

SPORTS A FIELD

JULY, 1943 - 20¢

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For Soldiers and Sportsmen

By COLONEL TOWNSEND WHELEN



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Fifty-Seventh Year July, 1943 Vol. 110, No. 1

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Cover Painting by Walter Haskell Hinton



Published Monthly at 404 N. Wesley Ave., Mount Morris, Ill., By
SPORTS AFIELD PUBLISHING CO.
Phoenix Building, Minneapolis, Minn.

Address all communications for publication to the Phoenix Building, Minneapolis, Minn.

IVAN B. ROMIG, *Director of Advertising*, 444 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.
STANLEY B. ROGERS, *Advertising Manager*, 30 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.
Pacific Coast Advertising Representative—Ned Brydone-Jack, 714 W. 10 St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Sports Afield is a monthly trade and technical journal serving the sporting goods industry and sportsmen.
Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Mount Morris, Ill., July 12, 1935, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Published monthly on the 24th of each month. Sports Afield Publishing Co., M. J. Bell, President; I. B. Romig, Exec. Vice-president; C. W. Hart, Vice-president; W. F. Taylor, Secretary-Treasurer.
20c a copy, \$1.50 per year, \$3.00 for three years, in the United States and its possessions. Canada, \$2.00 per year, \$4.50 for three years. Central and South America, \$2.00 per year. Other foreign countries, \$2.50 per year.

Addresses will be changed as frequently as requested, upon notification at least four weeks before date of next issue, in order to be effective for next number. Immediate notice should be given of any delay in receipt of magazine. Please allow the customary 30 to 40 days before reporting non-receipt of the first copy due on a new or renewal subscription. Not responsible for return of unsolicited manuscripts, photographs or art work; enclose self-addressed, stamped envelope. Printed in U.S.A.



Start Sniping Subs!

By **ROB F. SANDERSON**



Headed for water. Photographed at Spoon River, Illinois.

Ernest Robson

Introducing the pastime of turtle shooting as an off-season sport that not only produces pot meat but also in some measure protects our young fish and game.

"POOH-POOH! Inland water submarines?" you scoff, telling me, "You must have got the wrong thermos bottle when you reached for the coffee."

O.K. then, read these specifications: watertight hull, inventories surface with periscopic eye without exposing hull, submerges or emerges suddenly at will, cruises surface at night, predatory and destructive in habit, preys on helpless victims only.

And in one blink we recognize the description of the ocean going U-boat and the inland water snapping turtle alike, or I'll make you a turtle's egg omelette.

Why do I nominate the common snapper as the worst predatory menace inland water hunters, fishermen and trappers are up against? Because in turtles' stomachs I've cut open, I've found small fish and frogs almost intact, partially digested chunks of large fish, remnants of bones from practically every fish or small mammal, and the pulpy forms of young muskrats and ducklings.

This American water poacher No. 1 has stolen stringered fish from me all the way from bass in Ontario to catfish on the lower Mississippi, and how many fish I might have caught had they not been eaten in minnowhood or their parent eaten before they were

born, I'm certain must equal the total I have actually caught. About the only thing I'll trust around snapping turtle water is a dead duck in the icy waters of a northern November!

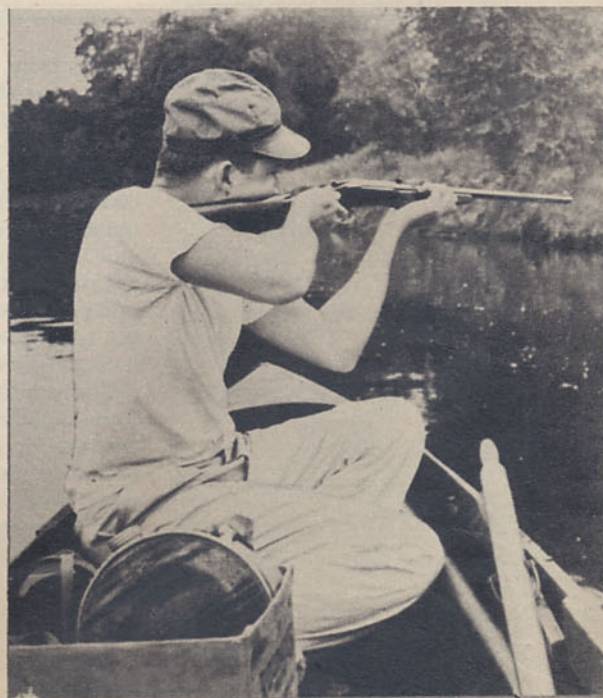
These facts make us all itch to get out and sink a few turtles ourselves. Trapping them, though effective if diligently pursued, is a tedious job. But the sport of plinking turtles has an allure about it that is magnetic to the instincts of every sportsman whom I've known to try it.

Summer shooting for turtles gives us the thrill of the hunt during an off-season of the year. You and I can get the pre-season practice we need before the leaves turn. We can practice up our shooting eye and trigger finger, and at the same time eradicate a conservation menace many times greater than the wickedest crow or hawk or average varmint.

With a closed season on woodchucks in our

resident county in Wisconsin, brother Tom and I spent most of our bass fishing time in popping at turtles.

Tom having a new .22 autoloader and ye pot shooter a new .22 Hornet with which we had practiced all spring in the kitchen shooting imaginary chucks, the fact that woodchucks were on the zoo list practically gave us dyspeptic symptoms. Not that chucks don't deserve protection—they dig a lot of holes to shelter small game when the anti-freeze begins to shiver.



Shooting in the half light just before sun-up, when turtles are abroad in biggest numbers and have the least suspicion.

Mind you now, the turtle isn't easy game. He's smart—and he's yellow clear through. His eyes and ears surpass your own for keenness. He's cautious and does most of his operating at night. We're talking about snappers now, both the rough hard shell and the smooth soft shell, not those little mud rascals that come right up to the boat and blink at you.

BOAT or shore hunting, you can give turtles the same medicine. Boats are often quieter (than this college Indian can stalk, anyway), more comfortable, and capable of accommodating multifarious equipment which tends to give the shore hunter a hall-rack complex. With a boat you are better able to retrieve shot turtles and can bait cast the pads and logs between volleys.

On the other hand, sneaking along shore is sometimes more convenient, and works well if the footing is quiet and you exercise great discretion in approach. It puts you higher above your target than when boat shooting. The higher the angle, the bigger the target, as the turtle is more wide than thick. Shore shooting provides a steadier rest than a boat, which if it doesn't wobble disconcertingly, is almost sure to drift or pivot in the slightest breeze.

Having cut my teeth on a Wisconsin river oar, I lean toward the boat method. Two men, two paddles, two

guns, and a down-wind or down-current drift make an ideal set-up. You will soon learn the preferred sun decks of the turtles in your neighborhood—logs, planks, drift piles, sand bars, protruding rocks and other homey places.

Rules of conduct are simple. Banging on the boat is the very poorest etiquette, especially if it is the other fellow's shot; and splashing is but slightly less discreditable. The slightest noise when a turtle is head-up and alert will send him swan diving into the deep.

Warmest weather is not, I have learned, the best weather. Ideal climatic conditions exist when the water is yet chilly but the sun is warm. At this particular context turtles sun indiscriminately at all hours of the day and are apt to be semi-sluggish and slow to jump from their ultra violet bath back into the disagreeably cold water. On days when both coolish water and warm sun prevail you will have the best chances to bag the big granddaddies weighing 30 pounds and upward.

In normal warm summer weather, early morning is the best time. Turtles cruise around at night looking for



Three soft-shells, which are slightly preferred for eating purposes by the Mississippi shanty-boaters, who catch them on lines and in nets.

prey and like to catch a bit of sunshine before diving down into the ooze for their daily snooze. Also, the biggest turtles come out onto shore drydock at night to lay eggs. For this reason you will often notice myriads of big turtle tracks on sandbars during the day, while the persons of the makers remain as obscure as ancient dinosaurs.

SO IF, after reading the morning paper, watering the lawn and puttering about the asparagus bed, you go on a turtle safari and don't use as much of your ammunition supply as you thought you would after reading this glowing account in Sports Afield, move your regular corn-toastie hour back and get out in your boat while the seats are still wet with the night dew, and chances are you will find as I did that chronology is one of the controlling secrets of filling your boat bottom with the big-shelled, amphibious tanks.

In earlier summer, sandbars are excellent shooting locations. Turtles come here to lay eggs. I remember shooting several large snappers one morning about sunrise as I walked down along an inshore bar to a favorite catfish hole I was bankfishing. Three were large female hardshells full of eggs. The eggs of the hardshell, by the way, look like ping-pong balls, have flexible shells, and I recall having eaten them as a lad. The taste, I remember, (Continued on page 66)



The writer with three turtles he "Horneted" before breakfast on an August morning. There is plenty of snapper meat here for a good stew.



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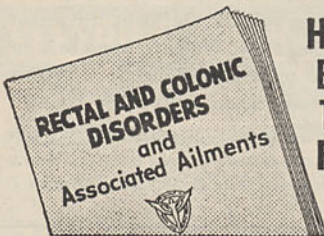
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START SNIPING SUBS!

(Continued from page 21)

has its own personality and makes the eggs of chickens seem very drab flavored indeed.

If you are not an early riser, perhaps one try will make you like myself, an early bird solely during turtle and duck shooting weather. Or if you are an incurable, as I once was thought to be, you will like the spring and fall hunting when high noon is an unsurpassing fatal hour for sunbathers of the turtle clan.

I remember running a fast outboard up the cold spring-rain swollen waters of the turbid Baraboo River with brother Tom as my gunning partner. We came up at full throttle to within 50 feet of the first old turtle, big as a prize hog, and as he stuck his cold-fogged reptilian head up from a lethargic snooze we shoved three bullets into him and scooped him into a landing net before his reflexes started scrambling for the water. We shot three more big babies and several small ones on a short stretch of river.

A landing net is a wise precaution and will save many turtles for you. Many times with its aid you will recover a thoroughly-shot turtle in the act of making an unconscious escape on his reflexes. As dead turtles usually fall off their perch and sink when shot, the convenience of a net is too obvious for discourse.

"Why retrieve shot turtles?" somebody asks.

Brother soup-and-stew-slupper of the great outdoors, your stomach hasn't really lived! Because, as "Ducky" Clemmons would tell you, there's seven-er-leven of the best kinds of meat you ever palated right there on that snapper." Ducky can show you just where the chicken, the pork, the veal, the beef, the mutton, and other varieties are.

This meat is surprisingly easy to get at. Simply slide a sharp, thin-bladed knife around the extreme outer under edge of the top shell. There's an easily severable cartilaginous joint here, and upon a complete circuit of the knife, the shells will part like castanets (after cutting a few belly muscles too). The meat lies readily visible against the upper shell. The edible tid-bits include the choice meat of the four legs, tail, and neck. Cut out, leaving the rest of the carcass intact, an operation requiring but a few seconds for each piece, then skin the meat and put it on ice for a couple of days. This latter admonishment is because the reflex

of the turtle's muscles keeps them tense for a very long time and a two or three-day roost in the refrigerator will make the meat more tender.

All snappers are edible, from the two or three pounders to the 50 pounders. Above 15 pounds, the meat sometimes gets a little stringy, although the flavor is still superb. As to hard shells versus soft shells, I found that the shanty boaters along the lower Mississippi had a slight preference for the soft shells, or "leather backs." As one floating nomad explained, "They tastes more like chicken."

Toss this richly flavored meat into the soup pot or stew pail with rice, vegetables, and anything else your imagination may creatively suggest. That snapper meat will cook into the choicest morsels you've ever downed. Contrary to my experience with crows, woodchucks and other flesh recommended to me as "edible," snapper meat alone proved surprisingly delicious rather than disappointingly distasteful.

As for guns and cartridges—any rifle you're used to. You can do long range telescopic work on turtles' heads, or you can use your stalking ability and sneak up to get them over open sights.

The .22 rimfire ventilates more turtles that swim away and live to swim another day than do larger calibers. Although I've seen some pretty dead turtles result from one .22 L.R.H.P., again I've seen them paddle off after a triple hit. Myself, I prefer the rimfire's big brother, the .22 Hornet. My recoveries for turtle soup with this gun are about twice the recoverables from my brother's .22 automatic, although the rapid fire of the latter weapon often strafed three or four reptilian dishpans off a log while I was shelling one.

If you've been one of those fellows who keep their gun in the attic all summer, or even if you're hep on crows or chucks—don't neglect to give turtle shooting a try this summer. You'll find you'll experience dozens of shooting thrills that you've been passing by each week, and besides enjoying unseasonal shooting and keeping in practice, you'll be doing conservation a mighty big service.

And the biggest satisfaction of all—introducing your friends to a new sport—is yours, too. How to do it? I invite them over to a turtle meat dinner. They begin with, "Just a small piece, please." But when the second helping comes by—watch them dig in. From then on, it's, "When do we go sniping for snappers?"

SURPRISE IN THE SAGEBRUSH

(Continued from page 25)

began to climb. Ted hit a track within a hundred yards, and started running. I could see a big cock bird ahead of him, streaking along the ground like a race-horse. Earl tried to keep up, but the dog and the chink left him far behind. Finally the cock flushed, well out of range.

Anyway, there were birds here. But our confidence took another blow when we flushed four more chinks out at the head of the draw, fully a hundred yards in front of us.

"They won't lie," Earl complained. "There's no cover for them in this

blankety-blank desert. Why, the dogs hadn't even struck their scent!"

I nodded in mournful agreement. We came out of the gully into a flat area of a hundred acres or more. It was surprising to see how high we had climbed. The valley farms lay cool and green far below.

For want of something better, we began working across the little plateau. Nearly in the middle of it the dogs started to make game. We had learned by this time that if we wanted to get any shooting we would have to sprint. We ran after the dogs as hard as we could go, and slid to a stop with our guns swinging up as the birds flushed. There were maybe a