

Weapons that Won the West

By D. R. KING, High River, Alta.

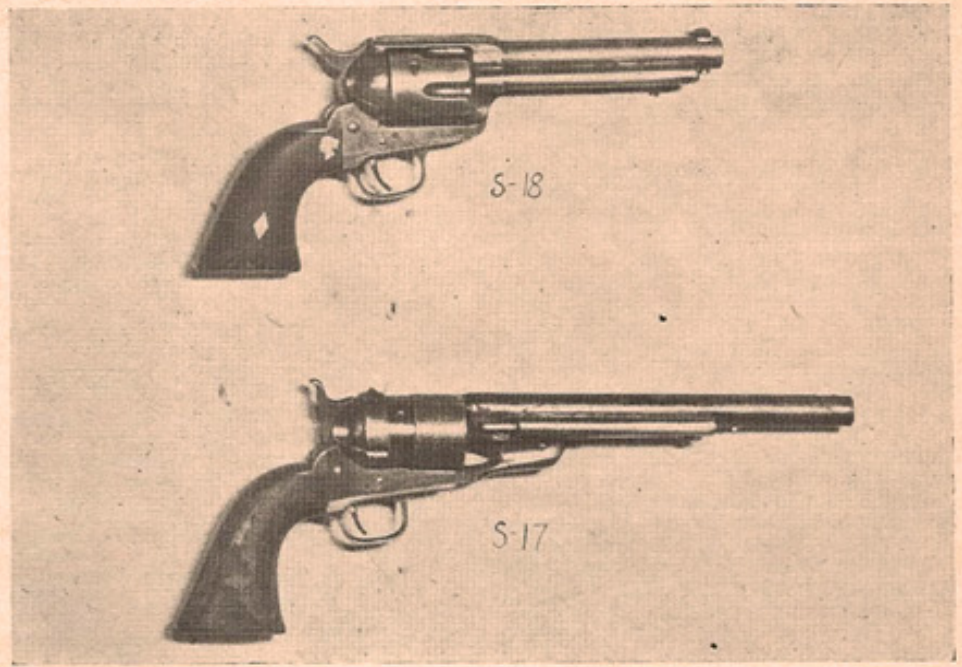
IN the year 1834 young Samuel Colt, later to be known as Colonel Colt, set up an armaments factory at Passaic Falls near Paterson, New Jersey. The power to run the works was drawn from the falls itself and the old factory was a landmark for many years. Colt's company failed, in 1842, to the sum of \$150,000; however, the first years were spent, in Colt's own words, "gaining experience in gun manufacturing". Years later, in 1861, the old factory building was destroyed by fire.

At the outbreak of the Mexican War (in 1847) Colt received encouragement from the United States Government to open a new armories, and was supplied with a contract to produce one thousand revolvers of the same design as those he formerly made at Paterson. There was, however, no specimen at hand to copy, so these guns were produced from memory. Actual manufacture took place at Whitney's Armory in New Haven, Connecticut, but in 1855 Sam built his own plant at Hartford, Connecticut, which still remains the centre of Colt firearms. The weapons produced at Whitney's were known as the famous "Walker" revolver, and only one thousand were turned out, as per contract. They were on the same pattern as the first Colts.

Naturally the original Colts were hand-loaded, the powder being poured in and the ball rammed home with a rod. The following is a reproduction of the printed instructions which accompanied each gun, as copied from the catalogue put out by Francis Bannerman Sons of New York.

"Directions for Loading Colt's Pistols"

"... First explode a cap on each nipple to clear them from oil or dust, then draw the hammer to the half-cock, which allows the cylinder to be rotated; a charge of powder is then placed in one of the chambers, keeping the barrel up, and a ball with the pointed end upwards, without wadding or patch, is put into the mouth of the chamber, turned under the rammer, and forced down with the lever below the surface of the cylinder so that it cannot hinder its rotation. (Care should be taken in ramming down the ball so as not to shake out the powder from the chamber, thereby reducing the charge.) This is repeated until all the chambers are loaded. Percussion caps are then placed on the nipples on the right side of the lock-frame, when, by drawing back the hammer to the full cock, the arm is in condition for a discharge by pulling



the trigger; a repetition of the same motion produces the like results, viz. six shots without reloading.

"... N.B.—It will be safe to use all the powder the chambers will hold, when reloading with the flask, leaving room for the ball, whether the powder is strong or weak. Fine grain powder is the best. Soft lead must be used for the balls. The cylinder is not to be taken off when loaded. The hammer, when at full cock, forms the sight by which aim is taken.

"To carry the arm safely when loaded, let down the hammer on one of the pins between each nipple, on the end of the cylinder.

"The arm should be thoroughly cleaned and oiled after firing, particularly the base-pin on which the cylinder turns."...

There then follows detailed directions for loading with foil cartridges, cleaning, taking apart and putting together.

The early model Colts featured a folding trigger, hence no trigger guard; however, later models adopted fixed triggers. The lower figure (S-17) in the photo shows said early model; however, the rammer has been replaced by an ejector upon conversion to take metallic cartridges. The rear of the cylinder has, of course, been altered also, and a gate cut on the right side for loading. You can see the space in front of the cylinder where the ball was turned under the rammer.

This is only one of many methods used to alter hand-loaders to metallics, for not

only were the armories working on it, but individual gunsmiths as well, and each shooter had his own ideas and changes.

Although it was known as the standard Army sidearm, the actual piece (owned by Bud Davis of High River) bears intricate engravings on the cylinder, depicting a naval battle involving sailing ships and side-wheel steamers. At the top of the scene is inscribed the passage — "Engaged 16 May 1843". I am afraid I have no clue to the significance of the engraving or inscription. Being a standard Army gun, it was first altered to keep up with advancement in weapons, and later discarded in favor of the new model of 1873, which is shown above, S-18.

S-18 is the Colt revolver Model 1873, the first Colt weapon made expressly for metallic cartridges. It was manufactured in two styles, a seven-and-a-half inch barrel known as the "Cavalry" model, and a five-and-a-half inch barrel known as the "Artillery" model, shown above. In later years it remained almost the same until being outmoded by the modern double-action, high-pressure guns. The model 1873 is the well-known "Frontier" Colt, producing such expressions as "Colt Law", "King Colt", "The Law of Colonel Colt", and "Judge Colt's Court", all of which meant simply, death by "lead poisoning". Until the last war Colt's factory was turning out a few modern counterparts of the "Frontier", which are much favored by shooters. They are built of modern steel, take nitro-powder cart-

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ridges, but retain the same shape, balance and flavor as the originals.

The piece shown above was the pet of Senator Dan Riley, and I have met many eye-witnesses to his prowess with this lead-slinger. It is reported the Senator would invariably knock off jack-rabbits while shooting from the back of his running horse. When the Senator's sons were youngsters, they heard much of their straight-shooting dad. George and Neil decided to try their hands at it. While the old gentleman's back was turned they made off with the Colt, and hit out across the fields.

They didn't have to go far before they spotted a coyote loping up the hill in front of them. When he disappeared on the other side, they hurried up the hill. Neil, with the gun, was in the lead, and both boys' eyes were trained far ahead, anticipating that the progress of the coyote would carry him out on the plain beyond the hill. Unknown to the boys the hill was the bank of a creek, and the coyote, not having seen them, had stopped, and was just starting back up the bank. As the lads, staring far out to catch the first glimpse, topped the hill, the coyote sauntered over from the other side. Immediately Neil whipped up the Colt and fired point-blank at the animal. It dropped like a stone, and the boys, in high spirits, dragged the carcass home. There they strung it up and began skinning it. As the skinning-out progressed, they became increasingly aware of a mystery. Finally, with the entire pelt off, they searched both hide and carcass, but nowhere could they find either hole or trace of blood to show where the animal had been struck. The shock when he topped the bank and came face to face with the boys, coupled with the blast of the gun, caused him to suffer a heart attack. Scared plumb to death!

I can readily understand how the noise frightened the coyote. When I took my friends Frank Fleming and Don Osborne out to try the old hog-leg, that black powder sure packed a mean bark.

Well, so much for the Senator's gun. Those who knew him will vouch for his marksmanship. Even the holding of his pet sidearm is enough to inspire a person. Thus, it is not only the collecting of guns which is thrilling, it is the association with the people who made them and used them that makes my hobby worth while.



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to sustain him staggered into camp on Monday the 21st almost famished. His story was that after leaving the troop on his hunting expedition he became completely lost, and his horse having played out he left both horse and saddle on the prairie. Fortunately he was aware that the main column was making for the Trois Buttes, a landmark that could be seen on the prairie for many miles, so after walking at least fifty miles in that direction he ultimately reached our camp alive but very weak.

Gales of laughter greeted long-legged Frank Spicer as he was seen enjoying a wild ride astride a bawling buffalo calf whose mother had just been sacrificed to supply the troops with meat. The calf,

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while its rider, long legs wrapped around his mount's body was sawing vigorously at the poor beast's throat with a sheath knife, dashed helter skelter through the camp, charging in and out among the tents, and scattering cook fires and cooking pots and their contents right and left until weakened by loss of blood and the weight of the huge man on its back the brave little animal was brought to earth.

The saying: "He who rides a tiger", etc. must have occurred frequently to Spicer as his four-legged tornado tore through the camp.

It must be confessed that this spectacular ride, while it might have appealed to that great showman Buffalo Bill, would not have made much of a hit with a representative of the S.P.C.A. But this bothered us not at all. All humanitarian feelings we may at one time have had were submerged by the insistent calls of hunger, and the prospect of juicy veal cutlets in the offing.

The vitriolic comments of the disgusted cooks, as they surveyed their ruined establishments were drowned by the lusty cheers that greeted both victor and vanquished.

Here I was transferred from "D" Troop to "E".

CHAPTER XV Quid nunc

Our "dolce far niente" life at the Trois Buttes gave the "Quid nunc" in our midst a grand opportunity to meet in conclave and discuss the personal characteristics of all ranks as they were observed during the past few months of hardships and trials. This one was a rotter; that one a pukka sahib, and so on.

However the consensus of opinion at these round table conferences was that the officers were, with very few exceptions, fine men and good fellows, willing to learn all there was to be learned.

All agreed that the backbone of the Force, then as now, was the "Non Commissioned Man". The splendid example

set by the Sergeants, many of them old campaigners, undoubtedly heartened the strong and sustained the weak. Although authoritative in their manner the Sergeants were at the same time miracles of patience and tact. Whether training raw recruits in Toronto, or shepherding inexperienced officers and men during the march to the west their passionate devotion to duty proved them to be mirrors of soldierly virtue.

So accustomed were our halfbreed drivers and scouts to being harried and driven by the energetic masterful Sergeants that they were brought to believe that the man with gold braid chevrons on his sleeve was the beginning and end of all authority, and they frequently addressed Captains, Majors and Colonels as "Sergeant".

As for the other ranks, their devil-may-care spirit was epitomised in the person of a big red-headed Irishman named McKibben, a member of my own troop, whose habit of leaping and rushing about bareheaded and with his hairy chest exposed earned him the nickname of "The Leaping Goat". He leaped to some purpose one night in camp when an overgrown lout named McHamish had threatened to kill me after I had smacked him on the nose with my small fist for stealing my drinking cup. The Lord only knows what mayhem he might have committed on me in reprisal had not McKibben seized him by the throat and, between wild Irish yells promised to knock his head off if he did not "lave the boy alone".

Fortunately, while these two modern counterparts of Brian Boroihme and Robert the Bruce were thus arrayed against each other the ubiquitous Sergeant dropped around, and after inspecting the cup, and finding my initials scratched thereon awarded possession of it to me.

The drinking cup (?), the cause of all this belligerency was an empty baking powder tin picked up at Dufferin, and since carefully treasured by me.