

# Why I don't shoot cap 'n ball pistols

I'd been looking at a pretty, brass-framed BP percussion revolver in the case at Shattuck's Hardware for a couple of months, and boy was I ever proud the day I went in and plunked down the money for it! Eleven dollars in one dollar bills... and eighteen dollars in quarter and dimes. Old man Shattuck was a great old guy, whose eyesight, thankfully, had gotten really bad over the years... he didn't recognize me as he sold me the .36 caliber pistol... he even threw in a box of pure lead balls with the pistol and percussion caps when I bought the pound of black powder.

I told Mr. Shattuck that I was anxious to shoot it and was heading straight for the dump, and asked him to show me how to load the gun. "*It's pretty simple,*" I recall him telling me. "*You measure your powder into the cylinder chamber, put a bullet over it, ram it down in with the hinged thing under the barrel, put your cap over a nipple, and you're set to shoot.*" I thanked him for his help and headed for the door. "*One last thing!*" he called to me as I was running out the door, "*Don't forget to put grease over your balls! Crisco works fine!*" I didn't understand the need for the last part, but I stopped at Tony's Grocery and bought a little blue can of Crisco. And now... to the dump! Where bottles and cans, rats and crows were just waiting for this ol' cowboy to do 'em in!

I replayed Mr. Shattuck's instructions in my head as I laid out all my gear on the smoothed-out brown paper bag at my feet. The first thing I realized was that I didn't have anything to measure the powder with... UNTIL I remembered my knife! I carried one of those folding stag handled camper's knives - you know, the ones with a fork on one side and a spoon on the other? The spoon was perfect for what I needed! Very carefully (thank heaven there wasn't any wind blowing) I poured a spoonful of powder from the can into the spoon, then tipped the spoon up and tapped the powder into the cylinder. Sure, I spilled a bunch over because the spoon held so much more, but what the heck! Powder was cheap, back then... and I had plenty to spare...

Being a methodical kind of kid, I filled all six chambers with the powder, managing to spill as much around my feet, I suppose, as I was getting into the cylinder. I can laugh now, but when I bent over to get the bullets all the powder fell out of the cylinders onto my boots... so I had to fill them all over again! I managed to get all the chambers filled with powder and then stuck a bullet into the first cylinder... I had to really tap it in with the butt of my knife to get it started... then shoved it in as far as it would go with the rammer thingy. I lost a little powder in the process, but eventually I had all

six chambers loaded and ready to go. Then I put percussion caps over the things sticking out the ends of the cylinders... Oops! I forgot a couple of things! Why I was supposed to smear Crisco on my balls is still a mystery to me. But I figured Old Man Shattuck knew what he was on about, so I looked around to make sure I was alone, then dropped my pants to my knees, opened the can of Crisco and began to smear it over Lefty and Righty. Standing there in the hot summer sun, slowly massaging soft, silky grease into my scrotum... gee WHIZ! I guess the old man knew what he was talking about after all! Welcome to the joys of shooting!

I had to force myself out of my reverie...

One last thing and then I'd be ready to shoot... I took my baseball cap off and stuffed it inside my shirt over my left nipple. Okay... I guessed I was ready (except, of course, that in my haste I'd forgotten to pull up my pants...)

Well sir, I crooked my left arm out in front of my face, rested the trigger guard of the pistol in my right hand, drew a tight bead on an old Four Roses bottle, and squeezed the trigger. I remember a bright flash, a burning sensation on my arm and face, then something hit me square in the forehead and the lights went out.

It must have been quite sometime later when I awoke. I was laid out across the back seat of Sheriff Miller's car (I knew this from the plexi-glass partition and a previous ride when I was sixteen), one door was open and my feet and lower legs were hanging out. As I raised my head to look for the source of the voices I heard, I felt like someone had hit me in the head with a sledgehammer. I could see two men in the dim, evening light, just outside and within my range of vision. At least, I thought they were two men... I could hear two voices speaking but they were sorta spinning around and they looked like six. From the voices, I knew they were Sheriff Miller and my Dad... "... *busy on another call so the volunteer fire department was the first out here.*" I heard the Sheriff explaining to my dad. "*Mabel Krutchner called it in... said she saw smoke comin' from the dump and had heard an awful explosion over this way.*"

"*Near as I can tell from what the firemen say, when they got here they found your boy lying over there. At first they thought he was dead. The dump was on fire all around him, his left arm and face were all black, his boots were scorched pretty badly, he had a HUGE knot on his forehead where somebody'd cold-cocked him... And... well, we think the boy's been... well, taken advantage of.*"

"What do you mean '*Taken advantage of*' ? I heard my dad ask.

" *Well, Al, it's like this,*" the Sheriff said. " *The first men to get to your boy said he was unconscious; they found part of a gun by his body, his pants were down around his ankles, his crotch was smeared with KY Jelly and he was sportin' a big boner...*"

Then I heard Mr. Shattuck's voice. " *I always knew there was something wrong with that boy...This will probably keep him out of the army...*"

And THAT'S why I don't shoot cap 'n ball pistols.