

## Elmer Keith's 600 yard shot

The story of Elmer Keith's famous, or infamous, 600 yard shot with a short barreled revolver has been told and retold many times over the decades since it happened. Sometimes this tale is told by people using it as evidence that handguns can be used at long range, sometimes by people who think Keith was another old cowboy telling tall tales. Many of you have heard of Bob Munden. He's famous for both lightning fast quick draws with a Colt Single Action Army (SAA), and just about any other handgun, and long range shooting. In one demonstration that's been shown on Shooting USA several times he used a stock 6" iron sighted Smith and Wesson 44 Magnum (629) and factory ammunition to pop a balloon at 600 yards using a truck hood for a rest. That doesn't prove that Keith made his shot, it does show that it is possible for someone to shoot that well.

Of all the times the incident comes up the real story is seldom told. It wasn't as if Keith drew his revolver and dropped the deer offhand at 600 yards. He had been shooting that gun and load at several hundred yards that week and knew the kind of hold over he would need. He also didn't do it in one shot, and was prone. None of those facts changes the truth of the story or diminishes Keith's accomplishment or shooting ability. In my opinion it does give more credence to the story.

While I don't make any claim that I can shoot as well as Elmer Keith I do know how well I can shoot at long range and I've seen other, better, shots do amazing things with handguns at long range. I believe Elmer Keith made that shot.

Here is one of Keith's recounting of the infamous shot...

*Paul Kriley and I hunted up Clear Creek on the right side where it is partly open bunch grass meadows and partly patches of timber. We hunted all day, and although we saw several does at 80-90 yards, one at 60, that I could have killed. We passed them up, as I wanted a buck. Toward evening we topped out on a ridge. There was a swale between us and another small ridge on the side of the mountain slope about 300-400 yards away. Beyond that, out on the open sidehill, no doubt on account of the cougar, were about 20 mule deer, feeding. Two big bucks were in the band, and some lesser ones, the rest were does and*

*long fawns. As it was getting late and the last day of the season, I wanted one of those bucks for meat. Being a half-mile away, I told Paul, "Take the .300 Magnum and duck back through this swale to that next ridge and that should put you within about 500 yards of them. I'll stay here (the deer had seen us), let them watch me for a decoy.*

*" Paul said, "You take the rifle."*

*"I said, how is it sighted?"*

*He said, "one inch high at a hundred yards." I told him to go ahead because I wouldn't know where to hold it. I always sighted a .300 Magnum 3 inches high at a hundred and I wouldn't know where to hold it at 500.*

*I said, "You go ahead and kill the biggest buck in the bunch for me." Paul took off, went across the swale and climbed the ridge, laid down and crawled up to the top. He shot. The lower of the two bucks, which he later said was the biggest one, dropped and rolled down the mountain. I then took off across the swale to join him. Just before I climbed up the ridge to where he was lying, he started shooting again.*

*When I came up on top, the band of deer was pretty well long gone. They'd gone out to the next ridge top, turned up it slightly and went over. But the old buck was up following their trail, one front leg a-swinging. Paul had hit it. I asked Paul, "Is there any harm in me getting into this show?" He said, "No, go ahead."*

*I had to lay down prone, because if I crawled over the hill to assume my old backside positioning, then the blast of his gun would be right in my ear.*

*Shooting prone with a .44 Magnum is something I don't like at all. The concussion is terrific. It will just about bust your ear drums every time. At any rate Paul shot and missed. I held all of the front sight up, or practically all of it, and perched the running deer on top of the front sight and squeezed one off. Paul said, "I saw it through my scope. It hit in the mud and snow right below him." There was possibly six inches of wet snow, with muddy ground underneath. I told him "I won't be low the next shot." Paul shot again and missed with his .300 Magnum. The next time I held all of the front sight up and a bit of the ramp, just perched the deer on top. After the shot the gun came down out of recoil and the bullet had evidently landed. The buck made a high buck-jump, swapped ends, and came back toward us, shaking his head. I told Paul I must have hit a horn. I asked him to let the buck come back until he was right on us if he would, let him come as close as he would and I'd jump up and kill him. When he came back to where Paul had first rolled him, out about 500 yards, Paul said, "I could hit him now, I think."*

*"Well," I said, "I don't like to see a deer run on three legs. Go ahead." He shot again and missed. The buck swapped ends and turned around and went back right over the same trail. Paul said, "I'm out of ammunition. Empty." I told him to reload, duck back out of sight, go on around the hill and head the old buck off, and I'd chase him on around. Paul took off on a run to go around this bunch-grass hill and get up above the buck and on top. He was young, husky, and could run like a deer himself. I got on the old buck again with all*

*of the front sight and a trifle of the ramp up. Just as I was going to squeeze it off when he got to the ridge, he turned up it just as the band of deer had done. So I moved the sight picture in front of him and shot. After an interval he went down and out of sight. I didn't think anything of it, thought he had just tipped over the ridge. It took me about half an hour to get across. When I got over there to the ridge, I saw where he'd rolled down the hill about fifty yards, bleeding badly, and then he'd gotten up and walked from the tracks to the ridge in front of us. There were a few pine trees down below, so I cut across to intercept his tracks. I could see he was bleeding out both sides.*

*Just before I got to the top of the ridge, I heard a shot up above me and then another shot, and I yelled and asked if it was Paul. He answered. I asked, "Did you get him?" He said, "Yes, he's down there by that big pine tree below you. Climb a little higher and you can see him." Paul came down and we went down to the buck. Paul said the buck was walking along all humped up very slowly. He held back of the shoulders as he was quartering away. The first shot went between his forelegs and threw up snow. Then he said the buck turned a little more away from him and he held higher and dropped him. Finally we parted the hair in the right flank and found where the 180-grain needle-pointed Remington spitzer had gone in. Later I determined it blew up and lodged in the left shoulder. At any rate I looked his horns over, trying to see where I'd hit a horn. No sign of it. Finally I found a bullet hole back of the right jaw and it came out of the top of his nose. That was the shot I'd hit him with out at 600 yards. Then Paul said, "Who shot him*

*through the lungs broadside? I didn't, never had that kind of shot at all." There was an entrance hole fairly high on the right side of the rib cage just under the spine and an exit just about three or four inches lower on the other side. The deer had been approximately the same elevation as I was when I fired that last shot at him. We dressed him, drug him down the trail on Clear Creek, hung him up, and went on down to the ranch. The next day a man named Posy and I came back with a pack horse, loaded him and took him in. I took a few pictures of him hanging in the woodshed along with the Smith & Wesson .44 Mag.*

*I took him home and hung him up in the garage. About ten days later my son Ted came home from college and I told him, "Ted, go out and skin that big buck and get us some chops. They should be well-ripened and about right for dinner tonight." After awhile Ted came in and he laid the part jacket of a Remington bullet on the table beside me and he said, "Dad, I found this right beside the exit hole on the left side of that buck's ribs." Then I knew that I had hit him at that long range two out of four times. I believe I missed the first shot, we didn't see it at all, and it was on the second that Paul said he saw snow and mud fly up at his heels. I wrote it up and I've been called a liar ever since, but Paul Kriley is still alive and able to vouch for the facts.*

**Elmer Keith**