



ELMER MERRIFIELD KEITH (1899-1984)

■ It is with a feeling of deep, personal loss and sadness that we report the passing of Elmer Keith on February 14, in Boise, Idaho. He would have been 85, March 8.

Elmer had been almost totally paralyzed by a stroke some two years ago. With typical Keith grit and guts, he fought his last fight with the defiant grin and the Scottish twinkle in his eyes that had become his hallmark. He died as he lived—a fighter. He knew no other way.

I was privileged to share not only a professional relationship but a close friendship with him for 23 years, his tenure with *Guns & Ammo* magazine. I treasure the warm memories of those occasions when we shot and hunted together; sharing a campfire and a bottle of “highland dew.” There would be the inevitable exchange of views on everything from life in general to big-bore rifles. You really get to know a man that way.

If, as sages claim, sophistication is the art of simplicity, the rugged, gentle cowpuncher from Salmon, Idaho, was a sophisticated man in the purest essence of the term.

He had a deep and abiding faith in God, a fierce pride in himself and a tenacious dedication to his beliefs. He didn't give a damn what any detractors might think; he didn't take kindly to criticism. He was a true individualist—a free spirit in keeping with the big sprawling country where he spent his life. These are rare qualities today. But these same qualities were a common denominator in the makeup of the Western outdoorsmen he was raised among—the individualists with whom he chose to “ride the trail.”

Elmer was the last of an era we will never know again. He was a piece of true Americana.

His life was never an easy one. He was a man of the soil who loved good friends, his guns, horses, his unshakable beliefs and always, always, the truth as he saw it.

But as with most unique men who stand apart, his greatest love was his wife, Lorraine—“Mom,” as he always fondly referred to her. They shared their joys and sorrows for 58 years, and they experienced an abundance of both. “That's what life is all about,” he once told me.

Elmer was laid to rest overlooking the scenic grandeur of the Lemhi Valley he loved so much. An honor guard of old friends fired a salute with .44 Magnum handguns. The haunting strain of a Scottish dirge skirled over the countryside. The bagpiper, a kilted Highlander clad in tartan regalia, stood at ghostly attention in the swirling fog atop a nearby hill. Elmer would have really liked that.

To the host of friends and readers who wrote to him to convey their best wishes during his illness, we at *Guns & Ammo* say simply, thank you. You helped keep a stout heart beating during a very difficult period.

So the clock strikes and the little cowboy with the big hat, big cigar, big grin and the big guns moves on. He leaves behind a precious legacy for all of us here who knew and worked with him. He also left behind a pair of size five cowboy boots. As small as these are, no one will ever come along who can fill them.

The mold is shattered. There will never be another Elmer Keith, but he will not be forgotten. He was the stuff that legends are made of.

—Thomas J. Siatos