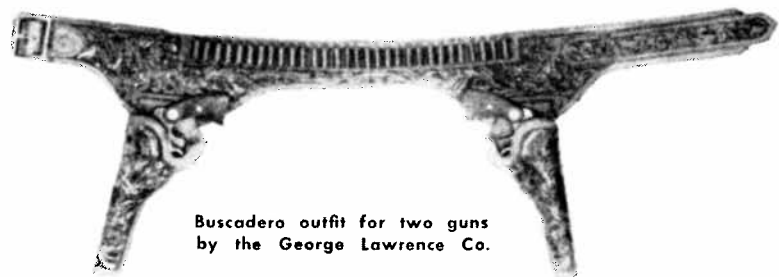
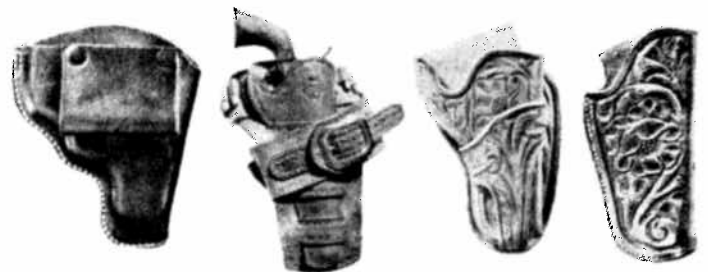
I have seen one suspender holster of the shoulder-holster type that worked very well for plainclothes men. The gun was carried rather low for a shoulder holster, just above the waist belt, with butt well forward, so that one could



Lawrence spring shoulder holster



Above: Holster designs to fit various types of guns. Below (l to r): waist band holster, and three right hand hip-draw holsters



Buscadero outfit for two guns by the George Lawrence Co.

get a good shooting grip on the gun when he drew it. It was both fast and well concealed. Personally, I never liked 'galluses' and would not like such an outfit for myself.

The first Buscadero belt I ever saw was on some Hollywood Hero. I have never seen any of these huge leather corsets on the range, though the old stage drivers used to wear a wide belt to help protect their kidneys from the continuous jolting of the coach. Many freighters also wore them for the same purpose. I have seen them slip a gun down in front of these belts much the same as many old-time bartenders and some peace officers would slip a $4\frac{3}{4}$ -inch .45 Colt in the front of their waistbands with the loading gate open to keep the gun from slipping. This position is fast and handy, but offers little protection to the gun on hot days—perspiration will rust any blued gun.

The big Buscadero belts are ornamental and useful for exhibition shooters. Any desired position and angle of the gun can be attained and the guns are also swung low in the best possible position for a quick draw. However, such belts are wide, heavy, and hot, covering up too much of one's anatomy for comfort. While they make an excellent corset, I would prefer a $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch width gun belt to any of them. For a quick-draw outfit I like the grip of the gun above the belt so that no leather gets in the way of the fingers of the shooting hand.

Heavy and wide Mexican-type holsters with wide back skirts are in the same category as Buscadero belts. They, like the Buscadero belts, offer a lot of expanse of fine leather for the expert leather worker to do a beautiful job of carving, but they are not practical.

(Continued on page 65)

Gun Rigs

(Continued from page 25)

Some folks like holsters loose on their guns, especially those who walk or ride only in cars, but I much prefer a holster that fits the gun snug and fairly tight. It will not then jump, or fall out of the holster, if you jump a ditch or log or get a bad fall or are on a pitching horse. For the same reason I prefer to have a safety strap, narrow and long, over the gun back of the hammer spur, so that one can snap the heavy glove fastener when he has to ride a mean horse and know his gun will stay put.

If the gun belt is worn fairly low and tight around the hips, the holster won't move when the gun is drawn. A leg strap can also be used by the rider to keep the gun from flying up. I used to have a small snap on the bottom of the holsters and a ring on the side of my chaps so that I could snap the bottom of the holster to the ring and the gun could not move from its proper position. It was always in the right place when needed.

Many years ago I designed a holster for the single-action Colt for the George Lawrence Company of Portland, Oregon, that suits me better than any other I have ever used on a belt gun. S. D. Myres of El Paso, Texas, also has a similar design in his "Tom Three Person" holsters.

The best holster makers I know of in this country are the George Lawrence Company of Portland, Oregon, the S. D. Myres Saddle Company of El Paso, Texas, and J. H. Martin, of Calhoun City, Mississippi. There are many other saddlemakers who do the best of fine leather work as well, and their materials and workmanship are beyond reproach, but very few have the grasp of the shooters' needs and can execute the proper design.

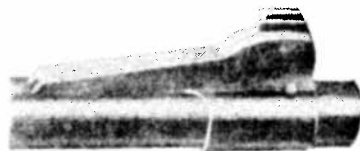
One individual who does grasp the shooter's needs is Capt. A. H. Hardy of Hollywood, California. He makes some fine holsters and gun cases and, being a lifetime shooter, he knows how to make them right. He has worked out the best system I have yet seen for holding a single-action Colt in a holster. He simply sews a strip of light leather with a hole through it in the top front of the holster that comes back over the top of the frame and fits around the firing pin on the hammer. One simply lets the hammer down with the firing pin through the hole in the strip of leather and the main spring tension keeps the gun from being jarred or shaken from the holster. Yet the gun clears the holster instantly if you cock it as it is drawn, all in one quick, swinging motion. This is a better and faster system than a safety strap or the leather string loop which so many cowpunchers hooked over the hammer spur of their guns and thumbed off as they drew. Of course, it works only on the single-

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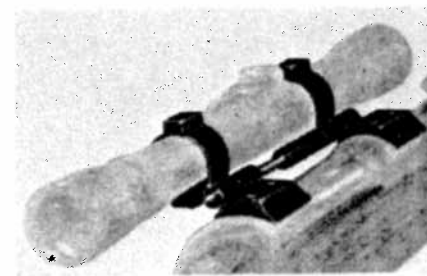
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action Colt. For double-action carried with the grip and trigger riding above the leather of the holster a safety strap in back of hammer glove fastener is a good addition for the rancher, hunter, or rider. The strap should be long enough to fasten back inside the belt when not needed.

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Scattergun Ammunition

(Continued from page 29)

August 1951, page 24) used by market gunners were more in the cannon class, weighing from 20 to over 100 pounds, and firing a pound or two of shot for kills at well over 100 yards. Since the migratory bird law was passed, however, guns over 10-gauge in size have been illegal. The largest magnum presently manufactured in this country is the Winchester model 12 pump in 12-gauge with a 3-inch magnum shell. Few gunners would ask for a gun more powerful than this, but there is one available. The Continental Arms 'Magnum Wildfowl' is a double-barrel \$400 Belgian creation, fitted with a rubber recoil pad. This gun utilizes 5 drams of powder and 2 ounces of shot in a 3½-inch magnum shell.

In the overall view, American shotguns and their ammunition represent another way that natural ingenuity has been harnessed to bring outstanding value to the ordinary sportsman. Everywhere else in the world sporting weapons are made for a favored few who can afford beautifully hand-made weapons, and the privileges of being allowed to hunt. Here, guns are available to all, and at lower prices, in relation to wages, than anywhere else.

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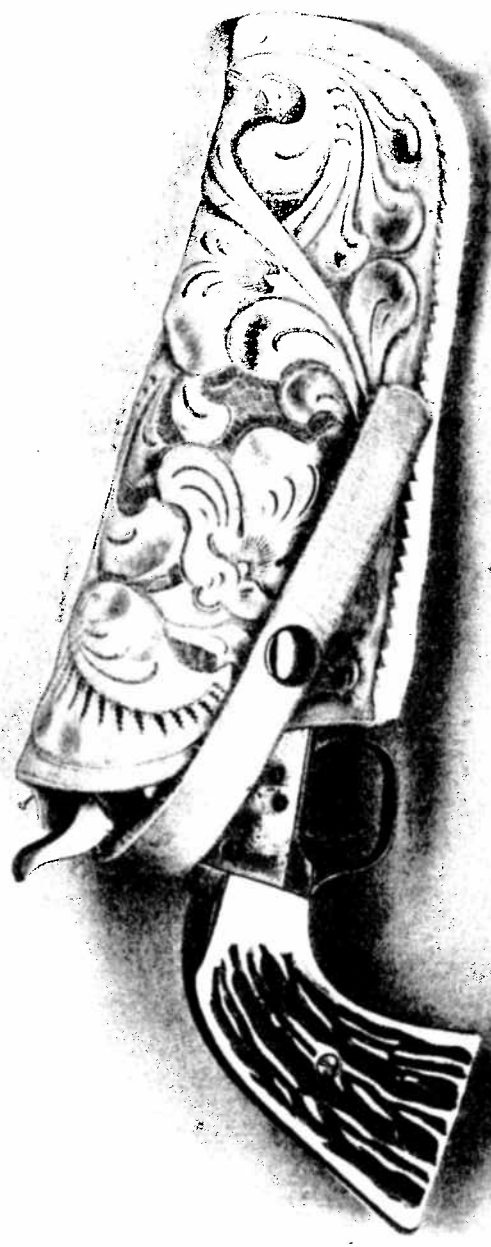
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(Right) This is just a part of Elmer Keith's collection of handguns, ammunition belts, holsters. (Left below) Keith-designed Number 120 George Lawrence holster for single-action Colt is fine example of leatherwork. (Right below) George Lawrence Number 7 shoulder holster is comfortable and a very practical means of carrying a handgun.

