

AS I RECALL

By: Bill Boyd

Introduction: *I've known Bill a lot of years, and heard of him before I met him. I performed shows for his campaign rallies when he was running for Lieutenant Governor of Nevada in the early 80's. He was a key figure in the formative years of Fast Draw. Bill was one of the first Chairmen of what became the Western Fast Draw Association in the early 60's. He hosted the first Nevada State Championship held in Virginia City in 1963. The sport was rapidly changing to all out speed in those days and equipment was being heavily modified. Rules were changing with each competition, sometimes each club would have their own rules. It was both the rise and fall of the sport due to disorganization and not having goals and principals that were clearly defined and accepted. Here is Bill's account, in his own words, from the way he saw it back in that time period. We are proud to have Bill and his wife Connie back involved with Fast Draw and members of the CFDA.*

Cal Eilrich (2012)

In the late summer of 1956 I flew to Anchorage Alaska to Drive a Truck for Isabel Construction of Reno. Nevada. I was advised to carry a side arm while working in the Territory. I purchase a 7 1/2" Calvary Model Colt .45 caliber six gun and Holster. I was 25 at the time. I am 80 now and this is how I remember it.

I grew up in Burbank and North Hollywood California around and with many Western Movie Stars, extras like Lucky Stevens, Chief Thundercloud (The Original Tonto), Tyron Power, Tex Amberson, Nudies Rodeo Tailors, Jimmy Dean, Roy Rogers, Hoot Gibson, Bob Steel and stunt men. I spent a lot of time in the Old Western Towns like 29 Palms and the various studio sets watching um "shoot it out".

The Colt was the only Gun I would even consider wearing. We worked long hours but there was nothing to do when not working so I started shooting. I got pretty good at hitting what I was shooting at. The more I practiced the better I got. It was a lot of fun and I never gave it a thought that I could have shot myself in the leg if I had not cleared leather before firing. If you read this, Never Fast Draw with Live Ammunition.

I flew to Reno, Nevada in 1957. Started shooting at the base of Rattlesnake Mountain .Then at the Harold's Club Gun Club on the Old Pyramid Highway. I would shoot with the Washoe County Sheriffs Deputies there. I became a Reserve Deputy under Sheriff Bud Young. The Range Master there asked me if I would like to enter a contest of guy's who dressed western and competed in events and shows for Harold Club. The first contest I was in was with live ammo at the Gun Club with targets at 25'. My 7 1/2" barrel Colt won the day and I won my first Championship. I won many events over the next 2 years. The next contest was a staged event with blanks in a Walk and Draw against an opponent. I knew I had killed each of the guy's I was up against even if they fired first in the judge's opinion who were estimating that they had fired on a level basis at me. It was not really a contest but I lost those rounds

because they were using 4 ¾" Colts. I went to buy one but could not find a .45 Caliber. So I settled for a .44 Russian blue beauty that was to serve me through several years from Cannon's Pawn shop on Commercial Row. Then I discovered that Colt's regular .44 round was not dependable in my .44 Russian. So I bought a Colt .22 Magnum to play with. It took me six months before I found a dealer who had .44 Russian Ammo. Over the next two years I competed for myself and then was sponsored by Harold's Club. I became known as Bill Boyd The Nevadan when Sundance Silver Cravat working for Hoot Neuman's Silver Shop dubbed me so when he engraved a Championship Trophy sponsored by Harold's Club Gun Club.

In late 1959 Sun Dance Silver Cravat who had decorated my black leather silver mounted vest asked me if I had heard of a new Fast Draw Club called the Reno Gun Fighters and if I would like to go to one of their meetings. I went and after the business was concluded they began to do some Fast Draw shooting at balloons with blank loads. At the time I had two rigs. One for my 7 ½" Colt and another for the 5 ½" Colt .22 magnum that I had found was much cheaper to practice with. No timers, just judging each other as to who was the fastest. The founder of the club was a County Commissioner named Al Pagni and it was his family Italian restaurant on Highway 395 that the meetings were held between Reno and Carson City Nevada. I was not too impressed but agreed to attend the next meeting and the possibility of joining the club. At the next meeting a lot of arguing with the members made me realize that they had a long way to go in forming a workable club. I met another member, Don Damron who suggested that he and a couple of other members were going to drop out with idea of forming another club. After the meeting I met with him and 3 others and we talked of forming the Club in Reno and I suggested that they might consider going up to Virginia City to form The Fast Draw Club. We then decided to meet at Dons house a few days later and discuss how we were to go about it. What our rules would be, etc.. I had had some contact with several of the business in Virginia City prior to this and had put on a couple of shoots in the streets for them. I knew that getting sponsors for the club would not be a problem, so the Group named me a Special Coordinator of events. Lucky Schumate was elected President, Don Damron Vice President and Floyd Mastalka Secretary. Sundance Silver Cravat did not wish to hold office of the Original 5 members of the Virginia City Frontiersmen Fast Draw Club. See picture No. 1. This picture was taken by the Territorial Enterprise of Virginia City to show and announce us to the locals. Stalwart backers of the club from the get go were The Delta Saloon, The Bucket of Blood, The Silver Queen, The Old 62 Bar, The Turquoise Shop, and The Territorial Enterprise.

Don Damron designed the shoulder patch. Created the first ever Ping Pong Ball pop up for shooters to see if they could beat its up and down action. We had not seen a Timer at that time. Staged street shoots were held on a regular basis in Virginia City on weekends. We shot at each other and busted balloons. The sheriff would deputize all of us on weekends during that summer to help with the crowds. That fall we had another join our club, Stan Alvarez. Stan was a American Indian. The first ever contest we had was with the Reno Gunfighters and Stan Won! During the time we had with the Reno Gunfighters we were introduced to a Fast Draw magazine with Richard Boone on the cover. It told of a contest at Redwood City California. I tried to get some of the others to go with me but because of Jobs etc.. I wound up going alone. That was in 1960.

The Sport of Fast Draw seemed to me to have come about by six-gun enthusiast who wanted to participate in some way with Western Stars of the time and was strongly influenced by the Western performers in the many Westerns that had grown out of Hollywood's Movies and the advent of the Western Television Series that dominated evening television in the early 50's and 60's. Have Gun Will Travel, Gunsmoke, Bonanza, Wanted Dead or Alive and others on TV. Shane, Fastest Gun Alive with Glen Ford, the Naked Spur and the many westerns made with John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, Gary Cooper, Richard Widmark, Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, Woody Strode, Joel McCrea, Randolph Scott, Ben Johnson, Ken Curtiss, Bill Smith, Fess Parker, Bill Williams, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and of course the Lone Ranger and Tonto. To play act the shoot outs must have been the catalyst that started the sport. When Arness drew his 5 ½" Colt at the start of Gunsmoke and gunned down Arvo Ojala every evening for I can't remember how many years, must have triggered at least part of the sport. Richard Boone was a strong promoter of Fast Draw.

I do not remember much about what went on at that shoot at Redwood City. I learned that the only weapon you were allowed to shoot with had to be Colt. It did not matter what the Caliber it was. Some competitors were even shooting 1862 black powder Navy Colts. I remember meeting George Narasaki who introduced me to a Timer and Self Start. The first time I tried it I fired a 13/100. I came away with the knowledge to enable me to order a Timer for our club and some idea of what was going on in the form of contests with shooters. It was all noise and blanks being shot at balloons! The noise of the round exploding stopped the clock and sometimes the blanks busted the balloons. George was a thumb buster like me. I think he won overall that day. We became friendly and he offered to help with the formation of our club anyway he could. I also met my friend Paul Christensen. I spent a lot of time with Paul at his home in Sacramento, California. He actually designed and formed my first real Fast Draw holster, I don't remember if it was one I already had or not. I know I became a lot faster after that. We spent a lot of time "Timing" our Colt's, loading blanks and practicing. I had used holsters from Tandy and my Doubles rig was from Arvo Ojala. Later as the sport progressed most everybody who could afford it was using Alphonso's rigs.

During this period I became acquainted with the rules of Contest. First, you had to stand or walk upright in a normal manner with no part of your shooting hand closer than 6" from the butt of your gun or holster. Your hands had to hang at your side. Thumbing or Fanning. Most of the contests being held were firing at Balloons with blank loads or Walk and Draw against an opponent as depicted in the many western movies of the day. Both contests were subject to ridicule by anyone who fired at a target. Firing a exploding blank cartridge in the vicinity of a balloon was enough to bust it. Accuracy was not involved. Walk and Draw was adjudged by other shooters standing at the side determining if the shooters had shot at a level to reasonably assume that the other had been Shot Down! Everybody was having a great time though and the crowds loved to watch the contests. I used my Colt .22 firing blanks at the first Walk & Draw contest in 1961 I attended and learned the hard way that it did not make any difference if I was faster and shot first. The noise of a .45 blank over rode my .22 report. That happened to me at the shoot I attended at the annual Frog Jump in Jackson California. It never happened again.

Without a doubt Walk and Draw against an opponent was the most popular, staged or in competition. I remember one time I was competing in Down Town San Jose when I reacted and fanned a second shot

on my Colt .45. At that time it was a natural thing for me to do because I had learned to thumb the first shot and then fire as many shots as I could when I drew my Colt shooting at targets. Unfortunately for me I was not wearing my fanning glove and I caught my little finger on the firing pin and ripped a 1" gash to the end of my finger and it spewed blood all over the front of me! I looked down at my hand as I was holding it in front of my chest because it hurt like hell. It all happened so fast the ladies in the crowd started screaming thinking I had actually been shot! The contest was delayed and it took several minutes to assure the crowd that I was Ok. It made for great drama.

When the sport started Fanners did not stand much of a chance against a good thumb buster for time because of the hand rules. There was no penalty for firing a second or third round when you drew your Gun. You either beat the other guy or busted the balloon with the first shot; what followed was only for show. One of the Targets I used to shoot at for time and to please the audiences was a rotating Wagon Wheel with six balloons attached to it. Another was 3 Stands, each with a balloon 3' apart and a micro switch on the last to record the time it took to bust all 3 from left to right. Left to right was harder to do than right to left by about 10/100. The plastic cup balanced on the back of your shooting hand hit before it could fall to the ground was also a crowd pleaser. Another trick was to hold 3 balloons in your gun hand, let them go and then bust them. During my travels in Fast Draw one of the friends I made was with Rod Redwing. Rod and I knew many of the same people in the Western Movie business. He showed me many tricks for shooting at targets. He was at the time, besides being in all kinds of westerns, the one person that the studios would call upon to make those dramatic shots that you would see on screen. His favorite when performing was firing a .22 caliber bullet at a knife blade, splitting the round in half and busting a balloon on either side of the Knife Blade! He would Fast Draw his .22 six-gun and fire at the Knife Blade and bust those balloons every time. He never missed! It was spectacular. The secret to doing it was a trick. But that would be for him to tell you what it was. It was like the Sport at that time, Show Business. When I wore my double rig we performed together. I did the Gun Handling and he did the shooting. We did that at two of the National's.

Over the next four years the Virginia City Frontiersmen Fast Draw Club attended many shoots with other clubs and the National's held in Vegas. They put on several contest including 4 Nevada State Championships. The first was held at Harold's Club Gun Club, one in Sparks, Nevada at the Greenbrae Shopping Center at Night and the next two were held in Virginia City. Most all of the events held in Virginia City were covered by the Territorial Enterprise. When I was Chairman of the Western States Fast Draw Association all of the contests held that year were recorded by the paper. All the then World Records for all events were also recorded. All of these records were turned over to the new elected President of the WSFDA and from what I later heard then disappeared forever? All of the records that the Territorial Enterprise recorded can be found in the Library at the University of Nevada in Reno. My guns and last Alphonso silver mounted rig, with my loading tools, uniforms, shooting accessories, records and Trophies are now in the Nevada Historical Societies keeping at the University of Nevada Campus at Reno, Nevada along with my appointment as Marshal of Virginia City and Gold Hill Nevada in 1977 by the Storey County Commissioners. I had continued to represent and promote the area as I still do today.

I quit Fast Draw in 1965 because of the bastardization of the sport by the Crab Crawling Twisters who had turned the sport in my opinion to one of convenience to enhance the fanners ability to beat thumb busters and the wide spread use of weapons other the Colt. They no longer competed by the rules of the sport as they had been originally established. I competed as all that had with me to establish a Sport under those rules and to represent the Old West at least as it was being portrayed at the time in the entertainment industry. Many records were set by many shooters not using the original rules that in my opinion never should have been recognized. A screaming example is the .62/100 World Record set in 1964 by the teenage shooter who had to shoot under those rules and who later by not competing under those rules has claimed to be the World's best. He is a very good performer the way he shoots. But what he shoots is not Fast Draw; it's Quick Draw with no posture or hand rules. His ability to hit what he shoots at has never been established under the old rules. The event he attended in Virginia City was witness to the fact that he could not even slow draw and hit a life size target, one out of three that had been designed by Dave Tuttle for the State Championship. These twisters ruined the Nationals sponsored by Colt Fire Arms in Las Vegas Nevada. One by competing in the fashion they did and using cut up Rugers and bragging to Colt about it! The last year I attended the Nationals I don't think there were 10 out of the hundreds of competitors that were thumb busters and I don't think that there were 3 of those using a Colt. After 7 years of Colt sponsoring shoots all over the country, donating hundreds of single action six guns to the competitors either directly or through some of their dealers and sponsors of the contests, it was a sad parting beneath most of us who had tried to maintain the sport in its original fashion. I continued as a reserve Deputy in Virginia City and became a Reserve Class One Deputy under the New Sheriff Bob Galey in Washoe county from 1972 to 1977.

During those five years from 1960 to 1965 the club enjoyed some great times and accomplished many charitable deeds. Hundreds of shooters attended our shoots. Thousands of spectators witnessed our shoots and the special events we performed at like the Silver Spurs Awards in Reno. Many celebrities became members of our club. John Wayne, Richard Boone, Jim Arness, 3 of the Boys from Bonanza, Dan, Michael and Lorne and Ken Curtiss. We had our own 1956 Chrysler Black Limousine that was lettered all over with Virginia City and promoting 8 of the sponsors, one on each of the car doors . When this vehicle went to the Nationals it was featured in front of the Las Vegas Convention Center for all to see. We had our own uniforms that also had one each of those 8 sponsors featured on the backs of those white long sleeve shirts for both men and women shooters. One of our shooters placed 7th in the Nationals one year and we had many winners at events that the club attended. Our shoots were sponsored by the afore mentioned businesses and others in Virginia City and Sponsors all over Reno. Harold's Club, The Sportsman, Parkers Western Wear, The Mapes Hotel, The Silver Spur, Fitzgeralds Casino and the Chamber of Commerce. We hosted many events in Reno including the Reno Rodeo Auctions for event riders held in Sammy's Showroom at the top of the Mape's Hotel the night before the Rodeo began. The district Attorney even tried competing at one of these shows. We hosted the World Premier of the Western Movie "Guns of the Timberline" starring Alan Ladd in Reno at the Esquire Theater on 1st. Street. We performed for all the service clubs at their outdoor events. We drew thousands of spectators to Reno when we performed with and presented memberships to the Winners of the Silver Spurs Award given to the Best Western Movie Actor and sponsored by the Chamber.

Dave Tuttle, Stan Alvarez and myself hung around a lot. Stan Taught Dave and I to Hunt with 65lb Bow and Arrows. Once when we went to a shoot in Sacramento, California held at the fair, sponsored by Chuck Kneezels Sacramento Pistoleros, while the 3 of us were waiting for the contest to start we were walking around and enjoying the sights when a Barker that had a Bow and Arrow target site started to harangue us about being "Cowboys" that couldn't hit the broad side of a barn with a Bow & Arrow. Dave looked at me, I looked at Stan and we decided to see if we might be able to hit this guy's targets. To make a long story short, a half hour later we owned every prize that guy had to give away. Every time you hit a target you got a free arrow. Every time you hit a bulls eye you won a prize. Boy was this guy ever sorry he'd seen us. When we decided he had had enough we talked it over and Stan took 5 of the top toys for each one of his kids, Dave took 2 for his and I took one for my son. We let him off the hook for the rest and was he glad to see us go.

The best time I ever had while attending a shoot was actually at George Narasaki's house when he invited us to take part in a poker game. It started out friendly enough, but as the night went on some heavy betting started to change the nature of the game and one player was becoming obnoxious. He was a dealer from Las Vegas who for some reason, known only to himself, elevated his ability to play poker over all others. I had noticed that while we were playing he bluffed his way through a couple of hands. His manner towards other players was that none of them stood a chance against his superior knowledge and experience. He even singled me out as being from an inferior area as Reno! Several hands later I was dealt an Ace high straight flush in Hearts in the first five cards of 7 card stud. The betting was pretty active; the dealer was at my left. I opened to my left for 2 dollars and then bumped by the next, call, call and then bumped by Vegas again. The next guy dropped out. I had Ace, King going in so I called. The Dealer dropped out. The first card up showed 2 Aces, 1 King, 8 and I got the 10 of Hearts. Left of the dealer was not afraid of Vegas and his Ace was high so he bet into him. Next player called, King Called, Ace Called and Vegas Called. I bumped it on the possible Heart flush 4 bucks. That brought about a tirade from Vegas about how I was playing in a game that was over my head and other remarks because I was from Reno. The next card was a King and then another Ace, Jack and Vegas got another 8. Check, Aces checked, check and Vegas bet into me for 4 bucks. I had drawn the Queen of Hearts. I called, Ace King Called, Aces Bumped him back, next dropped out and Vegas Bumped back. I called and Vegas immediately called me a sucker for doing so. I don't really recall what the others got next because I got the Jack of Hearts. I knew that I had won. Ace King checked, Aces bet into Vegas I think because he just did not like him. Vegas bumped him 10 dollars. I did not know if he actually had a hand or not because of all of his conversation telling everyone to ignore my hearts and that his 8's were going to sink us all because he knew his hand was better than every ones. I promptly bumped him 20 bucks just to shut him up. Boy did he start on me. How stupid I was ect.ect.. Ace King dropped out. Aces Called, Vegas came back roaring of his expertise and bumped me, I called. Aces dropped out. It was me and Vegas. To make a long story short, his pair of 8's were high and he bet into me. Bumped him, he bumped back, I bumped him again and he got mad and challenged me with a hundred dollar bump. He knew I did not have that much left in front of me. I turned to George and asked if the game was held to table stakes and he said no. I called my wife and asked her to give me the money she had in her wallet. I called. He laughed and said he was not worried about taking my money and turned over 4 8's. He started to reach for the pot when I turned over the Ace King. He became the first Mexican I ever saw

turn pale white! Almost everyone in the room busted out laughing when I told him to make sure when got back Vegas he told everyone how this cowboy from Virginia City had cleaned his clock. And then I said to him; Money Talks, Bullshit Walks. He left soon after. I don't how he got home, but it was not with the Cash he brought with him.

Memorable shots I made or; The Walk and Draw events I won, Single and Doubles for Harold's Club. The 2 World Records I shot at the Nevada State Championships. The 78/100 (.25,.26 &.27) 3 shot aggregate I shot at Modesto and then got disqualified for fanning a second shot at the last. A new rule that was said to be a safety measure? The .27/100 Standing at 15' and the .26/100 Walking from 21' to 15' with Red Jet Wax at a 4" balloon when I performed for the Reno Police Department Detectives in 1963. The contest I lost at Bob Whites event because his .44 ammo would not work in my Russian .44. The .03/100 I fired on self start that they disqualified me for because after arguing that I had kicked the stand I could not shoot any better than a .08 and .07. The rules said you had to fire 2 more shots within .03/100 for the first shot to qualify! When I shot down several Fanners at the Nationals. The most surprised was my friend Paul Christensen after he stopped Thumbing and went to Twist Fanning. When I shot down Clint Eastwood at the Nationals and then after when we were posing for the pictures for the UPI and the National Press he said to me; Say, would you mind showing me how you did that?

All in all though I must say that I had a great time getting to know the different contestants and attending the hundreds of events even after I stopped shooting. Most of them were great people.

Now in my 80th year I have had the pleasure of meeting my friend again Cal Eilrich (Quick Cal), we first met in the 80's and his wife Dinah (Alotta Lead)! In my opinion they have done more for the preservation of the Sport of Fast Draw than any other individuals who have been connected with the Sport. My wife Connie and I have rejoined the spirit of the Sport, and Joined the Cowboy Fast Draw Association and look forward to my meeting with many of my old friends and making new ones. Bill Boyd