

Chapter 15

INLAYING MADE EASY

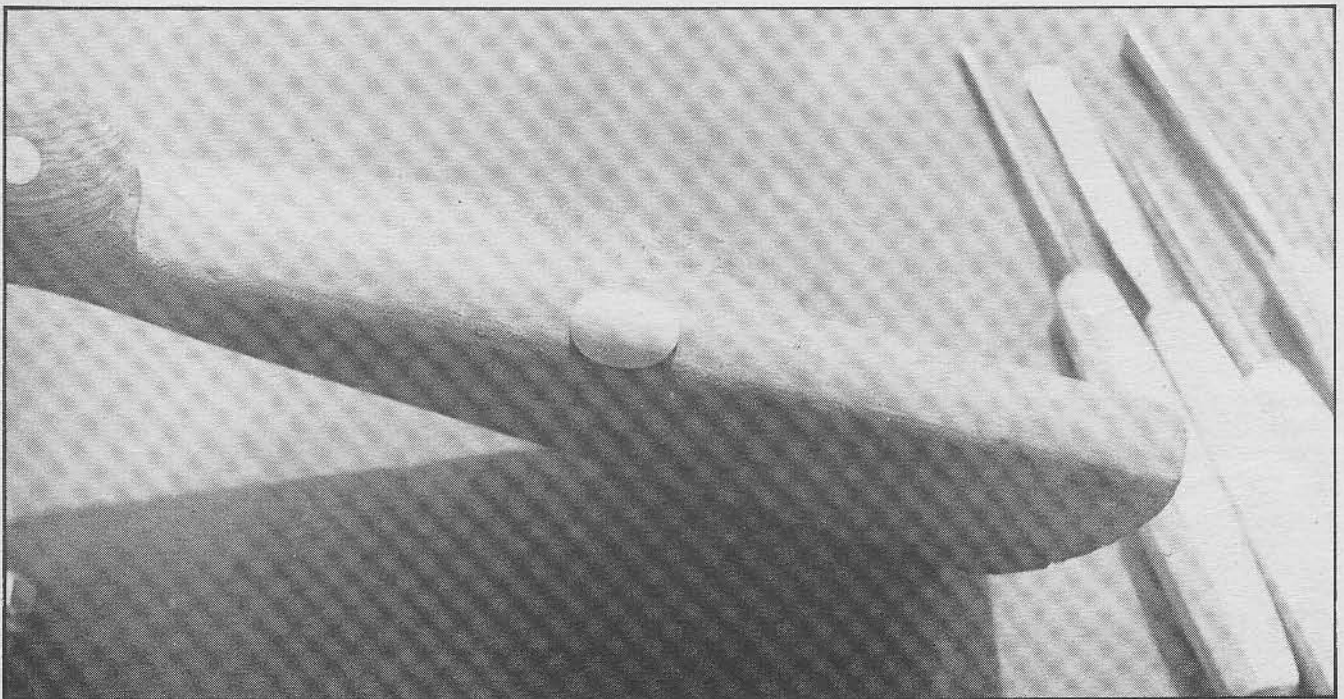
The Author Takes The Mystery Out Of This Means Of Adding Personal Touches To Firearms

VIRTUALLY since the advent of gunpowder, man has endeavored to decorate the stocks of his firearms with precious or semi-precious materials. More than two hundred years ago, Americans adopted the art of stock inlaying in the forms of patch boxes, initial plates, hex signs such as six-pointed stars, crooked hearts and even fish. All were inlaid into the wood of the stock just below the surface.

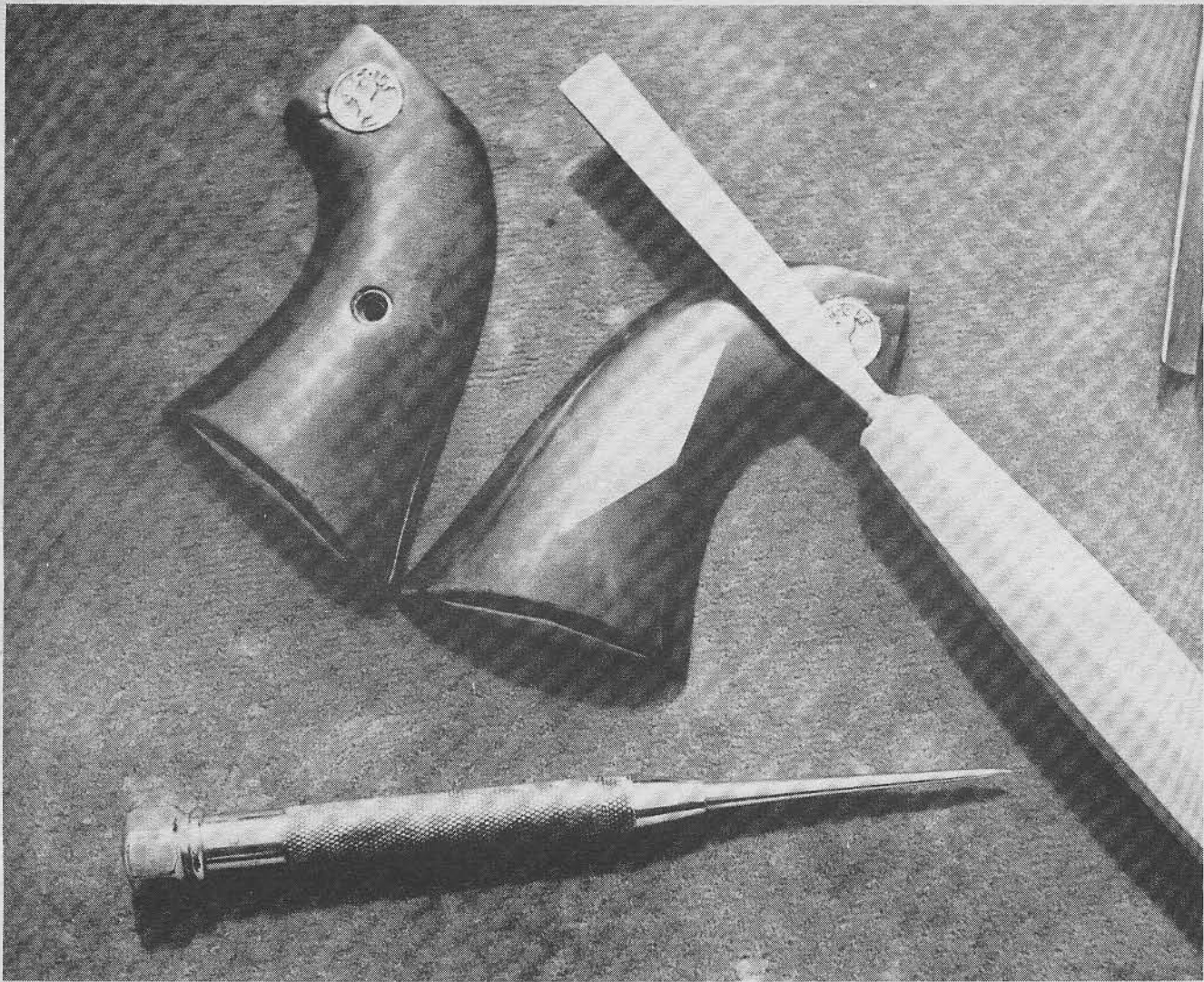
Instead of sitting in front of the glaring eye of the family television for relaxation, I enjoy selecting a few chisels and doing a little inlay work.

Admittedly, inlaying gold or silver initial monograms into a rifle or pistol stock — and doing it perfectly — is no job for the rank amateur. One must undergo several hours of apprenticeship in actual practice to become adept at handling the various chisels necessary. When finished, the

Once it has been inlaid in the wood, the initial plate should extend a little above the surface of the stock's wood, thus allowing for proper stock contouring. The plate usually will have to be bent to follow the wood's contour.







Author's experience has shown that tools needed for simple inlay jobs are minimal: wood chisels, scribe, lead pencil.

inlay has the appearance of being a finished part of the stock or grip wood. No ugly cracks or overcuts are apparent to the naked eye under close examination. The wood and precious metals are wedged into a perfect union, making the stock or pistol grip more attractive, at the same time, adding individuality.

The types of inlays that might be incorporated into a rifle stock or a pair of pistol grips are many and varied, but good taste in design is important. Take, for example, the various forms of initial or monogram plates. These may take the form of a shield, oval plate, a diamond, pointed oval or merely a square piece of silver or gold plate at least .025 in

thickness. The size of these monograms can make the difference between an inlay that is over-done and one that is in good taste.

About five-eighths-inch in overall length by about one-half-inch in width is the accepted size.

Some years ago, I made a set of burl walnut grips for the late Ward Bond of *Wagon Train* television fame. It was his idea to have each of these grips for the Colt Single Action revolver capped with sterling silver and the Colt medallions set into the upper portion of the grips. When finished, these grips had just enough decoration to set them apart. I made a second set for myself despite the fact that

moulding the silver and insetting the walnut perfectly was a sizable chore.

Inlaying a seemingly simple monogram plate into a rifle stock or a set of pistol grips can change the characteristics of that particular gun completely. It sets that gun aside as something special.

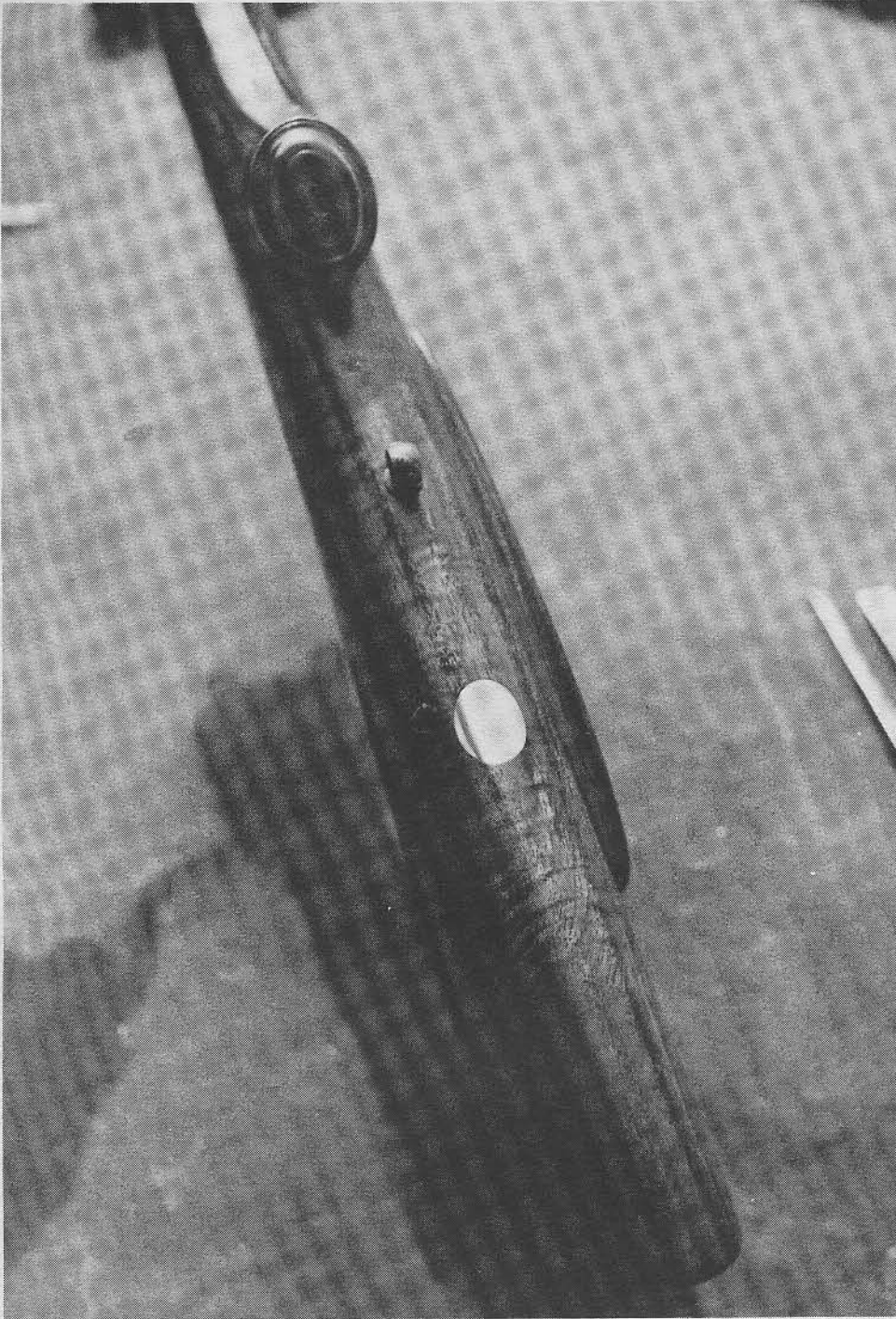
William "Wild Bill" Elliott of Western movie fame made himself a set of grips for an outstanding set of Colt Single Actions engraved by the late Cole Agee. These two revolvers had been covered completely in cattle brand engraving as only Agee knew how. This was one set of about four such matching pistols ever done by this famed engraver.

The grips made by Elliott were of a good grade of burl walnut, but were quite plain. He allowed me to inlay a simple initial plate into each of the grips. Of sterling silver, these plates were border-engraved for decoration, then Bill's initials were engraved in the center.

It does require a certain amount of artistic ability, but inlaying can be picked up with surprising quickness by anyone with infinite patience and skill with handtools. However, the complete stranger to this field of gun adornment should spend at least several hours in practice before attempting to work on one of his pet sporting arms. I would suggest an old piece of scrap walnut and sheet brass for this purpose. The brass is used in lieu of more precious gold or

In cutting the mortise for the metal inlay, chisels are held perpendicular to area being mortised out to accept the inlay. Properly accomplished, this should provide a perfect seat for the metal inlay; don't cut too deeply.





Monogram or initial plates may be utilized in various sizes and shapes, ranging from shields to oval designs.

sterling silver. From it may be cut the configuration of the initial plate desired, using a jeweler's fine-toothed saw.

Once the inlay has been cut from the material, whether practice brass, gold or silver, it is smoothed to final contour with Swiss needle files. All edges must be filed to a slight taper downward to permit the inlay to slide into the mortise when cut.

The inlay material is placed on the stock or pistol grip in exactly the position desired for the finished inlay. Using a sharp scribe, outline the complete inlay on the wood, making certain that the scribe is held in a perfectly perpendicular position.

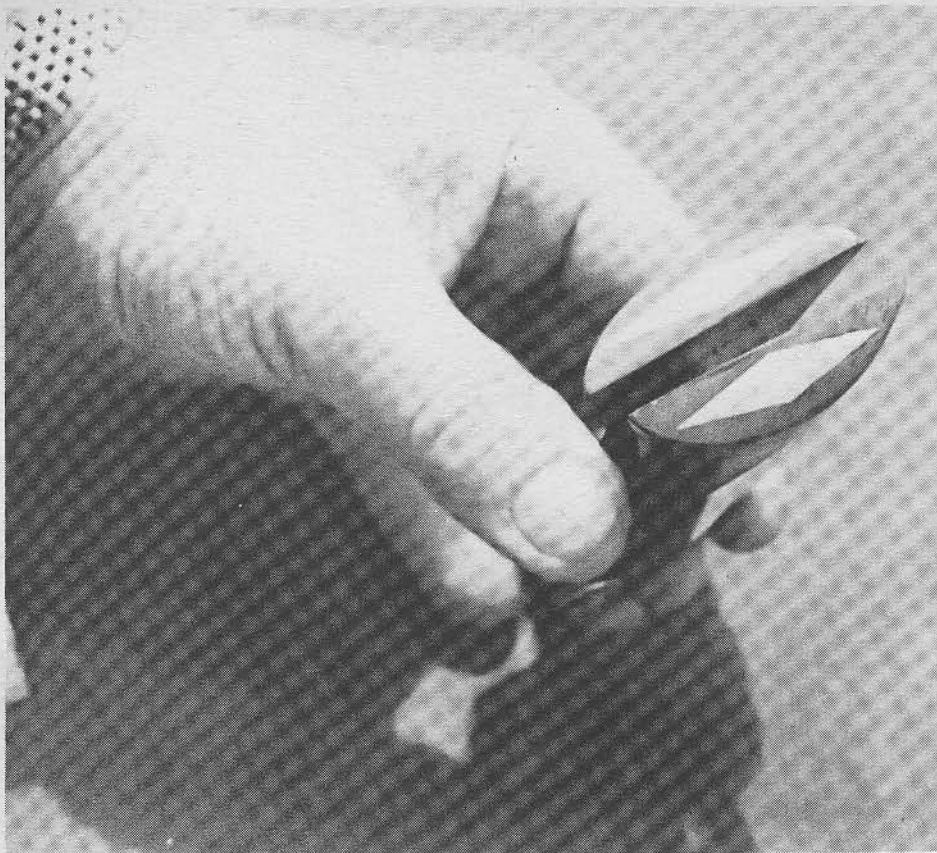
The chisels needed are few, the number depending upon the configuration of the inlay design, but they should be of



Butt of walnut grip is capped with silver. Technique required for shaping the silver prior to inlay in the wood is discussed in the text. It is not a simple process, but can be learned quite fast.

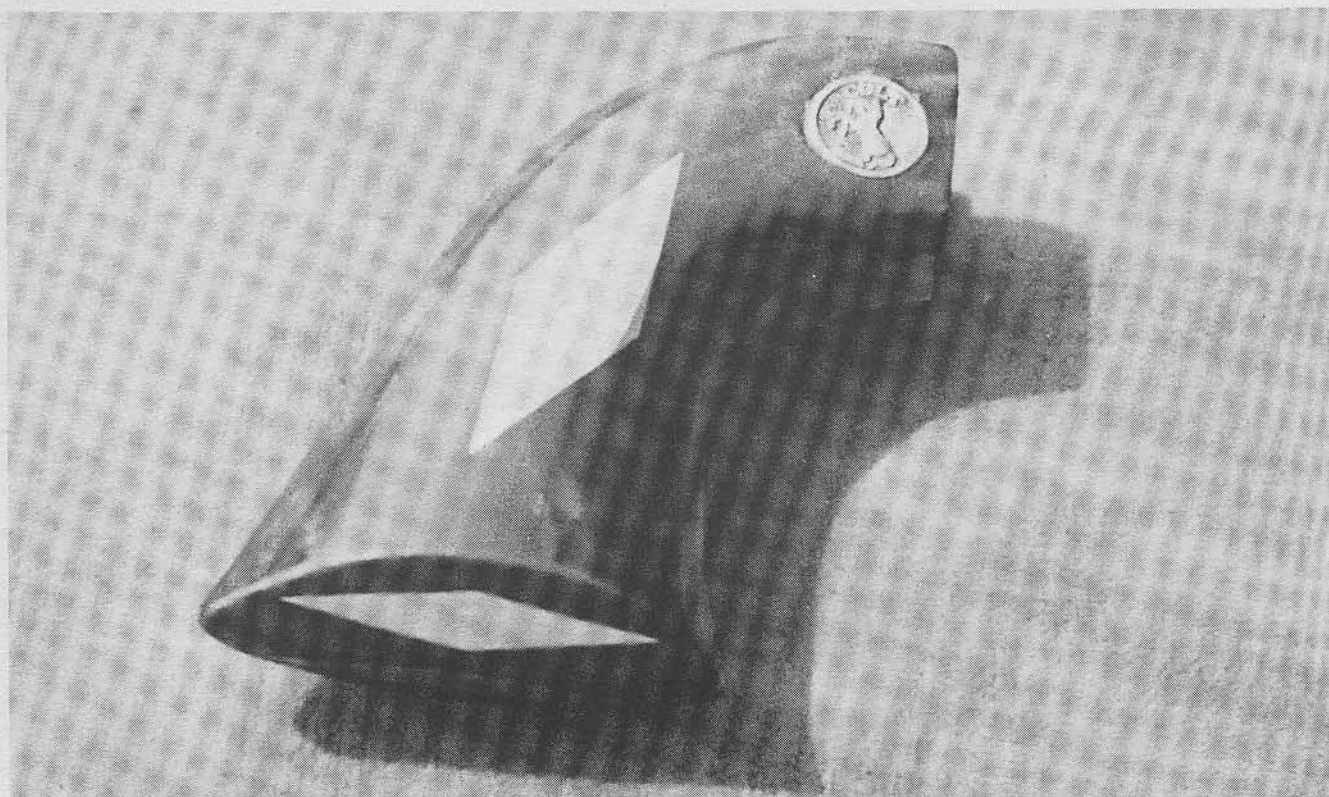
The late Western film star, Bill Elliott, did the inlay work on these grips; ivory ones were made by Bish.



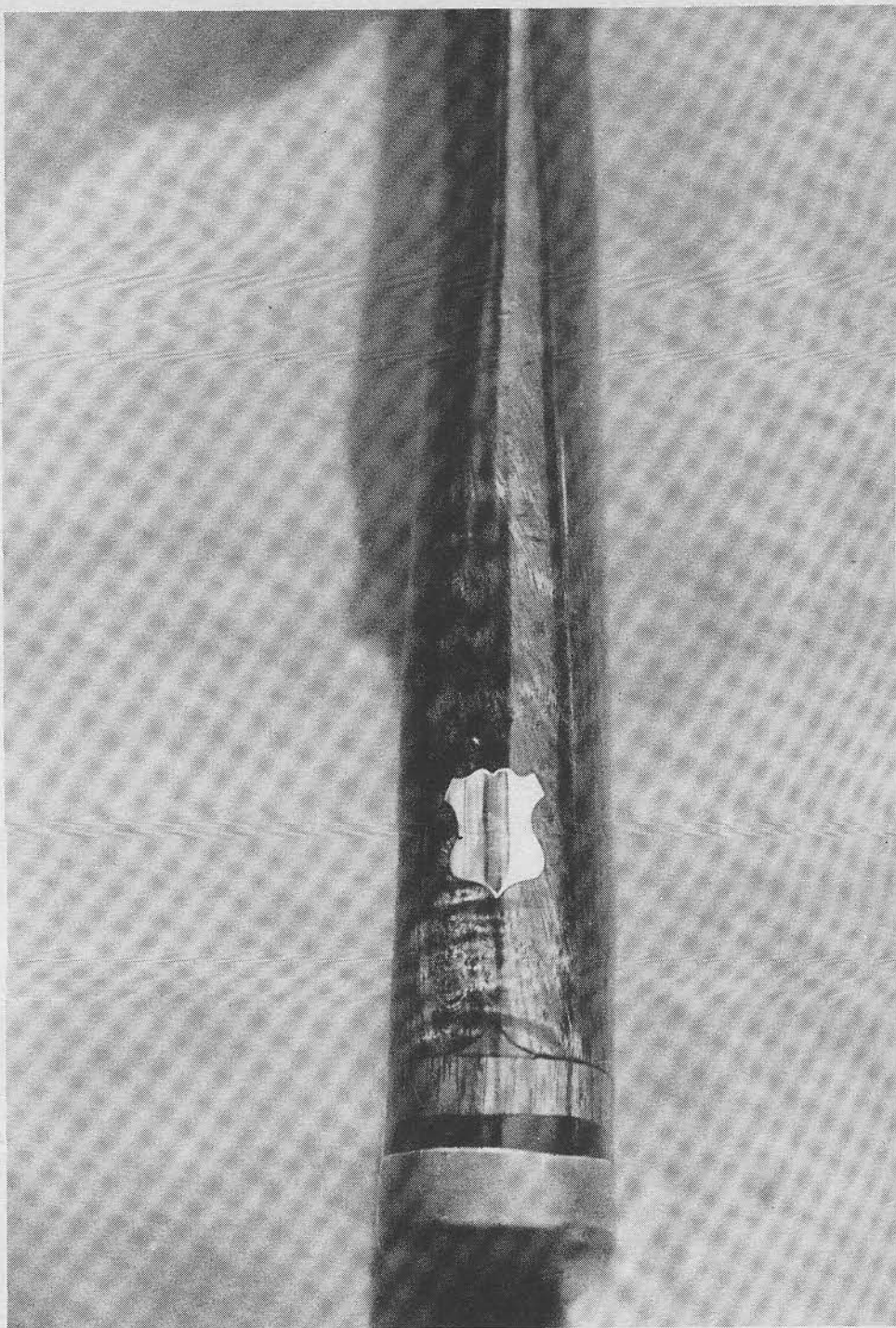


As explained in this chapter, the butts of revolvers can be inlaid with various designs; author chose diamond shapes.

Silver lozenges or diamonds have been laid in the butt of this one-piece grip as well as on the sides for decoration.



Making the required cuts to inlay a shield can prove a challenge to the novice. One should start with simple shape such as an oval on a first try.

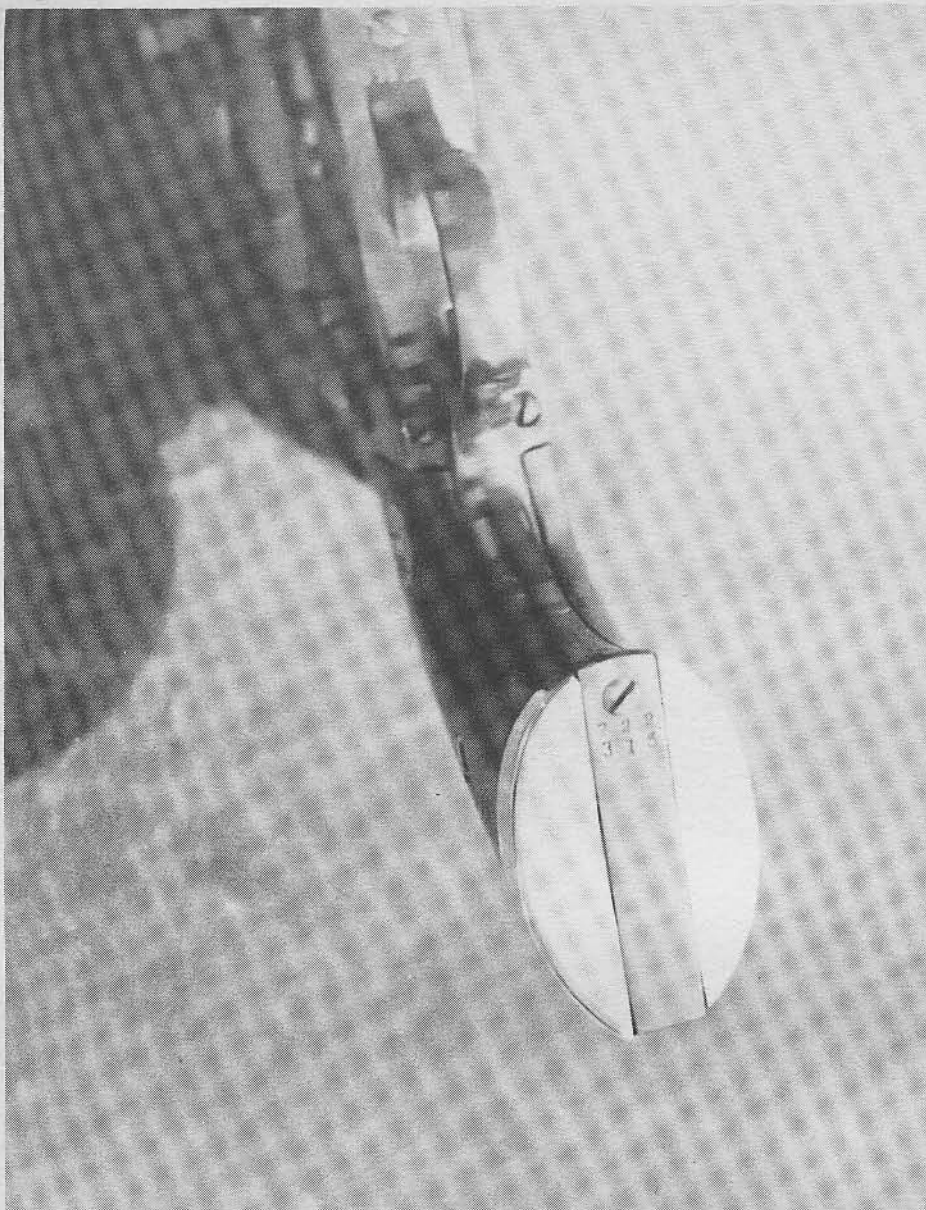


good quality, kept razor-sharp and held in a perpendicular position throughout the entire inletting process. In other words, the mortised section to accept the metal inlay must be cut with great precision to accept the inlay in a snug, slide fit throughout its entire contour. To cut the mortise oversize results in a sloppy-looking job.

With the inlay cut to the design you desire, the edges filed until the inlay is symmetrically perfect and the mortise precisely cut, the only chore left is to install the inlay into the mortise. For this, use a thin coating of epoxy cement to secure the metal in the mortise. When the epoxy

has hardened, it should be dressed to match the contour of the stock or pistol grip.

The usual position for an initial plate on a rifle stock is either on the rounded bottom portion of the stock, half-way between the toe and pistol grip section or about two inches in from the heel of the stock. Regardless of which position you might prefer, both are rounded surfaces, while the metal inlay — at this point — is still a flat piece of metal. To be installed onto a curved surface, it must be bent in length to conform exactly to the stock's contour. This bending is done prior to outlining the inlay position on the stock with



Silver-capped grips are most difficult to make, requiring extensive knowledge of metal shaping and soldering as well as technique of final inlaying.

the sharp scribe. Otherwise, the result is a mortise that is too large for the metal inlay.

The inlay is bent to the contour of the stock section, its outline scribed on the stock and the mortise to accept the inlay then is chiseled out.

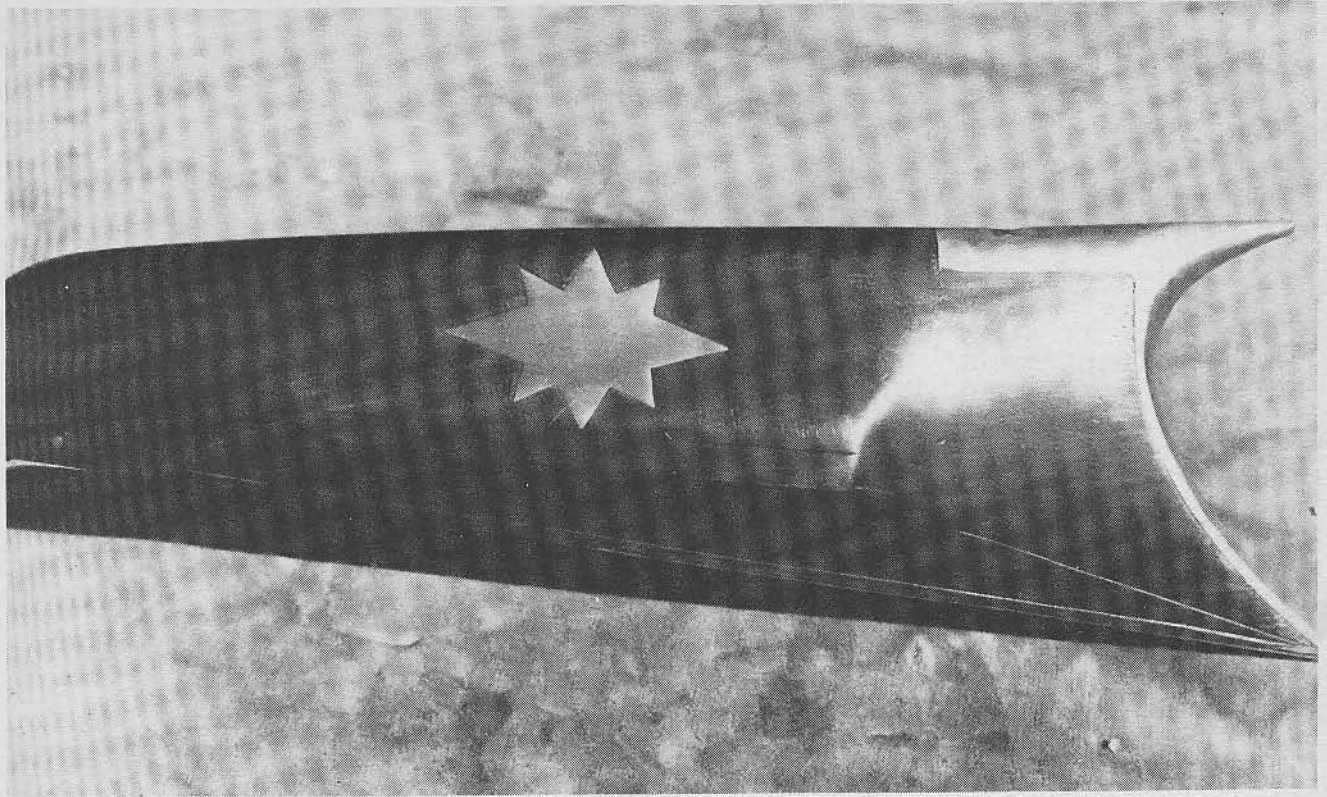
Mix a small portion of epoxy cement thoroughly, then coat the interior surfaces of the mortise with the epoxy. Now take a sharp scribe or awl and scratch the underside of the metal inlay over the entire surface. This will provide a far better surface to which the epoxy cement can adhere. Coat the scratched surface of the inlay with epoxy, press tightly in place in the mortise, then allow it to cure and harden for at least twenty-four hours.

Make absolutely certain that the mortise is cut only deep enough to accept the major thickness of the metal inlay. Make allowances for at least a small portion of the inlay to protrude above the surface of the wood. This will allow for

final filing to the exact stock contour after the inlay has been epoxied into the wood and the epoxy completely cured.

After a twenty-four-hour wait for the epoxy to set and harden, use a fine-tooth ten-inch mill bastard file to dress the metal inlay down to the exact surface of the wood. Care must be exercised that the file doesn't slip and cut gashes into the stock wood. Take your time and dress the inlay until it is flush with the wood surface. This accomplished, wrap a piece of 300-grit garnet paper around your file. Smooth up the inlay with this paper, until all file marks disappear from the surface. The final step is to touch the inlay to a loose cloth buffer treated with white buffing compound. This will give the inlay a higher luster.

Installation becomes more of a task with a completely finished stock. More caution must be taken to avoid marring the finish of the stock. When the inlay is completed, it can be engraved with your initials by any engraver.



This unique star-shaped inlay was used extensively on the Kentucky-type rifles of two centuries ago. It is simple for the beginner, as only straight cuts are required in the mortise. (Below) Ornate patchboxes and hex signs were used on Kentucky and Pennsylvania rifles of two hundred years ago. Note precise inletting of this replica's inlays.

