

Wild West Gunmen Were Not so Hot

Charles Askins, Jr.

July 1941

Since we're about to destroy some legendary paladins of the American West, we must quickly present the credentials of our author (and authority). Charles Askins, Jr. is the son of the late Maj. Charles Askins, a shooting editor for *OUTDOOR LIFE* for many years. At the time of this story, Charles Jr. (Col. Askins now) had won the national pistol championship, the national all-around championship and ranked No. 1, .22 caliber all-America pistol team. He had won state championships in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and Oklahoma, and Southeastern, Southwestern and Northwestern regional championships. He had won a rapid-fire Olympic championship. And he was a former member of the U.S. Border Patrol. So, stand back, please, out of the line of fire.

"The Lily Belle Saloon was quiet with hushed expectancy, its silence broken only by the rasping voice of Wolf McSween. Big Wolf, sixgun, in hand, was taunting little Bucky Johns, fastest gunswoop of all the Big Bend. McSween teetered on his heels, the snout of his .45 describing little circles in the vicinity of Bucky's belt buckle.

"'Why don' yah say yore skeered?'" he demanded. 'We knows yah fer a yella dog. Beg, Tejino, 'cause I'm gonna cut yah down—now!' Screaming the words he threw the .45 forward.

"Bucky Johns in that death-stalking instant, moved. Moved with the lashing speed of a jungle cat. Spinning, his right fist flashed down and up, spitting fire. The blur of his shots became a staccato yammer. Then it was all over. With an agonizing scream big Wolf McSween clutched his wrist, blood spurting between his fingers. . . ."

How many times have you read tripe like that in the baker's dozen of Wild West pulp magazines which clutter our news stands? How many times have you read it in the supposedly authentic biographies of the gunfighters of the old West—Wild Bill Hickok, Billy the Kid, Bat Masterson, Wyatt Earp, and the rest? How many times have you seen it acted out for the movies by handsome gunmen who invariably flinch as their blank cartridges go off?

Countless times, I have no doubt. Matter of fact, the gunning fracas described above is mild indeed—generally the hero knocks half a dozen guns spinning. Western-story writers have a certain number of stock situations which they rotate for their gun-swinging valiants. Briefly they may be summed up as follows. 1. He rides down the trail, flips out the Old Equalizer, and dusts off a jack at 200 yards, not, please understand, killing the innocent rabbit, but neatly shooting him through both ears. 2. He dots the "i" in the sign over the Silver Dollar Saloon, remarking meanwhile that "some painter man was downright car'less 'bout his spellin'." 3. Later he knocks the gun out of the brother's, father's, or uncle's hand, when the brother, father, or uncle of the love interest (i.e. heroine) attempts to ventilate our hero (believing him to be the rustler king). 4. Finally, in the last paragraph, he tackles six gun-wolves all at one time, shooting three through their respective shoulders, two alongside the head, so that they are ren-