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# GUN NOTES



By Elmer Keith, Executive Editor

## TRAPPING AND THE LAW

*continued from last month*

*In these excerpts from Hell, I Was There!, Elmer relates his experiences with the guns and the great outdoors of his youth. Last month, we left off where Keith had just shot and skinned his first bobcat.*

In the summer of 19 and 20 I signed up with the U.S. G.L.O. to run a government pack string from Ovando as far down as Big Salmon Lake; six days one way on the South Fork of the Flathead. They had hired this big string from a man named Stanley Arkwright at Miles City in addition to two more small strings, so we had 23 head of packs and our two saddle horses. Arkwright had never packed but he was a good cowpuncher and a big powerful man. I let him do the lifting while I lashed stuff on.

We had only sawbuck saddles, had to pack the sides and the top pack, then throw a diamond hitch on top of it all. I used the old government three-quarter diamond most of the time. It always worked well for me with sawbuck saddles. A man named Harris was the U.S. cadastal engineer. I told him that one pack string wasn't enough to handle a double survey crew of 16 men, plus the cook, his wife, and little five-year-old daughter that far from Ovando unless he let us buy the grub. I says, "If you'll let me buy the grub and let me take in only dry food, dried fruit, dried beans, and stuff of that sort, I believe I can supply you with these 23 head of horses. But if you are going to order canned goods to any extent at all, why it's impossible."

He decided I could handle it, and he

would buy the grub. So he bought canned peaches, apricots, pears, pineapple, canned pork and beans. He bought all the canned goods he could, and I had to freight all that water in over the divide. We had no man-ties, so we had to get good wooden boxes as much as possible, or sack up stuff for top packs in order to move it. We moved the whole outfit into Sullivan's cabin over the Montour Divide and arrived at Babcock Creek to find it in flood stage. I told him it was impossible for a string to get through without drowning. He wanted me to tackle it. I wouldn't do it. So I says,



**Elmer Keith's first hunting rifles were Sharps buffalo guns. He has collected and hunted with them through his long career. Elmer shot this bison with a .45-120 Sharps using a 566-grain cast bullet.**

"The only thing to do is to set here a week until this water comes down."

Another man came along with a sever mule string and decided to try it. He got out with his saddle horse and one of the six mules and the others all drowned. Then Mr. Harris agreed to let me go back to Ovando and freight in another load of grub

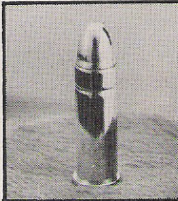
*continued on page 12*

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# BEEMAN

## GUNNOTES

*continued from page 10*

and pile it up there. When Babcock Creek started dropping he changed his mind, and decided we ought to go on. He says, "Why don't you go out and kill an elk for us and then we can make it until you get us over to Big Salmon Lake and come back for another load of grub?" I told him. I was at loggerheads already with the game department and the forest service on account of a fire I had had on McCabe Creek the year before when I was working for the forest service. A man named Tatro and I fought the fire a week and it was getting away from us all the time and I asked the ranger for a crew and a cook and bedding so we could stay with it and get it out. Finally he said us punks didn't know what we were doing anyway. He pulled 20 men off of the trail crew and went over and took charge of the fire. It got away from him and



*This photo shows Keith in 1951 sighting in an 18-pound .45-100-566 Sharps Sporting rifle.*

burned up 20 square miles of Anaconda Copper Company's saw timber.

There was hell to pay.

The supervisor came up from Missoula and he questioned everybody. Finally he questioned a man named Clarence Herring. Clarence says, "I been the cook here all this time." He says, "Keith has come in and asked for men for a week." He said, "Him and Tatro stayed out there three days on one lunch fighting that fire, trying to hold it, and" he says, "Beard, the ranger, wouldn't give them any men. Finally when he did go, it was too late and the fire got away from them." I knew Beard held that against me and there was nothing I could do about it.

When Harris wanted me to kill an elk I told him, "He's got two smokechasers here and if they hear a rifle shot I know they will investigate."

"Well," Harris says, "you get me an elk." I says, "Will you be responsible, Mr. Harris?" He says, "I will." He says, "It's customary for survey crews to kill meat in the hills and live on it when they can't get any fresh meat and the camp is far into the wilderness." I knew that because I'd already acted as meat getter on a couple of surveys. I had my sixgun and a little .250-

3000 Savage for a saddle gun, so I went over to a lick I knew about and sconched myself behind a log 50 yards from the lick. I laid there and after a while I saw an old cow elk coming with several more behind her. She came up to some timber about 50 yards from the lick on the other side. She poked one eye and one ear around the bole of the tree, and watched for several minutes. Then she slowly pulled her head back and those elk all disappeared without a sound. I laid there until nearly night. Finally a five-point bull came in. I took a bead on his heart, and was going to pull the trigger, when I had a feeling somebody was watching me. I put the safety on, made a circle, and found tracks of a man, but I never found him. So I went a couple of miles farther over where I knew there was another elk lick and I waited there. Just before dark a big dry cow came in. I shot her right in the front of the neck, and down she went in a pile. She jumped up and whirled to go around. I shot her again in the side of the neck. I didn't know it at the time but I cut the jugular vein that time, too low for the spine. She went down in a pile again and jumped up and ran again. I chucked the darn Savage, pulled the six-shooter and taking both hands, I hit her in the back of the head and that did it.

I took the feet, hide, head and all the guts, dug a hole, piled them in it, covered them up neat, sacked the four quarters and with ropes I had along, pulled them up in fir trees and tied them. I took the heart and liver and went to camp. The next morning Harris says, "We'll break camp today and head on up Babcock Creek, over the ridge and down to Big Salmon Lake from the back side."

We had most of the camp down and when we pulled down the cook tent, bless Moses, there was the heart and liver laying in a dishpan. At the same time along came Bud Beard and two of his smokechasers and sat down in the camp. They knew darn well I'd killed an elk. They had a pow-wow with Harris and wanted to take me to Ovando, Harris told me. They had quite a pow-wow. Finally they said if I would turn over my guns to them they'd let me go on and pack. I had no intention of going anywhere with them. If they wanted a gun fight they could have it because I knew them too well. I didn't know if I would get to Ovando if I did go with them after turning my guns over to them. So finally I agreed to turn my rifle over to them.

When they first came to camp they walked over by my saddle. My rifle and sixgun were on it so I walked over, buckled the sixgun on and ran the strap around my leg, threw a saddle on a horse and led him over to the other side of camp. After the pow-wow and they decided I'd turn a rifle over, they let me go on the pack. So I pulled the little Savage out of the scabbard, walked over and turned it on the three of them. I slowly worked the shells out of the magazine while I looked them in the eyes. Their faces got as white as chalk. I re-

*continued on page 15*

## GUNNOTES

*continued from page 12*

versed the gun and handed it to Beard. He says, "Let me have your sixgun."

I said, "Never. I'm not going to be in the hills with you birds without a gun." They let me go on and pack.

We finally made it up Babcock Creek and over Holbrook Ridge, down into the head of the creek that fed Big Salmon Lake and established camp. There Arkwright and I pulled out for Ovando. We left the elk with them, but even so I knew they were going to run out of grub. It was six days one way back to Ovando, then a day to go over the packs, cargo up the grub, and start the next six-day trek back. We did our part of it, but the survey crew at Big Salmon Lake ate all the food they had, ate all the elk, boiled the bones, and they were counting the number of beans each man got with his soup the day before we got back. They said they intended to try to hike out to Ovando the next day, but without grub they never would have made it.

We packed out of Ovando for about half the summer, then went down past Holland Lake to the head of Swan River to a ranch there. From there we took a Dodge truck and went to Missoula, and freighted the food up to the ranch in this Dodge truck. It would twist an axle off about every trip so we carried a couple of spares. Then we'd

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pack up around the old goat trail above Holland Lake, over the divide, and down Holbrook Ridge into the camp.

Horses had never been taken around the mountain on the right side of the lake to intercept the old South Fork of the Flathead trail. I asked a ranger that came in one day if it was possible. He said he didn't think so, but we could try it. So Arkwright and I elected to go out that way and save the long climb up over Holbrook Ridge, down into Babcock Creek, and down to Sullivan's cabin. We had a rough time of it getting off that mountain. We skinned some of the horses up but we didn't break any legs, and we made it. Up past Big Prairie Ranger Station we intercepted the trail over the Montour at Sullivan's cabin.

After the survey was over and I was home, Dad wrote Bud Beard for the return of my rifle. It didn't come. Dad said, "Send it, Bud, or I'll come over after you and it too." Then the rifle came. In the meantime they killed an elk, for evidence, probably one of Bud Beard's, took the front quarters, shipped them to Helena and put them in cold storage. They were determined to get us some way.

*Continued Next Month*

# Black Powder Champions Win With Hornady!

*Don Malson — Captain, U.S.  
Muzzle Loading Team and  
Leading Medalist at the  
World Championships*



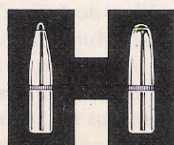
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