

Pistoleros



Skeeter Skelton wrote a book called Good Guns, Good Friends and Good Whiskey. In it, he wrote of some of the more interesting people and his good fortune to be friends with them. The sixgun community is chock full of such characters. It has been much my privilege to know and toast Skeeter with a glass of Henry McKenna with with a special few.

Glenn Swaggart is the youngest of the group but wise beyond his years. He is not only well versed in the sixgun but a capable precision rifleman as well. More, he is either capable of reading minds or is the most intuitive soul I have ever met. He will smile his way into a group conversation and just glide on in and pick up like he has been there all along. He has an easy laugh that is alarmingly disarming. Often when one of us is pulling someone's leg Glenn will walk up and immediately grasp the situation and with a completely straight face start pulling the guys other leg. He seems to know everyone who is anyone in the firearms community like family. Glenn is also on a whole nuther level when we are on the subject of BBQ. He gets plumb scientific about it. The result however is amazing. He is great to have come conversation time. The number of people he knows is staggering but then again, who could blame them for wanting to be friends with this young man.

Jeff "Tank" Hoover is the biggest guy in the bunch and by far the most easy going. A career Police Officer from Maryland who spent many years as a motor jock. Jeff like most of us is a joker and prankster and his warm laugh and concrete block handshake makes you feel welcome. Anyone who has read his articles knows he is a master of the written word. I remember the first time I ever met Jeff in person. He had been around us all day and promptly and quietly picked up on our "modus operandi" of skewering anyone who dared come around. Coincidentally it was also the first day I met Ruth Ann, Dick Thompson's amazing wife. Somehow either late that night or just before I woke up that day Jeff got ahold of Dick's cell phone and sent me a text message that implied I had somehow terribly insulted Ruth Ann. You can't imagine my shock. I was almost paralyzed with anxiety. I hurriedly dressed and with my heart pounding in panic I rushed to my "friends" for help. I swear you could hear their laughter in the next state. I had so completely been punked. Jeff innocently blames it on Doc Barranti. As efficiently and neatly as a professional hit man the big rat dropped me in boiling hot grease that day. You have been warned!

Steve "Callshot" Call is the tallest of us and long on heart as well. We all came to know Steve as the very epitome of the words "dutiful and faithful" as for many years he stayed by his wife Betty who was stricken with MS. Steve cared for her BY HIMSELF to such an extent and with a tender hand that Betty never even got so much as a single bed sore. At last Betty passed and Steve was able to travel a little. When those of us who didn't know him personally got to meet him we were not disappointed. Steve not only is running buddies with Dick Thompson but also quite a sixgunner in his own right. One day Steve jumped out of Dick's truck and in high winds and offhand clobbered a Rockchuck at some 175 yards or so. More, he did this with a 44 Special Ruger we had all given him. He was quite proud of his feat until we got ahold of it and made him famous. We told him he had been selected to give a "Seminar on Long Range Handgunning" to a group of seasoned sixgun men. The normally shy and reserved Callshot suffered at our hands for nearly a year before the prank was revealed. We literally had the whole sixgun community in on it. For a minute when I told Steve it was all really a prank I thought he was going to shoot me!!! He actually has his own 44 Special "Callshot" brass. Look it up in Cartridges of the world if you think I'm pulling your leg!

Dick "Sixshot" Thompson is also known to us as "The Meathammer". Big or small from ground squirrels to Moose, Dick has taken them all with a sixgun. He is a walking encyclopedia on hunting, cast bullet shooting, and one of the best storytellers alive. He is the very essence of been there and done that. More, his sense of humor and easy way of sharing seasoned and hard won knowledge make him welcome wherever he goes. Even as a 70 year old man he stalks game like a ninja. Perhaps he has a "cloaking device" but he never fails to get close enough to put a cast slug right on the money. He is a master of cast iron cookery as well and you will find yourself having to unhook your belt. He is one of the most admired and loved people in the Sixgun Community. Many turn to him as he gives advice freely and there are so few anymore that can start from a lump of lead, make it into a bullet, take a relatively stock sixgun, clobber a big game critter with it, pack the beast out, dress it, jerk it or otherwise prepare it into a delicacy and do it with such ease.

Mike "Doc" Barranti is the artist in the group. It's important to understand that like a Doctor, an Artist's mind just doesn't work like a normal person. Doc doesn't simply see a thing or a person. He sees their/it's essence, aura, and totality and then captures their grace and fine lines. It is only fitting that his nickname is "Doc". As I might have mentioned, this group wastes no opportunity to pull a prank on any unsuspecting victim. Doc will quietly keep a straight face and not even look up and just seem to be scribbling with pen and paper ignoring the fray. About the time the laughing starts ole Doc will produce a caricature drawing that perfectly captures the moment. Behind his easy going laugh and warm ways Doc is a stayer and far tougher than you would expect such a sweet guy to be. It's hard to summarize such a complex person with mere words. When describing his work you end up having to switch to another language to not run out of superlatives. The only unfortunate thing about Mike Doc Barranti is there is not and never will be enough of him to go around. His work is highly sought after and the line isn't getting any shorter!



A sketch by Doc of himself with some random bandit....



Alan Harton is simply one of the most amazing people I have ever met or imagined. What a life he has led. From a LRRP in Vietnam to a lifelong Tool and Die Maker to Master Sixgunsmith nothing whatsoever seems to challenge the man. I can't count the times I have challenged him to make something and he just off handedly says, "Oh that's easy" or "It's just a little welding" or "Nothing but basic Blacksmithing". I think he has gone from a "No Easy Day" life style to everyday is a new miracle to enjoy. I have learned so much from this man I have actually started a book on his life. I may never be able to finish it. I can't spend enough time with him. Watching him work in his shop is a treat. It's like he is everywhere at once. He has a tool and a fix for everything. To him all things are possible. He is a teacher and mentor to me and I am proud to have his confidence.



Rob Leahy and I were friends long before we ever met. He is such an inspiration for his support for our veterans and he has a gentle easy way about him for such a giant of a man. My favorite thing is to make him laugh. It's like starting an avalanche and sometimes I am afraid I went too far and Rob is laughing so uncontrollably hard he is going to break a rib. He doesn't just support our veterans, he is also a staunch supporter of all shooters. It has been my privilege to be a part of some of the many drives Rob starts to support our Wounded Warriors. He is also living the American Dream with hard work and sweat building Simply Rugged into a household name across the US and internationally. People marvel at the level of service and value for their hard earned dollars. I enjoy our frequent phone conversations. They have become our own way of taking a "time out" from the task of forging our way through life. A visit with Rob is always uplifting for me and never fails to make my day. I most especially appreciate him taking time out from his busy schedule to encourage me onward with my own business. He is not unlike a great cattle baron working to be sure everyman has American beef on the table. Rob takes all of this in with a humble attitude and is almost shy about the importance of his place in the American gun community.



Skeeter often wrote of traveling to the Turkey Track Ranch and his adventures there. Mark Hargrove and I are stark opposites that form a perfect union. His own ranch is an enchanting place and was once the stomping grounds of the mighty Comanche warrior. You can feel their ghostly presence as if they might come screaming out of an arroyo to do battle at any moment. If there is a host equal to Mark, I have never met him. To just see and experience his warm smile and firm handshake make the long drive worth every mile. He is a long time friend and brother, a master pistol shot, and it is amazing to see how he celebrates every day of life. The trophy buck pictured here was taken by Mark with his FA .454 Casull at 165 yards. Note the perfect shot placement! He is yet a young man, but is admired by all who know him. I can't believe he makes time for a crank like me. Many people say they have never seen me smile. It was with Mark Hargrove I "christened" my No5. I asked Mark if there were any culls he needed trimmed from his deer herd. Despite the size of his property the Cull showed up right where Mark described as if on cue. I took that little dwarf of a deer with a 250 grain Keith bullet at 1200 fps out of my Harton built from scratch Keith No5 at 84 steps. Yeah, I smiled that day.

I'm lucky to have each and everyone of these Pistoleers. Together we keep the Cowboy Code, Sixgunning, and the Art of the Prank alive and well.