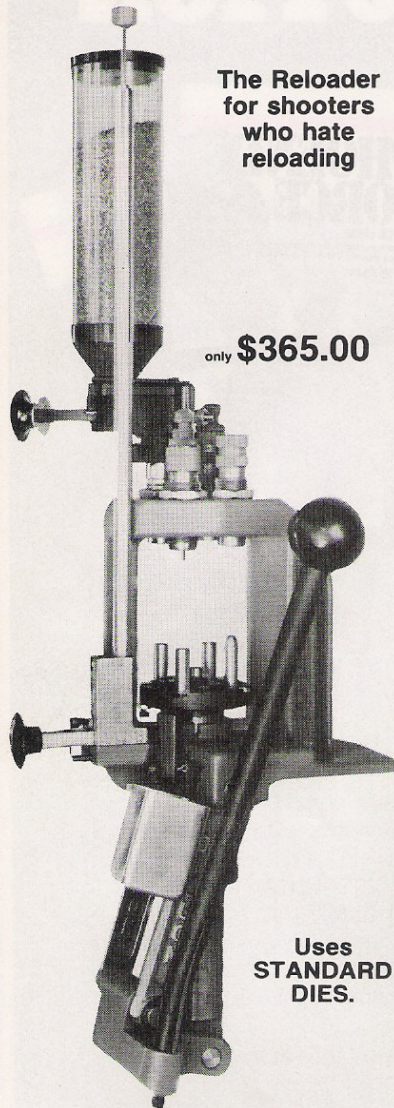


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GUN NOTES



By *Elmer Keith, Executive Editor*

TRAPPING AND THE LAW *continued from last month*

In these excerpts from Hell, I Was There!, Elmer reflects upon his early days of hunting and trapping. Last month, we left off where Elmer had been packing supplies in to a government survey camp.

George Lamb and I were trapping muskrats at the head of Helena Lake. I remember we got 88 rats, three mink, and a skunk in the ten days. We'd broken camp at the lake there in a little cabin, and packed up all our fur on a packhorse, and were heading for Lamb's ranch. A big car came along, stopped, and two men got out. One each side, both were in full-length beaver overcoats. At that time all the game department men and their wives had full-length beaver coats. There was a lot of politics in the beaver industry in Montana in those days.

One of them named Bosler came over and he says, "You Elmer Keith?" I says, "Yes." He says, "You're under arrest." I says, "What's that all about?" "Oh," he says, "I've got a warrant for you. We're going to take you up to the state game warden." I says, "Okay."

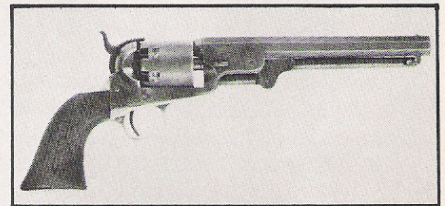
I unbuckled my sixgun and handed it over to George. He looped it around the fork of his saddle. Bosler rushed over and said, "Give me that gun." George drew it and cocked it. He says, "Where do you want it, Mr. Bosler? This gun was left in my care, and all you'll get out of it is the contents." They desisted, so I got in the car with them. I asked them if I could stop and shave, so they stopped at Lamb's ranch, let me shave, change clothes, and then took me up to the state capital. Immediately

they said that I'd killed an elk and they had half of it in cold storage.

I says, "Mister, I never done anything that I'm ashamed of in my life. I did kill one elk for a double survey crew and the cook's wife and little girl, and they ate it, they cracked the bones for marrow, they boiled it, and every sprig of it was eaten."

I says, "If you're going to prove that this half elk you got here is mine, you can just go ahead and hop to it."

I phoned Dad at Winston. He was on the warpath instantly. He got hold of the state game warden, told him to go right ahead. He says, "I watched Harry Morgan



Keith recalls that his first good six-gun was a cap and ball .36 caliber Colt, such as this 1851 Navy.

killing grouse out of season last year when it wasn't necessary." He says, "My kid killed an elk when it was necessary to feed people, and we'll fight it to the last ditch if you want it."

So Dad came to town and we went up to the survey office and asked Mr. Harris what he wanted to do about it.

"I can't be mixed up in it in any way. You'll have to take the rap, Elmer."

"Well," I says, "I've no intention of taking any rap. I've done nothing I'm ashamed of in my whole damn life, and I'm not about to start in now."

So they turned me loose, and went after
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GUNNOTES

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Mr. Harris. They got him to 'fess up and pay a \$200 fine. Next time I came to town, Harris wanted me to ante \$20 to help him with the fine. I told him to go plumb straight to.

That was the first and only time I've ever been arrested.

Next summer at the ranch several people came in from Ovando. They said to tell Elmer to never go back to Ovando, that Morgan and Beard are going to get him if he ever shows up. Dad heard it all. Finally one morning he says, "Elmer, I guess you and John Lawther want to go to Ovando elk hunting this fall, don't you?"

I says, "Yes, Dad, I think we'll go up there." Dad never said any more but when he came back from Helena he had 200 pounds of pig lead, 25 pounds of black powder and 5,000 caps for my old .45 Colt. I asked him what this was all about now that the sheep were gone. "Oh," he says, "I thought you might want to do a little practicing 'fore you went to Ovando this fall."

Practice we did, both John and I. I was very good with a single action then, and could draw and hit a gallon can at ten yards in about a quarter of a second or a shade over. I had two .44-77 Sharps, and plenty of handloads for both rifles. We elected to use them for the elk, as they had proved adequate and far better than any .30 caliber for me. We saddled up, loaded our beds and grub on packs, took extra pack horses, and lit out for the long trek to Ovando.


When we came in sight of the town, I just ran the strap of my old sixgun around my leg and buckled it down. I told John, "The first thing we've got to do is call those crooks." Ovando at that time was in the form of a little square. Scoop Moore ran a billiard parlor and a restaurant, and to the right of it was Kit Young's saloon and across the street the other way was the post office. We rode up where we could look into the billiard parlor. There were curtains around the lower part of the window. Harry Morgan and another man were playing pool. John laid his old Sharps across the saddle, cocked it, and I fell off my horse and went in the door. Morgan whirled around when he saw me. He looked like he'd seen a ghost. I called him everything I could think of that would make a chipmunk fight. He wouldn't. I knew he had a .41 Colt in a shoulder holster and another one on his hip. I begged him to take one hand off the billiard cue so I could kill him, but he wouldn't do it.


I says, "Mister, you sent word you was going to get me if I ever came over here. I'm here now and I'm calling you publicly. Fight or get out." He wouldn't fight so I backed out while John watched him, went over to the store and found the ranger and I called him. He wouldn't fight either.

We went to see some friends named Hol-

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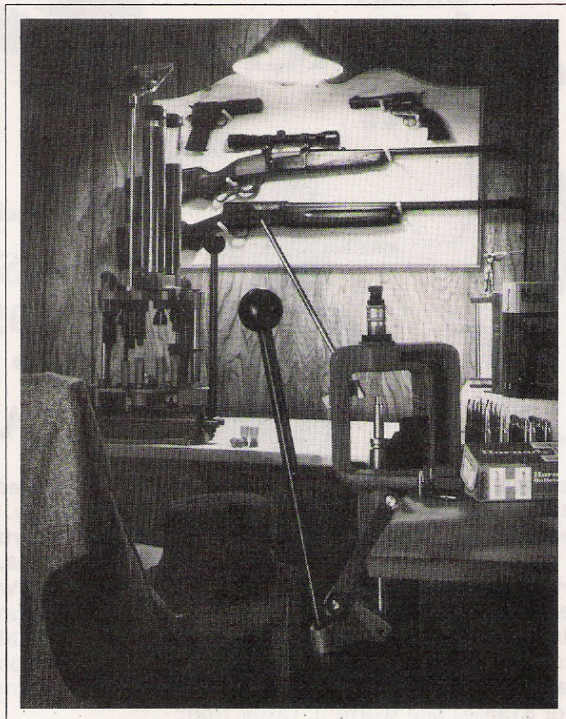
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ler and stayed overnight with them. I remember we got six inches of snow that night. They had a cow that had bloated and died, and the coyotes had been working on her. At daylight one of the Holler boys, John and I sneaked down to the last timber overlooking the little meadow where the cow lay and, sure enough, a big coyote was on it. As soon as he spotted us, he took off on a run. It was early in the morning and I held a little too much front sight, and went over his back on the first shot. He lit out in hard run around the sidehill. My next slug threw up mud and snow right under his tail. I increased the lead for the third shot. At that shot he jumped high in the air, made a twisting turn, and headed up over the hill.

We went over and picked up his tracks. There was not a drop of blood anywhere, but right where he made the twisting jump was a bunch of food, hair, and cow meat

**COMING NEXT MONTH:
 MORE FIELD TESTS FROM
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that could only have come out of his intestines. So we trailed him up over the hill and there he lay in a pool of blood. My 470-grain paper-patch slug hit in front of the right hip and came out back of the left shoulder.

We stayed a day at the Holler ranch resting our horses, and the next day we headed for the South Fork of the Flathead, over the old Montour trail.

We had ridden up the Montour River several miles past the ranger station when here came Harry Morgan and a deputy down the trail. Evidently they'd been looking for us and didn't know we'd stayed. I cocked the old Sharps, set the set trigger, let it lay over my left arm, and pointed it at his chest.

He says, "Where's your license?"

I says, "It's in the barrel of this old Sharps, Harry. Where do you want it?"

The deputy's face got white and he rode way up in a wide circle around the trail. Harry looked at me a minute or two, and I says, "That's it, Harry. You can go for it or you can take the slug out of this Sharps, just as you want."

He too then rode up the hill and went around. Then John Lawther hollered from the back of the pack string, he says, "Shall I show him my license?"

I says, "Only in case you want to. You just as well show him the Sharps." That's what John Lawther did. They went on into Ovando and we went on into the South Fork on our elk hunt.

Those were rough times in Montana in those days, and a man carried his law with him. If he didn't, he might not last too long.