



# The RIFLE on CROWS

By BERT POPOWSKI

**Wary and hard to hit, crows make nearly ideal targets for riflemen. They tax the shooter's ingenuity and skill—and there's no bag limit!**

**M**ANY years ago it was my good fortune to fall in with an expert rifleman; a chap who practiced more than he preached and who, when his guns failed to produce killing hits on flesh-and-blood targets, knew what to do about it. We collaborated in firing hundreds of rounds of carefully hand-loaded ammunition in various calibers, and many of those were "in the black" (literally) on the top varmint target of them all—the common crow.

We were equally interested in the performance of various bullets on selected varmint targets, as well as in their accuracy. Secondly, we shot prairie dogs, gophers, jack rabbits, as well as crows; but, of them all, the crow was by far our favorite target. Not because we killed any great number of the black rascals, but because they furnished us an unsurpassed target and because of the satisfaction we got in sending each of these black nest-robbers to its final reward.

Jack rabbits were our top long-range targets, for they provided us with an opportunity to check the amount of wind drift affecting various loads, and often permitted a second, sometimes even a third, corrected shot. Prairie dogs and gophers were somewhat less suitable targets for two reasons. Generally they moved around so much as to interfere with a perfect check on the shooter's and rifle's finest possibilities; and, second, they were so small that they had to be taken at relatively short ranges, before windage became a telling factor.

Crows, on the other hand, give just that element of uncertainty that makes them the rifleman's dream targets. Not only did they give us shots at all ranges, usually long, but they were no easy marks—even after wind drift had been definitely established for that particular range and at that particular angle to the bullet's flight. For, when a crow is stripped of its padding of feathers, you haven't more than a two-and-a-half-inch circle into which you must plant your killing bullet.

Compare that with the official bull's-eye at 100 to 200 yards and you will readily see that hitting crows calls for a brand of accuracy that is difficult to achieve even on paper targets that hold still. The official bull for scope sights at 100 and 200 yards is four and eight inches, respectively. For iron sights it is six and eight inches at the same distance. Most factory-made high-power rifles must be doctored a bit to make them group closely enough to kill crows consistently at these ranges. (AMERICAN RIFLEMAN September, 1941.)

The fine accuracy demanded on crow targets required that all of our shooting be done from as solid a foundation as possible. We had half a dozen well-camouflaged setups into which

we could slip with a couple of rifles, a pair of binoculars, and a double handful of loads, and then chuckle with ghoulish glee when one of our carefully held shots produced that satisfying "whock" that told its own story.

Shooting over the South Dakota plains, where we had constant winds of varying velocity, we rarely squeezed off without having to make compensation for air currents. This windage problem gave us wonderful opportunities to test the performance of various calibers and we speedily learned that some of the ultravelocity slugs bent like fishhooks when the range was beyond 200 yards. We soon evolved a formula which we applied to all windage shooting problems (AMERICAN RIFLEMAN December, 1938) and then our windage worries were over—or so we thought.

Spring and fall crow migrations, chiefly the former, gave us the bulk of our shooting. Not only were we able to work on a constantly changing, and less wary, crow personnel, but the scant vegetation of the spring months left the black birds out in the open where the entire target was exposed. Much of our shooting was done by the gunner slipping out of the car and into a ditch, while the driver rolled the car on for some distance before stopping to focus his binoculars on the performance.

But this was a time-wasting procedure. We soon evolved a picnic-bench type of shooting rest which folded up for easy transportation. This we set up in the shelter of a grove, baiting our set with a couple of dead jack rabbits or a half-dozen gopher or prairie dog carcasses set out from 100 yards on out, according to the specific locale in which we shot. When we were through shooting, we gathered up the shattered crow carcasses and disposed of them some distance from the site; but we left the bait where it was, to teach the birds that this area was a likely spot for free dinners.

Our shooting stand was always set as rigidly as possible, and, since our targets were placed in a relatively small area, it seldom required much movement on the part of the shooter to get his shot away. The rest on which the forearm was placed was padded with a combination felt-and-rubber cushion. This



This is the spot you must hit to make sure crow kills. It's approximately a 2½ inch target.

prevented marring the forearm of the piece and provided a nearly slipproof support for the rifle. The rest provides also a rear support for the shooter's right upper arm so that natural muscular tremble and heart-beat deflection is greatly reduced. When you're shooting at a two-and-a-half-inch spot at 200 yards, you must be able to set the cross hairs firmly and unmovingly on that tiny mark.

My favorite rifle for this shooting was, and still is, a Model 54 Winchester in .250-3000 caliber. This rifle is fitted with a Marksman stock, in which is bedded a twenty-four-inch round barrel, tapered from one-and-three-sixteenths inches at the breach to three-fourths-of-an-inch diameter at the muzzle. It has a fourteen-inch rifling twist and is perfectly capable of making inch groups at 100 yards with the most accurate loads we uncovered.

While we used several scopes atop this fine barrel, the best one for crows was a Fecker, six-power, with half-minute clicks and No. 2 cross hairs. The whole outfit weighs just over eleven pounds and is short enough for quick and easy handling. This is important when you're holding on a nervous crow and must get the shot away in a minimum of time.

The rule we generally followed was "shoot until you miss." The shooter then yielded the rifle and took on the spotter's job. My records show that a run of seven successive hits was tops, but this was in a ridge-sheltered area where bullet drift was slight, and the shooting was done at a range of 175 paces. However, this same spot yielded a kill made at 345 paces on a wily old crow that had previously been missed at our decoy setup and had stopped atop a fence post for a final fatal survey.

All of our shooting setups were so made that we could clearly survey the area beyond the point of the bullet impact, enabling us to see to it that no ricocheting slug would endanger man or beast. Safety was further served by the use of soft-nose, protected-point, or expanding bullets, which tumbled out of line as misshapen metal, once they'd made contact with crows or the earth. At no time did we shoot at crows perched at such an elevation that the spent slug might drop over the horizon and into farmyard or field. This is a common, and sometimes fatal, mistake made by riflemen in shooting at chance targets—birds perched in trees, on fence posts, or atop a ridge. The danger increases in direct proportion to the density of population.

For the Model 54 .250-3000 we experimented with several .25 caliber bullets but finally settled on the 100-grain slug as the one which gave us the finest accuracy and the deadliest performance. We used two types: the Peters Silvertip, and the W.R.A. soft point, the latter often hollow-pointed with a three-sixteenths-inch drill. So treated, it becomes a murderous slug that will blow small flesh-and-blood targets to shreds.

With these bullets we used both 4064 and DuPont 4320 powders. We found little to choose between them in accuracy. We used from thirty-six and one-half to thirty-eight and one-half grains, finally settling on the former load as the one giving the finest accuracy. The lighter charge also gave a saving in powder and a reduction in bore erosion.

Most riflemen do not fully appreciate how accurate a combination of rifle, ammunition, shooter, and scope is necessary

in order to kill crows consistently. With a two-and-a-half-inch target into which you must slip your killing shot, if your hold is off as much as one and one-fourth inches you may pluck a few feathers or smash a wing bone, but your bullet won't land with that explosive "Whoock" that is the announcement of a very dead crow.

In fact, considering the human element, we found that the only consistent crow-getters were those guns that could consistently put five-shot groups within one minute of angle at all ranges up to 300 yards. Others were in-and-outers, clipping off hits in championship style one day, missing with disgusting regularity the next. The Model 54 did produce several inch-and-three-quarter groups at 300 yards in test shooting, and



Three youngsters out on a limb—which, in the opinion of crow-nemesis Bart Popowski, is where all crows should be!



Crows hate owls, will come from miles around to scold them. Not many crow lures are better than "Old Who-ey," alive or stuffed.

that's accuracy in any man's language. At 200 yards we didn't indicate any especial surprise when we got inch-and-three-quarter groups, and those should kill every crow shot at, if elevation, windage, and hold were right.

In a fifteen-mile wind the bullet drift of the 100-grain bullet, ahead of thirty-six and one-half grains of 4064 powder, was one-and-a-half inches at 100 yards, four inches at 200, and nine inches at 300 yards. At twenty miles an hour, the wind drifted this same bullet two-and-a-half inches at 100, six inches at 200, and thirteen inches at 300 yards. When the wind

blew at or over twenty-five miles an hour we packed up and went home, for our experience told us that it carried pockets of different pressure which raised hob with accuracy.

Another .25 caliber rifle with which we did considerable shooting was the .257 Remington-Roberts. This gun was a Remington 30-S Action fitted with a twenty-eight-inch Sukalle barrel, the whole weighing nearly thirteen pounds. While this weight made it a very nice rifle to shoot, the



excessive length was unwieldy and gave no better results than the Model 54 .250-3000.

This rifle used the 100-grain bullets with finest accuracy, a point we established by shooting away several hundred of the 87- and 117-grain .25 caliber bullets. The drift of the 100-grain bullet was not appreciably different from the Model 54 load, though the .257 cartridges were loaded to start at a considerably higher muzzle velocity.

In figuring wind drift, a formula is almost indispensable in estimating this enemy of rifle accuracy. First of all, it is necessary to take into consideration the angle at which the bullet coincides with wind flow. For instance: suppose you're shooting on the face of an immense clock, locating yourself at six o'clock and shooting at your target at twelve o'clock.

Any wind that will affect your bullet that blows between 7:30 and 10:30 on one side, and between 1:30 and 4:30 on the other, will drive the bullet out of line the same amount, though in opposite directions, of course. Likewise, the amount of resulting deflection that a wind of equal velocity will produce in that segment of the circle between 12:30 and 1:30, and 4:30 to 5:30 will be identical to, though in the opposite direction; from, that resulting when the wind blows between 10:30 to 11:30, and 6:30 to 7:30; but it will be only half as great as the deflection mentioned in the first sentence of this paragraph.

What about the drift resulting from a head-on or tail wind? That will produce groups of almost double the size of those resulting when the wind is definitely on one side or the other. Such a wind pushes the bullet one way on one shot and in the opposite direction on the next shot. It is better

to get the wind definitely on one side or the other to get consistent X's, whether your "black" is on paper or on a crow.

In practical shooting, it is best to have the wind blowing as near to right angles to your bullet path as possible, since your adjustment to compensate for drift is then much more uniform. In this segment of the circle, the formula for figuring wind drift is: muzzle velocity, less the residual velocity of the bullet at 100 yards, divided by a mean factor of 100. This gives you the drift in inches at 200 yards. Since most of your crow shooting will be at that range, it is only a matter of experience to set down or up from that figure for shorter or longer ranges.

No one in the United States is more interested than I am in encouraging the killing of as many crows as possible, whether their demise is accomplished by rifle bullets or by a hatful of shotgun pellets. But, unless your pet crow rifle groups exceedingly well, it won't kill crows with any degree of regularity. If it doesn't group tightly enough, or if its zero shifts from day to day, or if you aren't careful in protecting the scope setting once you've got it where it should be, you won't kill crows regularly regardless of how fine a piece of burl walnut you have in the gun's woodwork. Small groups come first. Then come those twins of good marksmanship: good holding, and the ability to estimate range and wind drift and to set your scope to compensate for them. Holding off for either range or windage, or both, is slovenly shooting and won't produce the results that may be achieved by setting your scope for them so you can center the cross hairs right where you want the bullet to land. ♦ ♦ ♦



## "Seabees Can Shoot!"

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attack after Iwo was secured. The path of the attack stopped at the edge of camp where a battalion, which had just reached the island, was bivouacked. For two or three hours it was a real initiation for the newcomers.

"It was hardly daylight when the charge started," said Richard C. Webster, Carpenter's Mate Second Class, of Crewe, Virginia. "I was on watch and, the first thing I knew, there was shooting all around me. It was being done by some Marines waiting to go aboard ship, and by some Army groups. I did a lot of shooting, too. When it was all over, there were ten dead Japs in one shell hole not far from my post."

Seabees are more noted for their building than for their shooting, but they do some of both. One enterprising 'Bee

mounted a light machine gun in the body of a dump truck. He jockeyed the truck around where he had a good view of the area for frontal fire. For two or three nights he found enough targets to keep his interest but, as the Japs thinned out, he let boys in their dugout guard posts take over. Perhaps the Japs became suspicious of the vehicle.

On Iwo Jima, the Seabees did more than build bases en route to Tokyo. They demonstrated they could protect themselves, or fight if needed, as well as construct airfields. And they used

all of the various types of small arms a construction battalion carries. The total Japs killed and captured makes a fancy figure for a service troop organization. Especially one that did not go looking for the enemy.

They are a versatile organization. They are sharpshooters with carbines, Thompson submachine guns, and machine guns, as well as experts with their famous bulldozers. On Iwo Jima they proved that "Seabees Can Shoot!" as well as build. ♦ ♦ ♦



"I'm not shooting up to par, Lieutenant. I think maybe it'd be a good idea to send me back home for a refresher course."