

# The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

## Of Old Rifles, Old Friends, and Cast Bullets

By: Glen E. Fryxell

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Old friends come in many flavors. As more and more hunting seasons pass, I have come to realize that what makes special hunts really special isn't always a spectacular setting, or some exotic species, or a great shot, or a big rack.....what makes a special hunt really special are the old friends. The hunting partners who can work the woods together with just a few sidelong glances, or well-understood hand gestures, and know where the other hunter is going, and what he will do. The old hunting knife whose blade is but a shadow of its original profile from years of gutting and re-sharpening, but still holds a fine edge and makes short work of each deer. The work-worn carbine that was old way back when it was handed down to you, and time has fogged the count of exactly how many seasons have passed with that rifle cradled in your hands, but you still think of the man that gave it to you as you caress the patina, sitting beneath your favorite "deer tree". These are friends that have stood the test of time for a very simple reason, they work and they are trusted. You know exactly what they will do when called upon. These are some the things that make hunting special.

Rob Applegate, Bill Gilson (aka "El Cazador") and I originally met through the online hospitality of Jim Taylor's [sixgunner.com](http://sixgunner.com) and John Taffin's [sixguns.com](http://sixguns.com) discussion boards. Over the last decade, we (and our wives) have become good friends. Rob and I have hunted together, we have plinked together, and we have spent hours out in the shop fiddling with little chunks of metal, discussing cast bullets, the making of bullet moulds, and what makes cast bullets fly accurately. Rob understands (and shares) my fascination with bullet moulds, and their history, like no one else I've ever met. He understands how a cast bullet works, and what it needs to best do its job. Caz and I have also hunted together. He is a pistol-packin' preacher and a serious elk hunter ("El Cazador" is Spanish for "the hunter"), and he has an almost pathological fondness for leverguns. It was inevitable that the three of us would hunt together. Given our nostalgic tastes, there is little surprise that this trip would find us hunting with older rifles. Equally unsurprising is the fact that for Rob and I, these old friends were loaded with cast bullets, specifically tailored for the hunt.

I was hunting with an older Marlin 336 .35 Remington that Rob had given me a while back as a birthday present (Rob and I are both big fans of the .35 Remington cartridge). This rifle has a 24" barrel and 2/3 magazine. It pre-dates Microgroove rifling, and has 6-groove "cut" rifling. The bore is in superb condition, and it shoots cast bullets very nicely indeed. The serial number is "G55xxx", indicating that it was made in 1950, so this rifle was made during the first year that Marlin chambered the Model 336 in .35 Remington. For this trip, it

would be loaded with the RCBS 200 grain GC-FP, cast to a BHN of about 13, and loaded to 2100 fps with 38.0 grains of H335 -- an accurate and reliable thumper of a load.

My back up rifle for this trip was a Marlin 336 chambered in .32 Winchester Special. This carbine was made in 1949, the first year that Marlin made the Model 336. This 20" carbine also has 6-groove "cut" rifling, and a mint bore. The ammo was loaded with the RCBS 170 grain GC-FP (also BHN of 13), over 27.0 grains of H335 (inspired by Jim Taylor's pet .30-30 load) for almost 2000 fps and excellent accuracy.

In an interesting sense of symmetry, Caz had brought along his 1948 vintage Marlin 36 .30-30. This was the last year that Marlin made the Model 36, so we had "the changing of the guard" represented in our hunting camp -- his gun being one of the last of the 36s, and my two being among the first of the 336s. In addition, we had a suitable selection of calibers represented (.30-30 Winchester, .32 Winchester Special and .35 Remington).



Winchester 86 .45-70 (made in 1901) that Rob used to shoot his buffalo. Knife by Marbles used to field dress the buffalo and the ammo belt is an original US Gov't issue ammo belt for the .45-70. The revolver is an early S&W .44 Mag.

Rob brought some very special leverguns along for this hunt. For a "coyote gun" he brought a very nice old Savage Model 99 (made in 1937) that was chambered in .303 Savage. The .303 ammo was loaded with Lyman 311291 HP's (the HP version of the classic, and very accurate, old round nose GC Ideal bullet, dating from 1906), seated on top of 30.0 grains of 3031 powder for 2150 fps. Just in case the critters got big and bristly, and needed lots of killing, he also brought his trusted old Winchester 86 .45-70 that was made in 1901. Rob shot his first buck with this rifle, many years ago. Ammo for this beautiful old rifle consisted of a 393 grain plain-based round-nose cast bullet (Lyman 457124, that dates back to the 1800s), cast of WW alloy (air-cooled), loaded on top of 50.0 grains of 4895 for about 1650 fps or so (readers of Elmer Keith might recognize this load). He also

brought along a recently acquired Winchester 95 chambered in .405 Winchester, made in 1922.

Yup, this was a levergun hunt, and we were going to be hunting for feral hogs at Clover Creek Ranch in central Oregon. You might say that we were loaded for boar...

We met up at the bunkhouse on Monday evening, a little before sunset. After getting unpacked, we decided to work out a few of the kinks from the drive over by taking a little hike into the hills. Caz and I showed Rob the pig pen and wandered up the fence-line to the west to get a better look at a bull elk that was a little over half a mile up the canyon, watching over his harem and bugling occasionally. As we worked our way up the road, soaking in the country, the

colors of the sunset and the bugles echoing off the canyons, I heard an ominously familiar sound, just a few feet in front of Rob. I was just about to say something when Rob said, "Whoa!" and jumped back, alongside me. There, 15 feet in front of us, was a 2 1/2 foot long rattlesnake, crossing the road.

"Fire in the hole!" I blurted out, as my favorite 3" round-butt S&W 624 .44 Special came out of the holster and came to bear on the rattler. 10.0 grains of HS-6 sent the Lyman 429421 HP on its way, almost cutting the rattler's head off. (OK, so I "cheated" a little bit... since the snake was lying on a hard-packed jeep track, I aimed about 1/2" low to skip the bullet along the ground, making sure that I hit him -- much the same sort of way that the old Kentucky squirrel hunters would "bark" their squirrels). Rob mumbled to nobody in particular, "I hate snakes...", whipped out his old Ka-Bar Marine issue knife (that his Dad had carried through the Marianas campaign) and finished cutting off the head. We stood there for a moment, watching the headless body slowly writhe on the road in the fading twilight, then we slowly wandered back to camp for a snack of chips and salsa, seasoned with a liberal splash of hunting stories.

Breakfast the next morning was cooked on the griddle that Rob's great Grandmother had used to feed the Applegate men and threshing crews in years gone by. We had a big breakfast and got off to a lazy start. We drove up the hill to the broken down Cat bulldozer, and then worked our way through the thick stuff up the hill and through the woods to the fence-line half a mile to the south. As I got out of the scrub and into the woods, I kicked up a nice looking Russian boar that high-tailed it out of there so fast I never got a chance to see if he had a red tag hanging out of his ear (red tags are how the meat animals are differentiated from the trophy animals). We then swung around and followed the fence line up to the ridge, where we met up with Caz, and the three of us were overlooking the big pasture on top, with the water hole and mud wallow. There were three massive buffalo bulls grazing away, off in the distance. Rob was transfixed.

"You guys didn't tell me there were BUFFALO!"

"Yes, we did."

"No you didn't!" (really, we did)

(Glen and Caz, the smart-aleck choir, in unison) "Rob, there are buffalo on this ranch."

We kept looking for hogs, in various places, and with little luck. We found a few isolated stragglers here and there, but generally either out of range, or no shot opportunity presented itself. As we were glassing from one ridge looking for hogs, Rob kept going back over to this nearby spot where he could see another trio of buffalo (small, medium and large) that were watching us from a ways off. Kinda like the guy at the gun show who contracts a case of "the-gotta-have-its" and keeps returning to the table that bears whatever bauble has caught his eye. Rob has wanted to shoot a buffalo since he was a boy, and he was thinking real hard about this opportunity to shoot one at Clover Creek.

I left Rob and Caz to do some more scouting, and I ran down the hill to fetch the lunch fixin's and talk to Clark. By the time I got back, Rob had pretty much made up his mind that he was going to shoot a meat bull. We ate lunch, and then headed up the hill to the big pasture where the small/medium/large trio was currently grazing and napping. I positioned myself in a brush-pile to photograph the event, and Rob slowly approached, with his Winchester 86 at the ready. At about 75 or 80 yards, the young meat bull stepped clear of the other two and stood broadside. Rob hammered him with the big 400 grain cast bullet, through the front half of both lungs. From my vantage point 150 yards away, the bullet's impact sounded like Babe Ruth had his Momma's rug-beater, and was swinging with all his might to clean her rugs. All three buffalo just stood there.



Rob's .45-70 hammered him with the big 400 grain cast bullet, through the front half of both lungs.

The young bull, mortally wounded, took a couple of steps and turned to face away from us. Rob repositioned himself in an effort to get another shot. The opportunity presented itself when the bull took another step or two, presenting his other side. Rob tried to spine him, but a buffalo spine takes a few twists and turns, and is deceptively placed with all that shag and hump, and his

second shot passed a couple of inches below the spine. Once again, the impact was resounding, and once again, there was little or no reaction from any of the three buffalo. The young bull slowly turned back to face in his original direction, and Rob's .45-70 roared once again. The third shot also hit him in the lungs and this time knocked the dying bull decisively off his feet. At this point, the other two turned away from us, and slowly started to walk off, towards the woods in the distance. The fallen bull still had a little life left in him, so Rob quickly placed a finisher into the back of the neck, and all was quiet. A mature bull can tip the scales at over 2000 lbs, but this "youngster" probably weighed "only" 800-1000 lbs. His hide was beautiful. After we took a few pictures, Rob set about field dressing his first buffalo and I ran down the hill to get Clark and his winch and trailer for hauling the carcass down to the skinning shed.

When I got back, Rob had gotten much of the gutting chores done, but had hit an impasse at the buffalo's hefty sternum. I loaned him my bone saw and he made short work of that, and soon had the gutting chores completed (a buffalo generates an impressive gut pile!). Rob saved the volley-ball sized heart, and Clark winched the field-dressed carcass up onto his trailer and hauled it down off the mountain to the skinning shed. As they were skinning it out, Clark found one of Rob's lung shots under the hide, expanded into one of the most perfect mushrooms you've ever seen. This was a WW bullet at 1650 fps, after it had gone through about 3 feet of buffalo.



The unfired bullet weighs 393 gr.  
The recovered bullet weighed 385.6 gr.

Caz and I continued to hunt for hogs for the remainder of that afternoon, but all we saw were buffalo and fallow deer.

We were up before dawn the next day and quickly up the hill. We kicked up a group of 25 or 30 hogs in the field near the hog pen, and they scooted into the woods as we came through the gate. We had a pretty good idea as to where they were heading, so we drove up onto the ridge line, then got out and snuck around to get into position where we thought we might intercept the herd. A few minutes later, we could hear the grunting of the hogs and knew they were getting close. We had to adjust our position by side-hilling about 100 yards, as the herd was now clearly headed for the saddle to our right. I found a good spot and dropped into an open-legged sitting position, with the Marlin held at the ready across my knees, and waited for the hogs to appear. It didn't take long. About a minute later there was a veritable sea of pork flowing through the trees below me. I picked out a nice sized meat hog (about 250-300 lbs) and followed it with the sights. It stopped, giving me a clean broadside presentation in one of my shooting lanes, so I locked on for a spine shot on the right shoulder and fired. Pre-dawn pandemonium broke loose -- there were squeals and grunts of every tone and pitch imaginable, and hogs running everywhere. I thought I saw the hog I shot at stagger for a step or two, but then I lost sight of it in the stampede and the trees. Caz and I followed the herd in an effort to get a second one for him, but they had pretty much cleared out. I went back to field dress my hog, but it wasn't there. I found where I was sitting when I fired the shot. I found where the hog was standing when I fired the shot. I even found where my bullet had hit the ground and ricocheted. I searched all up and down that porcine highway, but there was no carcass, no blood, no hair, no "stuff" to indicate any kind of a hit. The bottom line is I missed. This really bothered me because this was a well-planned, well-rested shot, at a standing target only 45-50 yards away, and I checked the zero of the rifle with that exact load less than 48 hours earlier. Hhmmm... (we'll come back to this in a minute)

A little while later I caught up with Caz and we continued to work our way down to a watering hole to see if any critters were watering. We worked the area over, seeing lots of sign, but no animals (the water hole was dry, they've had very little rain this year). We ran into Clark, and he told us that he had just come from up by the Cat and that there were 7 or 8 hogs up there right now feeding and drinking out of the creek and rolling in the mud. We piled into the truck and drove up the ridge, parking well short of the meadow with the broken down bulldozer. As we approached the watering hole from behind the Cat, the first thing that became apparent was the pair of mature buffalo bulls that were standing there, 25 yards distant, scratching themselves (rather forcefully) on the brush pile adjacent to the creek bed. The older bull seemed to be completely unconcerned about our presence (he knew we were there), while the younger bull seemed mildly curious, and stared at us for quite a while (10+ minutes). I suspect that the older bull had the younger bull's favorite scratchin' post and the youngster didn't have anything better to do than watch us while he patiently awaited his turn. There were indeed a handful of hogs milling about in the area, but unfortunately most of them were in the bushes on the far side of the creek



and therefore hard to make out. There were also a couple of young shoats milling about in the brush pile that the big buffalo bull was scratching himself on (if that old 2000 lb bull had lost his footing and taken a tumble, that little 25-30 lb shoat would have been in a world of hurt!). I tried to get a better look into the bushes by climbing up on top of the Cat, but that didn't help. I went back to the rear of the Cat, where Caz was watching all of the goings on. Suddenly, Caz's hand was on my shoulder, "Look! There's one in the bushes on this side of the creek!". The shadows were dark, and so was the pig, so I had some trouble picking him out at first, but eventually I figured out what I was looking at, and that was a 150 pound black pig, broadside, facing my right, at all of about 20 yards. There was a wrist-thick branch covering his heart/lung region, so I rested the Marlin on the back of the Cat and held just over the top of the branch for a spine shot. When I dropped the hammer, that hog shot out of his hiding place as though he had been fired from a cannon. The first thought that went through my head was "How did I heart-shoot him with that branch in the way, and when I was holding for his spine?". Once again, there were squeals and grunts as the other hogs milled about, trying to figure out where the shot came from. And once again, the buffalo didn't really do much. Another 150 lb hog wandered out on the left hand side of the brush pile, out into the dust wallow, giving me a clean 30 yard broadside shot, so I racked another round into the .35 Remington, held for his heart and fired. The RCBS 200 grain GC-FP hit home audibly, and smacked the meat hog off his feet, in a cloud of dust. I told Caz to go check the creek bed for the first hog (expecting him to find it dead a few feet from its hiding place), while I went and checked on the one in the dust wallow. The dying "dust wallow hog" still had a little life left in him, so I put a finisher down between his shoulder blades, and all was quiet.

At about this point, Caz spoke up, "Uhhh, Glen, there's no pig down here. Are you sure you hit him?". I looked down at the dead hog at my feet and saw that my first shot had landed several inches above my point of aim, missing the heart entirely, and instead taking out several inches of his spine. I had been using several thousands of pounds of Caterpillar steel as a bench-rest (you can't get much more solid than that!), and a very easy 30 yard shot had still landed about 4" high. I looked at my rifle and the story became apparent, at some point during the past 48 hours, the elevator on the rear sight had gotten bumped and it was holding the sight in a much higher posture than it should have been (the spring tension of this rear sight leaf is a little light, and as a result the elevator slides more easily than most -- this rifle has a Lyman peep sight in its immediate future). Now I understood why I had missed earlier in the morning and why Caz couldn't find a hog down in the creek. On both of those hogs, I had held for spine shots, but since the rear sight had



The Author's Marlin 336 in .35 Remington. The RCBS 200 grain GC-FP hit home audibly and smacked the meat hog off his feet, in a cloud of dust.

the rifle shooting high, both of those shots had simply sailed harmlessly over those hogs' backs. When I held lower, for a heart shot, the cast bullet smashed into the "dust-wallow hog's" spine, dropping him on the spot. The first shot had passed right behind both shoulders, took out a chunk of spine, and exited. The second shot entered between the shoulder blades, smashed more of the spine, ranged down through the chest, punched out just to the left of the sternum, stayed under the hide as it ranged down the left foreleg, and it exited just above the foot. We found a couple of minor lead fragments in the region of the spine, but it was impossible to tell which shot they had come from. The bottom line is that both bullets clearly held together and exited.

We had arranged to let the Buffalo-killer sleep in, and Caz and I would return to camp for a late brunch. Right on time, we came toolin' into camp at 10:30 to drop off the hog at the skinning shed and found that Rob had his Great Grandmother's griddle up on the old antique gas burners, cooking sausage and eggs. The coffee was fresh-perked and hot (in Uncle Gus's old pre-war coffee pot that had been all over Alaska and the Yukon), and scrambled eggs and maple sausage was just coming off the griddle. How's that for a buddy? Thanks Rob, that was one of the best breakfasts I've ever had. The food was almost as good as the company.

Clark got the meat hog gutted and skinned out while the rest of us ate. By the time we finished, the hog was split and hanging in the cooler. We sat around digesting and drinking coffee for a while, then I headed out for one last shot at getting a second hog. On Clark's recommendation, I headed for a series of "benches" in the hills, where there were some remote shaded areas where the hogs would bed down and get out of the mid-day heat. I climbed into the hills and could see lots of sign of hog traffic, but no hogs. The woods were too open, and there wasn't enough shade on the slopes. Once I got on top of the bench, the story changed dramatically. Every tree that had 20 feet or more of canopy had the shaded ground beneath it thoroughly torn up from all the rooting around and bedding by the hogs seeking the cool moist earth in the shade. There were hogs here, I could smell them. I worked my way slowly across the top of the bench, with a very accurate 6" S&W 629 held at the ready (just for the record, it was loaded with Ray Thompson's Lyman #429244 HP, BHN 13, seated over 23.0 grains of Winchester 296 and a CCI 350 primer, for 1400 fps). Suddenly, I heard a grunt. I looked to my right and 45 yards uphill I saw a tail lazily swish a fly away. Peering into the shadows, I could make out a back line just above the earthen berm. A few seconds later, I caught the flick of an ear, several feet to the right of where the tail had flicked. There were at least 2 hogs bedded down and sleeping in under that shade tree above me. Had I gone another 25 yards along the path I was following, I would have been directly upwind of them. I slowly and quietly backed up about 50 yards to get behind a juniper tree and back out of the wind. I quickly evaluated the lay of the land -- there was a line of trees that led uphill to a spot where I would be directly downwind of the hogs. The angle of the sun was such that I would be in the shade the whole way uphill (if I stuck close to the trees). I started climbing as quickly, and quietly, as I could. About halfway up, I felt the one sensation that every hunter deplures --

that of a renegade gust of wind on the back of the neck. Seconds later came a cacophony of grunts as 14 or 15 hogs stood up as one, and started milling about. They quickly headed uphill, away from my scent stream. About 65 or 70 yards up, they crossed over an open patch of rocks, but they were moving fast enough that I had no chance for a well-aimed shot. The last hog (about 150 lbs) to cross over stopped on the rocks and I brought the revolver up, but with their unexpected exodus and my fast scramble up that caliche slope to get into position, I was huffing and puffing enough that I couldn't keep the front sight on his shoulder, so I lowered the hammer and wished him "bon voyage". I'll be back again next year, after he's packed on a little more pork, and next time I'll know where he takes his siestas.

It's hard to imagine how we could have crammed more quality into just two days. The old rifles, the meticulously tailored ammunition, the carefully crafted cast bullets, and the desire of trusted friends to hunt together. The kind of hunters who offer the handshakes and backslaps of congratulations when game is harvested, and at the same time feel reverence and sadness for the death of a noble beast. These are some of the things that make hunting special for me. Old friends are special indeed.

- Glen E. Fryxell

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