

*Wild West Gunmen Were Not So Hot*

sight which was also the hammer firing pin. I do not know how you'd move a notch like that to get in perfect zero on your target.

After sighting my guns in by bending the sights and filing down the back notch, I group-fired both at fifty yards with black-powder loads. This to get a definite line on the accuracy of the .45 single-action and the old, reliable 255-grain black-powder load. The first gun fired from a bench rest made a group size of 7.3 inches; the second ran 8.7 inches. At 200 yards my groups (multiplied by four) would mean the best I could do would be to hit a thirty-two-inch circle, approximately. Unfortunately Wild Bill's historian doesn't tell us the size of the "oo" in Blacksmith Cooley's name, as painted over the shop door, but somehow I have a feeling these letters did not measure thirty-two inches. I was somewhat discouraged by this and must confess that I did not even try to duplicate Hickok's 187-yard shooting feat. I'll grant he has me at the long range.

The next thing I did was to make a dummy. "Trigger McGook" I dubbed my stooge, and a right good make-believe man was he, what with his ready gun and fierce scowl. I stood Trigger up and put his sixgun in his hand. Then I had him do the road agent's spin, and just at that instant I decided to disarm him by the fiction-worn expedient of shooting the gun out of his hand. Now, .45 black-powder loads, which I was using are potent indeed. In fact, they pack more wallop than any smokeless load you can get. My bullet caught McGook's iron between barrel and cylinder. The gun came all to pieces, and the unfortunate part of the story must be related here. Various large chunks of the receiver, ejector-rod spring, spring housing, as well as the ricocheted bullet, penetrated McGook's paunch. He bled copiously of alfalfa, his life fluid.

Hell of a hero I'd make in one of those Wild West books if, intent on disarming the gal's brother by shooting his six out of his fist, I filled his belly full of assorted parts from the suddenly come-apart revolver! Evidently even in the heat of battle with my straw man, I should have selected a better aiming point than the junction of barrel and cylinder. I'll have to get acquainted with some of these Western writer chaps and find out where you hit the other man's iron so that it flies harmlessly behind the bar, and the owner isn't even bruised.

Trigger McGook eventually digested the ejector spring and other bits of steel, and was just as belligerent and ready to shoot it out as before. This time I gunned for his wrist. The distance was twenty-five feet, pretty long range for gun scraping. My first shot, triggered from the hip after a fast gun snatch, hit McGook squarely in the chest. The second blast took him in the navel and the third connected with his elbow. Since Trigger was practically immortal, I blandly disregarded the highly probable lethal effects of that dose in the chest, followed by the hit in the belly, and congratulated myself on that damaging shot in the elbow. Of course, it had missed the wrist by a couple of inches, going high, and would never have done in the judgment of the rankest writer of Westerns, but I felt pretty good about it.

I think I should confess right here that I am an ardent Western-story fan. I digest 'em by the dozens. Not infrequently I find where the hero's Man Friday is being hanged by the villains of the piece. Invariably the hero gallops in and shoots the rope in two just before his pardner gasps his last. So it seemed to me I'd better try this with my man McGook. Forthwith I strung him up. Backing off on the paint horse about two pistol shots' distance, I galloped forward in best Hollywood style, jerked out the .45, and went to work. A brisk little wind was blowing and Trigger was swaying pretty badly. This had a wholly distressing effect on the rope. Undoubtedly a dancing lariat would prove no handicap to your real Western gun-pointer, but it proved damnably annoying to me. On the third shot I did manage to cut one strand of the rope. McGook's face was turning