

day in the streets of old Abilene, Bill whipped out his "cutters" and as he pointed 'em with that scintillating wizardry of his, he also instantly calculated the bullet drop for the range. Nine-and-one-half feet it was, and Bill, so far as I am concerned, on the basis of that little piece of shooting alone, makes some of our modern ballistics experts, who must plot for hours to figure a trajectory curve, look like the rankest amateurs.

What about all these entrancing yarns of the gun fighters of yesterday? How much of these grand Sagas of the Sixgun are we to accept as truth, what part pass over with a knowing smile? Isn't it possible the revolver wizardry of those super fighting men was a brand not seen among the effete target marksmen of today? Isn't it logical that those devil-men, grim gun hawks with a thousand enemies about them, practiced with such dogged persistence as to achieve a hammer skill which modern pistolmen have never attained?

Maybe—but I think not.

In the last ten years I've shot away something like 340,000 rounds of pistol ammunition. I'm betting that's more shells than all the leather slappers west of the Mississippi burned up among 'em! I fired those shells mostly at targets—but not altogether. In the last year, and at times before, I practiced constantly to master the hip-shooting technique of our Western immortals. Of the more than a third of a million bullets sped down the range by me, I expect a full 100,000 have gone into draw-and-fire practice. In the last decade, when I used up more than 30,000 hulls annually, I was lucky enough to win the national pistol championship, the national all-around championship and the .22 all-American No. 1 rating. Today 420 medals adorn my walls and I claim 117 cups and similar trophies won by me at one time or another. If a comparison is to be drawn between the shooting skill of our bygone trigger men and that of today's shooter, it may add some light to explain my success (or lack of it!) in attempting to duplicate the gunning feats accredited to those lead spillers who lived and died in the smoke of Colonel Colt's most famous invention.

To begin with, I got two .45 single-action sixguns. Made of infinitely better steel, bored to closer tolerances, fitted tightly at cylinder and joint, with good trigger pulls and improved sights, these modern counterparts were vastly superior to the best that the gun swingers of the old days could buy. Six-shooters in those days were made of inferior stuff, sloppily bored and rifled, the cylinders loosely pinned to the frame, chambers quite frequently drilled out of line, and the sights were an abomination. But the ammunition—whew! It was by long odds the worst part of the combination. I have before me a box of black-powder .45 loads purchased in Tombstone in 1889. This fodder shows a variance of eleven grains weight between individual bullets and a difference of 8.3 grains weight between powder charges. When Clay Allison pipped his cards, and Bill Hickok punctured his signboard, they must have had better hulls than these!

The old gunfighters never had been to the Camp Perry School of Marksmanship, so they did not know anything about sighting in a sixgun. They believed, like a lot of folks who buy new shooting irons today, that the factory makes 'em to hit dead center. When you attend the Camp Perry shooting school you learn better. The first .45 S.A. sixgun I bought, shot, I found, exactly level but four inches to the right; the second hit three and one-half inches high and four inches right. How in hell can I shoot the spots off cards and the gun out of an opponent's hand, as well as satisfactory plug signboards and otherwise be a bad man, with guns that shoot off center like that?

Maybe Wild Bill and Ben Thompson savvied more than I give 'em credit for. Maybe they adjusted their sights and got their powder burners to hitting true, but it is a fact that a lot of converted cap-and-ball sixguns in those days had a back