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The **Colt Combat** **Commander**

by David Stroud



After the Second World War, the US Army thought about replacing the Colt 1911-A1 and eventually issued the weapon's necessary requirements in 1949. The pistol had to be no longer than 7.0 inches in length, weigh no more than 25 ounces, and be chambered for 9 mm Parabellum.¹ To select the replacement, a series of government-sponsored tests were conducted at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland and at Fort Benning, Georgia.²

The weapons tested were Browning Hi-Power variants by Canada's Inglis, a FNHi Power, the T3 trial pistol, Belgium's Farique Nationale, Smith & Wesson's S & W Model 39, and Colt's modified version of its famous 1911A1. The Colt came

1 "Syd, "The Evolution and Development of the Colt Commander," The Sight M1911-A1, http://www.sightm1911.com/lib/review/colt_combat_commander.htm;

"Colt Commander," **Wikipedia**, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colt_Commander.

2 *Ibid.*

with a receiver and mainspring housing of aluminum alloy that Colt developed and patented as Colt alloy®. It had a 4 1/4 inch barrel, an overall length of 7 3/4 inches, a weight of 26 1/2 ounces, and had a 9-round magazine.³

None of the pistols was selected, and the Army decided to continue issuing the 1911A1. However, Colt had created extensive public interest in its lightweight weapon, and the *American Rifleman* reported “an anodizing process produced a blue finish on the receiver and housing that was comparable to the standard blue of sell parts...A new Gun has been born.”⁴

In October 1949, Colt placed its newborn weapon in commercial production. It was marketed as the Commander, Colt blue finish only, chambered for 9 mm Luger .45 ACP and .38 Super.⁵ The serial numbers began with 001 to 065 in 1949, and in 1950 through 1969, the numbers were 66-LW to 60277-LW. The Model 70 series is numbered CLW001 to a few less than 100,000 and includes the all-steel Combat Commanders that were introduced in 1970 with finished, blued, nickel-plated steel or stainless steel.⁶ From then on, the Commander was referred to as the Lightweight. Colt has continued with the Commander-style pistols such as the Gold Culp National Match with blued steel and matte or bright stainless steel, MKIV Series 80, M1991A1, and XSE. All include Commander and Lightweight Commander models.⁷



The slide-stop markings for the .45 caliber are unmarked or “number 1,” while the Super .38 and 9mm are “number 3.” The slide markings are “COMMANDER MODEL /COLT/ AUTOMATIC CALIBER .45, SUPER .38” or “AUTOMATIC 9MM LUGER” to the right of “COMMANDER MODEL” and left of a rampant colt with two arrows.⁸

Colt Firearms was correct in believing the Commander would be a winner. When gun author Syd selected a Colt Combat Commander to personalize, “I wasn’t really looking for it. I guess you could say that it found me.”⁹ I’m sure Texas Rangers Howard Alfred, John Dendy, Bob Mitchell, and Sheriff Eddy Boggs felt the same way when Don McNeil, through Governor Mark White, presented each of them a personalized, inscribed Colt Combat Commander.

3 *Ibid.*;

Clawson, Charles W., *Colt .45 Government Models: Commercial Series*, Clawson Publications, 1996, 92.

4 Wilson, R.L., *Colt: An American Legend*, Abbeville Press, 1985, 244.

5 Colt catalog, undated, 23. The Commander sold for \$78.25 and the catalog for 25¢.

6 Syd, “The Evolution and Development of the Colt Commander,” *The Sight M1911-A1*, http://www.sightm1911.com/lib/review/colt_combat_commander.htm;
“Colt Commander,” Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colt_Commander.

7 Syd, “Personalizing the Colt Combat Commander,” *The Sight M1911-A1*, http://www.sightm1911.com/lib/review/colt_combat_commander.htm.

8 Clawson, 92-97.

9 Syd, 2.