

# Colt Single Action Army “Artillery” Revolver

## *Serial Number 140054*



Noted author and historian John A. Kopec examined this Colt Single Action Army (SAA) “Artillery” revolver on February 12, 2018. Following a careful examination, he issued a Letter of Authentication (LOA) attesting to its legitimacy and originality. This paper incorporates information from the LOA, and the book *“Cavalry & Artillery Revolvers... a Continuing Study,”* by Kopec & Fenn.

During 1893, most of the Colt SAA cavalry revolvers assigned to Regular Army units were recalled by the Ordnance Department and placed in storage. By this time, many of these revolvers were well worn after hard service during the Indian Wars. The plan was to replace these old “warhorses” with a new double-action .38 caliber service revolver.

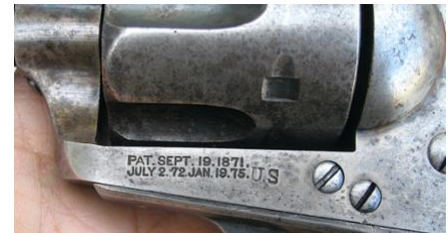
The U.S. Government discovered they didn’t have enough .38 caliber revolvers when the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898. To remedy the situation, they decided to refurbish and then reissue 16,000+ of the cavalry revolvers in storage. During this procedure, the Springfield Armory was directed to disassemble, clean, replace unserviceable parts, shorten barrels from 7 ½ inches to the 5 ½ inches, and then reposition the front sights. Armory workers reassembled the guns without attention to maintaining matching serial numbers. Keeping serial numbered parts together was seen as an unnecessary step that could cause shipping delays. The Ordnance Department sent one of the first shipments of these altered revolvers to an Artillery unit. According to legend, that’s why today we refer to them as “Artillery” revolvers.

Collectors initially showed little interest in Artillery revolvers because of their mixed serial numbers. This changed after they realized that some Artillery revolvers were assembled with one or more parts from cavalry revolvers used at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the Battle of the Rosebud, the Red River War, etc. For instance, Ordnance Department records show that 330 cavalry revolvers survived the Battle of the Little Bighorn and remained in service or were returned for repairs. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Springfield Armory disassembled many of these

handguns and incorporated their serviceable components in Artillery revolvers issued during the Spanish-American War and Philippine Insurrection. More than a few Artillery revolvers issued to Teddy Roosevelt's "Rough Riders" had components from Cavalry revolvers carried by the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at the Little Bighorn!

### ***Facts & Photos***

The frame of this handgun is from U.S. Cavalry revolver #140054, which was made during 1891. It was sub-inspected by Rinaldo A. Carr (RAC). Mr. Kopec speculated that #140054 was probably in unissued condition when Colt shipped it to the Springfield Armory for conversion to the Artillery configuration.



The trigger guard bears serial #3618, which came from a U.S. Cavalry revolver made in 1873. The Ordnance Sub-Inspector for this series was O.W. Ainsworth. His initial "A" can be seen below the serial number on this trigger guard. Archives records show that Cavalry revolver #3632 belonged to the 7th Cavalry as of December 16, 1880. Revolvers #3576 and #3623 had been issued to Company K, 4th Cavalry during June or July of 1874.

The backstrap bears serial #6372 and the "A" initial of O.W. Ainsworth. The "host" Cavalry revolver from which this backstrap originated was manufactured within Lot Six (#5505-#6516), which was one of the "prime" lots from which many of the revolvers had been issued to the 7th Cavalry. The 2nd and 5th Cavalry also received their initial issues from within Lot Six. Records show that #6242 and #6413 had been issued to the 2nd Cavalry during 1874. 7th Cavalry revolver #6269 was located at the site of Sitting Bull's Camp in Saskatchewan, Canada.



The barrel of this handgun bears the complete serial number of Cavalry revolver #5576. It was inspected by O.W. Ainsworth during 1874. Cavalry revolver #5576 also originated from within Lot Six, one of the "prime" lots from which revolvers had been issued to Custer's 7th Cavalry. Archives records show that #5505 had been "recovered" at St. Paul, Minnesota, on June 3, 1878. #5637 was reported as "lost" by the 7th Cavalry on November 1, 1875. #5607 is listed in Kopec's book *"Colt Cavalry & Artillery Revolvers"* as being a "Presumptive, alleged 7th Cavalry deserter's revolver." Another example, #5657 was reported as being "lost" by the 2d Cavalry on June 15, 1875. The barrel address remains in near "textbook" condition showing the partially broken letter "o" in the abbreviation "Co." and the partially broken letter "A" in the word "HARTFORD."





The cylinder has the partial serial #1?08 and the "DFC" mark used by David F. Clark, the government sub-inspector at the Colt factory during the 1880s. Although this mark provides us with the timeframe the cylinder was made, it's impossible to determine the complete serial number or exact year of manufacture of the gun from which this cylinder came.

The one-piece stocks were probably fitted by Springfield Armory during 1898. They show moderate wear and display a very faint partial date "18??" on the left panel. This indicates they were in used condition when they were refitted to this revolver in 1898. The initials of the Sub-Inspector, Rinaldo A. Carr (RAC), are stamped on the left butt, indicating these stocks originated from an 1890 or 1891 manufactured revolver. Dents and scratches on the butt area of this revolver conform well with those corresponding dents and scratches of the butt-strap, assuring originality.



Collectors initially showed little interest in these mismatched Colt revolvers. This has changed and today you can expect to pay \$3,000 or more for an authenticated Artillery revolver in good original condition. Those with serial numbered parts from revolvers issued to legendary military units, like Custer's 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry, are worth quite a bit more.

Colt Forum member MRCVS put it this way: *"If you want history, and revolvers that have seen Indian Wars action, then an Artillery Model is more likely to have seen such action, or at least the components, one or more. Purchase a non-matching Artillery Model revolver, and between the barrel, frame, trigger guard, and backstrap, you roll the dice once and have four chances of a major component having been there and done that."*

*Rusty Edwards, Arms Collector and Historian*