

Colt 1860

New Model Army

The Revolver that almost wasn't



The basics of the Model 1860 Army Revolver

- 6 shot, cal. .44, weighing 2 lbs. 11 oz.
- 7 1/2 or 8 inch barrel
- 13 1/2 inches long
- 218 grain conical projectile or 140 grain round ball.
- 25 to 35 grains powder
- 700 to 1000 fps muzzle velocity
- Very similar performance to that of the Colt Dragoon.

The basics of the Model 1860 Army Revolver (continued)

- rebated cylinder
- cut for shoulder stock in early production runs.
- price \$16.00 in later production.
- 7 groove right hand gain twist.
- full or half fluted cylinder, or round cylinder.
- 2/3 of parts are interchangeable with navy model.
- estimated 180,000 and 200,000 produced from 1860 to 1873. Approximately 130,000 military contract.

5 Variations of the Model 1860 Army Revolver

- First model.
 - navy grip, 3 screw, no cap groove. (first 100)
- Second model.
 - army grip, 4 screw, cap groove, cut for stock.
- Third model.
 - army grip, 4 screw, no cap groove, cut for stock.
- Forth model.
 - army grip, 3 screw, cap groove, cut for stock.
- Fifth model.
 - army grip, 3 screw, cap groove, not cut for stock.



The improvements of the Model 1860 Army Revolver over the Dragoon

- Lighter weight (minus 1 lbs. 6 oz.).
- Smaller frame based on 1851 navy model.
- Creeping loading lever (rack and pinion).
- “Silver steel” gives greater strength to the material.
 - Likely a marketing device. Attributed to superior furnace control in the foundry yielding higher carbon steel that gave about 30% increase in strength.

The Model 1860 Army Revolver



The Model 1860 Army Revolver (continued)



Development of the Model 1860

- 1856 Colt knows that a new design is needed.
 - Dragoon too unwieldy, heavy and obsolete
 - Navy model is more appealing to Ordnance Department but the caliber is not what the Army wants.
- **Early experiments with the Dragoon with fluted cylinder and milled frames are not satisfactory.**
 - Adapting the .44 cal. cylinder to the Navy frame proves to be promising.
 - Creeping loading lever added for operability and weight.

Old Model Army Experiment

Note the mixture of early and late features on this lightened OMA, SN 60.



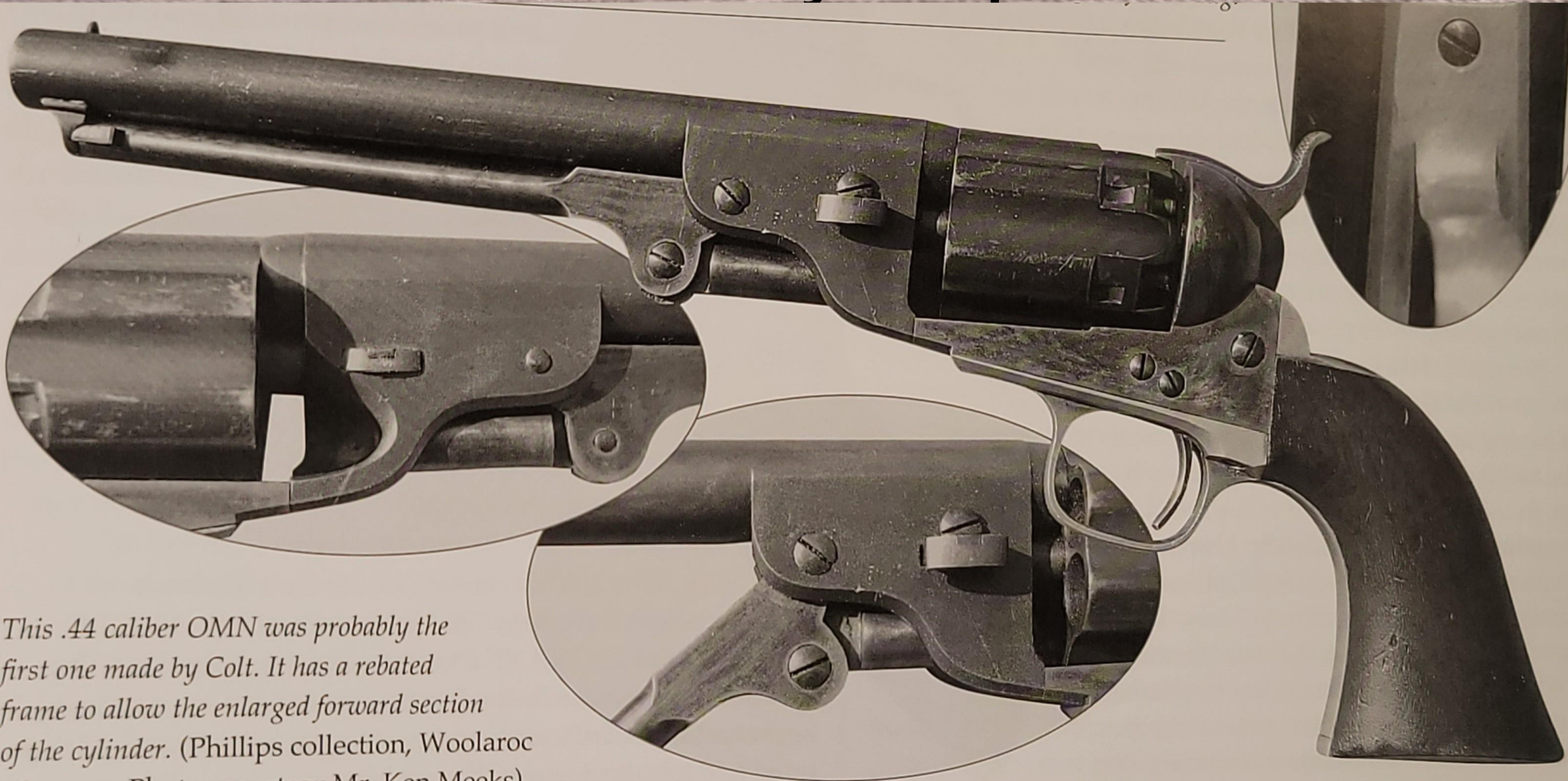
Close-up of the fluted, lightened OMA SN 60.

(Photos courtesy James D. Julia, Inc.)

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Old Model Navy Experiment



This .44 caliber OMN was probably the first one made by Colt. It has a rebated frame to allow the enlarged forward section of the cylinder. (Phillips collection, Woolaroc Museum. Photos courtesy Mr. Ken Meeks)

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Creeping Loading Lever



How to Make Enemies and Influence Friends

- Colt personal and political troubles start in mid 1850's.
 - Crosses swords with Chief of OD in 1856. Issues tied to: pricing, putting undue pressure on procurement process, bribes on patent extensions, and Military Store Keeper (Newman) scandal suggesting inducements to buy Colt firearms.
- Accusations of 'situational ethics'.
- Congressional push back over pricing.
- Problems in Hartford over plant expansion due to civic duty accusations.

How to Make Enemies and Influence Friends

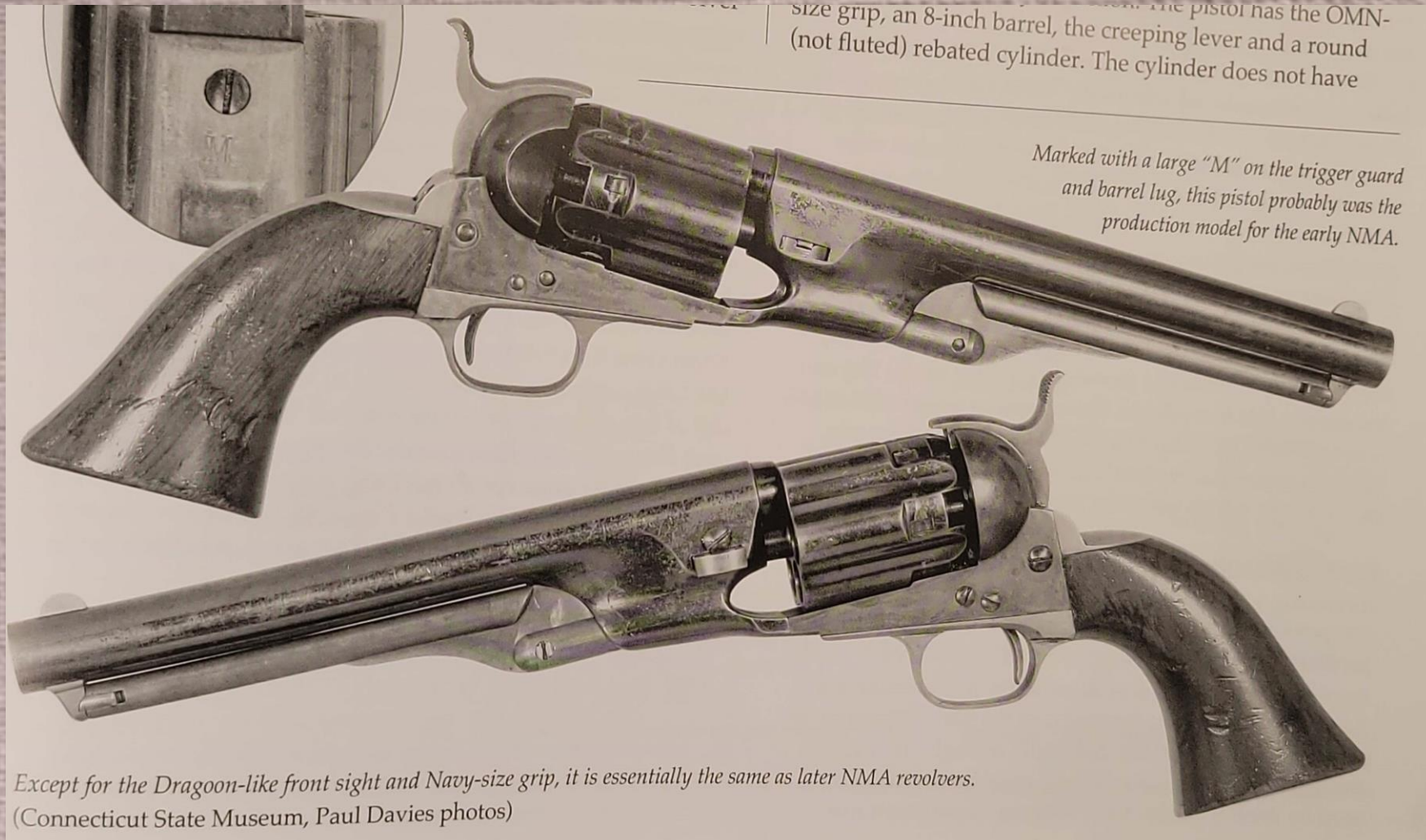
- **Colt needs contract with Ordinance Department.**
 - financial issues and numerous schemes for trading arms for surplus muskets, deals directly with state governments, offers to build facilities in Virginia.
 - no new contracts coming in 1859, only getting piecemeal orders.
 - orders his agents to make deals at cut rate prices.
- **New congressional opponent Jefferson Davis**
 - concern over excessive profits

Near Disaster for the Model 1860

- Congress passes law prohibiting purchase of 'patented' arms.
 - June 1860 militia appropriation bill amendment "...arms to be supplied to the states, except revolvers, sabers and swords, shall be made at U.S. armories or arsenals."
 - Chief Ordinance Officer letter Sept. 1860, prohibited procurement of patented arms or supplies.
- Colt has plan to build firearms without using patents.
 - most of the patents have expired and new improvements are not included in the new revolvers.
- Congress repeals the law in Feb 1861, contracts begin in April 1861.

Close to Production

- Model M is assembled in late 1859.



Proof of the Design

- May 1860 two prototypes are ready for testing.
 - very favorable report from Army testing
 - "...superiority of Colt's revolvers...is now finally confirmed by the...new model with the 8" barrel. (**special order no. 94 report**)
 - improvements needed
 - longer grip
 - cut for stock
 - iron backstrap
 - 4th recoil stud
 - 8" barrel
- June 1860 first examples of the production model are being produced.

SPECIAL ORDER, No. 94.

WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE, }
Washington, May 18th, 1860. }

A Board of Officers, to consist of Brevet Colonel J. E. Johnston, Lieut. Colonel First Cavalry; Major W. H. Emory, First Cavalry; Captain W. Maynadier, Ordnance Department; Captain J. W. Davidson, First Dragoons; will assemble at the Washington Arsenal at 10 o'clock a. m., to-morrow, or as soon thereafter as practicable, to examine and report upon certain improvements recently made in Colt's Revolving Fire Arms.

The junior member of the Board will act as Recorder.

By order of the Secretary of War, E. D. TOWNSEND,
Assistant Adjutant Gen'l.

To COL. SAMUEL COLT, Hartford, Conn.

REPORT.

WASHINGTON ARSENAL, D. C., May 19, 1860.

The Board of Officers appointed by Special Order No. 94, "to examine and report upon certain improvements recently made in Colt's Revolving Fire Arms," having made the examination as directed, submit the following Report:

The improvement, as claimed by Mr. Colt, consists in diminishing the weight of his Revolver known as the Dragoon or Holster Pistol, and retaining the same calibre, thereby securing as great efficiency of fire, without the disadvantages heretofore found in carrying and handling the heavier pistol of that description. The Board first made a careful examination of the Improved Revolver, from which they are convinced that it possesses decided advantages over that which it is designed to supersede, not only from its reduced weight, but also from its superior model, which is apparent at first view. There were two Revolvers of this model presented for examination, differing only in the length of the barrel: one being $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, the exact length of the old model; the other half an inch longer, or 8 inches in the barrel.

The following are the results of trials made by the Board, for the purpose of ascertaining the comparative practical efficiency of the present and the Improved Revolvers, and also of the improved $7\frac{1}{2}$ and 8 inch barrels, as compared with each other:

	Ratio of Penetration.	Ratio of Accuracy.	Weight.
Old Model, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inch Barrel.	1.000	1.000	4 lbs. 2 ozs.
Improved Model, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inch Barrel.	1.133	0.950	2 lbs. 8 ozs.
Improved Model, 8 inch Barrel.	1.333	1.050	2 lbs. 8½ ozs.

The same kind of cartridges, loaded in the same way, were used; the targets and distances were the same for all the firings by which these ratios were determined. It may be proper to remark, that the circumstances attending the firing, for accuracy, were rather more favorable for the old than the new model, the former having been fired with a cloudy sky, and in a calm, while the latter was fired in a strong light, and with a smart breeze across the line of fire.

To ascertain the strength of the New Model Pistols, the chambers of each were loaded with Government powder to their utmost capacity, so as to admit the insertion of an elongated ball, which was rammed firmly over the charge. They were fired with these proof charges, without any injury resulting. In order to ascertain whether any injury might result from using, either accidentally, or from necessity, the carbine cartridges (for a different arm of the same calibre,) in the new model pistols, they were loaded with such cartridges and fired without any injury to the arms; the only difference being in an increased ratio of penetration. The arms were loaded and capped, and then loose powder was scattered around the percussion caps, and also around the balls, when they were so fired without producing any premature discharge, or communication of fire from one chamber to another.

The results of all the examinations and trials by the Board, leave no doubt in their minds of the decided advantages which Mr. Colt has gained for his pistol by the introduction of his recent improvements. The superiority of Colt's Revolvers, as an arm for cavalry service, which has been so well established, is now finally confirmed by the production of the new model with the 8 inch barrel. There are a few minor points requiring modification, to which the manufacturer's notice has been called, and to which he should be required to attend in any arms he may furnish for the Government use. With these modifications, the Board are satisfied that the New Model Revolver, with the 8 inch barrel, will make the most superior cavalry arm we have ever had, and they recommend the adoption of this New Model, and its issue to all the mounted troops.

The Board having concluded the duty for which it was ordered, adjourned "without day."

J. E. JOHNSTON, Acting Inspector General.
W. H. EMORY, Major First Cavalry.
WM. MAYNADIER, Captain of Ordnance.
J. W. DAVIDSON, Captain First Dragoons.

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Model 1860 and the South (CSA)

- Production began late 1860 (about Oct., Nov.).
 - first shipment end of Nov. 1860 to Savannah, Ga (Lamar 100).
- At least 2159 were shipped to southern states before April 16, 1861. (Ga., Md., Sc., Ms., La., Tx., and Va.)
- Total production for 1860 is approximately 1500.
- Fluted cylinders accounted for 3800 civilian and 1275 military. total fluted cylinder models estimated about 5000.
- 7½ inch barrels are about 3000 revolvers.

Comments on this New Model Army Sn: 287

- Considering the three p's: possibility, probability, and provenance; did sn: 287 go south?
- Likely; Colt ordered production of 3000 revolvers (no contract until 4/61). And, that 2159 were supplied to the South prior to any Army contracts, it is possible and probable that this one indeed served the South during the civil war.
- However, there is no documented provenance.

References used in this presentation

- *History of the Colt Revolver 1836 to 1940*, Haven and Beldon, 1940.
- *The story of Colt's Revolver*, Edwards, 1957.
- *The Colt Model 1860 Army Revolver*, Pate, 2017.
- [CAPANDBALL - YouTube](#)