

Edward Cathcart Crossman
The Father of American Smallbore Rifle Competition
And
His Famous Firearms Family
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After spending the cool productive morning hours writing, the solidly built man with the black brush moustache emerged from the Spanish Colonial style house at 907 Whitehead Street in Key West, Florida to wander about town. He was on the prowl, looking to make new friends, meet old ones, and to listen to their tales while carefully filing away the details for use later. As the afternoon slowly dissolved into evening he often found himself tableside at Josie Russell's saloon "Sloppy Joe's" with old cronies Captain Eddie "Bra" Saunderson, who ran a charter boat, local lawyer George Brooks, or hardware store owner Charles Thompson. Together they would knock back more than a little Teachers Scotch Whisky and soda and it was here, among his drinking and fishing friends, that he picked up the nickname "Papa."

Ernest Hemingway had come to Key West in 1928, at the urging of fellow writer John Dos Passos, living there, off and on, until 1961. He said it was, "the best place I've ever been anytime." About the time he completed *For Whom The Bells Toll* in 1940 the literary man who would become both a Pulitzer and the Noble laureate, took some time to inventory the Key West house's bookshelves. Sandwiched alphabetically between a privately printed collection of poems by Caresse Crosby and one by e.e. Cummings were three volumes by the same

author, *The Book of the Springfield, Military Sporting Rifles, and Smallbore Rifle Shooting*. It comes as no surprise that these books might appear there for, as a youngster, Hemingway had spent many of his summers hunting and fishing Northern Michigan's Walloon Lake. Even as Hemingway strutted about the literary stage, one of the 20th Century's greatest stars, he recalled his younger days and felt it necessary for his library to contain works of an equally influential writer of a different nature and discipline.

Edward Cathcart Crossman, better known as "Ned" to his extensive and admiring reading public, was the most influential shooting sports writer of the early 20th century in the United States. He certainly was the first to sustain himself solely on the strength of his pen, setting the stage for the likes of both Charles Askins senior and junior, Horace Kephart, Julian Hatcher and the trinity that closed out the century he had begun, Townsend Whelen, Jack O'Connor, and Elmer Keith.

Crossman was born in Iowa in 1889, son of Leander C. Crossman whose was born in 1853, soon after his parents John Alexander Crossman and wife Mary Cathcart emigrated from Pennsylvania to Iowa in about 1850. John was a member of the short lived abolitionist Free Soil Party and whose home was a station on the Underground Railroad. Leander was raised on the western frontier and, like most boys of this era and his age, learned to use firearms early in life to gather food, provide protection, and on occasion, recreation. By the time he had grown to adulthood he had become a well known rifleman of his day, making his name as a member of the Muscatine Guards-Company C of the 9th Regiment of

the Iowa National Guard. The elder Crossman ranged wide in his pursuit of shooting glory. He usually placed well in major rifle matches with the service rifle of the day, the Springfield Model 1873, the single shot rifle more commonly known as the "Trapdoor Springfield." Chambered for the black powder .45-70-500 cartridge the rifle had an effective range of 1,000 yards.

Leander used it well. With issue open sights he managed to hold his own against teams from Massachusetts Springfield Armory, birthplace of the rifle, and riflemen based at the Creedmoor Range on Long Island who often used the more sophisticated Remington-Hepburn or Sharps-Borchardt long range match rifles. The apogee of his shooting career came when, in 1887, commanding general of the United States Army Lieutenant General Phillip Sheridan, pinned a silver medal on the breast of his uniform tunic and presented him with \$75 in prize money.

When not traveling and shooting with the National Guard, Crossman earned his keep by teaching Latin and serving as a school principal. He married Nellie Bishop and they had a son who skill with language and firearms would far outshine his father's.

Edward Cathcart Crossman was born in 1881, just two years after his father's shooting triumph. As a child he followed in his father's footsteps as a rifleman and must have paid close attention in school for his writings are well constructed, erudite, and entertaining. Life as a young boy on the banks of the Mississippi River, at the end of the 19th century, was probably little different than when Muscatine was founded a half century earlier. The spirit of the frontier and

Manifest Destiny was rich the in the culture of the rural Iowa countryside of Ned's youth. Even living in a small town he had plenty of opportunity to explore, hunt, fish, and indulge a youth's imagination in the fields and rich river bottom land. These experiences would help form the boy into the man he would become, much like Mark Twain, who had worked for his brother Orion on the *Muscatine Journal* in the 1850s. Twain wrote of Muscatine that "... I remember Muscatine--still more pleasantly--for its summer sunsets. I have never seen any, on either side of the ocean that equaled them.... The sunrises are also said to be exceedingly fine. I do not know."

At some point in time the family moved the California where Ned first came to public notice, at the relatively young age of 23, when his first contribution to *Arms and the Man*, the predecessor of the National Rifle Association's flagship publication, *The American Rifleman* was published in 1904. He was a prolific writer, with a fund of information and interests that was both broad and deep, allowing him to write for a wide variety of magazines from outdoor publications to *Scientific American*. Once he had tasted the life of a free lance outdoor writer he never looked back and never really had any other main means of employment to support his family.

Perhaps working for himself, as it were, was a good thing. Ned Crossman did not suffer fools and was opinionated to the point of being abrasively obstinate. He was held in high regard by a large and loyal following which readily purchased and digested all he wrote as fast as he could out churn articles. What drew his readership was that he clearly knew his subject well, was sharply

honest, could explain complex technical matters in a readily understandable manner, and wrote in an entertaining style. In short he was authoritative, honest, and entertaining. This was a good thing as his no nonsense manner tended to aggravate his editors. However, they were smart enough to ignore the rough side of the uncompromising young author because they knew a cash cow when they saw one.

Crossman was widely experienced in the shooting sports and this first hand knowledge was his strength, which set him apart from his contemporaries. His skill with a shotgun, developed during his life long love of hunting, easily transferred over to the more organized sports of skeet and trap where he excelled. He was no slouch with a hand gun either but, oddly enough, he would make his biggest splash in the shooting sports in the rifle disciplines. He was very active in the establishment of the Los Angeles Rifle and Revolver Club and served for many years as its secretary.

Ned continued to write, hunt, fish, and shoot for the next 14 years. Being paid for what he enjoyed and did best, while all the while his fame grew, must have been immensely satisfying. His efforts were not solely confined to the field sports as he met and married Blanche Brown. Their only child Edward Bishop Crossman, called Jim for reasons unknown, was born on July 8, 1909. The family's domestic life was a bit out of the ordinary as the trio often left their base in Los Angeles to roam the wild back country of the west ranging from New Mexico to Oregon in pursuit of game, adventure, and material for Ned's columns.

Blanche Crossman was a woman far ahead of her day. Comfortable in the world of outdoor sport among men, she lost none of her femininity and fit just as easily fit into the accepted role for women of her day, that of home maker. Her talent as a modern day Diana was neatly balanced by a vocal gift. Her musical skill was such that she was a welcomed soloist in choir lofts about the city and was regularly heard over the air on several of Los Angeles' radio stations.

When the National Defense Act of 1916 was passed Ned may have taken a passing interest in it, as would any conscientious citizen, but he could have had no idea the impact the sweeping military law would have upon his future and that of competitive rifle shooting in the United States. Nine days after Congress declared war against Germany on April 6, 1917 General Peyton March, Chief of Staff of the Army, signed orders creating "The Small Arms Firing School of Instruction of Officers and Enlisted Men in Rifle and Pistol Shooting" with Lieutenant Colonel Morton Mumma as commandant. Here was a rare case of the Army fitting a round peg into a round hole, for Mumma was an experienced shooter, Distinguished Rifleman, a member of two Palma Teams, and an excellent rifle coach. Mumma appointed the capable Captain Smith Wildman Brookhart who, like Mumma, was on the Executive Committee of the National Rifle Association and a member of the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice, as Chief Instructor.

Mumma and Brookhart went about personally selecting the best marksman of the day for the staff. The Small Arms Firing School was not

designed to train instructors, not marksman; much the same as today's modern Army spends much of its instructional resources on 'Training the Trainer.' In recognition of his skill and knowledge as a marksman Crossman was ordered to active duty as a captain where he would join the great smallbore rifleman T.K. "Tackhole" Lee, long range specialists the likes of William Leusher and James Keogh and a host of others at Camp Perry, Ohio. Among those commissioned to be instructors of musketry was a young Harvard student by the name of Bernard DeVoto who had interrupted his studies to join the Army. After the war both he and Crossman would make their living and fame writing. DeVoto became one of America's great men of letters, a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his *Across the Wide Missouri*, and serendipitously enough the custodian of the papers of Mark Twain author of *Life on the Missouri* where he penned his keen observation of Muscatine, Iowa sunsets. The Small Arms Firing School was so successful that it has continued on as an institution at almost every succeeding National Match, where its attendance was often mandatory.

After the Armistice on November 11, 1918 the Army quickly demobilized and the staff assembled so carefully by Mumma and Brookhart was scattered to return to civilian pursuits. Crossman stayed in the Army while still penning articles for the popular outdoor press. He was recognized for his technical knowledge and writing skill and so, in 1919, detailed to Daytona Beach, Florida to serve under Lieutenant Colonel Glenn P. Wilhelm in checking the range tables of the 30 caliber M1 cartridge and determining its actual maximum range.

Crossman had taken away many lessons from his experience at the Small Arms Firing School, one of which was that the 22 caliber rifle was an excellent training tool for preparing men to use the service rifle. It was accurate, able to be used at short ranges and indoors, inexpensive, and was much less punishing a rifle than the Springfield 1903 which made it easier for the soldier to learn basic marksmanship skills. When the National Board for the Promotion of Rifle Practice resumed the National Matches at the newly constructed Navy range complex at Caldwell, New Jersey in 1919 it was all 30 caliber rifle and 45 caliber pistol.

Crossman, then stationed at the Infantry School of Arms at Camp Benning, Georgia, had been campaigning to establish a smallbore shooting program as a feeder for the service rifle competitions. While raising the consciousness of the shooting community to the smallbore game he took to the pages of *Arms and the Man*, in his position as an NRA Director, to solicit ideas from the smallbore community about the form a national smallbore match might take. As it is often said, one should be careful for what one wishes as it may be granted. On June 7, 1919 the National Rifle Association announced that Crossman had been selected to conduct a smallbore rifle tournament to coincide with the 1919 National Matches at Caldwell, just a matter the of a month and a half away. Faced with the daunting task of creating a national tournament out of nothing Crossman immediately enlisted the aid of a fellow Los Angeles Rifle Club member Captain Grosvenor L. Wotkyns, who was quickly detached from his post in California and sent east. He swiftly added several well known smallbore shooters to his staff but Crossman's ace in the hole was Captain E.J.D. Newitt, a

British citizen who an officer of that nation's Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs. Nesbitt had extensive experience in mounting the British smallbore championships at Bisley and would lend his expertise to the fledgling efforts in the United States.

There was added impetus for Crossman to create a smooth and successful national tournament. On May 27, 1919 the Executive Committee of Great Britain's Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs posted a letter challenging the National Rifle Association of America to once again compete for the Sir Thomas Dewar Challenger Cup. Competition for the Dewar Cup had been suspended during The Great War and, with the end of hostilities, the British were anxious to reestablish the match. The two shooting associations negotiated a set of rules requiring teams of 20 competitors to fire 20 record shots each at 50 and 100 yards with metallic sights in a time limit of one minute per shot, rules that have remained virtually unchanged to this day.

Crossman was able to publish the program and conditions for the first smallbore national matches in the June 28, 1919 *Arms and The Man*. He announced that the course of fire would be divided between prone events at 50 and 100 yards, in the British style, some long range shooting at 200 yards to simulate the 30 caliber matches, some matches open only to boys or the ladies, and some novelty matches requiring the breaking of frangible discs at various distances. Crossman made a conscious attempt to create a match program that would have wide appeal so as to attract as many shooters as possible for he wanted to build up the pool from which he might draw for Dewar team members.

Starting on August 4th, the smallbore shooters potted away and the events proved popular enough to remind high power coaches of the New Testament parable of the shepherd and the ninety and nine sheep. It was not uncommon for coaches to have to stop by the smallbore range to gather up a missing team member or two for the center fire shooting.

With one eye on the Dewar, Crossman was carefully watching all of the major players in the tournament. He selected the top 40 finishers in the Small Bore Individual Match, naturally a Dewar course, to participate in an elimination match over the same course of fire. When the scores from the two matches were totaled it was found that there was a tie for 20th place between Navy Commander H.D. Denny and the Dewar Team Captain and Match Director's wife, Blanche Crossman. The patience she displayed in putting up with her irascible husband was also on display on the firing line for she was a skilled shot with both center and rimfire rifle, as well as the shotgun, in a time when women of her social class might only occasionally engage in a little 22 caliber plinking at a picnic.

A shoot-off was scheduled to see who would occupy the final place, Commander Denny or Mrs. Crossman. The showdown was called off when it was realized that D.W. Price, a shooter of no mean skill who had finished higher up in the standings, had but one arm and used a forked prosthesis when shooting. The device was considered artificial support and barred under the rules requiring Price to withdraw and forestalling the shoot off. Thus Mrs.

Crossman entered into the shooting history books as the first woman to shoot on a United States international postal team.

The team assembled on the firing line, on Sunday morning, the 24th of August, and in three relays shot under almost ideal conditions. An hour after noon the match was over and when the scores were totaled and announced the United States had posted a 7,617 to Great Britain's 7,523. Newett, as the official representative of the British, was most effusive in his congratulatory comments.

With his mission seen to a successful conclusion Crossman could take great pleasure in both the team results and those of his wife. More importantly this international win would serve to fan the spark of the smoldering smallbore movement. Within days the National Rifle Association named a blue ribbon committee to standardize smallbore. What was just Crossman's dream in the early spring was now a growing reality in the late summer. Over the next years Crossman would be instrumental in developing smallbore rifle shooting as he served as match Director and Dewar Team Captain again in 1920 and 21, as the matches moved back to Camp Perry.

Crossman had been mustered out of the Army soon after his tour at Daytona when it was discovered that he had developed stomach ulcers, but his attachment to his days in the service were so strong that he would often use the honorific of 'captain' in the ensuing years. He returned to California where he would continue exhorting the shooting community to expand smallbore rifle competition. His first book, a trim paperback volume of just 100 pages, covering pistol, rifle, and shotgun shooting entitled *Gun and Rifle Facts* was published by

Outers Book Company in 1923. His efforts to increase competitive marksmanship were again recognized, as they had been in 1919, when he was called upon by the NRA to serve as a rifle coach as the 1924 Pan American Matches at Lima, Peru. The matches were a US triumph where Crossman played no small part.

Returning home he found that his extraordinary skills would soon be applied to police instruction. Two successive Los Angeles Chiefs of Police, James E. Davis and R. Lee Heath, were appalled at the poor quality of the force's pistol marksmanship and engaged Crossman to work on developing a program of instruction that would raise officer's skill to acceptable levels. He went to work with his typical intensity and within a year the Los Angeles department had a Crossman designed modern shooting range for training to service the new marksmanship course of instruction he had developed. As an ancillary benefit marksmanship became so fashionable within the department that the range was not only filled with trainees and officers qualifying but also a very popular 20 team police pistol league. The LAPD went so far as to emulate the military in offering pay increases to those officers who qualified as expert with the service revolver.

His vast store of technical knowledge, practical experience, and close proximity to the Los Angeles Police Department soon saw him branch off into a relatively new field of firearms forensics. He soon became associated with the Bureau of Forensic Ballistics, eventually dealing with over 200 cases. When his son Jim graduated from California Institute of Technology in 1931 he joined his

father in his practice. Soon after father and son joined forces Ned was again called upon to be part of an international shooting effort as the NRA representative and team leader for the US Rifle team at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

The Crossman family prospered and grew to be prominent and respected members of the Los Angeles community. Ned continued with his forensic work and was called as an expert witness on ballistics and explosives in several major criminal trials. His prolific writing filled columns in a wide array of outdoor magazines and he continued his affiliation with old friend, Thomas Samworth.

Crossman had become acquainted with Samworth when he was the editor of the *American Rifleman*. When Samworth struck out on his own in 1926 to open The Small Arms Technical Publishing Company, specializing in the arcane field of firearms technical reference Crossman was a natural choice to add to his stable of writers. Crossman joined such noted authors as Charles Askins, Sr., Roy Dunlap, C.S. Landis, Elmer Keith, Townsend Whelen, and Julian Hatcher. Crossman's inaugural effort for Samworth was *Small Bore Rifle Shooting*, published in 1927, the first major work of its type it was a natural extension of the work he had been doing promoting the sport. Sales were brisk and both parties profited. Samworth was very pleased with the work and commissioned Crossman to write a similar volume on centerfire rifle shooting, tentatively titled *Target and Sport Rifle Shooting*, which was so large that it could not be contained in one volume. It came out in two volumes as *The Book of the Springfield* in 1932, considered to be the final word on the subject of the

classic US military bolt action rifle and *Military and Sporting Rifle Shooting* which was released in 1932. Each of these works has gone through successive printings and have stood the test of time.

Jim had established himself and married Edith May Anderson in December of 1935, expanding the tight knit Crossman family with another lover of the outdoor life. Eventually they would have two children, Sylvia may and Alan Edward. The whole family often shared the quiet moments together before dawn as they settled into a duck blind anticipating a full bag. The Crossmans were living a very satisfying life until the 18th of October in 1938. Ned and Blanche had driven the 100 or so miles east from their home in Brentwood Heights to the Palm Springs area for a little dove hunting. No mean hand with a rifle she was also an excellent shotgunner. The previous year she took second place in the 1937 woman's skeet championship slipping behind in the shoot-off after tying for the championship. On the return trip Ned, at the wheel, was driving home through a blinding dust storm. In the limited visibility their auto was broadsided by a truck near Indio and Ned, unhurt, was horrified to see that Blanche had suffered a broken neck. Having survived the initial accident her prognosis was guarded. While it was hoped that her excellent physical condition, strong will to live, and expert medical attention would see her through, it was not to be and three days later she passed away.

Ned was disconsolate and, blaming himself for his wife's untimely death, slipped into depression. His friends noticed and gathered about him to try to draw him back into his everyday routine but the dark cloud which hung over him

would not blow away. Three months after the accident Ned closed the doors of the garage at his 142 South Rockingham Road home, slid behind the wheel of his car, shifted into neutral, set the brake, turned on the ignition, and calmly sat back awaiting the inevitable. His servants eventually heard the car running and drawn by curiosity found him slumped behind the wheel, passed out. They quickly shut off the engine and summoned medical help for the unconscious master of the house. Rushed to Santa Monica Hospital, he hovered in a coma near death for nearly a day before finally succumbing.

A diligent man, who wished to leave no loose ends, Crossman left a note addressed to Frank Nance, the Los Angeles coroner. They often had teamed up to settle matters at inquests and his note to his old colleague was to the point.

Dear Frank Nance: This is, of course, a suicide. No inquest is necessary, and for the sake of my family will you keep the matter as quiet as possible. Reason for suicide-the death of my beloved wife-Oct. 21, from the motor car accident which was my own fault. Best regards, Edward C. Crossman.

Townsend Whelen said of Crossman that, "...he has done truly remarkable work in the interest of the promotion of rifle practice. I know of no other shooters who w so well versed in the technique of the grooved barrel, or so familiar with the allied sciences."

Time had dimmed the memory of the man who can rightfully don the mantle of "Father of United States Smallbore Shooting." However his name and fame has been brought back to the attention of a new generation of competitors by the efforts of two smallbore rifleman and shooting historians, Paul Nordquist and Hap Rocketto when, in 2005, they petitioned the NRA Smallbore Committee

to name the plaque given annually to the high scoring member of the US Dewar Cup Team in Crossman's honor. Eighty six years after the first smallbore rounds went downrange in an organized United States national championship competition Olympian, World Champion, and former US National Prone Champion US Army Sergeant First Class Thomas Tamas walked across the stage in Hough Auditorium to accept the first Edward C. Crossman Memorial Plaque.

While was Jim recovering from the shock of losing both parents in so short a period of time he continued his career in forensics which would lead him to eventually be involved in investigating more than 600 cases. As a member of the California National Guard he was called to active duty when his unit was mobilized in 1941.

After the cessation of hostilities Crossman continued on in the Army and took part in competitive shooting as a member of various Army rifle and pistol teams, earning the Distinguished Marksman Badge in 1956. He was a regular presence at Camp Perry where, other than being a competitor, he served in various administrative capacities at the National Matches. Beginning as the Ordnance Officer he steadily progressed to Deputy Executive Officer and finally Executive Officer. During his military career he attended both Infantry and Ordnance schools as well as the Command and General Staff College. When he retired, in 1964, after 23 years of service, he was a colonel and Chief of the Weapons Branch of the Army Material Command.

Upon his return to civilian life he resumed his successful career as a firearms consultant. Four years after the murder of President John Kennedy Jim was called upon by independent investigators to try to replicate the shots fired by the assassin. After a week of practice in January of 1967 Crossman, with a duplicate rifle and scope, made six attempts at recreating the events of November 22, 1963. While he was not able to complete the shooting in the estimated time he did make two out of three hits on the target in half of his attempts. His opinion was that the rifle was not very accurate and that an element of luck played into the successful attempt on the president. The NRA called upon him in 1980 as an expert witness in its successful case against the Federal government to recover seven firearms confiscated from the NRA museum by the BATF.

Like his father before him, gained a national following as well as reputation as one of the countries leading firearms consultants and an authority on product liability matters concerning firearms and ammunition. The Association of Firearm and Tool Mark Examiners recognized his expertise in ballistic forensics when it selected him as a member of the first class of 'Distinguished Members" of that organization in 1973.

A member of the NRA since 1935 Crossman was elected to the Board of Directors in 1966, serving on the Executive Council, and remained a director until 1990. His vast competitive and administrative shooting experience lead him to be selected by the NRA, then the governing body for international shooting in the United States, as the team leader for the 1967 World Moving Target

Championships in Bologna, Italy. That gave him additional experience in the international arena to allow him to assume the role of assistant team leader to the larger US contingent to the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. He was also the director of the 40th World Shooting Championships held in Phoenix, Arizona in 1970.

The long time firearms editor of *Sports Afield* magazine authored many articles and opinions for other publications. While he wrote two well popular and well accepted books for the NRA in 1978, *Olympic Shooting* and the *NRA Deer Hunters Guide* he took particular pride in revising the Boy Scouts of America's *Marksmanship* merit badge book in 1967. In doing so he built upon the efforts of two NRA greats Executive Secretary C.B.Lister who wrote the original *Marksmanship* merit badge book 1938 and Executive Director Merritt Edson who revised it in 1953. Crossman's major contribution was to expand the scope of the merit badge program to include an optional shotgun course, perhaps in memory of his mother. The new volume was titled *Rifle and Shotgun Shooting* and featured new shooting requirements, up to date information, pictures and references.

Crossman remained quite active until slowed by a stroke. While recuperating and rehabilitating himself he fell and, eerily like his mother, broke his neck. This misfortune led to hospitalization at Mt. Vernon Hospital in Alexandria, Virginia where pneumonia developed and Jim Crossman passed away on February 26, 1994. He was laid to rest with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

The two Crossman men lead similar lives circumscribed by firearms, writing, the Army, and the outdoor life. Ned set a high standard, not only for Jim, but for generations of outdoor writers to follow in accuracy.

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