# GUNS AND GUNFIGHTERS

ANSAS CITY of the early 70's was the playground of the frontier world, where traders, teamsters, hunters and cowmen made headquarters during their brief holidays on the edge of the encroaching East For the buffalo hunters, Market Square was a summer resort at which they spent their months of idleness when the herds which furnished them a livelihood were in poor coat and less profitable to kill. There they lolled on benches or chairs tipped back against the walls of stores and saloons, following the shade around the square from morning until night, spinning their yarns of the hunting range, reviewing the season just closed, discussing items of information received and dispatched by the word-of-mouth grapevine telegraph of the frontier, which could spread the news of an individual or event across the Great West in an unbelievably short time, and planning expeditions for the season to come. Periodically, a group would arise

"When I first saw Market Square," Wyatt Earp recalled, "the spot favored by the men best known in frontier life was a bench in front of the police station where Tom Speers, then marshal of Kansas City, held forth each afternoon. Speers was an old frontiersman, with a wide acquaintance among hunters, overland freighters and cattlemen. An older man introduced me to this group, and because it was made up of those so well known in the country and the life which held my interest at the time, I spent most of my summer vacation on or near Tom Speers' bench. Among the men I met there were many whom I was to encounter later, pretty much all over the West, on the buffalo range, in cow towns, mining camps, and along the trails between; some of them I was to see again as far away and as much later as the Alaskan gold fields in '97 and '98."

from its loafing place, move indoors for a drink,

then return to loaf and yarn some more.

## Frontier Men About Town

"I MET Wild Bill Hickok in Kansas City during the summer of '71. Jack Gallagher, the famous Indian scout, was there, and among others were Jack Martin, Billy Dixon, Jim Hanraban, Tom O'Keefe, Cheyenne Jack, Billy Ogg, Bermuda Carlisle, Old Man Keeler, Kirk Jordan, Emanuel Dubbs and Andy Johnson. That list of names may not mean much to another century, but in my younger days each was a noted man. Much that they accomplished has been lost to, or ignored by, the permanent records of their time, but every one of them made frontier history. Most of them, I know, were illiterate and crude in other respects; a few were well educated and well informed; all were keenly intelligent and utterly fearless of personal danger. They had to be, for they

made possible the early settlement of the West. "To the average Easterner, there probably would have been no more surprising feature about this group of noted frontier characters than their mode of dress while in Kansas City. On the plains they wore buckskin garments made by the Indians, or heavy woolen shirts, jackets and trousers, with leather leggings. But when in Kansas City for a vacation, the hunters were most exacting in their demands on the local tailors and haberdashers. They did stick to boots, which were handmade of fine black calfskin, but white linen replaced the wool or buckskin hunting shirts, and black broadcloth was the preferred material for trousers and coats. Trouser legs were pulled down over the boot tops, and most of the coats were of the long-tailed frock variety, some with velvet collars or velvet facings on the lapels. Fancy vests were the rule, of silk or brocade, or possibly a handsomely beaded buckskin garment ordered from an Indian squaw especially for show. Turndown collars with black string bow ties were the stylish

# By Stuart N. Lake

neckwear. Wide-brimmed, black sombreros, creased in the middle of the high crowns, were worn by most of the frontiersmen, but a number of them, while in Kansas City, actually displayed silk hats. Some of those old buffalo hunters could get on a bigger spree in a clothing store than any saloon could inspire.

"During the hot, sunshiny days the men sat around Market Square in their shirt sleeves, and they took as much pride in appearing each morning in spotless shirts and collars as they did in the velvettrimmed frock coats and fancy vests which they donned later in the day. Evenings were spent, probably, at the variety shows in the numerous dance

Wyatt Earp, in the Early Seventies, When He Was Youthful Marshal of the Kansas Cow Towns

halls, or at a theater where traveling dramatic companies sometimes held forth. After the show, the real sport of the day—monte, faro and poker—got under full steam at the gambling tables. Play was available day or night, but the big games rarely got going much before midnight; once started, they might run well into the following morning.

"Of course there was a steady consumption of liquor. Kansas City offered opportunity for change from the raw whisky of the camps, and men made the most of it. The saloons were as well stocked with beers, wines, cordials and fine whiskies as the choosiest drinker could require, and the best in the land was none too good for the frontiersman who could pay for it. Some of the men went on sprees which lasted for days and weeks, but for the majority one protracted session immediately after hitting town appeared to suffice; then they would be satisfied with an occasional drink in the daytime, and what you might call a fairly reasonable amount of sociable drinking after supper. That was the general custom; there were exceptions, of course.

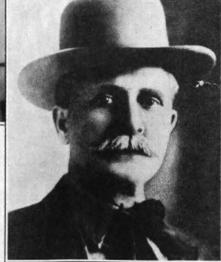
"As I recall it after all these years, when the Market Square conversations were not concerned with buffalo, they most often dealt with gun play of another sort, with the sudden end to which some well-known character had come, or with some desperate stand against heavy odds by some fighter with whom most of the hunters were acquainted. Such discussions quite naturally led to arguments over the merits of weapons and methods of bringing them into action. Supporters of any theory advanced were willing and able to demonstrate their points.

"There were few gun fights in Kansas City that summer, none between men of reputation that I recall; and, unless participants in a killing were well known, no one paid much attention to what they did or to what happened to them. The prominent char-

acters were not trouble hunters, as a rule; moreover, their relations with Tom Speers placed them under obligation to save him from the embarrassment which was certain to follow if a pair of topnotchers went to shooting. On the other hand, it was a dull day when we were not entertained by at least one exhibition of gun play by some past master in the art, or a match between two of them, with some inanimate target."

## Working at Gun Play

"I CONSIDERED myself a fair hand with pistol, rifle or shotgun, and I could make a creditable showing in target matches, but I learned more about gun fighting from Tom Speers' cronies during the summer of '71 than I had ever dreamed was in the book. Those fellows took their gun play seriously; which was only to be expected, in view of the conditions under which they lived. Shooting, to them, was considerably more than aiming at a mark and pulling a trigger. Models of



Bill Tilghman, a Graduate of the Buffalo Range, and U. S. Marshal of Oklahoma

weapons, methods of wearing them, means of getting them into action and of operating them, all to the one end of combining high speed with absolute accuracy, contributed to the frontiersman's shooting skill. The sought-after degree of proficiency was that which could turn to most effective account the split second between life and death. Hours upon hours of practice and wide experience in the actualities of the art supported the arguments over style.

"Paradoxical as it may seem, the most important lesson I learned from those proficient gun fighters was that the winner of a gun play usually was the man who took his time. The second was that if I hoped to live long on the frontier I would shun all flashy trick shooting-what in these days would be called grand-stand play-as I would poison. Later, as a peace officer, I was to participate in certain rather desperate battles against some notorious gunmen of the Old West, and some wonderment has been expressed that I came through them all unscathed. Certain outlaws and their friends had it that I probably wore a steel vest underneath my shirt when I went after them. Though there have been times when I might have welcomed the opportunity to wear such a garment, I never saw one in my life outside of a museum, and I very much doubt that any other

frontiersman has either. Luck was with me in my gun fights, of course, but so were the lessons learned in Market Square during the summer

of '71.
"Jack Gallagher's advice summed up about all the others had to say. It was to wear my weapons in the position most convenient for mein my case, as far as pistols were concerned, in the regulation open holsters; one on each hip if I was carrying two, hung rather low, as my arms were long, and with the muzzles a little forward on my thighs. Some men wore their guns belted high on the waist; others carried one gun directly in front of the stomach, usually inside, but sometimes outside the waistband, and another gun in a holster slung just in front of and below the left shoulder; still others wore two of these shoulder holsters. Style was a matter of individual preference.'

## A Riding Arsenal

HEN mounted on a horse and, 'armed to the teeth,' as the fiction writer would have it, a man's rifle was slung in a boot just ahead of his right stirrup, his shotgun carried on the left by a thong looped over the saddle horn. With the adoption generally of breech-loading

weapons, a rider who was equipped with two pistols, a rifle and a shotgun customarily had one of the belts to which his pistol holsters were attached filled with pistol ammunition, the other with rifle cartridges, while a heavier, wider belt filled with shotgun shells was looped around the saddle horn underneath the thong which held that weapon. He was a riding arsenal, but there might well be times when he would need all the munitions he could carry. Bowie knives were worn largely for utility's sake, in a sheath fixed to the belt just back of the hip; when I came on the scene their popularity for purposes of offense was on the wane; although I have seen old-timers who carried them slung about their necks and who preferred them above all other weapons in the settlement of purely personal quarrels.



anything but contempt for the gun fanner, or the man who literally shot from the hip. In more recent years I have read a great deal about this type of gun play, and of the success with which it was employed by men noted for their skill with a .45."

### Gun Fanning

FROM my experience and from the numerous sixgun battles which I witnessed. I can only support the opinion advanced by the men who gave me my most valuable instruction in fast and accurate shooting-which was that the gun fanner and the hip shooter stood small chance to live against a man who, as old Jack Gallagher always put it, took his time and pulled the trigger once.

Cocking and firing mechanisms on new revolvers were almost invariably altered by their purchasers in the interests of smoother, effortless handling in emergencies, usually by filing the dog which controlled the hammer, but some going so far as to remove triggers entirely or lash them against the guard, in which cases the guns were fired by thumbing the hammer. This is not to be confused with fanning, in which the triggerless gun was held in one hand while the other was brushed rapidly back and

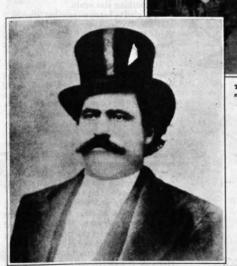
forth across the hammer in a fanning motion, thus cocking the gun, and firing it by the weight of the hammer itself. A skillful gun fanner could fire five shots from his .45 so rapidly that the individual reports were indistinguishable, but what could happen to him in a gun fight I'll tell when I come to the point where I describe several examples that I witnessed.

"I might say here that in later years I saw Jack Gallagher's theory borne out so many times that I was never tempted to forsake the principles of gun

equal. Bill's correct name, by the way, was James B. Hickok. Legend and the imaginations of certain people have exaggerated the number of men whom

The Market Square, Kansas City, Missouri, in 1872, When it Was the Sumner Playground for the Most Famous Characters of the Western Frontier "When I stress the fact that I learned to take my time in a gun fight, I do not wish to be misunderstood, for the time to be taken was only an infinitesimal fraction of a second that meant the difference between deadly accuracy with a six-gun and a miss. It is hard to make this clear to a man who has never been in a gun fight. Perhaps I can best describe such time-taking as going into action with the greatest speed of which a man's muscles were capable, but at the same time mentally unflustered by an urge to hurry or the need for complicated nervous and muscular actions which trick shooting involves. Mentally deliberate, but muscularly faster than thought, is

"In all my life as a frontier peace officer I did not know a really proficient gun fighter who had



Rowdy Joe Lowe, a Kansas Dance-Hall Owner

fighting as I had them from him and his associates. 'For speed and accuracy with a six-gun there was no man in the Kansas City group who was Wild Bill's

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## GUNS AND GUNFIGHTERS

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Wild Bill killed in gun fights and have misrepresented the manner in which he did it. At that, they could not very well overdo his actual skill with pistols.

"Hickok knew all the tricks which the fancy shooters employed and was as good as the best of them at that sort of gun play, but when he had serious business in hand, a man to get—the acid test of marksmanship—I doubt if he employed them. At least, he told me that he did not. I have seen him in action and I never saw him fan a gun, shoot from the hip, or try to fire two pistols simultaneously. Neither have I ever heard a reliable old-timer tell of any trick shooting employed by Hickok when fast, straight shooting meant life or death.

"That two-gun business is another matter that can stand some of the light of truthfulness before the last of the old-time gunfighters has gone on. They wore two guns, most of the six-gun toters did, and when the time came for action, went after them with both hands simultaneously. But they didn't shoot them that way. Primarily, the two guns were to make the threat of something in reserve; they were useful as a display of force when a lone man stacked up against a crowd. Some men could shoot equally well with either hand, and in a gun play might alternate with their fire; others exhausted the loads from the gun in the right hand, or left, as the case might be; then shifted the reserve weapon to the natural shooting hand if that was necessary and possible. Such a shift could be made more quickly than the eve could follow the movements of a top-notch gun thrower, but if the man in question was as good as that the shift seldom would be required.

## Notches Made to Order

"Whenever you see a picture of some two-gun man in action with both weapons held closely against his hips and both spitting smoke together, you can put it down that you are looking at the picture of a fool, or at a fake. I remember quite a few of those so-called two-gun men who tried to operate everything at once, but, like the fanners, they didn't last long in really proficient company.

"In the days of which I am talking, among men whom I have in mind, when a man went after his guns, he did so with a single, serious purpose. Where pistols were concerned, there was no such thing as a bluff, and when a gunfighter reached for his .45's every faculty he owned was keyed to shooting as speedily and as accurately as possible, to making his first shot the

last one of the fight. Under such conditions he just had to think of his gun solely as something with which to kill another before he himself could be killed. The possibility of intimidating an antagonist was remote, although the drop, as it was called, was thoroughly respected, and few men in the West would draw in the face of it. I have seen men so fast with their sixguns and so sure of themselves that they did go after their guns while men who intended to kill them had them covered, and what is more, win out in the play. They were rare exceptions. It is safe to say, for all general purposes, that anything in gunfighting which smacked of show-off or bluff was, with the men of whom I am speaking, left to braggarts who were ignorant or careless of their lives.

"While I am on this subject, I might add that I never knew a man who amounted to anything who ever notched his gun butts with credits, as they were called, for men he had killed. Outlaws, gunmen of the wild crew who killed for the sake of brag, followed this custom. I have worked with most of the noted peace officers-Hickok, Billy Tilghman, Pat Shugrue, Bat Masterson, and others of like caliberhave seen and handled the guns they wore many times, but have never known one of them to carry a notched gun. Strange how such wild tales become current.

"There may be some interest in the way at least one of them started—one about Bat Masterson's 'favorite sixgun with twenty-two notches in the butt.' Bat's sense of humor was responsible, and he regarded the joke so highly that he told me about it; he didn't dream of the possible consequences.

"It appears that some rapacious collector of gunfighters' souvenirs pestered Bat half to death with his requests for one of the six-guns which Bat had used on the frontier. This collector finally called on Bat in his New York office and, as Bat said afterward, was so insistent about the gun that Bat decided to give him one just to get rid of him. Bat did not want to part with the ones he actually had used, so he went into a pawnshop and bought an old .45, which he took to his office in anticipation of the collector's return. With the gun lying on the desk, Bat was struck with the idea that while he was providing a souvenir he might as well provide one worthy of all the trouble it had caused, so he took out his penknife and then and there cut twenty-two credits in the pawnshop gun. When the collector called for his souvenir and Bat handed it to him, he

managed to gasp an astonished question as to whether Bat had killed twenty-two men with it.

"'I didn't tell him yes, and I didn't tell him no,' Bat said, 'and I didn't exactly lie to him. I simply said I hadn't counted either Mexicans or Indians, and he went away tickled to death.'

"It wasn't long, however, before tales of the Old West with stories about Bat Masterson's notched gun and the twenty-two men he had killed began to creep into print. His case may offer a fair example of how all the others got started."

## Five Shots From a Six-Gun

"There are two other points about the old-time method of using six-guns most effectively that do not seem to be generally known. One is that the gun was not cocked with the ball of the thumb. As his gun was jerked into action the old-timer closed the whole joint of his thumb over the hammer, and the gun was cocked in that fashion. Experience had shown that the soft flesh on the ball of the thumb might slip under the stress of high speed or if a man's hands were at all sweaty, and a slip was not to be chanced if humanly avoidable. This thumbjoint method was employed whether or not a man used the trigger for firing.

"The second point often raises questions. I have been asked many times why five shots without reloading were all a top-notch gunfighter ever fired, when his guns were chambered for six cartridges. The answer is merely, safety. To insure against accidental discharge of the gun while in the holster, due to its hair-trigger adjustment, the hammer rested upon an empty chamber. As widely as this was known and practiced, the number of cartridges a man carried in his six-gun may be taken as one indication of a man's rank with the gunfighters of the old school. The really practiced gun wielders knew too much of the danger of carelessness and had too much respect for their weapons to take unnecessary chances with them; it was only with the tyros and the would-be's that you heard of accidental discharges or didn't-know-it-was-loaded injuries in the country where carrying a revolver was a man's prerogative.

"But let me go back to Bill Hickok's marksmanship. That summer in Kansas City he performed a feat of pistol shooting which often has been cited as one of the most remarkable on record. It was all of that, but the accounts which have been so widely circulated have invariably given the impression

that Wild Bill did his shooting from the hip. What really happened may be of some interest.

"Hickok was on Tom Speers' bench showing a pair of ivory-handled six-guns which Senator Wilson had given him in appreciation of his services as guide on a tour of the West. Tom as we all did, Bill's two favorite exhibitions of marksmanship—one, driving a cork through the neck of a bottle with a bullet; the other, splitting a bullet against the edge of a dime; both at about twenty paces. So, when Tom asked Bill what he could do with the new guns, he added that he did not mean at close range, but at a distance that would be a real test.

"Diagonally across Market Square, possibly 100 yards away, was a saloon, and on the side wall toward the police station a sign that carried a capital letter, O. The sign ran off at an angle from Hickok's line of sight; yet before anyone guessed what his target was, Wild Bill had fired five shots from the gun in his right hand, shifted weapons and fired five more shots. Then he told Tom to send someone over to look at the O. All ten of Bill's slugs were found inside the ring of the letter."

### The Etiquette of Rattle

"That was shooting. There were twenty or more witnesses to the feat, yet in every account of it that I have read in recent years, it has been stated that Hickok fired those ten shots from his hip. I am not detracting from Wild Bill's reputation or ability when I bear witness that while he was shooting at the O, he held his gun as every man skilled in such matters preferred to hold one when in actionwith a halfbent elbow that brought the gun slightly in front of his body at about, or slightly above, the level of the waist.

"It may surprise some to know that a man of Hickok's skill could make a a man of Flictor's sure could make a six-gun effective for any range up to 400 yards. A rifle, of course, was preferred for shooting over such a distance, but in a pinch the old-fashioned, single-action .45-caliber revolver could be made to do the work. A man had to know his gun to score accurately, but I have known them to kill at that range."
When the quality and the quantity

of the liquor consumed in the buffalo camps are considered, the character and the number of fights in which the hunters engaged are not to be wondered at. The affrays generally fell into one of two classifications. There was the suddenly flaring dissension which might turn to a rough-and-tumble encounter to settle the argument on the spot, or see each of two adversaries going for his guns to decide the matter for all time in favor of the one who was quicker or more accurate with his pistol. In such cases, bystanders never intervened. Or there was the affair which developed more gradually to its climax, staged before all the camp and under supervision of an umpire, which took on the aspects of the formal duel with its choice of weapons and its un-written code. Pistols, knives or fists might be chosen by contestants, and in more than one instance of the kind the duelists employed Sharps rifles fired at fifty paces. With this last choice of weapons, the first shot to hit the target ended all argument.

On spree days in the camps, with 200 or 300 fighting men three-quarters full of raw spirits and hunting trouble, only the rankest coward or a man of great courage could avoid difficulties of a serious nature through general recog-nition of his status. No one has ever intimated that Wyatt Earp lacked courage, but old buffalo hunters unanimously agreed that he was one of a few men whom the trouble-seekers avoided. With certain rare exceptions, he went about his business unmolested. Opinions as to the reason for this do not differ in their purport.

Even in the early periods of his life, and without his having participated in any gun play of fatal consequence, Wyatt enjoyed the wholesome respect the adventure-hardened men into whose company his calling took him. He was reputed to be speedier deadlier in action with a pistol than was safe in an adversary. Wyatt's reputation for skill with firearms had been won at the target matches, upon which the hunters wagered large sums in cash or hides. Marksmanship of high degree was essential to success in these contests, and he had repeatedly demonstrated that with pistol or rifle, and shooting under any of the numerous conditions imposed to determine all-around proficiency, he had few equals around proficiency, he had few equals in the Salt Fork camps. One or two occasions in which some hunter had decided to shoot out some difference of opinion with Wyatt Earp and had found himself looking into Wyatt's pistol barrel before he could get his

speed. In these instances Wyatt would have been justified by the code of the camps in pressing his advantage to a fatal conclusion. That he did not do so, that he carried his gun play only far enough to protect his own life and refused to take another's, struck most of the hunters as peculiar; so much so that it has since been the subject of considerable comment. In later years there were to be other men who could not fathom this magnanimity; certain ones who owed their lives to its exist-ence in the marshal, Wyatt Earp, lived, perversely enough, to hate him bitterly for this gesture.

own from the holster had been enough

to satisfy the most exacting as to his

## Card Games With Guns

Among the camp followers who preyed upon the prodigal buffalo hunters were numbers of crooked gamblers. on the range ostensibly after hides, but on the range oscensiny area indes, our in reality to fleece unwary card players. As in all camp games, the stakes ran high—the more protracted sessions saw thousands of dollars change hands. Such ventures were profitable for skillful and daring operators. The crooks worked in pairs or trios, and trimmed their victims methodically. They recruited their own numbers from reputed man-killers, and to them skill with guns was of even greater importance than dexterity with cards. Two or three of these men would get into the same game and build up interest in the play until it suited them to introduce their trickery. From that point on, their answers to any charges were made with pistols. A hunter who objected to methods of play which he detected as questionable would probably be shot out of his seat before he had finished his protest; the best he might possibly expect was enforced retirement.

To certain of the old-timers their most notable recollection of Wyatt Earp in the buffalo camps dealt with Wyatt an occasion on the Salt Fork when a poker game for high stakes was under way, in which two of the players were notorious gunmen suspected of a partnership in crooked gambling, and by which Wyatt stood as a spectator. After the tide of fortune had definitely

set in the direction of the two suspected men, Wyatt left the circle of onlookers for a time; when he returned, it was noticed that he wore his pistols.

At this point it may be well to record another peculiarity of habit which dis-tinguished Wyatt from his associates: Unless actually engaged in hunting, he seldom went armed. His camp was set a half mile from his nearest neighbors, and in his visits to friends in

the larger groups, it was unusual for him to wear guns. Thus, their presence at his hips upon his return to the poker game attracted the attention of those who knew him.

When a player quit, Wyatt took his place in the game. As he sat down facing both men under suspicion, he shifted his pistols to rest on his thighs, placed a roll of greenbacks on the blanket before him, and observed quietly:

"If no one objects, we'll

play honest poker."

No one objected audibly, and the game continued. Eventually, with one of the gunmen dealing, came the play for which Wyatt Earp had been waiting. From the character of the betting, it was apparent that every player had been dealt a strong hand and the pot was swelled until nearly all the money in sight was at the center of the blanket. Both men under suspicion forced the betting before the draw, until Earp asked the one with the larger sum left in front of him, how much there was in

his pile. Under the rules of a tablestake game, the man was compelled to

answer.

"All right," Wyatt said, as he counted an equal amount from his own pile.

"I'll tap you."

This left the gunman with the choice of risking all his money on the hand, or resigning his interest in the pot. And every other player in the game must risk a like amount, or as much as he had left toward it, on the outcome of the draw. To those who did not fathom his purpose, it appeared that Wyatt was turning the play to suit a crooked gambler. With all stakes in the pot, cards were drawn. Then Wyatt interrupted proceedings. With his cards in his left hand, his right resting on the blanket in front of him, he addressed the dealer and his accomplice by name.

## A Six-Gun Hand

"Throw your cards down and get out." he directed. "I guess you didn't hear me when I said we'd play honest

poker. In that time and place, the accusation of cheating at cards meant but one thing—gun play—and men who made a business of gambling went prepared for it. The two against whom Wyatt had called the turn were no exceptions; each wore two pistols at his belt. The inference needed no explanation, yet Wyatt had made no move for his weapons; he was looking steadily across the blanket at his adversaries.

"Throw your cards down," he repeated, "and don't reach for anything

else.

Wyatt's left hand held his cards, his right was still empty. This was unadulterated nerve.

As if at some prearranged signal, and simultaneously, both sharpers went after their weapons. Before either one had a gun half drawn from the holster they were looking into the muzzle of a six-shooter in Wyatt Earp's right hand. Bat Masterson, who stood watching the play, said that Wyatt's move was made more quickly than his eye could

follow it.
"Put 'em back," Wyatt cautioned, and get out of here.

To the witnesses of the episode, there was always something inexplicable



John Selman, a Well-Known Figure of the Cattle Driving Era

about the whole affair. They never could understand why, in the first place, the card sharps hesitated over the start of their gun play; it should have followed Wyatt's first words, instantaneously. Because of their unwonted hesitaney, the two gamblers whom Wyatt had accused could do nothing, and live, but get out of camp, leaving behind all the money they had staked in the poker game.

Some hours after the gunmen left, the poker game ended with Wyatt Earp, as he remembered well, a loser as far as cash was concerned. But he had called the turn on a pair of professional killers in a manner that was to spread the fame of his courage from the Rio Grande to Great Slave Lake. It was the forerunner of a series of similar displays of fearlessness which were a source of never-ending speculation for those who discussed them.

In consideration of the spread of Wyatt Earp legends which dealt with his gun-throwing proficiency, it is pertinent to remember that the buffalo camps of the 70's were the training schools which turned loose on the frontier the most talented gun fighters and gunmen that any time or territory has known. From them there traveled over the West to the cow towns and the mining camps a great majority of the outlaw killers, the gunmen who made frontier life a hazardous affair for peaceably inclined citizens long after dangers inherent to the country itself had been overcome. From them, too, came the majority of the frontier marshals and sheriffs who blazed the trail for law and order with six-shooters and sawed-off shotguns.

To graduate from this school at the head of the class, with all honors conferred by fellow students who were also the faculty, and that without having fired a shot to solve any problem of life or death, was indeed a distinction so unique that of itself, perhaps, it

demanded legendary justification.
While Wyatt was in Dodge, the wide fame he had acquired brought Ned Buntline—E. Z. C. Judson—out to that town to meet him. Buntline's prolific pen furnished lurid tales of life on the plains for consumption by an effete world that dwelt east of the Mississippi River and which, in the 70's, demanded that its por-

traits of Western characters be done in bloody red. Buntline's outstanding literary achievement had been to make William Cody, a buffalo hunter, into the renowned Buffalo Bill, and from the exploits of Wyatt Earp and his associates he now obtained material for hundreds of frontier yarns; few entirely authentic, but many of which were the bases of fables still current as facts.

#### Buntline's Special

Buntline was so grateful to the Dodge City peace officers for the color they supplied that he set about arming them to befit their accomplishments. He sent to the Colt's factory for five special .45-caliber sixguns of regulation single-action style, but with barrels four inches longer than standard-a foot in length-making each weapon eighteen inches over all. Each gun had a demountable walnut stock of rifle style, with a thumbscrew by which the stock could be fastened to the side plates,

thus fitting the six-gun for use as a shoulder piece in long-range shooting. The rifle stock was fitted with a buckskin thong by which it could be slung to belt or saddle horn when not in use. The walnut butt of each gun had the word "Ned" carved deeply in the wood, and each was accompanied by a hand-tooled holster modeled for the weapon. Buntline gave a Buntline Special, as he called the guns, to Wyatt Earp, Charlie Bassett, Bat Masterson, Bill Tilghman and Neal Brown.

"There was a lot of talk in Dodge about the specials slowing us on the draw," Wyatt recalled. "Bat and Bill draw," Tilghman cut off the barrels to make theirs standard length, but Bassett, Brown and I kept ours as they came. Mine was my favorite over any other gun I ever owned. I could jerk it as fast as I could my old one, and I car-ried it at my right hip throughout my career as marshal. With it I did most of the six-gun work I had to do. My second gun, which I carried at my left hip, was the standard frontier model .45-caliber, single-action six-shooter with the seven and one-half inch barrel-the gun we called the Peacemaker.

In later years, as Bat Masterson pun yarns of his early association with Wyatt Earp, no tales of gun play, in Bat's opinion, offered such vivid pictures of his friend's courage and prowess as the recollection of certain affrays in which Wyatt went against the handpicked bullies of the cow outfits with no other weapons than his two fists.

Wyatt's speed and skill with a sixgun made almost any play against him with weapons, no contest," Bat once observed, in explaining his preference in Earp anecdotes. "Possibly there were more accomplished trick shots than he, but in all my years in the West at its wildest I never saw the man in action who could shade him in the one essential of real gun fighting-the draw-and-shoot against something that could shoot back.

"In a day when almost every man possessed as a matter of course the ability to get a six-gun into action with a rapidity that a later generation simply could not credit, Wyatt's speed on the draw was considered phenomenal by those who literally were marvels at the same feat, and his marksmanship at any range from four to four hundred yards was a perfect complement to his speed. On more than one occasion I have seen him kill covotes at the latter distance with his revolver, and any man who ever has handled a six-gun will tell you that only a past master of the weapon could do that.

"Most of the old frontier gun wielders practiced daily to keep their gun hands in. I have known them to stand before mirrors, going through the motions of draw-and-shoot with empty guns for an hour at a time. Outdoors they were forever firing at tin cans, bottles, telegraph poles or any other targets that offered, and shooting matches for prestige and money stakes

were daily events.

"In all the years that I was associated with Wyatt I never knew him to practice the draw beyond trying his guns in the holsters when he first put them on for the day, or slipping them once to make sure they were free when he was heading into a possible argument; and he seldom did any target work when there was no competition

at hand.

"Wyatt had a keen sense of humor, and one of his favorite methods for its expression was to horn into the shooting matches at which the so-called fighting men were engaged. The way he'd outdo the best that the braggart gun throwers had to offer fairly burned those fellows up, and the casual manner with which he did it was not calculated to soothe any injured pride. But there was more than humor to this custom; it was Wyatt's quiet way of reminding the bad boys that against him they stood small chance. He was certain of that, and after he had made monkeys out of a few who went against him, the majority were willing to forgo

additional argument.

"Wyatt was the most perfect personification I ever saw of the Western insistence that the true six-gun artist is born that way. A hundred Texas men, more or less, with reputations as killers, whom I have known, have started gun plays against Wyatt Earp, only to look into the muzzle of Wyatt's gun before they could get their own guns half drawn. Whereupon, if the gunman thought particularly well of himself, or had any sort of record as a killer, Wyatt would bend the long barrel of his Buntline Special around the Texan's head and lug him to the calaboose.

"In the old days, to buffalo a gun toter, as hitting him over the head with a gun was called, was to inflict more than physical injury; it heaped upon him a greater calumny than any other form of insult could convey. A man for whom a camp had any respect whatsoever was entitled to be shot at: so Wyatt took particular delight in buffaloing the gunmen who set great store by themselves.

"When circumstances made it necessary for Wyatt to shoot, he preferred disabling men rather than killing them. Offhand, I could list fifty gun fights in which Wyatt put a slug through the arm or the shoulder of some man who was shooting at him, when he might as certainly have shot him in the belly or through the heart. There were instances in which I thought Wyatt too lenient, when it would have been better for all concerned to have put some gunman completely out of business, then and there, and, what's more, I have told

"'Didn't have to kill him,' Wyatt would answer, and that would be all he'd say."

Editor's Note-This is the second of a series of articles by Mr. Lake. The third will appear next