

COMMEMORATIVE CIVIL WAR GUNS



The gold inlaid engraving on the 2011 F.lli Pietta Starr Sesquicentennial tribute was copied from an original engraved Civil War era Starr single-action revolver. The Starr features a laser engraved floral motif and decorations, along with a special Sesquicentennial banner on both sides of the barrel.

Even after **160 YEARS** we are still learning from the experience through **REPRODUCTIONS** of Civil War era firearms, uniforms, and memorabilia!

BY DENNIS ADLER



AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CIVIL WAR THE UNITED STATES HAD VERY LITTLE experience as a nation of armsmakers, or as a nation, for that matter, having only been established in 1783 at the end of the Revolutionary War. Early American pistols and longarms had been built using tools and skills brought over from Europe by the colonists, with many early Colonial gunmakers being of German ancestry.

Thus the styles and construction of guns that one could define, as being "American" in nature did not become truly established until after the Revolutionary War. As for well-known American armsmakers in the early 19th century, there was only a handful. Most important among them was E. Remington & Sons, established in 1816; there was Samuel Colt's first enterprise in Paterson, New Jersey, which manufac-



Designed by John J. Adams, Sr. of Adams & Adams, the Colt North-South Civil War Sesquicentennial 1860 Army is limited to only 35 guns (\$3,500 each). John Sr. has engraved over 3,000 firearms for the Colt Mfg. Co., including 35 John Wayne Commemoratives. (Archival photos and copy of Gettysburg Address/Library of Congress)



(Above) The Adams & Adams 1860 Army comes with a handcrafted display case made by Pennsylvania furniture maker Duncan Everhart, and features a brass stand for the gun that allows it to sit upright and reflect the opposite side in the mirrored case lid. The stand can be mounted on either side to show North or South.

(Right) The color casehardened recoil shield on the Adams & Adams is engraved with the Union Jack and Stars and Bars.



tured guns from 1836 to 1842 before going into receivership, and his very successful second venture, established in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1847. The Federal Government had the Springfield Armory, founded in 1794, and the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), which began manufacturing arms for the US military in 1801. During the years leading up to the Civil War, there also arose a

number of smaller American armsmakers, mostly located in the North.

Since the Revolutionary War there had broad distinctions between the States and a discord had existed between the Antebellum South and Washington since the late 18th century. While we might think of America in the 1850s as one united county, in point of fact individual States maintained their independence, organized their own militias, many

coastal states had navy and merchant fleets, even their own currency. Thus, like pieces of a puzzle, America was composed of citizens from 34 separate states. Whether it was the issues of State's Rights, of pro- or anti-slavery, the economic and social disparity between the North and South, or the election of Abraham Lincoln; no one issue triggered the Civil War, it was just a matter of time, and that time was the 12th of April, 1861.

The War Between the States and its stories have resonated with Americans for generations, and even after 150 years we are still learning from the experience. One of the ways in which this has manifested itself is through reproductions of Civil War era fire-

arms, uniforms, and memorabilia, which in itself have become almost as collectible, and far more practical, than the original artifacts.

Handcrafted Commemoratives

While reproductions of Civil War era handguns and longarms are used as the canvas for modern day artisan engravers, it is noteworthy that the very first Civil War Commemorative revolver, a Colt 1861 Navy,

was created shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863. Gustave Young, Colt's master engraver, was so touched by the unprecedented loss of life on both sides and by President Lincoln's

speech at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery that he created a work of art known as "Tears of Gettysburg." Young engraved the 1861 Navy with his most intricate vine scroll patterns, incorporating animal heads (dogs, wolves, and American eagles) within the scrolls and on the hammer flats, much as he done on other master engraved Colts, only on this revolver every animal is crying. A single tear is present in the eye of each of the 11 wolf's head, dog's head and American eagle head motifs. Fitted with handcarved ivory grips, this 1861 Navy model, Ser. No. 14369, remains



The latest offering from America Remembers is the 2011 Sesquicentennial Tribute Henry rifle. Each is decorated in 24-kt. gold and nickel with a blackened patina background. The Henry is illustrated with scenes honoring major battles, pivotal moments, soldiers and iconic symbols of the war.

unique among the finest of engraved percussion Colt firearms of the Civil War period.

Since the 100th anniversary in 1961, the Civil War has been one of the most popular themes for limited edition, custom embellished firearms. The earliest examples came from Italian armsmakers, as did the first Civil War era reproductions of Colt and Remington revolvers. Although Colt had manufactured the original guns in the 19th century, the very first reproduction Colt-style percussion pistols were created in Italy during the late 1950s for Val Forgett, Sr., the founder of Navy Arms. And Italy is

where the story of most every contemporary Colt or Remington reproduction begins.

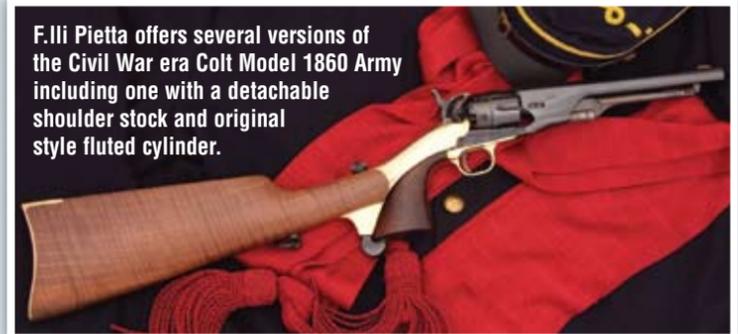
Forgett had wanted to introduce a line of Colt 1851 Navy revolvers and other models in

time for the Civil War Centennial in 1961. Those very first guns sold by Forgett were crafted by Aldo Uberti and manufactured in Italy by Gregorelli & Uberti. The introduction of Italian-made Colt revolvers not only started an industry, but also "encouraged" Colt to begin remaking its 19th century percussion models in 1971. The rest, as they say, is history.

The original 2nd Generation Colt Blackpowder Arms (Blackpowder being the company trademark name), were manufactured by Colt Industries from 1971 to 1982; first with assistance from Forgett (1971-1973),

SHOULDER STOCKED 1860 ARMY

THE WHEELS THAT VAL FORGETT, SR. put into motion more than half a century ago have never stopped turning. Between A. Uberti, F.Ili Pietta, Euroarms Italia, ArmiSport di Chiappa, and Davide Pedersoli, there are enough accurate reproductions of Civil War guns today to have armed the North and South in the 1860s. From the most established of Civil War era revolvers and rifled muskets, to some of the most obscure handguns and rifles of the period, these long established Italian armsmakers have researched and recreated, in exacting detail, the greatest American and European arms produced during the 19th century.



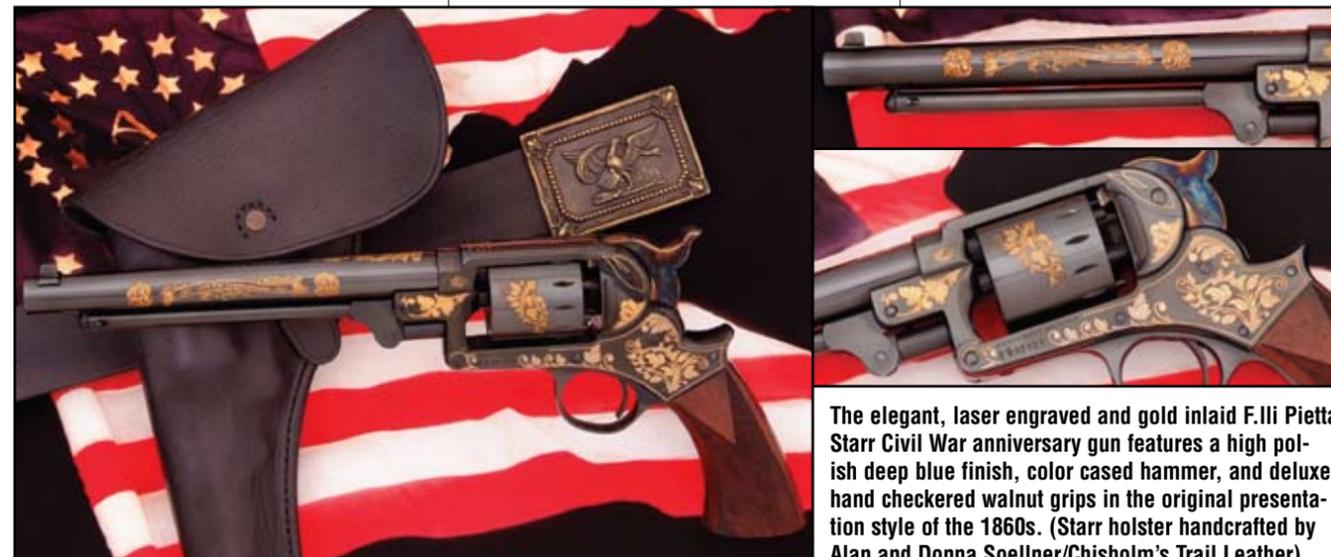
F. Ili Pietta offers several versions of the Civil War era Colt Model 1860 Army including one with a detachable shoulder stock and original style fluted cylinder.

One of more desirable Civil War models has always been the shoulder stocked Colt 1860 Army. Pietta makes a very accurate reproduction that is available with an authentic detachable shoulder stock. Historically, all early revolvers issued to the U.S. Cavalry at the start of the Civil War were all fitted with fluted cylinders. These proved to be problematic if overloaded (bursting of the cylinders around the bolt stops), and the Ordnance Department had Sam Colt go back to the drawing board. He came up with an improved cylinder design and eventually changed all 1860 Army models to the rebated cylinder design.

Pietta is the only maker today that offers a shoulder stocked 1860 Army with a proper fluted cylinder. The guns come with a rebated cylinder, but the Pietta fluted cylinders can be specially ordered and are also available from VTI Replica Gun Parts (860-435-8068; vtigunparts.com). The fluted cylinders are more attractive, and unlike the originals, the Pietta cylinders won't burst!



This deluxe F. Ili Pietta 1860 Army was engraved in Italy in a period vine scroll motif. The guns are polished stainless with blued screws, barrel wedge, hammer and trigger.



The elegant, laser engraved and gold inlaid F. Ili Pietta Starr Civil War anniversary gun features a high polish deep blue finish, color cased hammer, and deluxe hand checked walnut grips in the original presentation style of the 1860s. (Starr holster handcrafted by Alan and Donna Soellner/Chisholm's Trail Leather)

then Lou Imperato (Iver Johnson Arms Co.), between 1974 and 1976, with final assembly at the Colt factory in Connecticut. Colt finished its initial production from 1978 to 1982 having the guns completed at the Iver Johnson manufacturing facilities in Middlesex, New Jersey. Most of the truly noteworthy engraved contemporary Colt percussion revolvers came out of the 2nd Generation series, and all of the guns are regarded as genuine Colts. All 2nd Generation percussion models can be authenticated and lettered by the Colt factory.

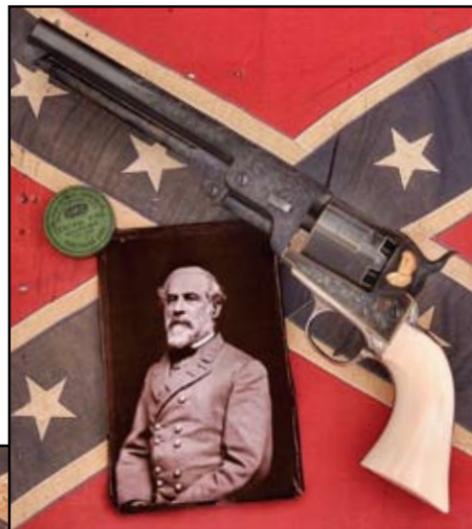
The first Civil War Colt Blackpowder commemoratives were the U.S. Grant and Robert E. Lee 1851 Navy cased sets produced in 1971 at the start of Colt's re-introduction of cap-and-ball revolvers. These were offered as individual cased guns and in a deluxe double cased Blue and Gray set. A total of 4,750 each of the individual cased guns were produced, and 250 double cased sets.

The second major Colt Civil War commemorate was the U.S. Cavalry cased set with two 1860 Army revolvers and a single shoulder stock, just as they were originally issued to the Cavalry from 1861 to 1865. There were several variations in this commemorative set, from plain blued guns (2,945 sets plus 40 sets with a "C" suffix) to two versions with factory engraving and gold inlays. The most elaborate set was limited to an edition of 40 but only 23 were made.

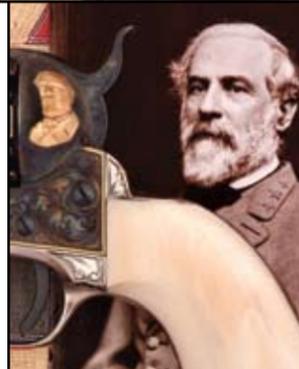
Over the years there have been dozens of Civil War commemorative guns, but the 150th anniversary has brought forth some of the best work in recent history.

Sesquicentennial Firearms

There are several ways in which commemorative Civil War era guns are manufactured today. All begin either as secondary market Colt Blackpowder Arms revolvers (produced from 1971 to 2002 in the Colt 2nd and 3rd Generation series) or new Italian-made copies of Colt and other percussion revolvers of the Civil War period. Engraving is either done by hand in the traditional



A one-of-a-kind Civil War commemorative, this Robert E. Lee Colt 3rd Generation Model 1851 Navy was engraved in an authentic Gustave Young pattern by the legendary Ken Hurst. The 24-kt. Gold bust of General Lee was cast and inlaid by Andrew Bourbon, who also engraved a copy of Lee's signature into the backstrap. The hand-carved ivory grips were done by Dan Chesiak, another Colt alumnus.



method using chisels and hammer, or with an electric engraving tool. A more common method today is laser engraving (similar to hand engraving but with less depth and clarity), which can either stand alone as a finished piece or be hand chased to add more depth. A third style incorporates laser etching, which is usually gold inlaid with artwork more so than engraving. All three techniques are used today in producing Civil War commemorative arms.

The first such example made for the Sesquicentennial celebration is from F.lli Pietta which has chosen the rarest and most eclectic of all Union sidearms for its 150th anniversary tribute, the Starr single-action topbreak revolver. Pietta is the only arms-maker in the world manufacturing the Civil War Starr single-action revolver, which was the third most issued gun to federal troops.

Finished in high-polish blue, with a color cased hammer, the gold inlaid engraving pattern for the Starr is based on an original Civil War presentation piece. The edition will be limited to 350 laser engraved guns (the very first of which is shown here, Serial No. XG02891) and there will be a special hand engraved edition of 150. The laser engraved models will be sold through Cabela's.

Hand engraving is naturally the most expensive and examples are often limited to very small editions, or even single guns. The most exclusive hand engraved edition for the 150th Anniversary celebration is the Adams & Adams "North-South Civil War Sesquicentennial 1860 Army" which will be limited to only 35 guns, one for each State that fought in the war plus the District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.). Designed by John J. Adams, Sr., the North-South design is unique, in that with one gun Adams manages to pay tribute to both the Union and Confederate States. The engraving pattern is based on an 1860 Army presented to General Ulysses S. Grant. The Grant gun was embellished with two banners rolling over the top of the barrel, with the words Liberty on one side and Union on the other. For Adams' rendition, Union appears on the North side of the gun and Confederate on the South. The handsomely engraved and color cased recoil shield is decorated with the Union Jack on one side and the Stars and Bars on the opposite. Each revolver is hand fitted with carved ivory grips featuring a high relief US on one side and CS on the other. The guns are all Colt Blackpowder Arms 1860 Army models, custom finished and color cased by Doug Turnbull.

Each gun in the series will have the backstrap inscribed for a specific State that fought in the war, with a traditional Shield insignia at the top. The North-South Sesquicentennial will sell for \$3,500 and comes in a handcrafted walnut presentation case with a special stand that allows it to reflect the opposite side in a mirror-lined lid. Adams & Adams has been producing hand engraved guns for over 35 years and is renowned for its work for the Colt's Custom Shop and for Smith & Wesson.

Exclusive Editions

When it comes to big production numbers and Civil War commemoratives one has to look no further than America Remembers and the U.S. Historical Society.



The first Civil War commemorative revolver was done during the Civil War. Known as "Tears of Gettysburg," it was done by Colt's master engraver Gustave Young. He engraved the gun in his finest traditional pattern with vine scrolls and animal heads, only on this one revolver, every figure is crying. A single tear is present in the eye of each of the 11 wolf's head, dog's head and American eagle head motifs. (Photos courtesy Rock Island Auction Co.)

America Remembers currently offers the following Civil War models:

A Tribute to the Confederacy; C.S.S. H.L. Hunley Recovery Tribute Revolver; Civil War Cavalry Leaders Tribute Rifle; Civil War Sesquicentennial Tribute Rifle; Gettysburg 1863 Revolver; Gettysburg Tribute Rifle; "God Bless Dixie" Tribute Revolver; Jefferson Davis Tribute Rifle; Mort Künstler Lee-Jackson Tribute Rifle; Museum of the Confederacy Tribute Revolver; Robert E. Lee & His Officers Tribute Rifle; Sons of Confederate Veterans Spencer Carbine; and the West Point Civil War Union and Confederate Leaders Tribute Rifles. Editions are generally limited to around 300 to 500, though there are exceptions like the 1860 Army Gettysburg 1863 Tribute Revolver, which is being produced in a special run of 1,863 guns. The Civil War Sesquicentennial Tribute Henry, the only model specifically built for the 150th anniversary, is limited to 500.

Portions of this article are excerpted from the author's latest book, *Guns of the Civil War*, (Published by Zenith Press), available from amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, and fine booksellers.

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