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## Guns of the Texas Rangers:

### The Colt Model 1860 Army

by David Stroud

In 1850, Sam Colt placed into production two of his most popular revolvers: the '49 Pocket and the '51 Navy. Only one new revolver was offered after that until 1860. That exception was the New Model Pocket Pistol, a side hammer designed by Colt's chief lieutenant and factory foreman, E.K. Root. It was placed into production in 1855.

Sam had experimented with an Army-sized sporting revolver in .44 caliber. However, it was too large and awkward to gain popularity and had little chance competing against Colt revolvers already on the market.

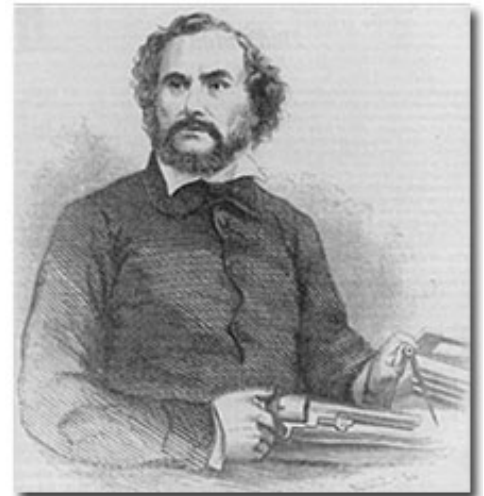
The U.S. Army desired a new weapon to issue its cavalry service for the Mormon Campaign. The board of officers convened at the Washington D.C. Arsenal on February 16, 1858, to examine Colt's revolver "with breech attachment, and Pistol-Carbine."

The board examined three of Colt's Pistol-Carbines with barrel lengths of 12,15, and 18 inches. They also looked at his revolver with a 7" barrel and breech attachment.

*To test the accuracy of fire, a number of shots were fired from all these arms, at the following ranges: at one hundred yards, and at three hundred yards; at five hundred yards with the three specimens of the Pistol-Carbine, and at two hundred yards from the Pistol with breech attachment.*

*The "results were satisfactory" as to accuracy. To test the penetration, "a target of white pine boards, seasoned, one inch thick, with an interval of one inch and a quarter between the boards, and two feet by two in size, was used."*

*The weapons were fired at a distance of thirty feet: The "Carbine with 12 inch*



***barrel penetrated 9 boards. The Carbine with 15 inch barrel penetrated 8 1/2 boards. The Carbine with 18 inch barrels penetrated 9 boards. The Pistol with breech attachment penetrated 7 1/2 boards.***

The officers concluded: "Colt's Carbine-Carbine, and Colt's Pistol with breech attachment, [is] superior for our Cavalry Service to any arm with which they are acquainted" and they recommended the Colt revolver with the 7" barrel "be procured in time for the operations of the approaching campaign" since no revolver with an 8" barrel could be produced in time.

The only revolver Colt had produced with an 8" barrel was the Second Model Colt Dragon, which quickly gave way to the Third Model with a 7 1/2" barrel. At any rate, Colt modified a few Third Models in early 1859 to lighten the bulky revolvers, but the method was unsuccessful. Therefore, the company concentrated on producing a lighter, 8"- barrel revolver of Army caliber.

The New Model Holster Pistol, or New Model Army Pistol, was placed into production in 1860 and quickly won favor with the military. The first 2,000 had the full-fluted cylinders, but they were replaced with the more common rebated ones. Only around 4,000 fluted cylinders were produced before the end of production in 1873. The first 1,000 Army revolvers were equipped with 7 1/2" barrels, but they quickly gave way to the 8" barrel the Army desired.

The 2 lb. 11 oz. 1860 Army is 14" overall. It has a round barrel and a round, rebated cylinder roll engraved with a scene of the Texas Navy engaging the Mexican fleet. It fires six shots of .44 caliber. The trigger guards are oval brass with iron back straps. The loading lever is the creeping-ratchet type, with the top of the barrel sterilely numbered below 1,600 is etched "ADDRESS COL. SAM'L COLT, HARTFORD, CT." After that, most are marked "ADDRESS COL. SAM'L COLT, NEW-YORK US AMERICA" with a few etched "ADDRESS SAM'L COLT, NEW YORK, U.S."



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Most of the first 50,000 1860 Armies had butt straps cut for shoulder stock and 4-screw frames to accept shoulder stocks. The standard Army revolver, however, had no such features.

In May 1860, the new revolver was ready to present to the Army, and a board of officers inspected the arm on the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month. The officers tested the New Model Holster pistols with a 7 1/2" barrel and an 8" barrel. They also tested a Third Model Dragon for accuracy and penetration. The officers reported: "The new model revolver with eight inch barrel will make the most superior cavalry arm we have ever had."

However, while the United States Army tested and evaluated Colt's new revolver, Southern dealers were placing orders. Before the Army placed its order, 2,230 New Model Holster Pistols were shipped South. No doubt, most

landed in the hands of Confederate soldiers.

In April 1861, Fort Sumter was fired upon and Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers. With battle smoke still drifting north, Colt turned his manufacturing to wartime production, and his '60 Army became the standard weapon of the Union Cavalry. The Ordnance Department ordered 127,000 before 1864, and another 15,000 through the open market. The revolvers were sold for twenty-five dollars each.



The U.S. Navy ordered 1,150 New Models in May and September 1861, and many of these were sent to Rear Admiral David Porter's Mississippi Squadron. Thereafter, Colt's 1861 Navy revolver became the favorite of the Sea Service.

Sam Colt died in January 1862. Soon after, his contract was cancelled by the Union government. However, production continued and thousands were sold to individual officers and enlisted men seeking the ultimate revolver. After the war, gunfighters and lawmen such as the Texas Rangers used the 1860 Army, and these old Colts have written many colorful chapters in our history.

§

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David Stroud was born in Tyler, Texas, and graduated from Henderson (Texas) High School in 1963. He enlisted in the Marines the following year and served a tour in Vietnam and two years as a drill instructor at Parris Island, South Carolina. He earned his B.S. and M. A. degrees in history at Stephen F. Austin State University and is a history instructor at Kilgore (Texas) College. He has written seven books, along with fifteen articles and book reviews.



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