

SHOOTING THE BREEZE Berdan's sharpshooters

During the War Between the States, our first units of special forces were formed. Founded by Col. Hiram Berdan, the First and Second U.S. Sharpshooters were assembled primarily for scout and sniper applications against the Confederacy.



These were the first United States soldiers to wear green uniforms in place of the continental blue. Unlike the regular infantry whose uniforms were designed to attract attention, Berdan's men needed to blend in with the landscape. Even the buttons on their coats were made out of black Goodyear rubber instead of brass so as to not betray them by sunlight reflection. Regular infantry were armed with the 1861 Springfield musket, while these "sharpshooters" were supplied with the 1859 Sharps breechloading rifle made in Hartford, Connecticut.

These rifles used .52-caliber bullets in paper cartridges, which were inserted into the breech and as the shooter closed the action, the breech block neatly sliced off the rear of the paper cartridge, exposing the powder to the chamber. After priming with a percussion cap, one was ready to fire. While not nearly as quick of a reload as the later self-contained metallic cartridges, these were a major improvement over any muzzle-loading design. This firepower proved to be a force multiplier should they need to engage mul-

multiple targets as they were nearly always outnumbered and behind enemy lines.

In 1861, training and qualifications were held.

All men in the outfit had to be able to place 10 consecutive shots, all fired from the off-hand position into a bullseye 200 yards away. Their group could measure no larger than 10 inches wide, or to say it another way, their hits could land no farther than five inches away from dead center of a 10-inch bullseye or they did not make the cut.

Now I'm not sure I know many modern day riflemen who could do that even with our contemporary equipment, much less black-powder rifles with open sights. In my experience we have come to rely upon our bench rests and bipods just a little too much these days. If you're up for a challenge, this is definitely worthy. See if you can keep 10 shots in 10 inches at 200 yards firing offhand.

Any way we can improve our marksmanship skills is a worthy endeavor. You may never need to employ your skills as Berdan's sharpshooters did, but you never know what kind of opportunity you'll get in the woods. Are you going to be qualified enough to make those tough shots? Practice up. Could you make the cut in the Berdan challenge?

Are you a history buff? Write to us at shootingthebreezebme@gmail.com!

Dale Valade is a local country gent with a love for the outdoors, handloading, hunting and shooting.



Contributed photo

Bailey McCracken dominated in the girl's cutting competition in Hermiston. She's pictured here at a previous barrel racing competition.

Grant Union dominates at rodeo competition in Hermiston

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

Grant County youth cleaned up at the Hermiston High School Rodeo competition April 16-17.

Grant Union's Sam McCracken and Bailey McCracken took the top spots in the boys and girls cutting competitions.

Cow cutting is an equestrian competition where a horse and a rider demonstrate before a panel of judges both the horse and rider's ability to handle cattle.

Sam McCracken finished with a time of 73, while Bailey McCracken finished with a time of 71.

Another Grant Union student, Jack Strong, placed third in bull riding. Strong finished with a score of 39.

Sarah Clark participated in poles

and barrels and had a nice pole run in the first round.

Sam McCracken brought home the state title in cow cutting at the Oregon State High School Rodeo State Finals in Prineville. In June, he finished in the top third in reined cow at the National High School Finals Rodeo in Guthrie, Oklahoma.

Last year, Bailey McCracken took first place in average time in barrel racing. She finished with an 18.07 in her first go-round and an 18.10 in her second.

Clark finished with the top 10 in pole bending, a timed event where a rider runs a weaving pattern around six poles arranged in a line. Clark finished with a 22.17.

The next Oregon High School rodeo will take place in Prineville April 30 to May 2.



Contributed photo/LindseyWyllie.com

Sam McCracken chases down a cow at the state competition over the summer. McCracken took the top spot at the boys cutting competition in Hermiston.

Grant County to have high school sports but with different guidelines

Blue Mountain Eagle

Regardless of whether the state moves Grant County to either the high or extreme risk levels, the county will continue to have high school sports this week.

Grant Union Principal Ryan Gerry said the high school would have some new guidelines to follow for sporting events if they were to move into high or extreme risk levels.

In the extreme risk level, the state's guidelines cap attendance at 50 people. The Oregon Health Authority allows outdoor full-contact high school sports.

In the high risk level, outdoor full-contact sports are allowed with a submitted plan.

According to OHA's sector-specific guidelines, congregate homeless sheltering, youth programs, child care, K-12 schools, higher education, drive-in operations and current collegiate, minor League, semi-professional and professional athletics operate under sector-specific guidance for all risk levels.



Eagle file photo

Grant Union/Prairie City Prospector Jordyn Young hits the ball in the second-round state playoff game against Lost River in 2019.

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SPORTS SCHEDULE

Wednesday, April 28
Grant Union/Prairie City softball vs. Pilot Rock, 2 p.m., 4 p.m.

Thursday, April 29
Grant Union golf @ Heppner Invite, Willow Creek CC, 11 a.m.
Prairie City, Long Creek, Grant Union track and field @ Burns Invitational, 4 p.m.

Friday, April 30
Grant Union golf, pre-districts @ Birch Creek Golf Course, 11 a.m.
Grant Union dance team, 6 p.m.

Saturday, May 1
Monument track and field @ Condon, 11 a.m.
Grant Union/Prairie City baseball @ Joseph in Enterprise, 1 p.m., 3 p.m.

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