

ARIZONA.
A Desperate Fight Between Officers of the Law and Cow-boys—The Killed and Wounded—Failure of Lord & Williams.
 Tombstone, A. T., October 26th.—This morning the City Marshal, V. W. Karp, arrested a cow-boy named Ike Clanton, for disorderly conduct, and he was fined twenty-five dollars and discharged in the Justices' Court. Clanton left, swearing vengeance on the Sheriff and Marshal Karp and his brother Morgan who tried to induce Clanton to leave the town, but he refused to be pacified. About three o'clock P. M., the Karp brothers, J. H. Halliday met four cow-boys, named Clanton brothers and the two Mc...
 A deadly fire ensued...

Wyatt Earp would have liked this gun. The F.lli Pietta Buntline is the first reproduction 12" model. The Italian armsmaker has done exemplary work making a quality revolver with a standard factory tuned action. (Holster by Chisholm's Trail Leather)



PIETTA 45LC BUNTLINE

Unique 12-inch SAA that carries on the Wyatt Earp/Buntline Myth!

BY DENNIS ADLER

IN THE JOHN WAYNE, JIMMY STEWART classic, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, newspaper editor Maxwell Scott¹ has the most memorable line in the film: "This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." However astute that remark may have been in the 1962 John Ford western, when it comes to dime novelist Ned Buntline and the long-barreled Colts he purportedly had built and then gave away to famous Western lawmen, the "legend" has become the fact.

Earp Buntline Myth

Wyatt Earp is arguably the most famous western personality outside of Buffalo Bill Cody and Wild Bill Hickok. No

other trio of real life individuals have had so many stories written about them or movies made about their lives, and in each telling of the tales the facts have become more and more obscured; the casualties of literary license. In the absence of any documentation that Buntline contracted with Colt's to make the first 16-inch barreled models, introduced in 1876—or any proof that he purchased guns from Colt's to present to famous frontier lawmen like Earp, Charlie Bassett, Bat Masterson, Neal Brown and Bill Tilghman, or any corroboration that these men ever carried or owned such a gun—the Buntline tale becomes nothing more than a story. Considering that Buntline built his early literary reputation on his writings about Buffalo Bill Cody, it seems all the more curious that Buntline never made mention of presenting one to Cody, who would



To holster the Pietta Buntline, Alan and Donna Soellner of Chisholm's Trail Leather added 2" to their standard Tombstone rig which is based on the holster worn by Kurt Russell in the movie. The design has a sewn together drop loop and no visible skirt.

have been the logical choice. That said, there is no question that Colt built the guns, which were first shown at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. The original guns are rare by any measure of comparison, only 28 are listed as having been manufactured in the 1870s² with the first shipment of four being delivered to B. Kittredge & Co. of Cincinnati in December 1877. That in itself dispels Buntline's claim of having presented guns to Earp and others in 1876.

There is, however, one truth in all of this—that the Buntline publicity, manufactured or not, prompted Colt's to build a "Buntline" model in the 20th century, first in the 2nd Generation line from 1957 to 1975, both in standard and target variations, the latter from 1962 to 1967; the Wyatt Earp Buntline in 1964; and within the 3rd Generation "New Model" SAA line, the Ned Buntline model introduced in 1979. Currently the Buntline Special is back in production as part of a special two gun Wyatt Earp/Hugh O'Brian cased commemorative set.

In his 1976 book, *Wyatt Earp & the "Bunt-*

line Special" Myth, author William B. Shillingberg took the Buntline tale to task at every possible turn, disproving any connection between the long barreled Colt revolvers and the lawmen to whom Ned Buntline claimed to have presented them. "It is accepted by many as historical fact inexorably linked to Wyatt Earp's actual life," wrote Shillingberg. "We are told again and again of dime novelist Ned Buntline giving such guns to Earp and four other worthy Dodge City peace officers sometime during the summer of 1876. The talented journalist Stuart N. Lake, who understood the value of dramatic devices, first published this story [in 1931] and countless persons have been retelling it since. Dare question the tale's

authenticity in some circles and you are greeted with gasps of disbelief and shown, as an antidote to your foolishness, passage after passage from Lake's highly controversial book *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal*." Adding further credence to the Buntline story, Stuart Lake was the historical consultant on the *Life and Legend of Wyatt Earp* television show starring Hugh O'Brian, which finally made the Buntline iconic in the American narrative of the Old West. The only factual truth is that Wyatt Earp did, at one time, own a Colt SAA with a 10-inch barrel, one of several barrel length variations made by Colts after 1876. Earp never mentioned another long-barreled Colt and none was found among his possessions at the time of his death in



The new nickel plated Buntline from Pietta looks almost identical to the nickel plated and ivory gripped 12" 2nd Generation Colt's produced from 1957 to 1975.

1929. However, in Lake's book he quotes Wyatt as having said, "There was a lot of talk in Dodge about the special slowing us on the draw. Bat and Bill Tilghman cut off the barrels to make them standard length, but Bassett, Brown, and I kept ours as they came. Mine was my favorite over any other gun. I could jerk it as fast as I could my old one and I carried it on my right hip throughout my career as a marshal. With it I did most of the six-gun work I had to do. My second gun, which I carried on my left hip, was the standard Colt's

frontier model .45 caliber, single-action six-shooter with the 7.5-inch barrel, the gun we called the 'Peacemaker.'" 4,5

As it turns out, Lake made up a lot of what was in his book, and Wyatt Earp died two years before it was published. There is no factual proof that Ned Buntline ever met Wyatt Earp, and if he did, it wasn't in 1876. One thing is for certain; both of the Buntline Special's champions were authors looking for a way to make Wyatt Earp larger than life. And it seems they succeeded, though Earp certainly didn't need the help.

Gun Details

While Colt is making Buntlines once again in the very limited Hugh O'Brian series, authentic reproductions have been available from A. Uberti for many years. Flli Pietta only began manufacturing SAA models in 2002 with the Buntline added in 2009.



The latest Pietta Buntlines come in two new finishes, polished nickel and an excellent antiqued blue with faded color cased frame and hammer. The guns have the same smooth out-of-the-box action as the rest of the current Pietta single-action line.

This is the first Buntline with a 12-inch barrel outside of Colt's, and the very rare Great Western Buntline revolvers built in Los Angeles back in the 1950s. The latest Pietta versions are available with either a polished nickel finish or handsome antiqued blue with faded color cased frame and hammer. Both have excellent fit and finish, and Pietta's latest factory tuned actions. Our test guns had an average hammer pull of 3.3

pounds, and a triggerpull of 2.9 pounds with 1/16th of an inch of travel. The guns worked as smoothly and consistently as revolvers that have had a custom action job. While some might regard the triggerpull as light, the Buntlines handle exceptionally well and for target shooting the hammer and trigger combination are ideal.

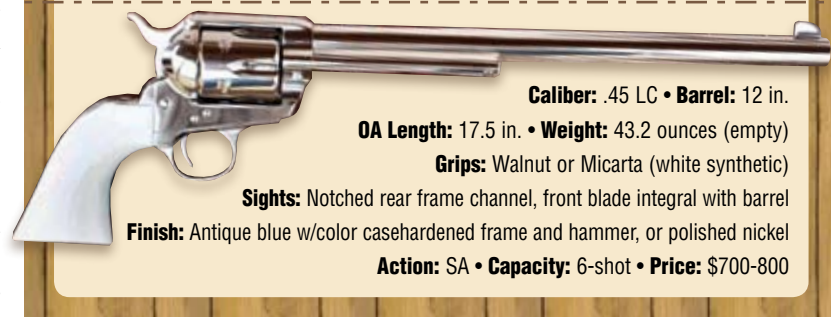
Whether Earp said it, or Lake made it up, Wyatt allegedly wore the Buntline on his right hip though Lake never

physically described Earp's holster or gun-belt. Since this is fact and fiction colliding we opted to have Alan and Donna Soellner of Chisholm's Trail make a 12-inch version of their *Tombstone* holster based on the rig worn by Kurt Russell in his portrayal of Wyatt Earp. This is a very distinctive holster with a heavy stitched drop loop, no exposed skirt and two Chicago screws on the back to secure the belt loop to the

4/C AD

SPECIFICATIONS

Pietta Buntline



Caliber: .45 LC • **Barrel:** 12 in.

OA Length: 17.5 in. • **Weight:** 43.2 ounces (empty)

Grips: Walnut or Micarta (white synthetic)

Sights: Notched rear frame channel, front blade integral with barrel

Finish: Antique blue w/color casehardened frame and hammer, or polished nickel

Action: SA • **Capacity:** 6-shot • **Price:** \$700-800

PIETTA .45 LC BUNTLINE



Pietta uses a double notched cylinder arbor and the transverse latch to create a safety mechanism. By depressing the latch and pushing the cylinder arbor further back, the rounded end protrudes through the back of the frame (arrow) blocking the hammer from fully dropping into battery.

holster. The standard model is for a 10-inch Buntline like Russell carried in the movie, but Chisholm's Trail now offers both 10- and 12-inch versions.

Despite Wyatt's supposed comment about the special, that he "could jerk it as fast as I could my old one," we found a strong side draw to be slow and very deliberate. Worn in a cross draw rig, the Buntline draws faster and comes right around into position to fire in one sweeping motion. If Lake was making up his tale of Earp's carry method he likely never actually strapped on a Buntline to see if a strong side draw was fast or not. And it isn't. But is sure looks impressive.

Range Test

There's nothing like piles of black powder smoke for Wild West realism so we did part of our range test with Goex Black Dawg Pinnacle Black Powder .45 Long Colt 235 RNFP cartridges. The smoky and hard hitting 235-grain bullets managed a best grouping from 50 feet of 1.5 inches center-to-center. The Black Dawg traveling down a foot of rifled steel cleared the traps of our ProChrono chronograph at a hefty average of 805 feet per second (fps). The accuracy with the Black Dawg was particularly good considering the amount of kick that the Pinnacle black powder produces. Our second test, also at 50 feet, was done with Ten-X 165-grain HBFP (hollow base flat point), which clocked an average of 500 fps. The Buntline shoots a little low at that range, but we decided to see how well it grouped at point of aim. The best 5-round string had a spread of just 1.12 inches all in the lower corner of

the target at 5 o'clock. A second group fired over the center of the target delivered a bull's eye and three more in the black but spread out to 3.5 inches due to one flyer in



Using Goex Black Dawg Pinnacle black powder .45 LC 235 RNFP cartridges a best group of 5 rounds measured 1.5" at 50 feet. The target pictured shows two grips of five shot from 50 feet with Ten-X 165-gr. HBFP. Best group measures 1.13" at 5 o'clock.

PERFORMANCE

Pietta Buntline .45 LC

Load	Velocity	Accuracy
Goex Black Dawg 235 RNFP	805	1.50
Ten-X 165 HBFP	495	1.13



Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by ProChrono chronograph, and accuracy in inches for best 5-shot group from 50 feet.

the 6-ring at 7 o'clock. All shots were fired using a Weaver stance and two-hand hold.

With a 12-inch barrel the Buntline is a little muzzle heavy, as might be expected, but the smooth, tuned action makes firing the gun almost effortless. The light hammer draw (we used a two-handed hold and the off hand thumb to cock the hammer as in SASS competition), and trigger make this a natural shooter for competition and target practice. For a SASS match the Buntline would really pack them in tight and fast, if you didn't loose too much time on the clock drawing the gun!

Final Thoughts

While historic authenticity takes a back seat with the Pietta Buntline, it is a high quality gun at a very reasonable price that exhibits the fit and finish that has become typical of Pietta's latest single actions. The issue, though a minor one, is in the frame design which is a reproduction of the 1896 Smokeless Powder Colt SAA frame with transverse cylinder pin latch. The original 1876 Colt Buntlines were all built on the earlier black powder frame which used a screw to secure the cylinder arbor. Pietta chose the later Colt frame for the Buntlines simply because their other single-action models are all based on the 1896 frame. In addition,

the Piettas have a safety mechanism that is tied into using the Smokeless powder frame. After checking to ensure the gun is empty, you cock the hammer, depress the crossbolt latch, and push the cylinder arbor further back into its second notch. With the arbor locked in this position the end protrudes

through the back of the frame and prevents the hammer from fully dropping. It's the best idea this side of resting the hammer on an empty chamber, which is what most wise cowboys did when packing a loaded six-shooter on horseback.

As reproductions go the Pietta Buntline, ether in the standard blue and color cased frame finish, polished nickel, or the eye catching antique blue, are all exceptional guns for appearance, accuracy, and handling. If Wyatt Earp had ever gotten his hands on one of these, he'd probably have carried it. ⚔



For over 130 years the tales of Wyatt Earp, Ned Buntline, and the Buntline Special revolver has been the fodder for books, movies and more stories than can be counted. In 1976 author and researcher William B. Shillingberg presented his case for debunking the Buntline myth.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Scott was played by character actor Carleton Young, a favorite of director John Ford.
- ² *Thirty-First Edition Blue Book of Gun Values* by S.P. Fjestad, 2011.
- ³ The television series starring Hugh O'Brian aired from 1955 to 1961.
- ⁴ *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal* by Stuart Lake, 1931
- ⁵ Historically there is no record that either Brown or Tilghman were Dodge City lawmen in 1876. Tilghman became marshal of Dodge City in 1884.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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