

“Dissertation of a Tennis Ball”

by Blacky Vela



My first experience as a cowboy shooter was with the Tejas Pistoleros back about 1½ years ago. A friend of mine name Martin Roth had told me about this sport and thought I would be interested in this type of shooting. I didn't know way back then what he was turning me on too and how things in my life were going to change. He told me about his friend who shot cowboy and wanted to introduce him to me. I agreed and met with him one early morning and off went to go and see this Cowboy Action Shooting sport. Living in San Antonio, we drove to a near by club just outside of Austin called "The Tejas Caballeros" and met this cowboy shooter name David "Hawkeye" Pierce! Hawkeye explained to me what this sport was about even showed me his pistols and then proceeded to shoot the courses that day. My wife Virginia and I, along with Martin, watched him shoot. I was very impressed; not with Hawkeye's shooting <wink>, but with the sport! Driving home that day I remember talking to Virginia about how much I thought I would like to shoot this sport. She agreed and said, "Honey, with all the dressing up and the lines you have say before you shoot, this is right up your alley!" I still to this day wonder what she meant by that remark. <smile> I then somehow, I still don't know how, came up with the guns I needed to shoot my first course of Cowboy Action Shooting.

My first shoot would be with the Tejas Pistoleros out of Houston. This was Hawkeye's home club. When I arrived the night before and settled into my hotel room, I couldn't sleep thinking about how excited I was about this shoot. When I woke up the next morning, it was raining and my heart sank in my chest. I thought for sure they were going to cancel the shoot and I would have to wait another day. "NO WAY!" They were going to shoot even though it was raining lightly. I went out there after having me a good breakfast and was ready to shoot. Of course as everyone in that club knows, all new and first-time shooters to the club must be instructed in the ways of cowboy shooting by my friend David "Hawkeye" Pierce! I remember that day well because I had the best time.

I look back to that time and think to myself, "What is it that made me fall in love with this sport?" I'm not sure if it was the challenge ... or the different style of shooting from what I was used to ... or if it was how nice everyone was. I just couldn't put my finger on "Why?". Well after thinking about it for awhile, I finally decided that it was not any one thing, but many things. People in this sport have nothing to hide in the way of trade secrets or skills. Everyone was willing to be a teacher and help me along that day. I was told about how safety is the main concern. I still remember hearing Hawkeye and Paladin saying "Muzzle direction! Muzzle direction! Muzzle direction!" The three sacred rules to never forget. I learned quickly that all one had to do was pay attention and the learning would be natural.

Well since then I have learned a lot from many people in the Tejas Pistoleros Club, but the one person who took me under his wing so to speak was Hawkeye! He went over many things with me ... not only about this sport and its people, but also about reloading, gun care and way too many other things to even remember in one article.

Times have changed and I have become a much safer and better cowboy shooter. BUT ... There was this one time I was shooting out at Tejas Pistoleros and had just run a course of fire out at the stagecoach and had really messed up my time by shooting the course wrong and getting a procedural. Tumbleweed Kate, Hawkeye's wife, was at the unloading table and asked me what went wrong. I remember explaining to her that it had been a few months since I had shot last and that I was really excited. I told her that I felt like a puppy dog who has seen the tennis ball and loses it completely with the excitement of the thought of play ... or in this case "the thought of shooting." Well since that time, the story has kind of stuck with me and every time I mess up on a course of fire, the wife looks at me and says, "Tennis Ball syndrome right?" I laugh and agree with her and say, "That must be the reason I make those silly, simple mistakes."

Well, I have even come to be called "Weedhopper" by my mentor Hawkeye. Awhile back, we were both in the Trailhead Shoot out at Columbus and were sitting around during a down range period. While sitting there, our friend Martin Roth took a photograph of Hawkeye, Virginia, and me sitting on the porch of one of the stages. In this photo, you'll see Hawkeye holding up a tennis ball. It looks like he is showing it to me, but he was actually showing it to a dog that you can just barely see behind me. We have come to call this photo "The Dissertation of a Tennis Ball!" If you'll look at this photo (at the top of this article), you can almost hear my mentor Hawkeye saying to me, "Weedhopper, when you can take this tennis ball from my hand, then ... and only then ... will you be ready!"

Well I may not be able to snatch that tennis ball from his hand just yet or out shoot him on every stage, but I will tell you this much. That day will come and I'll be ready to match him. I look forward to that challenge and even more I look forward to shooting every month with that fine group of folks known as "The Tejas Pistoleros!"