

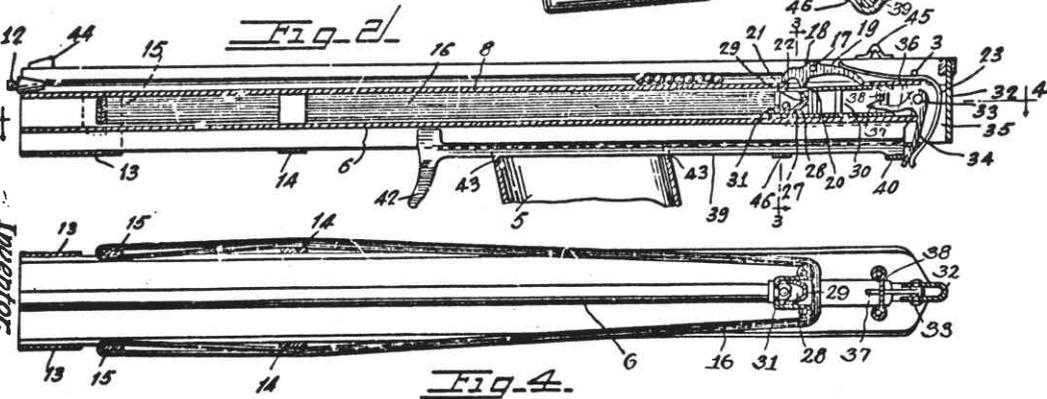
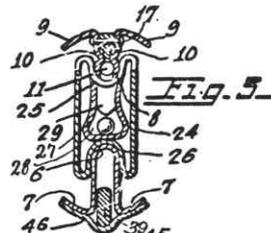
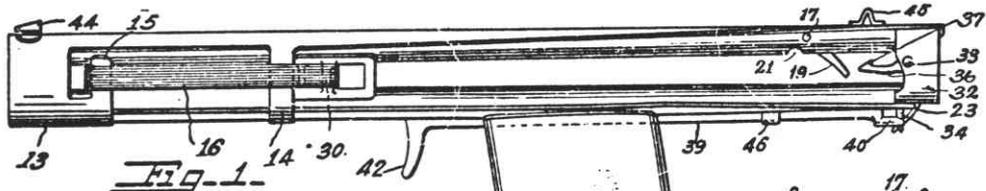
Feb. 26, 1924.

C. L. BUNTEN

FOR PISTOL

Filed Jan. 8, 1923

1,484,930



By Benjamin, Kachnowski & Associates
Inventor: Claude L. Buntten

The drawing from Dr. Buntten's first patent . . .

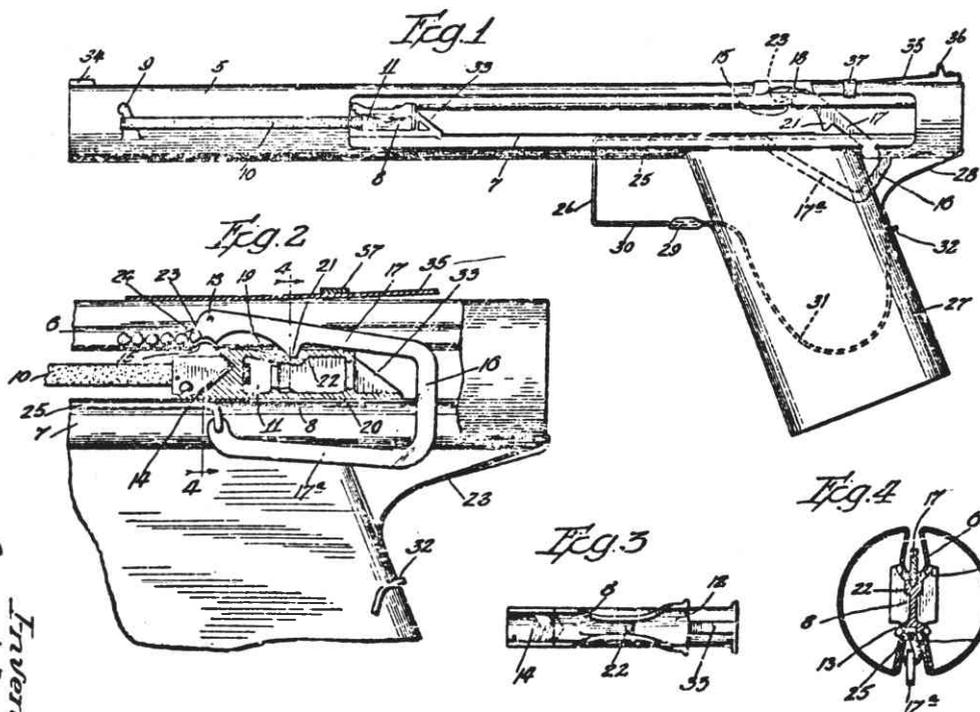
Jan. 12, 1926.

C. L. BUNTEN

FEED AND TRIGGER MECHANISM FOR PISTOLS

Filed April 22, 1925

1,568,999



Inventor: CLAUDEL BUNTEN
By E. Remondy

. . . and from his second patent.

Bulls-Eyes and Sharpshooters

The little-known, surprisingly accurate, noiseless, smokeless, harmless, and romantic indoor repeating target pistols.

Charles R. Suydam

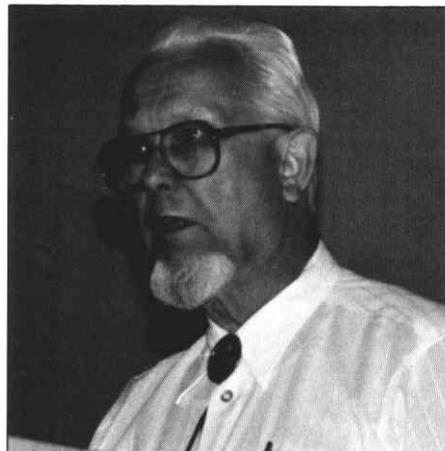
Some time ago I told Vern Ecklund I'd talk about Bulls-Eye and Sharpshooter pistols at Prescott if he wanted me to, since it was fairly close to home and I could bring them with me. His answer was interesting: ". . . I'd like to schedule you for the Prescott meeting . . . I like to interject '20th Century' material occasionally in our meetings".

I do hope that the reference to "20th Century material" as he made it doesn't mean that the ASAC is concerned only with Stone Age to 19th Century materials! While the Bulls-Eye and Sharpshooter pistols are certainly the ultimate in modern 20th Century arms, using caseless, smokeless, noiseless ammunition, there are surely other 20th Century arms worthy of the attention of this group. A collection of Colt Woodsman pistols won the best display prize at the recent Colorado Gun Collectors 25th Anniversary show in Denver - which, with 141 displays, was the biggest and best display show there has ever been!

Since I'm sure you've all studied the guns on display in the hall very carefully, I'll not try to have fun with you by pretending that they are the latest secret military weapons. But you may be surprised to know that a gross was purchased by the U.S. Coast Guard on the 23rd of June, 1934; that the U.S. Marines purchased 600; that the New York police department and some military R.O.T.C. groups used them for pistol training. An article in the *Denver Post* of 24 June, 1953, says they were sent to U.S. troops in the Pacific during WWII and that French soldiers on the Maginot Line also had them. So those of you who collect military handguns may have collections less complete than you think - unless you **do** have these pistols, too!

Now it is time to tell the romantic story of the Bulls-Eye and Sharpshooter pistols. Lest someone question the appropriateness of the word "romantic", among its definitions are "something that has a strange and fascinating appeal [or] a disposition toward the mysterious or adventurous". That the word "romantic" is correct will be shown as the story develops. It begins with a very brief biography of the inventor of the pistols, Dr. Claude L. Bunten.

He was born on a farm near Shellsburgh, Iowa, on August 1, 1879. In due time he attended Duke University, where he became a pole vaulter, won that event in the old "State Meet" in 1904. He received his dental degree from Creighton University, Omaha, then moved to Rawlins, Wyoming, about 100 miles west of Laramie. In 1920 it had a population of about 200, which may have



allowed him time out of his dental office for his other activities.

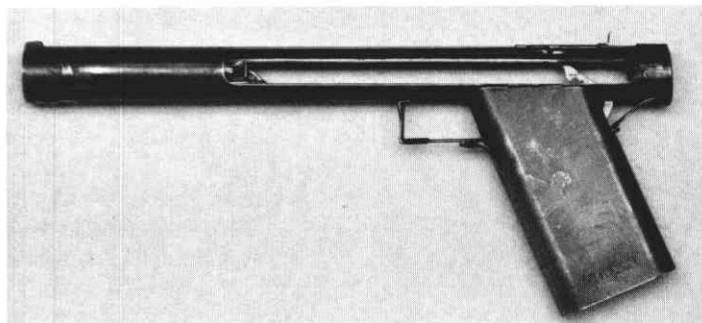
In Rawlins, Dr. Bunten combined dentistry with inventing, hunting, fishing, and target shooting; Figure 1 shows him with an elk he shot in the 1930s. He was a surfer for many years, learned to water ski when he was 75. Among his inventions were a bilge pump, a tubular boat trailer that would lower the boat into the water, a toy parachute in two metal hemispheres to throw high in the air with a launching stick. The parachute would open, and the thrower would then go search for it in the neighborhood. And, of course, the Bulls-Eye and Sharpshooter pistols, the first patent for which, No. 1,484,930, he received on February 26, 1924. The subjects of that patent, which calls the device a "toy pistol", are many: the magazine, the carrier, the trigger mechanism, the guide rods, ease of fabrication from sheet metal, ease of operation, that it may be quickly set and fired, readily manufactured at a moderate cost, and the use of a simple element for moving the carrier, such as a rubber band!

Dr. Bunten's second patent, No. 1,568,999, of January 12, 1926, covers an improvement in feed and trigger mechanism, and a "unique and dependable sighting device that may be readily adjusted . . . permitting the operator to more accurately aim . . ." The patent drawings show the rather elaborate mechanism for this "simple toy pistol".

What is believed to be the first version of the Bulls-Eye is shown (2): none exactly following the design of the first patent have been found. This well-used pistol has characteristics shown in the drawing for the second patent: the new carrier, bullet feed, and trigger



(1)



(2)



(3)

mechanism; but the rear sight has a narrow vertical leaf adjustable only for elevation, and the front sight has no elevation "lump" on the bottom front, as shown in (7). This pistol also differs in having only the first patent date, in a straight line on the left grip (3). It is shown (4) in its box, the top inside of which differs in printing from the later ones. Also shown are the celluloid parrots (made in Japan), Rawlins-marked yellow shot tube, target stamp and pad. There was a packet of rubber bands, too.

The later, "standard" Bulls-Eye (5), is similar to the first, has a rear sight adjustable for windage and elevation, shown in figure 6 next to the narrower first sight, also (7), a new front sight which can be adjusted for elevation (the lump on the bottom will lift it when it is shoved all the way in), and a new target-shaped logo on the left grip (8).

It might be well at this point to describe the operation of Dr. Bunten's pistol. Those familiar with the catapult, crossbow, and, better, the balista, will have little problem understanding the pistol: it is a hand-held balista! The balista shown in figure 9, from Stone's *Glossary*, rested on a tripod, had arms on two sides, a trough in the center, and a pocket connected to the arms, in which a clay ball of some size rested. The pocket was locked to the rear, tension applied to the arms, and, when the lock was released, the ball was carried down the trough and out the "muzzle" by the pocket or carrier.

Dr. Bunten's pistol operates the same way: guides at top and bottom of the "barrel" (so it would be in a firearm) direct the carrier toward the "muzzle" or forward end. There is a post on either side of the muzzle: a rubber band is passed through the forward hole in the carrier, and hooked onto the posts. An open-topped tubular magazine, fitted into the upper part of the barrel, also holds the front sight. The sight is slid forward and out, a number of No.



(4)

6 shot (Bull-Eye literature says 58) are placed into the tube by aid of a charger, shown in place on top in figure 10, and the sight replaced. To shoot, the carrier is pulled to the rear, creating tension in the rubber band. As it nears the end, the carrier lifts the sear, which is also the magazine release. This allows a shot to fall into its pocket at the forward end of the carrier; a very slight further movement drops the sear into its notch and closes the magazine opening. The pistol is ready to fire in the lower picture. The shooter holds and sights as with any other target pistol. Squeezing (*never jerking!*) the trigger releases the carrier, which zips down the guides, and the No. 6 shot is ejected, even as the shot from the balista. For those who wonder, a No. 6 shot is .11 inches or 2.79mm in diameter; there are 223 to the ounce, 3,568 in a pound.

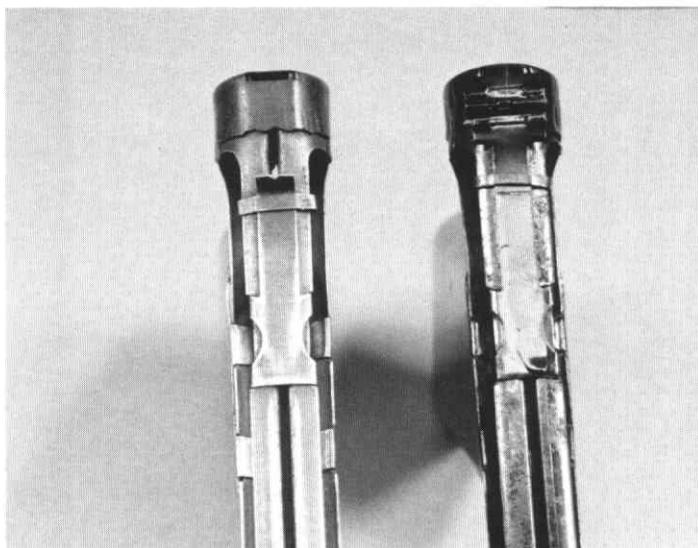
Now on with the story of the pistols and their makers. To clarify, the Bulls-Eye was made first, under Dr. Bunten's patents of 1924 and 1926; the slightly smaller Sharpshooter was later, made under his 1937 patent, and with its introduction, manufacture of the Bulls-Eye stopped. Bulls-Eye is hyphenated, has no apostrophe; Sharpshooter is one word except on the guns themselves. They are shown in figure 11.

Something of the manufacture of the pistols is told in a letter from Dr. Bunten's son, Dr. Leroy Bunten, dated 3 December, 1988:

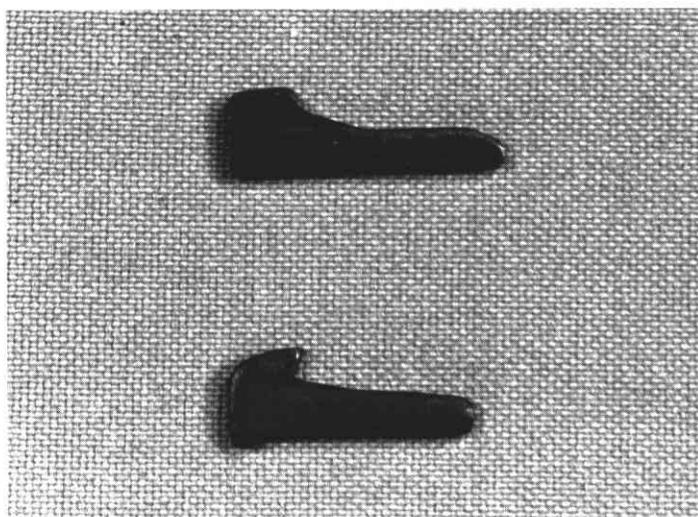
"The factory for some years was a wooden and "tin" building in back of the dental building . . . Dad had a big press in the shop to cut out and shape most all the parts, and he even made the spring triggers. Most of the dies were of his making, even; he "blued" the metal of the non-chrome (really nickel) models, cast the carriers, made some of the targets. There wasn't a lot he didn't make [but the celluloid parrots were made in Japan] . . . He was proud of the gun's trigger squeeze and accuracy."

Mrs. Faye E. Scott, Dr. Bunten's daughter, added more information:

"One who was helpful in promoting the pistol was Mr. [Capt] T.G. Brown, who was a former off-hand rifle champion. He and dad tested each and every pistol before shipping to insure accuracy. After the crash of 1929 . . . I worked for my dad . . . we shipped all over the world



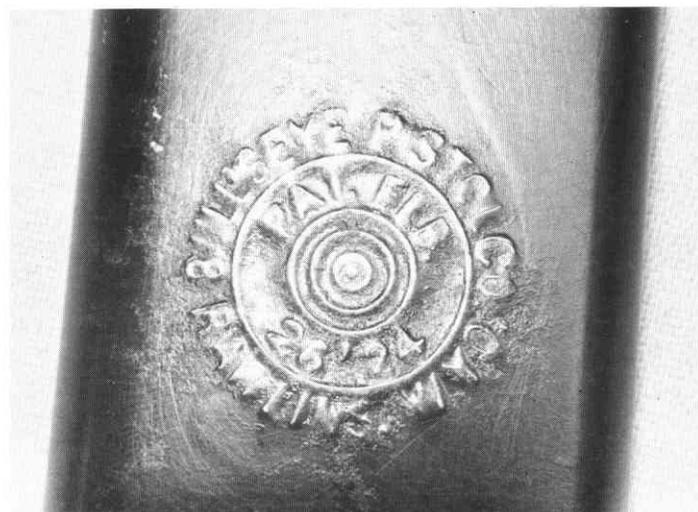
(6)



(7)



(5)



(8)

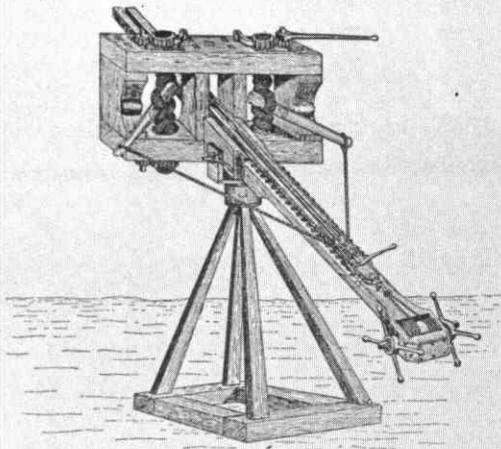


FIGURE 112. Balista. From Payne-Gallwey, *Projectile-Throwing Engines*, p. 21.

(9)



(10)



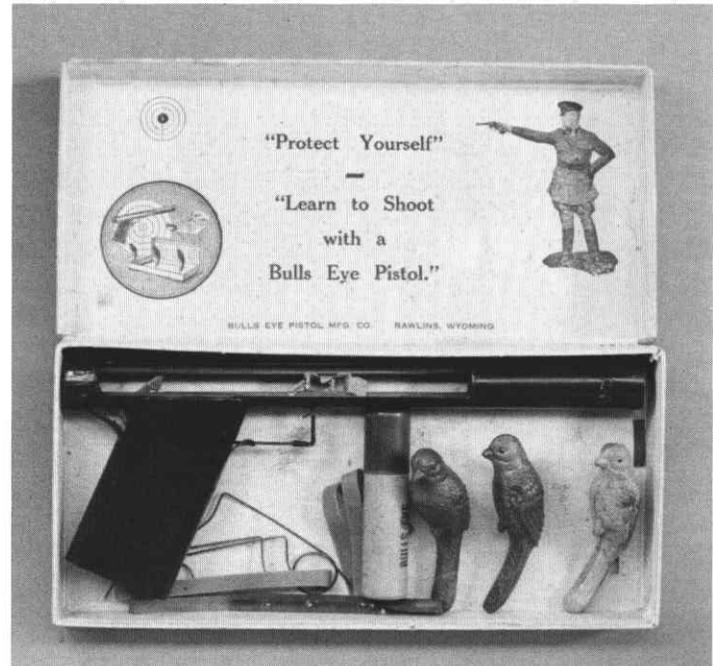
(11)

and to most of the largest sporting good stores in the U.S., including Abercrombie & Fitch, Marshall Field's, Stoeger Arms, to name a few". The picture inside the box lid (12) may be Capt. Brown.

Dr. Bunten was as capable a marketer as he was an inventor: the Bulls-Eye pistols were sold as an "outfit" or "kit", which, as an early advertisement said, "includes full shaped hollow celluloid birds, a rubber stamp for printing targets, rubber bands, pistol and ammunition, all packed in a very attractive box". The 1920s parlor scene on the cover (13) certainly qualifies as "very attractive"! There was also an instruction sheet and a small six-page testimonial folder in the outfit. The latter may seem optimistic: the front says: "Protect Yourself - Learn to Shoot with a Bulls-Eye Pistol"! But the writers of the testimonials include the Champion Woman Pistol Shot of the World, the winner of the 1919 Individual Pistol Match, Major W.D. Frazer of the 1924 Olympic Pistol Team, Major J.S. Hatcher, and others. Cost of the outfit was \$2.50 ca. 1926.

The top of the box is hinged: when the birds are placed on their perches on the front side, the cover acts as a backstop. Many boxes show marks where the pellets have struck, as does this one. Note the different shooter picture in Figure 14: this has a hilly background.

Nor was advertising only in writing: Mrs. Scott told in another letter that "my dad and I went to the National Rifle Matches in Camp Perry, Ohio, in September of 1936, where we set up a shooting gallery with the pistols. Wires were strung across the back of the tent and the celluloid birds were perched on the wires. Some of the best shooters in the world paid one cent to shoot at the birds [and] targets, light matches, or even shoot at one of the No. 6



(12)

chilled shot". Consider what she said, and remember the word "romantic". Also the lost value of the cent.

Certainly the most amazing testimonial to the accuracy, practicality, and overall fun of the Bulls-Eyes is in the most unusually enthusiastic full page story by Major Julian Hatcher in the December, 1925, *American Rifleman*. Note the date: the patent for the improved Bulls-Eye wasn't granted until January, 1926! Major Hatcher was one of the outstanding arms writers of that time. His story indicates that Captain Brown had had "his" Bulls-Eye pistol booth at Camp Perry in the summer of 1925, just over a year after Dr. Bunten received his first patent (and just in time to make the printing lead time for that December issue). The whole article is too long to quote here, but it is a masterly explanation of the pistol, and some parts are too good to leave out. It starts:

"Recently an acquaintance of mine called at a friend's house to play cards. During the course of the game, he was thoughtfully contemplating the cards held in his right hand, while between the fingers of his left hand, which rested on the table, a half-burned cigarette was burning. Suddenly out of the corner of his eye he seemed to catch a flash of light at the end of this cigarette.

He raised it quickly and looked at it and it was out. Mechanically he relighted it, took a puff or two, and started to examine his cards again. This time there was no mistake about it. The fire suddenly jumped off his cigarette and fell to the table. Most extraordinary!

In a few moments another member of the party let his hand drop to his side holding a cigarette. At the same moment our friend observed his host in the act of slowly raising a deadly looking automatic pistol and apparently aiming at the cigarette. There was no sound, but then the fire dropped off the cigarette, and at the same moment he saw a small bird shot drop to the floor. [That's really direct anti-smoking action!]

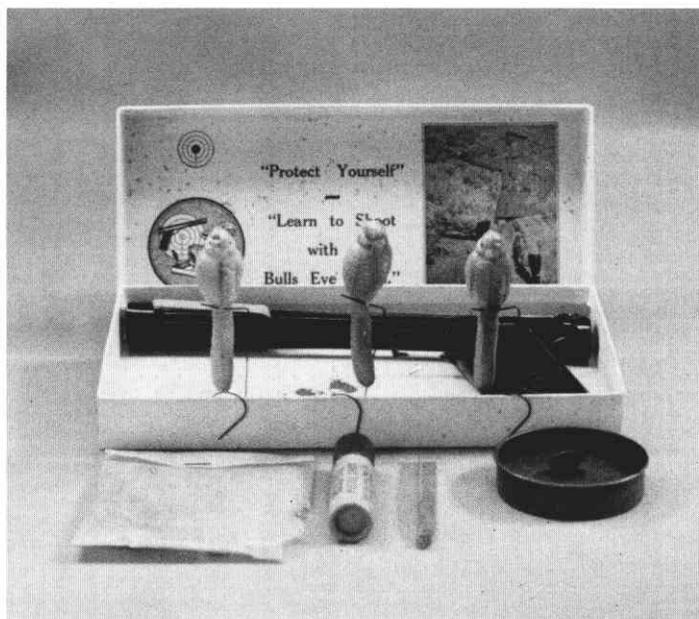
Major Hatcher's friend didn't solve the mystery at that point, but it is obvious that the host had a Bulls-Eye pistol. Major Hatcher continues, gives an excellent description of the pistol and its abilities, tells how to use it, and of two of his own sons, "who were not very strong in marksmanship; in the two weeks they have been playing with the Bull's Eye [sic] pistol, they have improved so much that when I took them out a day or two ago with a real pistol, they made excellent scores."

There was another article in the October, 1980, issue of the *Rifleman* about these pistols which has an interesting addenda in which NRA staff members discuss

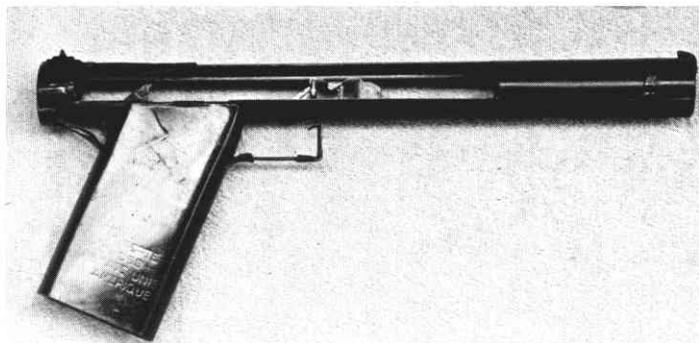
their memories of the guns. Two quick excerpts from it:

First, about the late M.D. Waite, former Technical Editor of the *Rifleman* and ASAC member. He was a devotee of the Bulls-Eye pistol who ignored the Sharpshooter, feeling it was inaccurate, but who had remarked that the early ones were, indeed, ten-foot fly killers. Bud used to amuse himself by stalking flies in the tents at Camp Perry. And Pete Dickey, now Technical Editor of TAR, firing Ken Warner's Sharpshooter through chronograph screens, got a 2.35" group, an average velocity of 165 FPS, and an energy of only .117 ft/lbs. The size of the rubber band isn't given, but it must have been a small one.

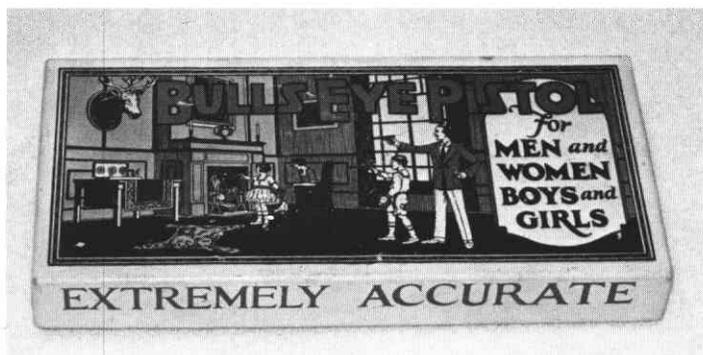
The romance continues with the third variation of the Bulls-Eye pistol (15): it appears to be, and is, the same as the standard Bulls-Eye, except for an additional stamp on the right grip: "IMPORTE DES ETATS UNIS AMERIQUE" (16). Its box also looks the same as that for the standard Bulls-Eye, except for a line (17) added to the front side, in small type and in slightly better grammar: "Importe Des Etats Unis D'Amerique". That the pistols were sold,



(14)



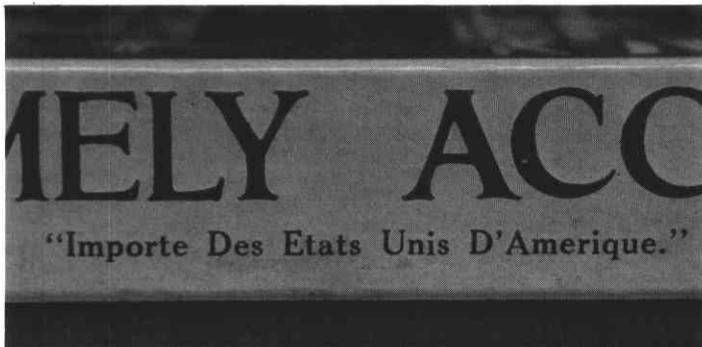
(15)



(13)



(16)



(17)

LEON JOHNSON
ARMURIER SPÉCIALISÉ
 CHAMPION DU MONDE ET CHAMPION OLYMPIQUE
 DE TIR

MAITRE TIREUR EXPERT
 A TOUTES ARMES DE CHASSE ET DE TIR



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 — AT⁰¹ - B - 28 - 33 (Gare St-Lazare)
 — 30 (Boulevard des Batignolles)

- 1 -

(18)

and were apparently popular, in France, is shown by a catalog of Leon Johnson, 4 Rue de Petrograd, Paris. The title page (18), says he is "Champion du Monde et Champion Olympique de Tir", and page 8 (19), a full-page advertisement for "Le Pistolet Bull's Eye" [sic] says he is "Agent exclusif pour la France, Les Colonies, la Belgique, et la Principaute de Monaco". A disposition toward the mysterious or adventurous, indeed. How did this "toy" pistol from a tiny town in Wyoming rate so highly and so prominently in the catalog of a major arms dealer in Paris? Only Schultz & Larson target rifles, the "Pistolets de Match" of C. Widmer and Ugo Anschutz precede it in the catalog! It is probable that the answer is somewhere in a combination of bird-shooting in a tent at Camp Perry and M. Johnson's olympic shooting championships, but this is only logical speculation.

The next variation is not in the gun, a standard Bulls-Eye, but in the box (20), on the back of which are printed - not pasted - two of the Blue Eagles of President Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration of 16 June 1933. These eagles not only help date the pistol, but also

BULL'S EYE PISTOLS C^y
RAWLINS. U. S. A.



AMATEURS DE TIR

les cartouches sont chères, entraînez-vous chez vous avec
Le Pistolet BULL'S EYE

C'est une invention américaine, entièrement construit et réglé aux États-Unis par des Champions de tir.

CE N'EST PAS UNE ARME puisqu'il est absolument inoffensif, mais c'est le meilleur engin d'ENTRAÎNEMENT au tir au **pistolet** et au **revolver**.

SA PRÉCISION EST EXTRAORDINAIRE
 jusqu'à 3 mètres **AUCUNE ARME NE PEUT LE BATTRE.**
CELUI QUI SAIT TIRER AU BULL'S EYE.....SAIT TIRER

Le **PISTOLET BULL'S EYE** est réglementaire pour l'**INSTRUCTION** et l'**ENTRAÎNEMENT** des Officiers, Corps de troupe, Police, Ecole de Cadets, etc. aux **Etats-Unis**.

SANS DANGER puisqu'il ne peut casser une vitre à bout portant et cependant il **PERCE UN CARTON-CIBLE**.

Major W. D. FRAZER, Champion Olympique. "C'est l'engin le plus utile pour l'enseignement du tir, il permet de donner au débutant les meilleurs principes du tir au pistolet".

Major J. S. HATCHER, de Frankford Arsenal. "Si un pistolet ne faisait ni bruit, ni fumée, ni recul, chacun pourrait apprendre à tirer très rapidement, tel est le pistolet **BULL'S EYE**".

L. JOHNSON, Agent exclusif pour la France, les Colonies, la Belgique et la Principauté de Monaco
 Vente en gros aux Établissements PIOT-LEPAGE, 12, Rue Martel, PARIS (10^e)

- 8 -

(19)

show that Dr. Bunten was a loyal supporter of attempts to relieve the depression!

Another item of interest is the business card (21) found in that box: it is interesting to speculate that Federal Laboratories found the Bulls-Eye pistol a fitting adjunct to their tear gas (and tear gas guns), bullet proof vests, Thompson submachine guns, and Smith & Wesson revolvers.

This gun (22) is shown because it is an “unfired” specimen, shows what they looked like new, and because it came in a very different box. Apparently the factory ran out of the Bulls-Eye parlor scene boxes just as the Sharpshooter was to be introduced, so the last of the Bulls-Eyes were packaged in this version of the Sharpshooter box. Note there is no address on the lid.

The last Bulls-Eye (23), is a non-factory modification, made ca. 1953 by Bud Beckwith of La Jolla, California, who added a fitted 6-ounce piece of lead beneath the barrel and another inside the grip. It is unlikely that this helped reduce recoil significantly, but it may have made it feel more like a real pistol. With that, it is time to look at the Sharpshooters.

The Sharpshooter Pistols

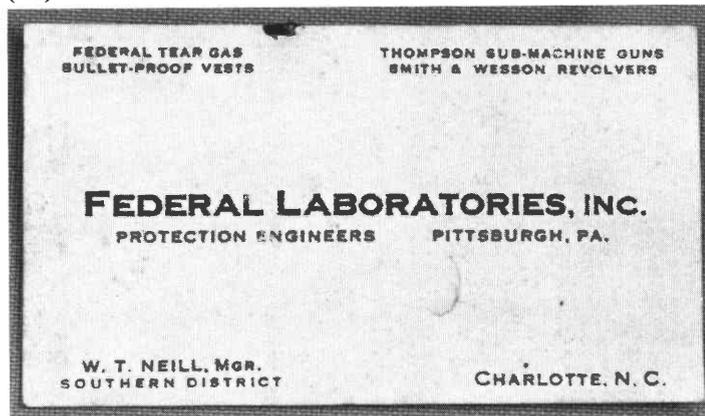
Dr. Bunten’s third patent, No. 2,092,301 of September 7, 1937, was for an improved Bulls-Eye pistol called the “Sharpshooter”, and it “relates to means for guiding the shot or pellet carrier, and the improvement concerns the provision of means for permitting a relative movement of one of the guides or tracks on which the carrier moves towards the other guide or track, which movement permits of precise adjustment of the structure so that the spacing of the guides may be accurately regulated or adjusted for the most efficient operation of the pistol”.

Hear that again: “an adjustment for permitting the movement of the guides for the carrier . . . for more efficient operation of the pistol”. Other target pistols have adjustable sights - as does this one - but *no* other pistol has means of adjusting the bullet carrier - the barrel - for more efficient operation! The drawing shows other things as well: a newly-designed trigger and trigger spring, new screws beneath the barrel, fore and aft, and, especially, a new trigger guard - none of the earlier pistols had a trigger guard.

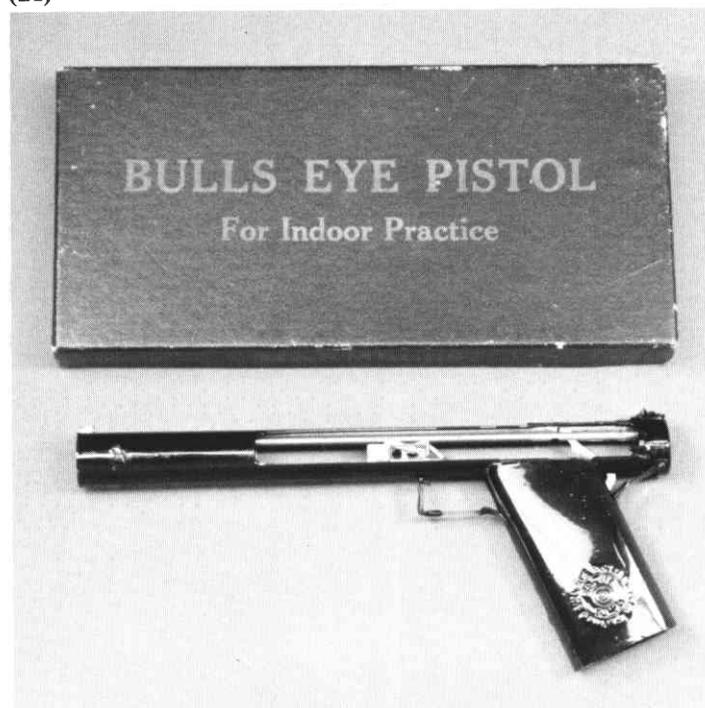
The pistol shown in figures 24 and 25 is neither a Bulls-Eye nor a Sharpshooter, but a prototype from which the Sharpshooter was derived. This is obviously a hand-made pistol (note the cuts in the trigger guard hole), originally bright metal with no finish and now lightly patinated with rust. The top of the frame, barrel, sights, etc., are all Bulls-



(20)



(21)



(22)



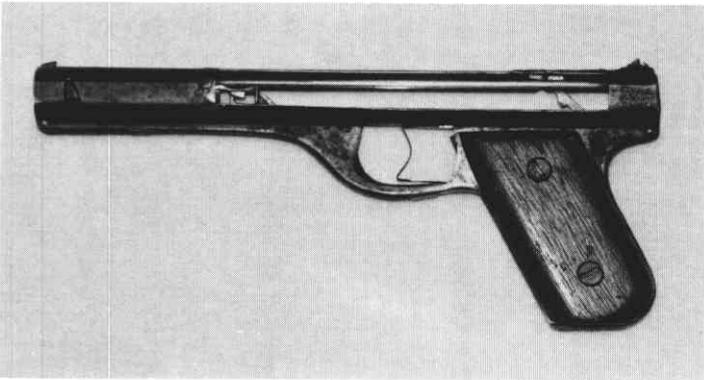
(23)



(24)

Eye pattern, but the barrel is .805 inches wide vs. .785 for the Bulls-Eye, a flattened .760 inch at the back vs. .800 inches, and 1/8 inch longer than the Bulls-Eye. The bottom, below the barrel, has a hand-cut Sharpshooter pattern trigger guard, the trigger design shown in the third patent drawing, and ca. 1-1/2 x 3 x 3/8 inch unfinished hardwood grips held by two common wood screws.

As with most of Dr. Bunten's work, there is no written reference to this pistol, but it was in Warren Beckwith's material, and its origin in the shop of Dr. Bunten is obvious. Its box is, appropriately, the last Rawlins pattern shown with the unfired Bulls-Eye pistol. There were no other items in the box.

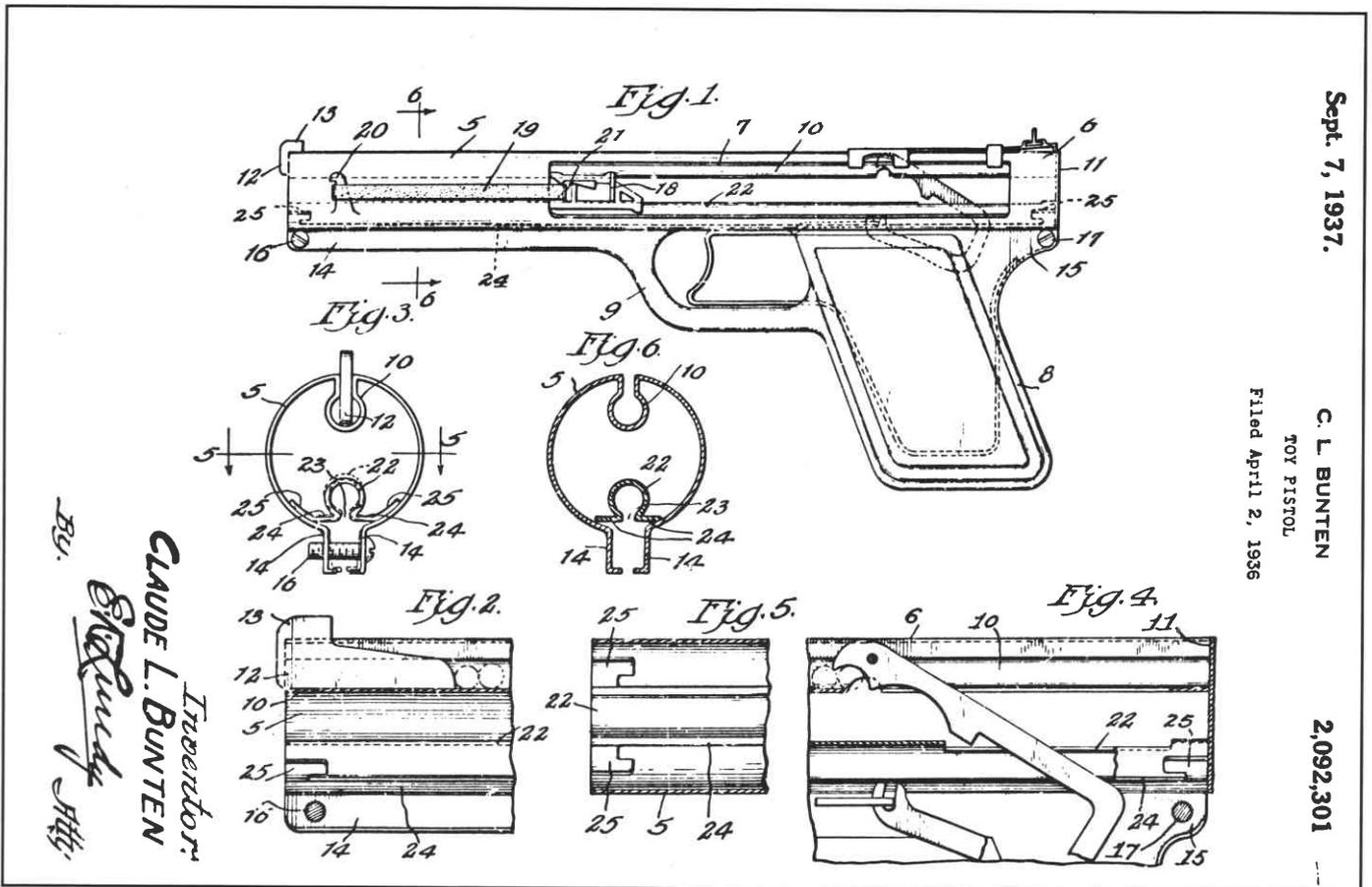


(25)

Next are the Sharpshooter variations and the romantic stories of their makers. With the coming of the Sharpshooter, manufacture of the Bulls-Eye stopped.

The first point to make with the Sharpshooters is the name: on all of the pistols, it is written as two words, unhyphenated: Sharp Shooter, but in the printed material it is one word, "Sharpshooter", which is used here.

The Sharpshooter pistols are all essentially the same, varying only in finish (nickel or blue/black), grips ("pearl", hardwood or none), carrier material (metal or plastic) and barrel markings. The Nickel Deluxe, Black Deluxe and Plain Black pistols are shown in Figure 26.



The drawing from Dr. Bunten's third patent.

They are 7-3/8 inches overall, have grips 2-3/4 inches long and about 3/4 inches thick, shorter than the Bulls-Eye grips but leaving the frame at the same angle. The triggers are longer, have a slightly different spring shape, as shown in the patent drawing. The grip, trigger guard, barrel, and back closure are all one piece of metal, formed and folded. The bottom carrier is a separate piece, as it is on the Bulls-Eye; screws at the front and back bottom ends, entering from the right side, regulate the carrier rail spacing as specified in the patent. Front and rear sights are the same as on the Bulls-Eye. "Stretch" of the rubber band is 5-1/2 inches, compared to seven for the Bulls-Eye.

The Sharpshooters were made and/or sold by four different firms: in succession, Bulls-Eye Mfg. Co. in Rawlins, Wyoming; Bulls-Eye Mfg. Corporation in La Jolla, California; Berry Brow Enterprises, Line Lexington, Pennsylvania, and Golden Key Enterprises, Sherman Oaks, California. However, only the first two put their names on the pistols.

The First Sharpshooter?

Figure 27 is thought to be one of the first Sharpshooter pistols because of the stamping (28) on the left side of the barrel:

SHARP SHOOTER
 PAT. FEB. 26, '27 - JAN. 12, '26
 OTHER PAT. PEND.
 FRANCE BREVETÉ (S.G.D.G.)

The significance of these markings is on the third and fourth lines. On the third line, "Other Pat. Pend.": Dr. Bunten's application for his third patent was filed on April 2, 1936, *over 17 months* before it was granted on Sept. 7, 1937. This line suggests he didn't wait for the patent to start making the Sharpshooters!

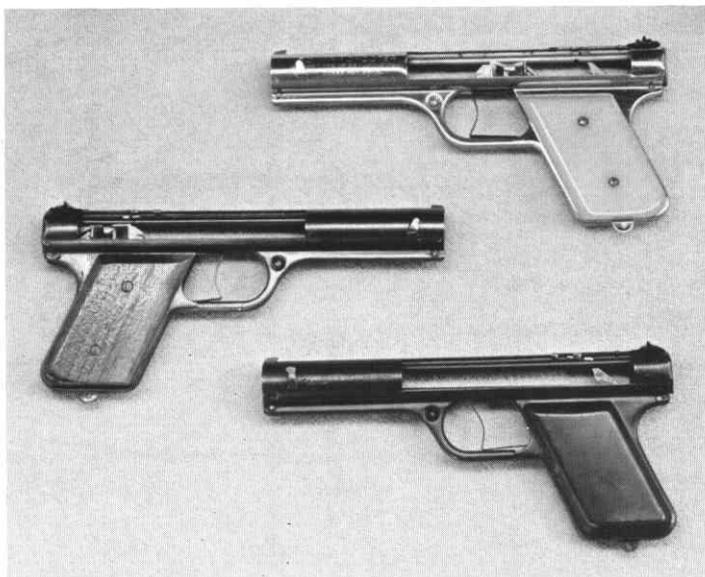
The fourth line is also significant: Breveté means "patented", which shows a *French patent* was granted; it also has the usual French government cautionary initials, SGDG: the patent is granted without guarantee of the government!

It is probable that pistols with this marking were made in late 1936 or early 1937. A Black Deluxe pistol in the Charles Best collection has the same marking on the left side, is additionally marked on the right,

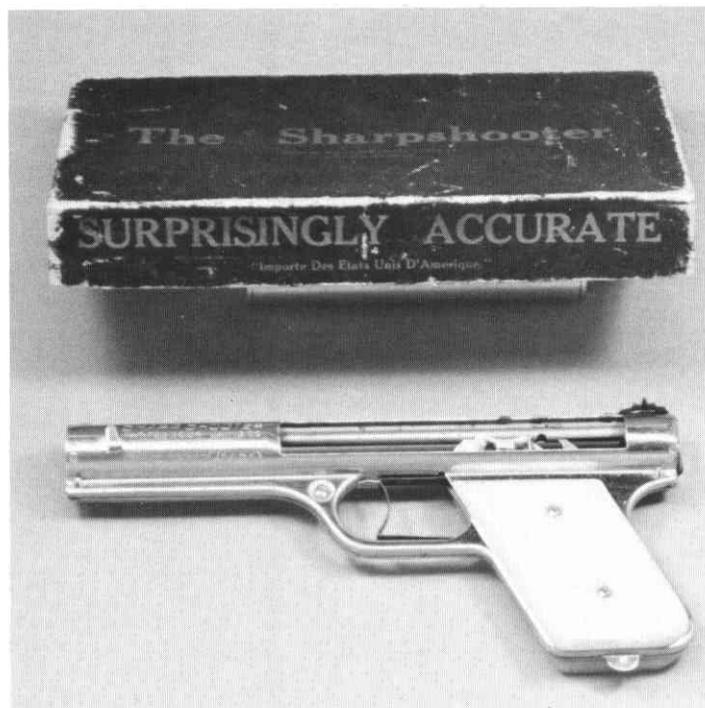
IMPORTE DES ETATS UNIS AMERIQUE.

This pistol also varies from the other Nickel Deluxe specimens in that the grips are yellow plastic ("ivory") rather than the usual white "pearl" grips. Its early Rawlins box has the French line on the front side: "Importe Des Etats Unis D'Amerique".

Note the slight bends on each side of the barrel where the rubber band rubs, to smooth its passage across the edge of the metal. They have not been noticed on any other Sharpshooter.



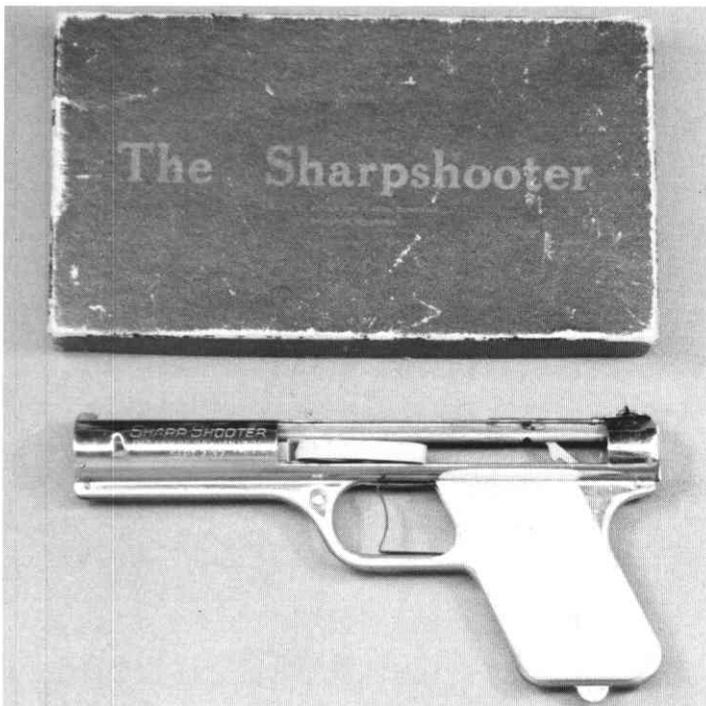
(26)



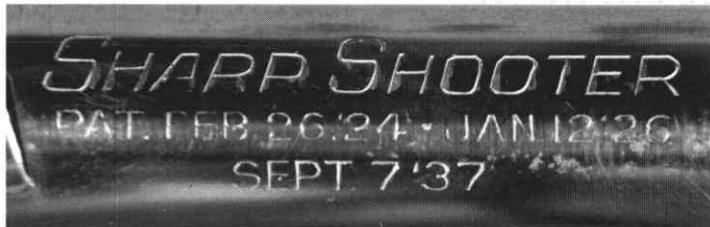
(27)



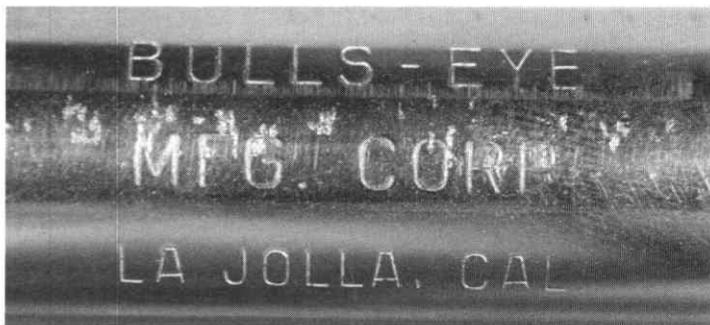
(28)



(29)



(30)



(31)



(32A)

A Rawlins Nickel Deluxe Sharpshooter

Figure 29 shows a typical Rawlins Nickel Deluxe Sharpshooter; the grips are standard white "pearl". In the box are new spinning disc targets and a wire to hold them, with instructions for their use. The box is the same as for the "French" pistol; the sides are marked, clockwise from the front: SURPRISINGLY ACCURATE, SMOKELESS, HARMLESS, NOISELESS. A red and white oval tag, 3/8 x 5/8 inch, pasted on the left end, says "Sharpshooter Nickel Deluxe".

The left side of the barrel (30), is marked with three stamps:

SHARP SHOOTER
PAT. FEB 26, '24 - JAN 12, '26
SEPT. 7, '37

Note the new third line. There are no other marks.

The La Jolla pistols: the romance continues!

After WWII, Dr. Bunten was thinking of retiring, and willing to sell the Bulls-Eye Company. Hunter Lewis, a salesman for the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, went into Rawlins on business, and, being a long-time Bulls-Eye enthusiast, visited Dr. Bunten. He learned the company was for sale and called a good friend and another Bulls-Eye fan, John O. Beckwith of La Jolla, California. John was a promoter and salesman, currently selling a variety of novel cigarette lighters, possibly made by his brother Warren, called "Bud". John was interested, took Bud and a banker friend, Austin Brown, to Rawlins, soon came back to La Jolla with the 40-ton press and everything else relating to the Bulls-Eye Company: certainly this was an adventurous undertaking! They began making Sharpshooters sometime in late 1946 or early 1947. The new firm was called the Bulls-Eye Manufacturing Corporation.

The La Jolla pistols are no different than those from Rawlins except for a stamping added to the right side of the barrel (31) (the left side did not change):

BULLS-EYE
MFG. CORP.
LA JOLLA, CAL.

Since the pistols are the same, the boxes in which they came and the minor changes in the instruction sheets add the necessary variations to inspire one to collect them. Figures 32A,B,C,D show the sides of the Bulls-Eye boxes, clockwise from front; figures 33A,B,C,D show the sides of Sharpshooter boxes.

But, as was shown in the Bulls-Eye group, Bud Beckwith was adventurous when he weighted that pistol. He was also responsible for one variation in the Sharpshooters: the gun with the extra-long grip (34). This is a Nickel Deluxe gun with unfinished hardwood grips 3-3/4 inches long - standard ones are 2-3/4 inches. They hold in the

extension area the 2-ounce lead weight shown. The extra length and weight made a decided change in the "feel" and balance of the pistol, but it was never produced commercially.

Strange and fascinating romantic events continue. The Bulls-Eye Corporation started making Sharpshooter pistols on Eads Street in La Jolla. Dr. Bunten doubted that their guns were as accurate as those he had made; so he visited the plant, found Harry Oakey, a one-legged young man, shooting the pistols to make 5 holes in a circle the size of a dime at eight feet on a long roll of butcher paper. When he got bored, he'd shoot at, hit, and start swinging, cords dangling from the light switches. Dr. Bunten was satisfied.

All was going well when a grocery chain decided to build a shopping mall, took the whole block in the process. The firm moved to Fay Avenue and started over. A few years later disaster struck again: another grocery bought *that* block, and the firm's banking partner died at his desk. The two remaining owners decided that was enough, and closed the plant.

The Berry Brow Sharpshooter

But strange, fascinating and romantic events continue. A friend of Bud's went on a world tour which included the Orient. Somewhere in Shanghai or Peking or some other exotic place he struck up a conversation with another man, began telling of the Sharpshooters and their troubles. To avoid a long story, the man, from Line Lexington, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, down on the border of Bucks and Montgomery Counties, southwest of Doylestown, with a population of about 675 today, not on a current road map, but with zip code of 18932: that man purchased the machinery in 1960 and announced that manufacture of the Sharpshooter would start again as a division of Berry Brow Enterprises. There are three bits of evidence that he intended to do so: an undated letter, not shown, announcing the start of production;

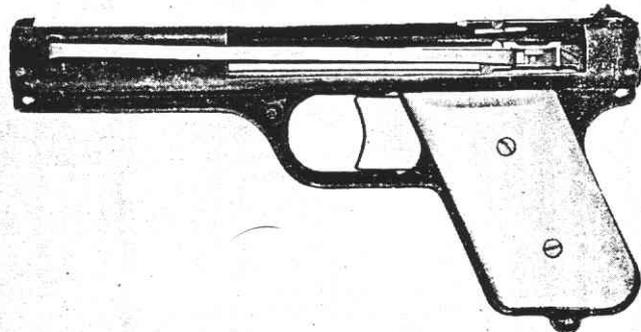


(34)

Rubber-Band Pistol

Bulls-Eye rubber-band target pistol, off the market for several years, is now available from Berry Brow Enterprises, Line Lexington, Pa. This magazine-fed catapult pistol fires No. 6 shot and is fitted with fully adjustable Patridge-type sights. It weighs 5½ ozs. The Blue Deluxe model

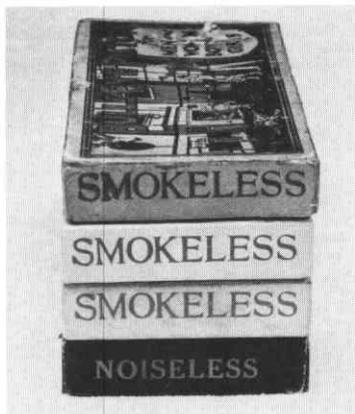
with simulated pearl grips is priced at \$5.95, or \$4.95 with plain grips. These pistols are furnished in kit form with a tube of shot, magazine loader, target stamp pad, spare rubber bands, and instructions.



Bulls-Eye rubber-band target pistol

THE AMERICAN RIFLEMAN
May, 1963

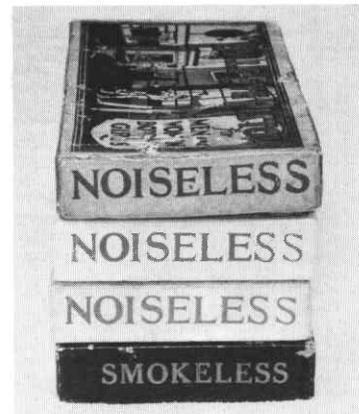
(35)



(32B)



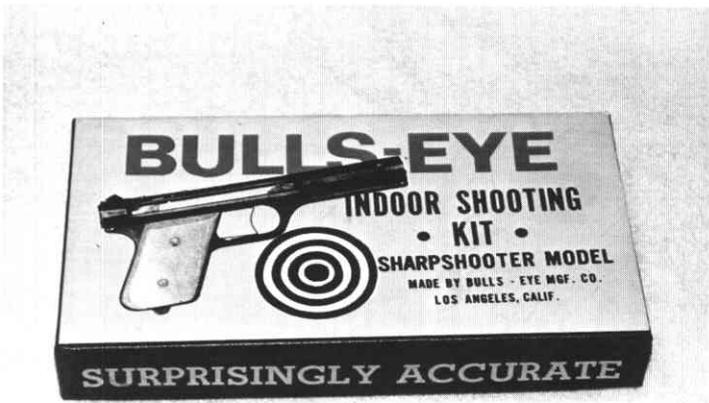
(32C)



(32D)



(36)



(37)

the article in the May, 1963, *Rifleman* (35), modified here, and the stamp in the lid of the La Jolla box in the collection of Charles Best (36). The box contains a Nickel Deluxe pistol with La Jolla markings. However, there is no indication of any sort that pistols were actually made at Line Lexington, and it is believed they were not made there. But the road from La Jolla to Line Lexington certainly took a romantic route!

The Golden Key Sharpshooters

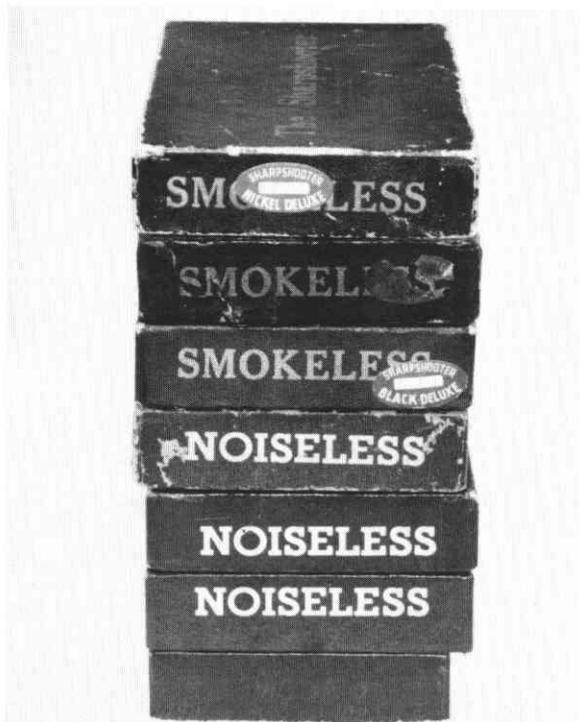
There is a hiatus in the story of the Sharpshooter pistols between the May, 1963, Berry Brow announcement in the *Rifleman* and the colorful material from Golden Key Enterprises, Sherman Oaks, California, shown in the display. There is no information as to the length of time that Berry Brow sold or attempted to sell the pistols, nor how the equipment got back to California.

The story starts again when Charles Best of Englewood, Colorado, saw an advertisement for Sharpshooters and wrote, asking about them. He received an enthusiastic letter headed "A Golden Key Message", description sheet and price list, all undated, and some other material. It is too long to quote here, but there is one definite date mentioned in a sales promotion sheet: "The field is wide open now, as 3/1/71 was our first ad", and another of some help: "The new beautiful Blue DeLuxe model will not be ready for release until July" - surely also 1971.

Some of the Golden Key writing has novel spelling and word order, and their F.B.I.-use information is



(33A)



(33B)

questionable, but their enthusiasm for the pistols is obvious, and their box well-labeled (37)!

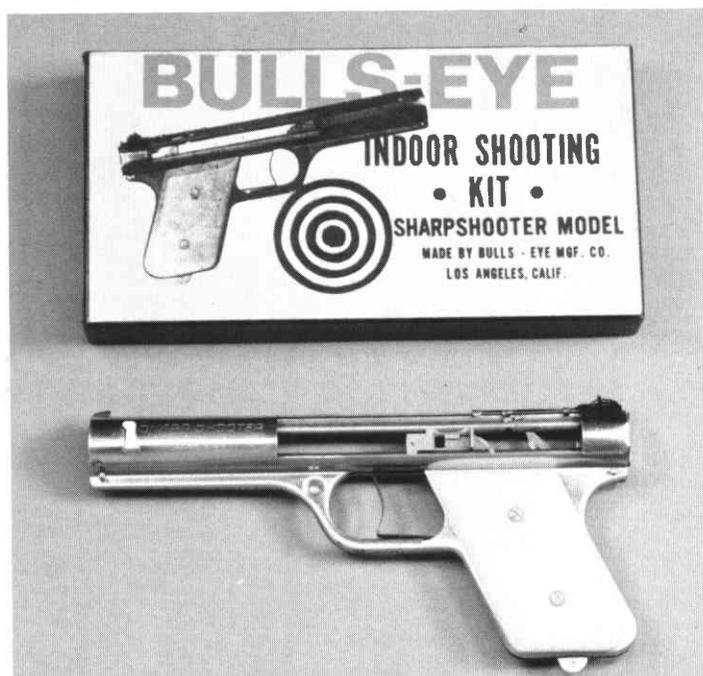
The first Golden Key pistol in the collection is a Nickel DeLuxe with Rawlins and La Jolla markings on the barrel; there is no additional Golden Key marking.

The gun (38) differs from the others in having the plastic carrier, shown here in the pistol, which will be mentioned later by Doc Carlson, and which was not used by Rawlins or La Jolla.

The box is essentially the same as the later La Jolla boxes with a colorful new Golden Key label. There is no printing on the sides of this box, but Charles Best has one where the Golden Key label appears to be pasted over the La Jolla top: it has the La Jolla markings on the sides.

Art Livingston had an unmarked white "Christmas" box for sale at the Saratoga Springs ASAC meeting with a pair of Sharpshooters in it. One was a standard Nickel DeLuxe with "pearl" grips and plastic carrier, but the other is different: the "pearl" grips (39) are blue instead of white! When removed from the gun, the inside of the grip is still white. They appear to be factory work. It is unlikely the box was supplied by the factory, but it did have instructions, targets, and other paper items, all printed on a romantic light blue paper!

Attempts to locate the Golden Key Enterprises in Sherman Oaks were frustrating: calls to the Chamber of Commerce and library about city directories of the early '70s got the response, "We don't have any that old". So did a call to the Pacific Telephone Company directory library! The problem was solved by J.W. "Doc" Carlson



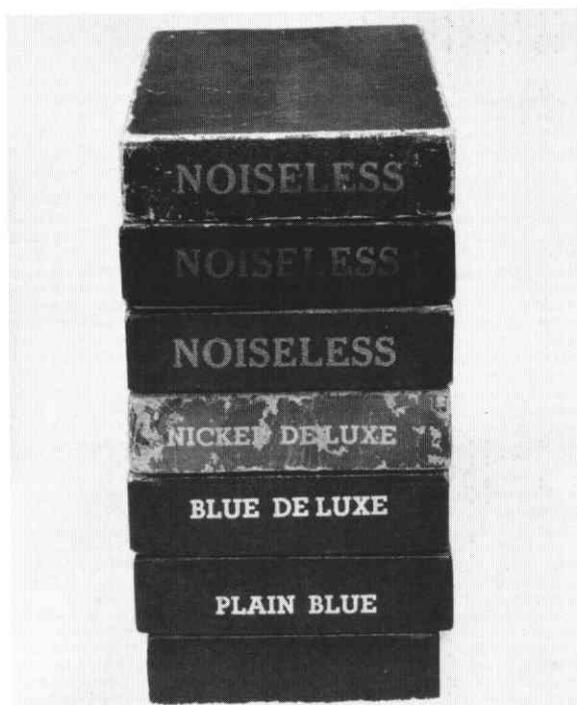
(38)



(39)



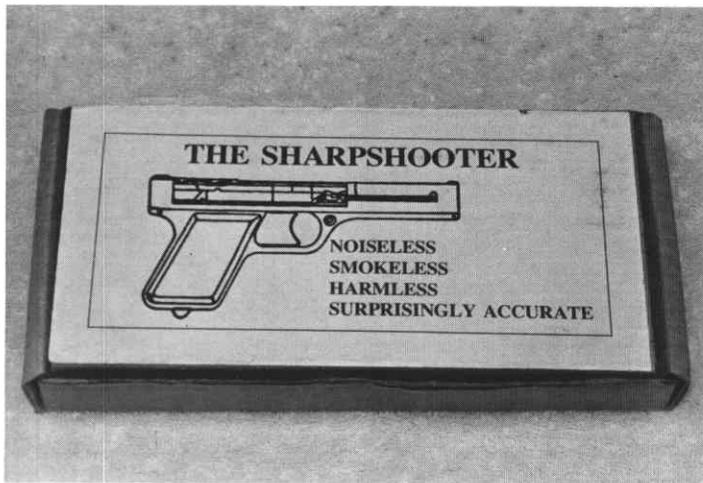
(33C)



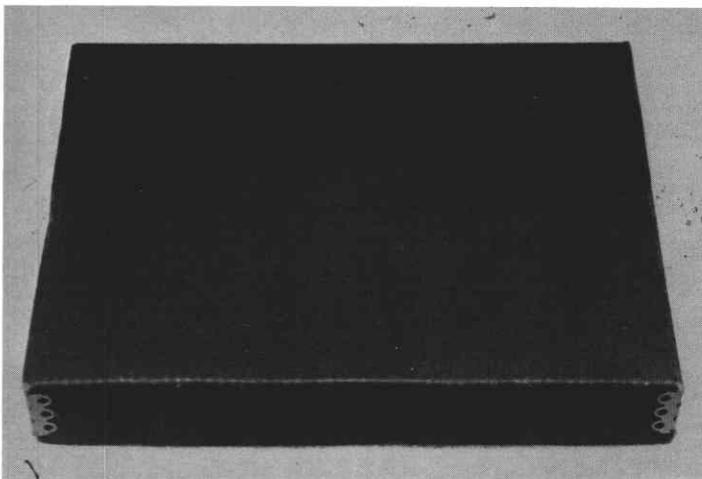
(33D)



(40)



(41)



(42)

of the Upper Missouri Trading Post of Crofton, Nebraska. His letter said, in part:

"We 'gun showed' during the 60's and 70's, and handled the pistols at that time. We bought them from Golden Key Enterprises, Van Nuys, California, [which is next to Sherman Oaks - they may have been shipped from there]. Along about 1980 or so I saw an ad in *Shotgun News* that Golden Key was for sale . . . I wrote to the Florida address that was in the ad. A year or so later I got a letter from the son of the family. He stated that his father had made the guns in California and he had worked with his dad putting them together. His dad had died and his [dad's] wife had moved to Florida. He found my letter after she had passed on . . . he had parts to assemble 600 or so pistols - I bought the whole bunch. At the time I asked about the tooling: his sister had it. It turned out that she had stored it in her back yard and the junk man hauled it off [after mom died]. So the tooling is gone. There were 13 punch press operations to make the little gun, I'm told. The ones we sold first had cast zinc carriers - these have plastic ones. Otherwise they are essentially the same".

The Mystery Sharpshooter

The pistol (40), is a Plain Blue La Jolla marked one (actually very black, but La Jolla marked the boxes "blue" while Rawlins used "black") which had a Sherman Oaks plastic carrier, now replaced with a metal one. The only other oddity is the vertical scratches on the right grip, possibly from an overly ambitious attempt to remove dirt or rust.

Most of the other boxes, Bulls-Eye or Sharpshooter, have among the contents a 5-ring target stamp with metal back, and a stamp pad. Not this one: the stamp is just the rubber disc shown - but directions have been added to the new Instruction sheet showing how to mount the stamp on a circle of plywood or pressed board, then add a *spool* for a handle! On the back bottom of the sheet, "Bulls-Eye Manufacturing Company" - no address.

The box (41) is folded, one piece, of corrugated cardboard, with the top covered by a white paper with thin black border of smaller size. There is no other printing on the box.

No other box of this type is known, and its origin was a mystery until Doc Carlson explained: when he bought the last 600 pistols from Sherman Oaks, there were not enough boxes and other kit items. He had this new box, stamp, and instruction sheet made. Mystery solved!

Back to La Jolla

That's almost the end, but not quite. After Bud Beckwith died, his brother John found a large number of parts for Nickel DeLuxe pistols in his garage, was able to assemble 100 of them, which he sold and gave away in the mid-80's. There were no boxes, and the closest size easily available

was a 6 x 8 inch blue box (42). So the last of the Sharpshooters were assembled back in La Jolla, just about 60 years after the first Bulls-Eye was made in Rawlins, Wyoming, by one of the persons responsible for its post-WWII rebirth. A truly romantic tale, you must admit! It was made possible by help from Dr. Bunten's daughter, Mrs. Faye E. Scott; his son, Dr. Leroy Bunten; the *Denver Post* article of June 24, 1953; Major Julian Hatcher's article in *The American Rifleman* of December 1925, and other *Rifleman* material; Charles Best, Englewood, Colorado; "Doc" Carlson, Crofton, Nebraska, and John O. Beckwith of Encinitas, California, who started the whole thing. Other people helped, too, of course, and to all I offer your thanks and mine.

But there is still more. Figures 43 and 44 are of a French version of the Bulls-Eye action in a pistol owned by Charles Best: they show a clever automatic pistol-looking device. There are thin spring hooks on either side of the slide: when the slide is pushed forward and they are pressed inward, they catch the carrier and pull it back to cocked position! Very clever, indeed.

And so our tale comes to an end.

Postscript: A Resurgent Bulls-Eye?

John O. Beckwith, once of La Jolla California and now slightly north of there in Encinitas, is not one to give up easily. Although the Bulls-Eye Manufacturing Corporation stopped making Sharpshooter pistols many years ago, John still believes they are a practical and desirable target training device, even worthy of their own shooting competition on a national level.

He and his designing expert, Michael Gegare of nearby Vista, California, have made several prototypes of a modern Bulls-Eye, adapting plastic frames from more powerful versions of the Model 1911A1 Colt and Browning Hi-Power pistols (45, 46, 47). Now 85 years old, John still hopes to see them back in production.



(45)



(46)



(47)



(43)



(44)