

AGARITA GAZETTE



A Chronicle of the Plum Creek Shooting Society



Agarita Ranch

August 2014

Lockhart, Texas

How'd he do that?



L.W. Hannabass shooting all three guns at the same time. You ask, how'd he do that? You'll have to ask photographer and fellow shooter, **Dutch Van Horn**.

Say it ain't so!
The Truth About Gunfights in the Old West
by Long Juan

It's an icon of the Old West - the gunfight in which two lone gunmen face off in the middle of a dusty street, pistols holstered, waiting for the first to draw and fire.

Hollywood movies are notorious for embellishing the truth, particularly when it comes to the Old West gunfight. Hollywood movies are not, however, the only place where the facts have been embellished.

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Many years before cinema was invented, dime novels were printed, captivating

readers. These novels contained stories of legendary Old West gunslingers like Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday, Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill, Bat Masterson and others. Authors of these stories would conjure up fictional accounts of the adventures of these famed individuals and/or would embellish things that actually did occur. It was not only the writers who embellished the truth, many of the "heroes" exaggerated the truth of their own stories. Newspapers also overstated tales of Old West gunmen in order to boost

Continued page 7

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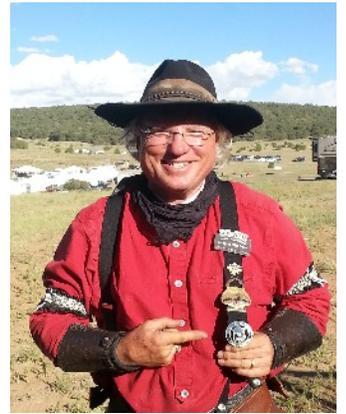
President's Word:

What a joy it was to return to shooting at Plum Creek after our summer wanderings. And a great shoot it was, as **Long Juan's** report in this issue describes.

Barely There and I had just gotten back from the San Diego Comic-Con. And people think we dress weird! It was a working visit as we were helping my wife's sister at a booth she had at the convention, but I got loose enough to get around to several of the booths and take lots of pictures of "Cosplayers"-folks who dress up for these conventions and are judged. There were some pretty amazing costumes, from Thor outfits to stormtroopers, elves, dwarves, zombies, Boba Fets, Batmen, Supermen, Zeldas and more Dr. Who characters than I knew existed.

It reminded me that while we are a shooting sport (and we are pretty good), we are also a fantasy game centered on the Old West. Dressing the part heightens the experience for everyone. No, I'm not going to say that blue jeans are forbidden (they're not), but a good old Western shirt with jeans will sure make a difference. Add a silk scarf and some garters to make a simple shirt and jeans much more than ordinary.

A good example of how dressing a part can make a difference was a shooter on our posse who had just returned from Tombstone where he bought an outfit (including a hat) that he wore for the first time at our match. He just looked great—from the back you would swear he was the Wyatt Earp of the movie "Tombstone." He even had the body shape and mustache to carry out the illusion. His presence gave our posse a little bit of flair (and maybe he shot 2 seconds per stage faster just 'cause he looked good? It could happen!). Now if I could just remember his alias.



SASS Regulator & PCSS President
Dragon Hill Dave



Continued next page

Like our scenarios and lines, dressing the part helps us all get into the Old West mood and enhances the experience for us all. Find a look that works for you (notice how Phantom is always in black?) and bring it to the match. These hot summer shoots make it hard to put on much (I admit I took my vest off before we started this time), but accessories like braces, scarfs (wet 'em down), garters, vests, cuffs, spurs or chinks (like Kickshot wears) can add to everyone's experience.

However you dress, we hope to see you in September. And it's not too early to sign up for the SASS Texas State Championship, "Battle of Plum Creek" coming in May 2015.

See ya'
at the



DHD's Favorite



At least two of the guys to the right would fit right in with our Cody-Dixon GAF posse.

Note: For anyone who's interested, there will be a Comic Con in Austin the weekend of our October match.

Find Delta Raider

Delta Raider was hanging out in the barrel of a '73 last month. See right. He's hidden again this month. Who can find him?

Hereby mentioned in the Dispatches for finding Delta Raider last month are: **Sterling Sage, Bear Gunz, Nichols Creek, El Sabre** (who wasn't first this month), **Two Spurs, Skinny Steve, Shooting Iron Miller, Sheriff Robert Love, Manassas Jack, Lincoln Drifter, Belle Fire, Meadow Biscuit Slim, Hairtrigger Hayes, Jarhead Jake** and **Big John Mesquite**. That's a record number of finders. Let's see if we can beat the record this month.





Long Juan Here: August Match Report

August 2nd dawned clear and relatively cool for summer in Central Texas. Temperatures were in the upper 60's, lower 70's as shooters arrived for check in. By the time the shooting was over, a little after noon, the temperatures were still only in the mid-80's. Humidity dropped during the match, at least in part because of the gentle breeze that **Delta Raider** ordered up for the morning.

We called the match a *Shoot & Scoot* because we did not have our usual lunch in the Pavilion after the match. With a wedding scheduled at the Agarita Ranch later that day, we checked in at the bunkhouse/barracks instead of the hotel/saloon. For many, it seemed better than our usual location, although that may have been because of the weather. Several shooters accepted the invitation to bring lunch and enjoy eating under the trees after the shooting was over.

In any event, the change in venue worked just fine. We had 70 shooters register for the match, most of whom arrived before the 8:30 cut-off, including notoriously late **Colt Faro** and his son, **Matt Black**. It was good to have Plum Creek President **Dragon Hill Dave** back from his travels. Thanks to **Lightning McQueen, Artiman, Lefty Leo, Joe Darter, Phantom, Dragon Hill Dave** and I am sure others who helped get the range ready the day of the match and before. Thanks also to **Delta Raider, True Blue Cachoo, Artiman** and **Jake Paladin** who made registration a breeze. Even with a few shooters arriving a little late, we had posses formed and were hammers down just a little after 9:00 a.m. We had several new-to-us shooters, some first-timers and a others who have not been to the Agarita Ranch for a while. A big welcome (back) to **Big Iron Patnode, Blacky Vela, Buckskin Brian, Fightin Parson, Flatwater Frosty** (and wife, **Cinnamon Sage**), **John Selman, Kettleman, Lucky Chambers, Mustang Sadie, Red Bud Anderson, Shorty, Texas Drifter** and **Texas Two Step**. Hope you and everyone else had fun and will be back soon.

We shot Stages 1-5, the Stockade, the Badlands, the Elroy Rogers Wheelwright Shop, the Livery Stable and the Blacksmith Shop. Everyone appeared to have fun. We had 16 (23%) clean shooters. Congratulations to **Abilene, Big John Mesquite, Boon Doggle, Colt Faro, Dragon Hill Dave, E.T., El Sabre, Farr Ranger, Jake Jones, Jake Paladin, Jarhead Jake, Kettleman, Kickshot, Rusty Shackelford, Skyhawk Hans** and **Texas Sarge**. Our Top Ten overall included **Colt Faro**, who beat his son, **Matt Black** by less than two seconds, followed by World Champion 49r **Phantom, Kickshot, Skyhawk Hans, Joe Darter, Dragon Hill Dave, Kit Carson**, Top Lady **Spur Broke**, who beat number 10 **Ivory Venom** by less than a second and her husband, **Tres Equis**, who finished 11th, by less than two seconds. Guess with those results, I will have to start saying, "accuracy is just as important as neatness in scorekeeping." Congratulations to winners in competitive categories: Cody Dixon Lever, **Gold Dog**; Cody Dixon Single, **Boon Doggle**; Wild Agarita, **Mesquite Creek Mike**; Elder Statesman, **Frank Longshot**; Senior, **Kickshot**; Silver Senior, **Skyhawk Hans**; Senior Duelist, **Farr Ranger**; Frontier Cartridge Duelist, **Nueces Ranger**; Classic Cowboy **Dragon Hill Dave**; Gunfighter, **Kit Carson**; Duelist, **Circuit Judge**, Ladies 49r, **Six Goin' South**; 49r, **Colt Faro**; Wrangler, **Rusty Shackelford**; Cowboy, **Phantom**; and Cowgirl, **Spur Broke**.

Continued next page

In closing, thanks to the many non-shooters, like **Cinnamon Sage** and **Little Bullseye**, who helped by keeping score, picking brass and a variety of other tasks that shooters on each posse would otherwise have to handle. Thanks also to those who came out for one or more workdays in the last couple of months to help work on the range, including **Lightning McQueen**, **Lefty Leo**, **Leo's Lady**, **Little Bullseye**, **Kit Carson**, **Dragon Hill Dave**, **Artiman**, **Walking Bear** and **Shinbone Bob**. Without their efforts and the efforts of other volunteers, we would not have the quality shooting facility we have. Finally, a big thanks to those who contributed photos from the August match: **Boon Doggle**, **Dutch Van Horn** and **Six Goin' South**. Some of their photos appear in this issue of the Gazette; more appear on the photos page of the Plum Creek website.



Stories from Jake (Paladin that is):

This is a story near and dear to my physician's heart. Failed bandit Elmer McCurdy's corpse had a more interesting life than the man himself.

Elmer McCurdy was born in Maine in 1880, spent three years in the Army and then traveled to Oklahoma, where he became a bank and train robber. In 1911, McCurdy robbed a passenger train thinking it carried thousands of dollars. The disappointed outlaw made off with just \$46 and a few bottles of liquor. He was killed shortly thereafter in a shootout with lawmen in the Osage Hills of Oklahoma.

McCurdy's body was taken to funeral home in nearby Pawhuska, Oklahoma. When no one claimed the corpse, the undertaker embalmed it and propped McCurdy in a corner of the funeral home's back room. He charged locals a nickel to see "The Bandit Who Wouldn't Give Up." The nickels were dropped into the corpse's open mouth, from where they were later retrieved by the entrepreneurial undertaker. As increasingly large numbers of people came to view the remains, McCurdy was said to be making more money in death than in life.

Five years into the lucrative scheme, a couple of carnival workers showed up at the funeral home and "claimed" McCurdy was their brother. They took the body so it could be "properly laid to rest." Instead, they displayed McCurdy in carnivals throughout Texas under the moniker given to him by the undertaker.

For 60 years, McCurdy's body was bought and sold by various haunted houses, amusement parks and wax



museums for use as a prop or attraction. The corpse also appeared in few low-budget films, including the 1933 film, *Narcotic*, but the owner of a haunted house near Mount Rushmore refused to purchase the corpse because he thought McCurdy's body was not lifelike enough. McCurdy finally wound up in an amusement park in Long Beach, California. The legend of Outlaw McCurdy was long forgotten and the body was assumed to be a fake.

In 1976, crew members from the TV show *The Six Million Dollar Man* were preparing to shoot on location at Queen's Park, formerly known as The Pike Amusement Park in Long Beach. Their plan was to capture Steve Austin riding in one of the cars along the track of a spooky ride called the "Laff in the Dark." The ride featured a tunnel in which ghouls, demons and skeletons popped up to scare riders as their car jolted from side-to-side in the dark. During filming, a crew member was moving what he thought was a wax mannequin that was hanging from a gallows. A finger (or arm, depending on the account) broke off, revealing human tissue. The "wax mannequin" was in

Continued next page



The Funhouse Elmer's Mummy Was Found In

embalmed and mummified human remains.

No one then knew it was the corpse of Elmer McCurdy. When the medical examiner opened the mummy's mouth for clues, he was surprised to find a 1924 penny and a ticket from Sonney Amusements' *Museum of Crime* in Los Angeles. That ticket, together with archived newspaper accounts and the location of a bullet wound in the chest, as well as scars, bunions and other tell-tale signs helped police and researchers identify the body as that of Elmer McCurdy.

McCurdy was finally laid to rest in 1977, when the Oklahoma Territorial Museum picked up the corpse and took it for burial in the Boot Hill section of the Summit View Cemetery in Guthrie, Okla. The state medical examiner ordered that two cubic yards of concrete be poured over the casket, so that McCurdy's remains would never be disturbed again. A laconic tombstone mentions the year of McCurdy's death and year of burial, without explaining why the dates are 66 years apart.

fact For anyone interested in reading more about Elmer McCurdy, Richard Basgall wrote a biography in 1989, *The Career of Elmer McCurdy, Deceased: An Historical Mystery*.

Editor's Note: The Pike was renamed Queen's Park in 1969 to coincide with the public opening of the historic ocean liner, RMS Queen Mary, which the city had purchased as a combination tourist attraction and hotel. The park retained this name until 1979 when the Long Beach city council refused to renew the land leases and demolished all of the structures and attractions that weren't trucked away.

After the name change and later demolition, locals continued and continue to call it The Pike. "Pike" was the name of the original wooden boardwalk connecting the Pine Street incline of the Long Beach Pier west along the shoreline to The "Plunge" bath house.



Elmer In His Coffin



The "Plunge" Bath House at Queen's Park, a/k/a the Pike

sales. In popular Western TV shows like *Bonanza*, *The Big Valley*, *Have, Will Travel* and *Rawhide*, the gunfight was a routine event. In the longest-running Western TV series ever, *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975), every show began with a "classic" gunfight.



The typical Hollywood gunfight, on TV or in the movies, involves two cowboys meeting on the street, usually about ten, twenty or maybe twenty-five feet apart. They wait for one of the two to draw and take the first shot. This signals that the fight is on and gives the second cowboy (almost always the hero or "good guy") the *right* to draw and shoot. The good guy almost always wins. Actual gunfights in the Old West were very few and far between. When they did occur, not one, but several gunshots were usually fired. Often onlookers were hit. Most of the time, no one knew who actually won the fight until several minutes later when all the gun smoke cleared the air. Easy shots were often missed. Often the shooters just continued firing until they had completely emptied their pistols.

Most experts on the Old West agree it was not the "fastest gun" who won, but the more accurate shot. Even more than speed and accuracy, a "cool head" was the single most valuable asset in an Old West gunfight. Although many Old West legends

have "fast gun" reputations, John Wesley Hardin, Wild Bill Hickok, Doc Holliday and Billy the Kid were actually *really* fast with their guns. Even those who were quick, however, usually didn't wait to draw and fire until after the first shot. Why? It was too risky. Much more frequent than the typical Hollywood face-to-face draw, the gunman would shoot the other guy at the most opportune time, e.g., if he got the drop on him, if the other guy was unarmed or even if it meant shooting him in the back.

Actual gunfights also varied from the typical Hollywood gunfight distance. Sometimes the opposing gunmen would be very close and would circle each other, like caged animals, before opening fire. In one of the few actually documented gunfights, however, the men drew guns at a distance of 50-75 yards and blasted away. One missed; the other didn't. This Hollywood-style gunfight was a rarity. The distance was questioned by skeptics, but was verified by several onlookers. See more below: the "Hickok-Tutt" gunfight.

Another Hollywood "mistake" was the "gun-in-the-holster" myth. Old West gunfights were sometimes conducted with the opponents' guns in their respective holsters, but more often the guns were held in belts or in pockets. Sometimes the guns were just tucked into the front of the trousers. Usually, each man clutched his gun in hand, no holster draw, no nothing. There is one thing Hollywood *did* get right: "liquid courage." A great number of Old West gunfights were not the result of some noble cause like "defending a woman's honor." The consumption of whiskey or other alcoholic beverage had a hand in a great percentage of *mano y mano* confrontations.

In one of those frequent "*co-inky-dinks*", while writing this article, I received my weekly email of "*This Week in the Old West*" from **Dakota Livesay**. His email started

with the statement, "I've said on many occasions that, in the Old West, shootouts didn't happen as portrayed in Hollywood films. This week's story is the exception to the rule." He went on to say,

On a number of occasions, I've said that two men facing each other at a prearranged time, with the good guy allowing the bad guy to draw first, was the imagination of Hollywood. But, today's story is the one documented incident during the Old West that two men had a Hollywood shootout.

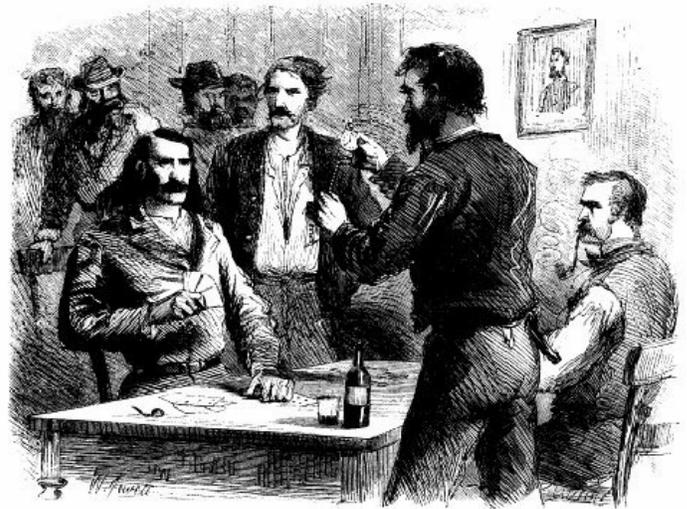
Here follows that story:

The **Hickok-Tutt** gunfight occurred on July 21, 1865, in Springfield, Missouri. It is one of the few recorded instances in the Old West of a one-on-one, quick-draw pistol duel in the town square, in the manner later made iconic by countless dime novels, radio operas, Western films such as *High Noon* and TV westerns such as *Guns Smoke*. The first story of the shootout was detailed in a *Harper's Weekly Magazine* article in 1867.

In July 1865, tensions were high in Missouri. The Civil War had just ended. The Show-Me State was a southern border state that never left the Union. Its history often saw brother fighting brother. It was against this backdrop that two gamblers engaged in one of the most epic gunfights in U.S. history. The two gamblers were Wild Bill Hickok and Davis Tutt. There never had been any love lost between Hickok, a former scout for the Union army, and Tutt, who fought for the Confederacy. The hostility between the two men increased when it was rumored that Hickok had fathered an illegitimate child with Tutt's sister and Tutt was observed paying a great deal of attention to Wild Bill's girlfriend, Susanna Moore. Hickok refused to play in any card game that included Tutt. Tutt retaliated by openly

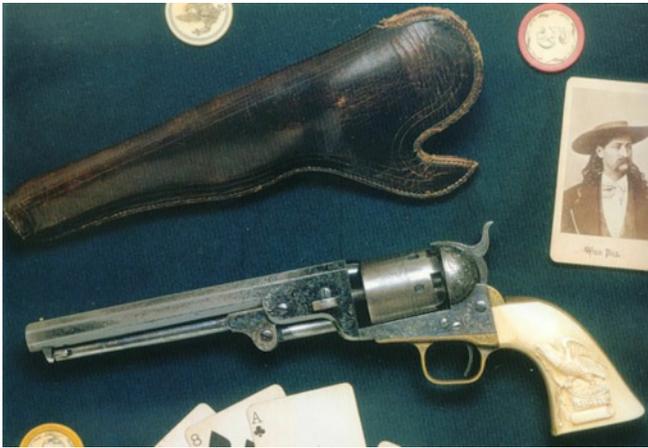
supporting other local card players with advice and money in an attempt to bankrupt Hickok.

Their running dispute finally came to a head during a game of poker at the Lyon House Hotel. Hickok was playing cards with several local gamblers. Tutt stood nearby, loaning the locals money as needed, while he encouraged and coached them on how to beat Hickok. The game was being played for high stakes and Hickok had done well, winning about \$200 (\$2,857.14 in today's



dollars) of what was mostly Tutt's money. Irritated by his losses, Tutt reminded Hickok of a \$40 debt from a past horse trade. Hickok shrugged and paid Tutt the \$40. Tutt then claimed that Hickok owed him an additional \$35 from a poker game. When Hickok responded that he owed only \$25, Tutt grabbed one of Hickok's most-prized possessions, a Waltham Repeater gold pocket watch, to hold as collateral. Hickok was stunned and furious. Taking "collateral" implied Hickok was insolvent and was trying to duck his debts. To ignore such an insult would have ruined Hickok's career as a gambler. He demanded that Tutt return the watch and told Tutt that he would shoot him if he wore the watch town. Tutt, nevertheless, left with the watch, bragging he would parade through Springfield's town square wearing it. Hickok went to his room

to clean, oil and reload his Navy Colt pistols in anticipation of a confrontation.



At 6:00 p.m. on July 21st Tutt stood in the Springfield town square with Hickok's watch openly hanging from his waist pocket. With the summer sun low in the sky, Hickok again warned Tutt about wearing the watch. With a crowd of onlookers lining the square, Hickok and Tutt faced each other, standing sideways like duelists. Hickok had a Navy Colt cocked and holstered; Tutt had a hand on his pistol. Tutt drew first. Then Hickok drew and steadied his gun on his opposite forearm. At range of 50-75 yards, the two men each fired a single shot at essentially the same time. The distance was extreme for any handgun, but Hickok's .36-caliber Navy Colt cap and ball pistol proved more accurate. Tutt's shot went wild; Hickok's bullet struck Tutt in the chest. Tutt cried out, "Boys, I'm killed," ran onto the porch of the local courthouse, then back into the street, where he collapsed and, in

Hollywood style, fell dead. Hickok quickly turned and leveled his gun at a crowd of Tutt's supporters who had gathered nearby, warning them not to interfere. They took the hint.

A witness described the duel as follows:

At that moment you could have heard a pin drop in that square. Both Tutt and Bill fired, but one discharge followed the other so quick that it's hard to say which went off first. Tutt was a famous shot, but he missed this time; the ball from his pistol went over Bill's head. Bill never shoots twice at the same man and his ball went through Dave's heart.

Hickok was tried for manslaughter, but the jury applied the unwritten law of the "fair fight" and acquitted him

Several weeks after the gunfight, Colonel George Ward Nichols, a writer for *Harper's Weekly*, sought out Hickok and began the interviews that would eventually turn the unknown gunfighter into one of the



great legends of the Old West. Tall, lean, and muscular, long blond hair falling to his shoulders, two pistols shoved into his belt, often wearing a lawman's badge on his chest, Wild Bill Hickok personified the image of the Western hero for both his and

later generations. The exploits of Wild Bill Hickok, spread by word-of-mouth and embellished by dime novels, would shape the popular image of America's frontier. Eleven

years after his gunfight with Tutt, Wild Bill Hickok was killed in the more typical manner of Old West shootouts. He was shot in the back of the head.

In conclusion, despite knowing the truth. Most of us enjoy a good TV or movie gunfight. They're dramatic, they're romantic and they're exciting. I guess we also like them because almost inevitably the good guy wins.

For anyone who would like to read the complete article about the Hickok-Tutt gunfight that appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in February 1867, check it out here <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/we-wildbill.html> For a funny, adult parody of the Old West gunfight, search for "The Old West versus The Voice" on YouTube. .

Editor's Note: **Dakota Livesay** has lots to offer of interest to those fascinated by the Old West. If you have not visited his website, you should.

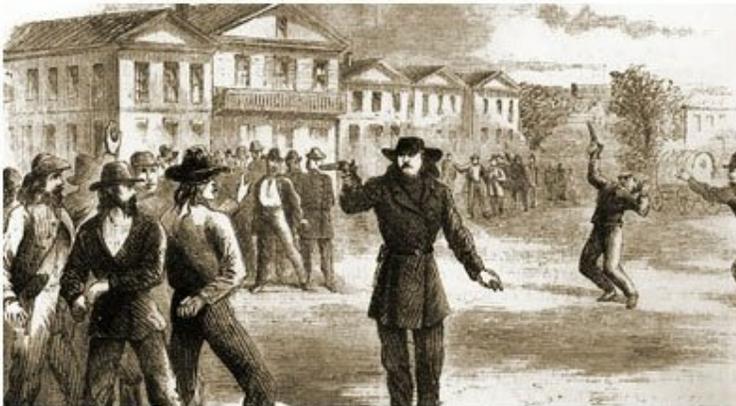
<http://www.chronicloftheoldwest.com/> If nothing else, subscribe to "This Week in the Old West." I guarantee you will enjoy the weekly story.



Wild Bill Hickok

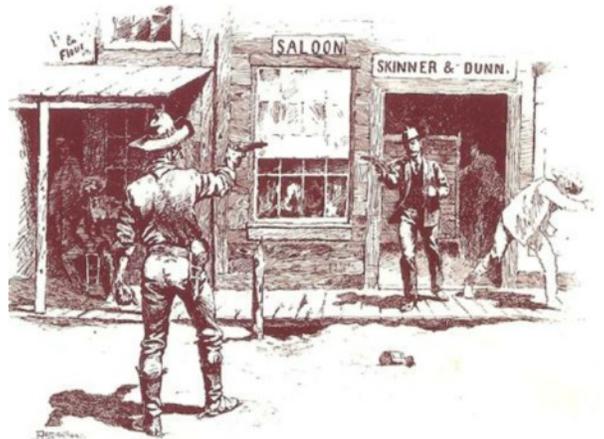


A Waltham Repeater gold pocket watch like the one that started the notorious duel!



Wild Bill Hickok threatens the friend of Davis Tutt after defeating Tutt in a duel.

Harper's New Monthly Magazine, February 1867



August Match Photos, thanks to Dutch Van Horn, Six Goin' South & Boon Doggle



Cinnamon Sage & Flatwater Frosty



Marshal John Henry showing good form



Farr Ranger looking Plum Tuckered



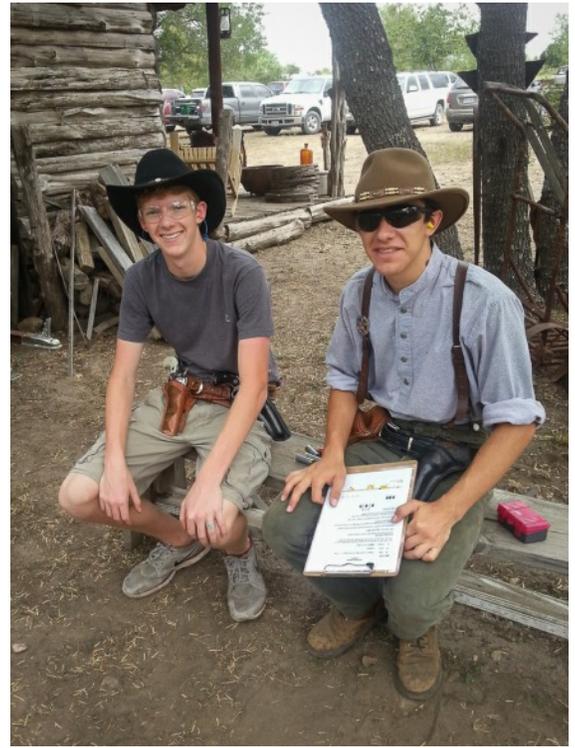
Is Whiskey Kid ready for Hollywood or what?



Little Bullseye



Abilene



Young Guns, now Cowboys, Shorty and El Pantero



Lefty Leo



True Blue Cachoo



Texas Sarge & Jake Jones



Shibone Bob with Whiskey Kid on the timer



Jarhead Jake takes dead aim



Yuma Jack levers his '73 while Phantom times



Charlie Reynolds shooting Gunfighter style



The Motley Crew: L.W. Hannabass, Nueces Ranger, Jake Jones, Scooter & Jarhead Jake



Someone must have told a good joke!

Artiman - waiting patiently to get the match started



It was good to have Texas Two Step shooting with us in August

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	125	RNFP	35	70
	125	FP	35	70
	130	RNFP	36	72
	158	RNFP	39	77
	158	FP	39	77
	158	SWC	39	77
.380	100	RNFP	33	65
.38-55	245	RNFP	59	117
.41	215	SWC	49	98
.44	180	RNFP	41	81
	240	SWC	52	104
.44-40	200	RNFP	45	90
.45 COLT	160	RNFP	46	92
	180	RNFP	41	81
	200	RNFP	45	90
	250	RNFP	53	106
9MM	124	RN	35	70
	125	CN	35	70
40 S&W	180	FP	41	81
.45ACP	200	SWC	45	90
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