



In Bounds

By Jack MacKenzie, CGCS
North Oaks Golf Club

"License to kill gophers by the government of the United Nations. Man, free to kill gophers at will. To kill, you must know your enemy, and in this case my enemy is a varmint. And a varmint will never quit - ever. They're like the Viet Cong - Varmint Cong. So you have to fall back on superior firepower and superior intelligence. And that's all she wrote." - Carl Spackler, Caddy Shack

In many, many Turf Management Centers across our great state, there is a tally board denoting the number of "varmint" taken by trap or other means off of the golf course. Long ago, before wall-to-wall irrigation and a golfer demand for higher maintenance, thirteen stripe gophers were abundant. As were today's primary rodent, the lowly blind mole. And we cannot forget to mention the infamous pocket gopher. Historically I have had battles with each of these creatures.

While a youth I would carry my Sheridan Blue Streak pump air rifle across my lap as I cruised the fairways upon an F-10 seven-gang fairway mower. My gun had the capability of dispatching creatures up to the size of a woodchuck, but was most effective against the ferocious ground squirrel. With keen eye and determination I slaughtered many of my alma mater's mascots, and made White Bear Yacht Club a safer place to play golf. However fun the sharp shooting was, my favorite four-footed quarry was the ever-elusive mole.

Long before the safer hoop traps entered the market, the tool of choice to kill moles was a spring trap. Once set off, six very sharp prongs would be driven into the unsuspecting creature, piercing its flesh and pinioning it to the ground. The captured prey would then be harvested as proof for the "tally" board. I also learned of another, faster means to dispatch my enemy from John Steiner, Superintendent at the White Bear Yacht Club.

You see, Johnny was a real man who carried a piece at his side during the wee hours of the morning, just in case, if you know what I mean. And one day he demonstrated the BEST way to kill a mole. After parking our Cushman along side of an active mole trail he whispered to me the secrets of real mole combat.

"You see Jake (*Jake was a nick name I had picked up 'back in the day'*), the mole is a very odd mutha creature. The bastards are blind. Without the ability of sight they have trained their auditory glands to pick up all sounds. Even the soft rhythm of your heartbeat through the soles of your shoes can be heard. Thus we wait upon the seat of a Cushman, or other such vehicle, for the unwary filthy beast to renew excavation.

And once that soil slippery varmint makes

his move we whack him, with a little lead pill to the skullcap."

Much to my amazement we waited in silence until a mound of soil appeared moving beneath the cart. Slowly and silently John removed the chrome plated 45-magnum pistol from his hip sling. Taking aim just feet above the tunnel he pulled the trigger. Blam, blam, blam, blam, blam! Bullet holes riddled the area of activity.

John then looked up at me with an odd gaze in his eyes and said, "And that, my friend, is how we kill moles at the White Bear Yacht Club!"

Not unlike John's style, I also used a firearm to eliminate some pesky animals off of North Oaks Golf Club. A couple of years ago a flare gun pistol was delivered to my office, complete with a box of 50 screaming/report cartridges. The weapon was to supplement my Golden Retriever in the discouragement of geese from the course. It worked well; a loud screaming wail would be emitted from the projectile followed by a spectacular blast.

My new toy went everywhere with me for the first several weeks. One

day I happened upon an active pocket gopher mound. Thinking my furry friend needed a little wake up call, I excavated the mound down to the tunnel opening. Then I placed the barrel of the gun into the hole and pulled the trigger, quickly placing my foot over the hole to prevent the missile from flying back into my face. To my enjoyment, I could hear the flare travel deep into the bowels of

the earth and then blow up. What fun!!!!

It wasn't a week later that my assistant and I were on our nursery green discussing a recently dug mole burrow under the green surface. Much to our surprise the tunnel began showing signs of activity. Reaching into my toolbox I grabbed the flare gun and a mighty cartridge. Carefully I uncovered the tunnel about three feet behind the varmint, lined up the gun and released the projectile with the intent of giving the said perpetrator a flaring hemorrhoid.

My assistant and I cried with sophomoric glee as the rocket screamed down the cavity just below the ground's surface. However, our giddiness quickly changed to ruckus laughter when the missile blew up, sending a 4-inch square of sod right smack into the middle of my forehead, where it stuck with resolve. We laughed until tears came to our eyes.

Ground squirrels, gophers and moles, oh my! There sure is a lot more to the management of fine turf than just laying sod green side up!

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- Carl Spackler, Caddy Shack*

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Jeffrey Hartman
952-443-2958

GOLF DIVISION

8011 Bavaria Road
Victoria, MN 55386