

On Being Shot Again: A Gulf Stream Letter

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If you ever have to shoot a horse stand so close to him that you cannot miss and shoot him in the forehead at the exact point where a line drawn from his left ear to his right eye and another line drawn from his right ear to his left eyes would intersect. A bullet there from a .22 caliber pistol will kill him instantly and without pain and all of him will race all the rest of him to the ground and he will never move except to stiffen his legs out so he falls like a tree.

If you ever have to shoot a shark shoot him anywhere along a straight line down the center of his head, flat, running from the tip of his nose to a foot behind his eyes. If you can, with your eye, intersect this line with a line running between his eyes and can hit that place it will kill him dead. A .22 will kill him as dead as a .45. But never think he may not move plenty afterwards simply because you know he is dead. He will have no more ideas after you hit him there, but he is capable of much undirected movement. What paralyzes him is clubbing him over the head.

If you want to kill any large animal instantly you shoot it in the brain if you know where that shot is and can call it. If you want to kill it, but it does not make any difference whether it moves after the shot, you can shoot for the heart. But if you want to stop any large animal you should always shoot for the bone. The best bone to break is the neck or any part of the

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spinal column; then the shoulders. A heavy four-legged animal can move with a broken leg but a broken shoulder will break him down and anchor him.

Your correspondent's mind has been turned to shooting and he is inspired to offer this information on account of just having shot himself in the calves of both legs. This difficult maneuver to perform with a single bullet was not undertaken as an experiment in ballistics but was quite casual. Your correspondent was once criticized in a letter by a reader of this magazine for not being a casual enough traveller. Trying to become more casual, your correspondent finally ends up by shooting himself through both legs with one hand while gaffing a shark with the other. This is as far as he will go in pleasing a reader. If the reader wants to break your correspondent down by smashing a large bone, or drop him cold with a well directed brain shot, or watch him race for the ice box with a bullet through the heart the reader will have to do the shooting himself.

We had left Key West early in the morning and were about twenty miles out in the Gulf Stream trolling to the eastward along a heavy, dark current of stream en route to Bimini in the Bahama Islands. The wind was in the south, blowing across the current; it was moderately rough fishing, but it was a pretty day. We had sighted a green turtle scudding under the surface and were rigging a harpoon to strike him, planning to salt him down in a keg, a layer of meat, a layer of salt, for meat for the trip, when Dos hooked a very large dolphin. While he played the dolphin we lost sight of the turtle.

Another dolphin hit Henry Strater, President of The Maine Tuna Club, hereinafter referred to as the President, and while the President was working on him a while a school of dolphin showed green in the water and from below them a large black shark of the type we call *galanos* on the Cuban coast came up to cut the surface of the water behind the President's dolphin which went into the air wildly. He kept in the air, wildly, the shark going half out of water after him. The President worked

on him with Presidential skill and intelligence, giving him a free spool to run away from the shark, and on the slack he threw the hook.

The dolphin were still around the stern and while Dos took motion pictures we put another bait on the President's hook and he slacked out to a dolphin and was still slacking to this or another dolphin when the shark had taken the bait in to what Old Bread, the wheelsman, referred to in other terms as the outlet of his colon.

With the President hooked into this shark and sweating heavily your correspondent slacked out from a gigantic new 14/0 reel with a lot of discarded line on it (we had been testing the reel for capacity and to see how the new VomHofe drag worked and had not put a good line on it yet) and a very large *galano* swung up to the bait, turned and started off with it, popping the old line. "Fornicate the illegitimate," said your correspondent and slacked out another bait on the same line. The *galano* with a length of double line streaming out of his mouth like one whisker on a catfish turned and took this bait too and, when your correspondent came back on him, popped the old line again. At this your correspondent again addressed the *galano* in the third person and slacked out a third bait on the President's heavy tackle. This bait the *galano* swam around several times before taking; evidently he was tickled by the two lengths of double line which now streamed in catfishlike uncatfishivity (your correspondent has been reading, and admiring, *Pylon* by Mr. William Faulkner), but finally swallowed the bait and started off, bending the President's heavy hickory with the pull of the new thirty-nine thread line while your correspondent addressed the *galano*, saying, "All right you illegitimate, let's see you pull, you illegitimate."

For a few minutes your correspondent and the President sweated, each busy with his own shark (the President's was on a light outfit so he had to go easy with him), then your correspondent's came alongside, and while Saca, the cook, took hold of the leader your correspondent gaffed the *galano* and holding

him with the big gaff shot him in the top of the head with the .22 caliber Colt automatic pistol shooting a greased, hollow-point, long rifle bullet. Dos was up on top of the boat, forward, taking some pictures of the shark going into a flurry and your correspondent was watching for a chance to shoot him again to quiet him enough so we could bring him up on the stern to club him into a state where we could cut the hooks out when the gaff broke with a loud crack, the shaft striking your correspondent across the right hand, and, looking down, your correspondent saw that he was shot through the calf of the left leg.

"I'll be of unsavoury parentage," remarked your correspondent. "I'm shot."

There was no pain and no discomfort; only a small hole about three inches below the knee-cap, another ragged hole bigger than your thumb, and a number of small lacerations on the calves of both legs. Your correspondent went over and sat down. The crack of the gaff shaft breaking and the report of the pistol had been at the same instant and no one else had heard the pistol go off. I could not see how there could have been more than one shot then. But where did the other wounds come from? Could I have pulled the trigger twice or three times without knowing it the way former mistresses did in the testimony regarding Love Nest Killings. Hell no, thought your correspondent. But where did all the holes come from then?

"Get the iodine, Bread."

"What did it, Cap?"

"I got shot when the gaff broke."

All this time the President was working hard on his *galano*.

"I can't figure it," I said. "There's a regular wound from a bullet that has mushroomed, but what in hell is all the little stuff? Look and see if you can find a hole in the cockpit where I was standing, or a bullet."

"Do you want a drink, Cap?" Bread asked.

"Later on."

"There ain't no bullet, Cap," Saca said. "Nowhere there at all."

"It's in there then. We've got to hook the hell up and go in."

"We got to pick up the dinghy, Cap," Bread said. "That we turned loose when you hung the sharks."

"Jeez Hem that's a hell of a note," Dos said. "We better go in."

"We better cut Mike loose," I said.

Saca went back to tell the President who was still working on the *galano*. The Pres. cut his line and came up to where I was sitting. "Hell, kid, I didn't know you were shot," he said. "I thought you were kidding. I felt some splatters hit my shoes. I thought you were joking. I wouldn't have kept on with the damned shark."

Your correspondent stood up and went back to the stern. There, on the top of the brass strip on top of the combing, slanted a little inside, was the starry splash the bullet had made when it ricocheted. That explained the fragments. The body of the bullet was in my left calf evidently. There was absolutely no pain at all. That is why your correspondent wrote at the head of this letter that if you want to stop large animals you should shoot for bone.

We boiled some water, scrubbed with an antiseptic soap, poured the holes all full of iodine while running into Key West. Your correspondent has to report that he made an equally skillful shot on his lunch into a bucket while running in, that Doctor Warren in Key West removed the fragments, probed, had an X-ray made, decided not to remove the large piece of bullet which was about three or four inches into the calf, and that his judgment was vindicated by the wound keeping clean and not infecting and that the trip was delayed only six days. The next of these letters will be from Bimini. Your correspondent hopes to keep them informative and casual.

One thing I am willing to state definitely now, in spite of all the literature on the subject that you have ever read, is that sailfish do not tap a bait to kill it. They take hold of a bait, more or less gingerly, between their lower jaw and the bill. Their lower jaw is movable and their upper jaw is fixed and is elongated into the bill or rostrum. What is mistaken for a tap is when

the fish takes hold of the bait lightly and pulls on it tentatively. When the fish comes at the bait from directly behind it in order to take it in his mouth he must push his bill out of water to bring the bait within seizing range of the lower jaw. This is an awkward position to swim in and the fish's bill wobbles from side to side with the effort. While it is wobbling it might tap the leader or the bait even. But it would be accidental rather than a tap given to kill the bait.

If sailfish tap the bait rather than take it how would they be caught on baits fished from outriggers as they are fished on the charter boats at Miami and Palm Beach? The baited line is held by a wooden clothespin and the fish *must take hold of it to pull it loose*.

I came to consider the possibility of sailfish not tapping through watching more than four hundred marlin swordfish hit a bait without tapping it in spite of all I had read about them tapping. This winter I began to think about the question of whether sailfish tapped or not and we all watched their swimming action in the water very closely and also watched the way they hit. All this winter I did not see a single sailfish tap a bait; and on one day we hooked nine. Now I believe they never tap a bait to kill it any more than a marlin does.

One other thing we have found out this winter and spring. Large fish, marlin, big dolphin and sailfish, hang about the turtles, both green and loggerhead, that you see scudding, floating, or feeding in the Gulf Stream.

Always pass a bait close to a turtle when you see one out there. I believe the large fish hang around to feed on the small fish that congregate in the shade and the shelter of the turtle; exactly as they will congregate around your own boat if you are broke down or drifting in the stream.

Blue marlin also turned up this winter off Key West. One was caught and three others were hooked and broke away. We raised five during the winter; had strikes from two, and failed to hook either one. They surged at the strip bait, then followed for awhile and went down. Two were raised just outside the

reef in about twelve fathoms of water. The other three were out better than ten miles in the stream.

On the way to Bimini we want to troll well out toward the axis of the Gulf Stream and see what we can raise. There is a lot of very fine looking current out there with a world of flying fish in it, that we have had to cross going back and forth to Cuba and you cannot tell what we may hit. Your correspondent plans not to hit himself in the leg.