

# Gunleather:

## Sewing and Finishing the Holster

by Will Ghormley

If you've been following along we're ready to stitch-up the holster. Before we do that though, There are a few finishing touches we need to add. First we need to burnish the edges of the leather. With a disposable foam brush, wet a section of the edge of the holster. With a piece of canvas rub the edge until it's rounded and smooth. If you don't have any canvas, use the inside of an old pair of jeans. Rub the edge of the leather until you can feel the heat of friction. Wet down another section of the edge and burnish that too. Work your way around the holster. Burnish the edges of the loops also.

Now we need to oil the leather front and back. An old-timer once told me that olive oil was the best leather oil. You would probably find plenty of folks who are willing to disagree, but that's what I use. I apply extra virgin olive oil with one of those disposable foam brushes - and No! I don't know what makes it extra virgin. It's not as oily and it soaks into the leather better, plus, it's great for sauteing onions in.

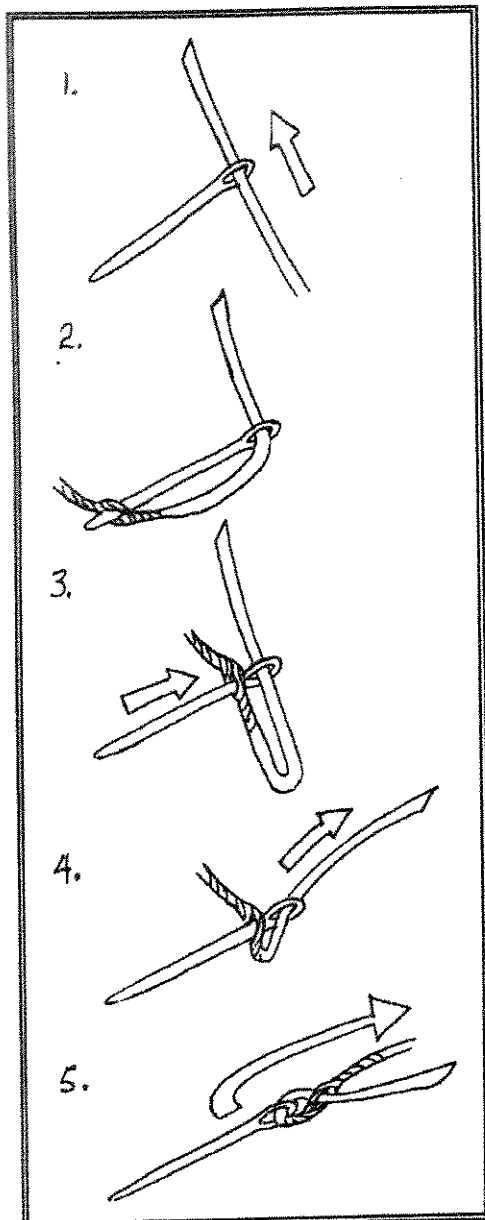
Put plenty on, but wipe off any that is left standing. After this has soaked in for about an hour you can apply the edge dressing. This is done with the smallest disposable foam brush you can find. Every edge should get an even coat, even the edges of the loops in the skirt.

Now we are ready to start stitching. When I started making holsters I used one of those all-in-one sewing awls with the spool of thread that fed out of the handle. I had it since I was a kid. Don't use one of those! Thank God Doug Fulkerson gave me some tips on sewing.

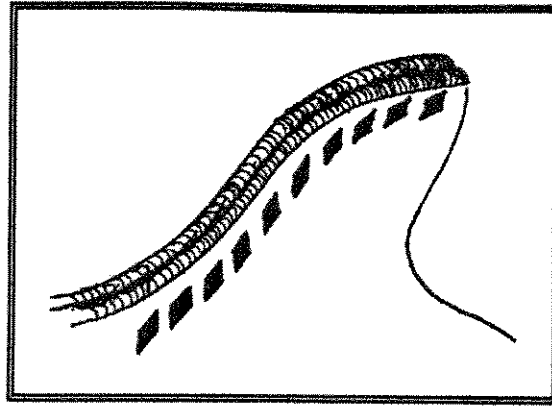
I'm going to ride off at an angle here for a second, please bear with me. Doug makes a fine line of leather goods and markets them through Red River Trade Company. We're in direct competition making leather for Western Action Shooters. I don't know of any other group of people where you can find folks who compete for business, yet are willing to share trade secrets and helpful tips so their competitors can improve their product. Not everyone is so cordial, but I know for a fact, if you need to know anything about the sport of Western Action Shooting, you won't waste any time finding someone who is willing to share everything they know.

Doug and I have spent a lot of time discussing leather goods. I don't know how much he has learned from me, but my product has improved because of what he has taught me. One of the tips he gave me was the best way to sew leather. Now I'm going to pass it on to you.

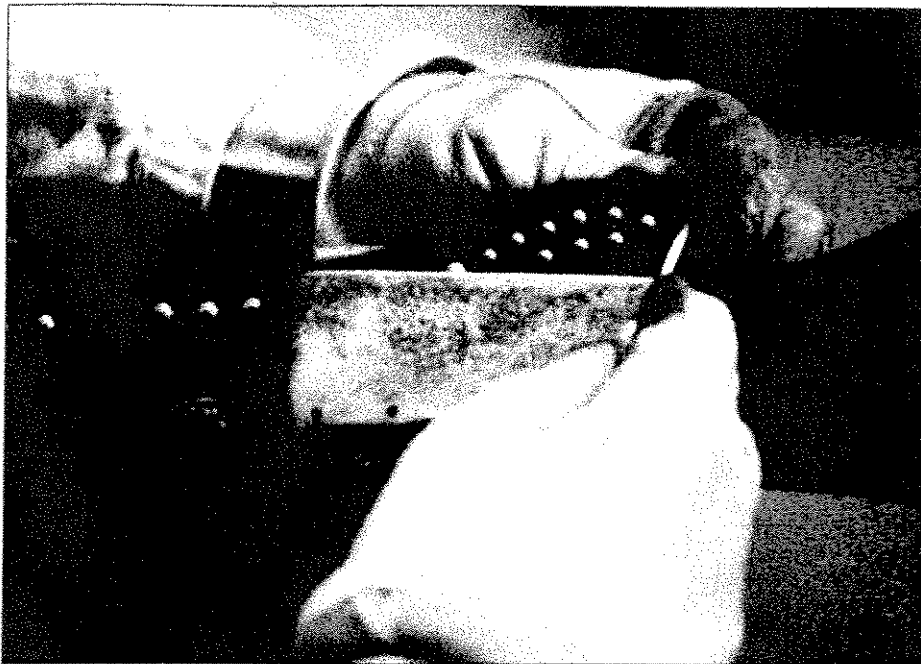
We'll start with threading the needle. There is nothing worse than getting almost done sewing the main stem of your holster and running out of thread, two holes short of the end. Grab your spool of artificial sinew and reel off a hank as long as your outstretched arms. This will be more than enough unless you have really, really short arms, or are making a holster for a Buntline Special. Believe me, it's better to waste sinew than to run short. Now you're ready:



1. Run the end of the sinew through the needle until it's as long as the needle.
2. Stick the needle through the long end of the sinew at the tip of the needle. It helps to twist the sinew where the needle will be passing through.
3. Slide the sinew down the needle to the eye.
4. Pull the excess sinew through the eye using the short end of the sinew.
5. Pulling on the long end of the sinew slide the sinew off the needle to lock it in place. With your thumb and fingers, twist the sinew together to help keep it from slipping loose.
6. Repeat these steps with the other end of the sinew.

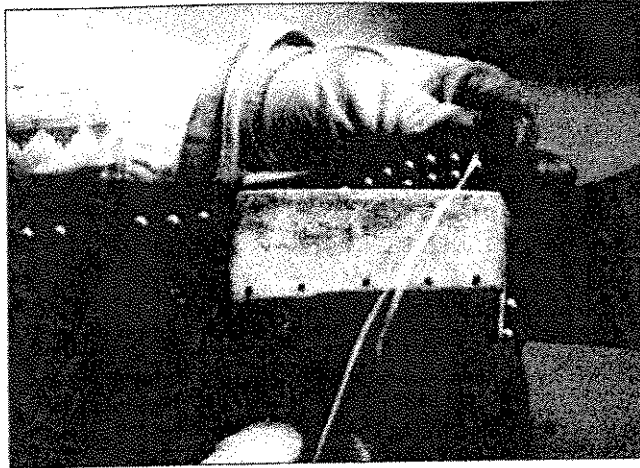


*How to angle the awl holes*

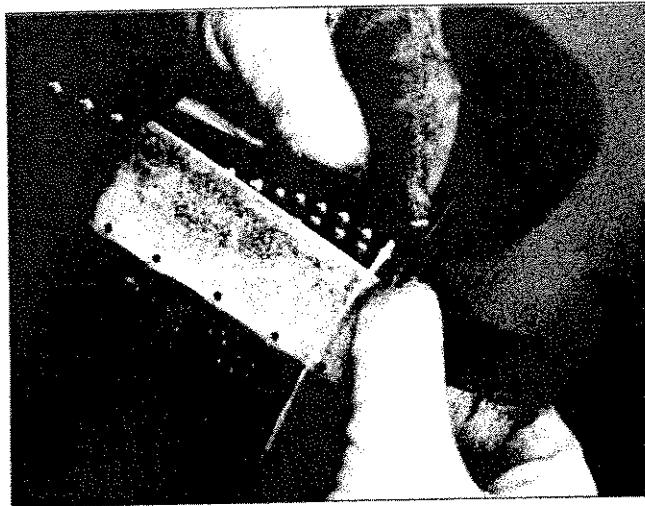


Now you're ready to start poking holes with your awl. Line the edges of the pouch up and clamp it in your stitching pony. I like to line the edges up as I go, but most people probably prefer to cement the edges together before they sew. If you decide to cement the edges before you sew, just make sure you don't get cement too deep into the pouch, or slop any onto the edge where it will be seen.

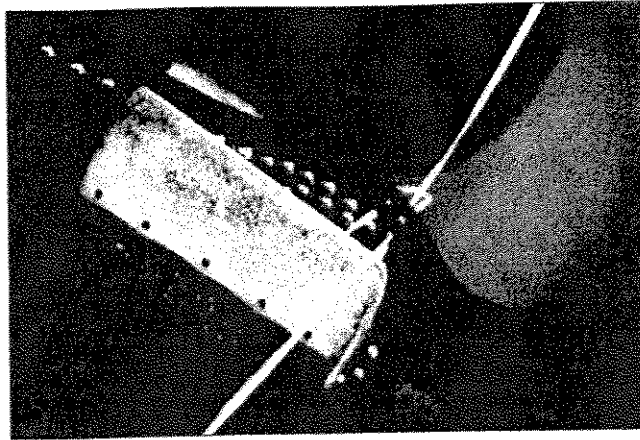
With the holster in the clamps begin poking the stitching holes with your awl. From here on out, I wear tight fitting deer-skin gloves to protect my fingers, another tip from Doug. For the beginner, the diamond shaped holes left by the awl should be at an angle to each other. This will help keep you from ripping out your holes as you lace up the main stem. You must be careful however, because it's too easy to pull the sinew too tight and rip the leather. My holes run about a quarter inch apart. I space them by eye and experience, you may want to use an Overstich Wheel to mark the spaces if you have one, or just use a ruler until you have a feel for how far apart to set your holes.



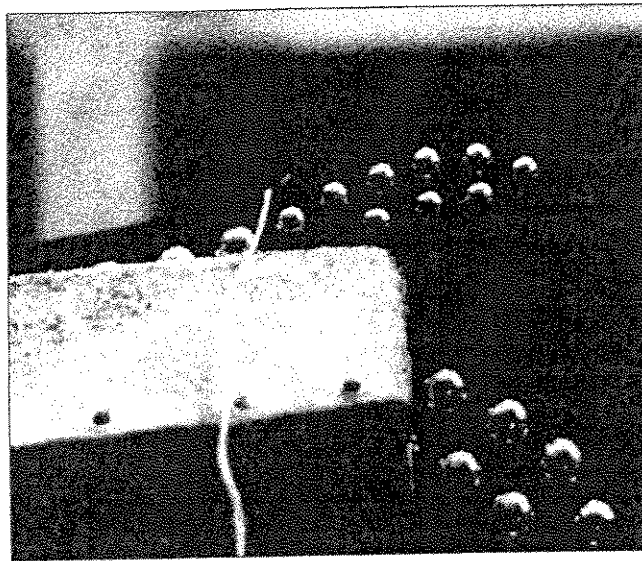
Poke the first four or five holes. Starting three holes in, run one needle through. Pull your sinew even on both sides.



Working back towards your first hole, stick each needle through the second hole from each side. Make sure the needles don't stick through the sinew from the opposite needle.

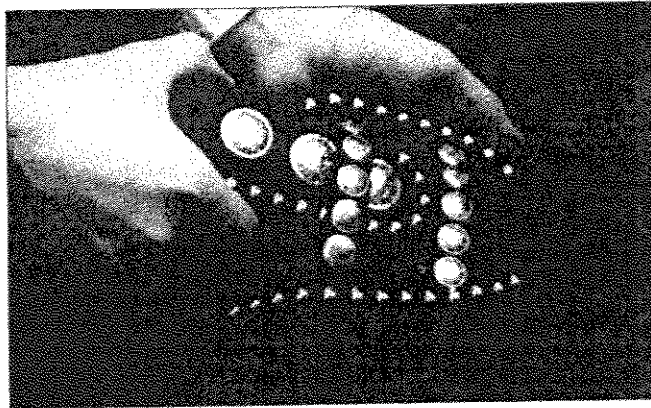


Pull them on through and make sure your sinew is still even on both sides. Don't pull the sinew any tighter than it needs to be to hold the leather together. Run both needles through the first hole just like you did on the second hole. Now begin stitching back over your first two stitches and on through the holes you've already poked.

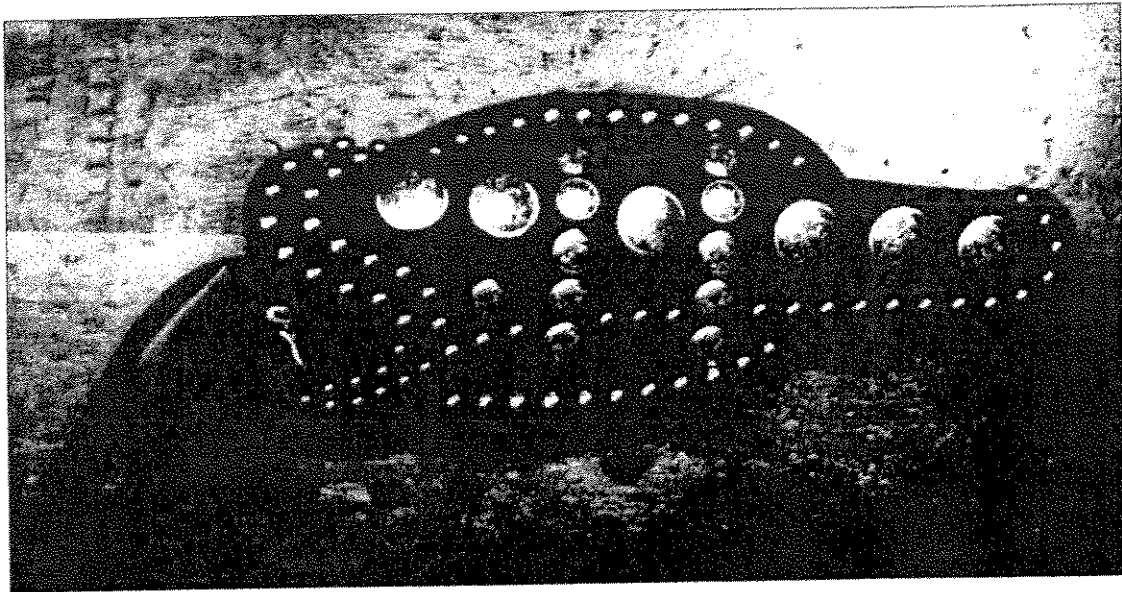


Continue lining up the edges of the pouch, poking holes and stitching, until you come to the end of the main stem at the toe end. Stitch back through the last four holes to lock the end of your stitch. End your stitching with both lines of sinew coming out on the back of the holster. Cut these off flush with the surface of the leather.

You are ready to burnish the main stem of the holster with the bone burnishing tool. With a disposable foam brush wet down the main stem of the holster. With the flat side of the bone burnishing tool, even out the edges of the leather. Apply as much pressure as needed to make the seam look nice. You might even finish it off by burnishing it again with the canvas.



Pass the toe of the pouch through the loops in the skirt. Often I will take the handle of a hammer and push it down into the pouch of the holster. This opens up the pouch and gives you something ridged to push against.



The holster is ready for iron and you're ready to be packin'. Next time we'll look into makin' a gussied-up holster for those of you who like it fancy. Until then, see you on the range.

