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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 near 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
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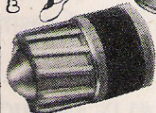
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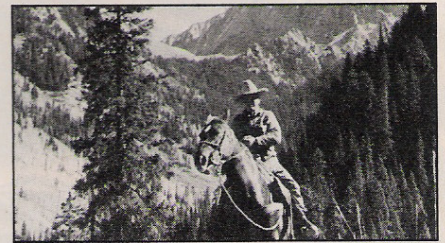
trees, or other horses, when tied up and this can also ruin a good rifle. Back in the early Fifties the president of the NRA asked me to design what I considered the best possible saddle scabbard for the Boyt outfit, which I did. Heavy saddle skirting leather was used for a full-length case with a heavy 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 broncs 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 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ -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 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ -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

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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 3/4 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 3/4-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.