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PATTON'S COLT ★ RETURNS ★

How Peacemaker Specialists recreated one of the most iconic .45s

By LARRY FORD • EDDIE JANIS PHOTOS

When people hear General George S. Patton's name, most think of him serving in World War II. Photographs of him in uniform, wearing his three-star helmet and an ivory-stocked, silver-plated Colt Model 1873 Single Action Army revolver on his hip, are ubiquitous. However, most people have no idea why Patton carried this Colt. They just assume that since he was a general, he could carry anything he wanted.

Upon closer inspection of some of Patton's more

notable photographs, especially those taken in Sicily around 1943, one begins to notice that his uniform is not the uniform of the period. Nor does it show any association with the U.S. Army Tank Corps. Further investigation reveals equestrian-style riding pants and a horse crop along with that Peacemaker.

From A Different Era

Patton's appearance in these photos resembles more the persona of a general from the 19th century Indian Wars, or

the Spanish-American War. In fact, George Smith Patton Jr. was born on November 11, 1885, during the "open range" era and the settling of the American West. His family had an extensive military background that included both the U.S. Army and the Confederate States Army. Patton followed this family tradition by attending West Point. He graduated in 1909 and earned a commission as second lieutenant in the U.S. Cavalry.

Patton maintained a strong interest in firearms throughout his life and owned



many weapons. He was also renowned for his expert marksmanship with handguns. Evidence of his shooting abilities is documented by his participation in the 1912 Summer Olympics pentathlon in Stockholm, Sweden. The first event of the 1912



Eddie Janis' replica of Patton's Colt features detailed engraving and the "GSP" initials on the right grip panel.

pentathlon was shooting, and Patton reportedly performed poorly. This cost him a chance at a gold medal. However, there was controversy surrounding Patton's actual performance.

Using a Colt .38 Special revolver, Patton assumed the Olympic stance with his gun arm fully extended and fired 20 rounds into the target 25 meters away. His grouping was so small that the judges could count only 17 holes in the target. Patton claimed that three of the rounds had passed through the other holes and therefore couldn't be accounted for. The judges disagreed, and Patton finished in 21st place in the shooting event.

In 1915, Lieutenant George Patton was assigned to the 8th U.S. Cavalry Regiment, Troop A, based out of present-day Sierra Blanca, Texas. This is when Patton began sporting a

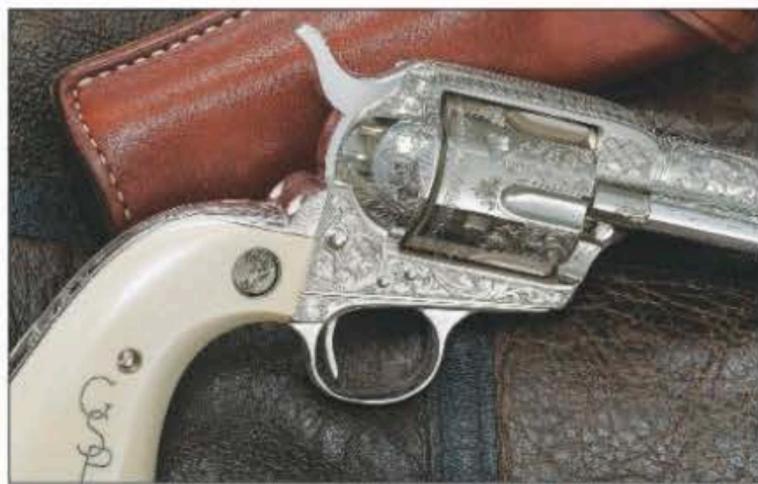
Colt 1911 in his waistband, rather than in a holster. One night in a saloon, Patton's pistol discharged unintentionally. It was at this moment that Patton began to review and study his choice of pistols.

Patton wanted a gun that, first and foremost, was safe. The deliberate actions required to fire a Colt SAA held some appeal. When carried, the hammer rested on an empty chamber, so there was no chance of an unintentional discharge. Patton also appreciated power in a pistol,

projectiles like modern hollow-point bullets didn't exist. Only lead round-nose (LRN) or full-metal-jacket (FMJ) bullets were available at the time. Patton also knew and understood the U.S. Cavalry's long history with the Colt SAA. And although its service had been discontinued sometime in the 1890s in favor of the new Colt Model 1892 in .38 Special, in 1899 the Army recalled the old workhorse SAA during the Philippine-American War, after reports that .38 Special rounds repeatedly failed to stop charging Filipino rebels at close range, even when they were hit multiple times.

So, Patton eventually decided to order a Colt SAA revolver. On March 4, 1916, a Colt Model 1873 bearing serial number 332088 was shipped

Along with customizing and fitting a number of components for the build, Janis performed a "Gunslinger" action job.



with a 4¼-inch barrel, silver plating and ivory grips. The left grip panel displayed an eagle clutching a shield in its talons. At some point after receiving the gun, Patton had the gun fully engraved, and his initials were added to the right grip panel. The engraver's name is unknown, but the workmanship is exceptional.

My theory is that Patton had some contact with the Texas Rangers during his time with the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Reportedly, Texas Rangers would have their guns engraved after they killed their first outlaw. It's possible that the young Lieutenant Patton had been influenced by this ritual, and had his gun engraved on his return in early 1917 with the AEF in Mexico.

Trouble In Mexico

The AEF was the result of troubles between the United States and Pancho Villa, which had been brewing since early 1915. The U.S. recognized Venustiano

Carranza, Pancho Villa's rival and former ally, as Mexico's head of state. Then, at 4:15 a.m. on March 9, 1916, Pancho Villa's troops attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico. Ten civilians and eight U.S. soldiers were killed in the attack, and two civilians and six U.S. soldiers were wounded. Pancho Villa's raiders burned the town, stole horses and mules, and seized machine guns, ammunition and merchandise before fleeing back to Mexico.

President Woodrow Wilson assigned General John "Black Jack" Pershing to command the AEF in Mexico. The goal was to pur-

sue the raiders, capture Pancho Villa and eradicate his organization. When Patton learned that his unit was not going to participate, he asked General Pershing for the assignment and ended up becoming his personal aide.

Pershing's soldiers were mostly cavalry and horse artillery troops. The cavalry units were armed with M1909 machine guns, M1903 Springfield rifles and 1911 pistols. On March 15, 1916, the AEF crossed the border into Mexico in search of Pancho Villa. And although most AEF soldiers carried their issued 1911s, Patton carried his soon-to-be-legendary Colt SAA.

On May 14, 1916, George Patton experienced combat in the first motorized attack in the history of U.S. warfare. Men under Patton's command utilized three Dodge touring cars to mount a surprise attack on three of Villa's men during a foraging excursion into the San Miguelito Ranch. Patton arrived with 10 additional troops and two civilian guides.

It was reported that Julio Cárdenas—Villa's second in command—and two others fled on horseback, and all three of them opened fire on the American forces. A firefight then ensued. In the fight, Patton was reported to have personally shot one of the bandito's horses at close

range, blocking his escape and killing the bandito. All three of Villa's men were killed in the battle.

However, the bodies had so many gunshot wounds that it was not possible to determine who had killed whom. It is true that

Army of the United States

“ Patton maintained a strong interest in firearms throughout his life and owned many weapons. He was also renowned for his expert marksmanship with handguns. ”



Patton's bullets struck each of the banditos, but it couldn't be determined if any of his shots actually caused the fatal wounds.

After the affray, Patton strapped Cárdenas and the other two dead Villistas to the hood of a car and drove back to camp. He later claimed Cárdenas's spurs as souvenirs. Patton had now earned the esteem of Pershing and widespread media attention as a "bandit killer," which is probably why Patton had the Colt engraved.

He ended up carrying the Colt for many years as his signature sidearm. The pistol now resides in the General George Patton Museum of Leadership at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Over the years, there have been many single-action replicas built as tributes to show gratitude, respect and admiration for General Patton.

Typically, these tribute guns were adorned with images of Patton, his name and replicas of the grips he used. There have also been efforts to design and issue exact replicas of Patton's Colt. But when it comes to exact replicas, the devil is in the details.

Enter The Specialists

Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists was recently commissioned to reproduce a replica of Patton's SAA. Eddie started the project by utilizing the frame, backstrap, triggerguard and hammer from a 1913 Colt. He selected and fitted various parts to ensure 100-percent reliability, functioning and accuracy. He then took a first-generation .38 Special cylinder and rechambered it for a .451-inch-diameter throat, which can increase a revolver's accuracy by 40 to 50 percent. Then he added a second-generation barrel with a 0.4515-inch bore diameter and an 11-degree forcing cone to guarantee optimum accuracy.



Patton's original revolver, helmet and belt are all on display at the General George Patton Museum of Leadership in Kentucky.

The early second-generation barrel also provided the exact same sight as the late first-generation barrels and used the same rifling. The only changes on the barrel were the address line—which had to be changed from the one-line style to the two-line style—and the caliber markings, which were changed from "Colt Single Action Army 45" to the period-correct "45 Colt."

Next, Eddie performed the "Gunslinger" action job, which is guaranteed for as long as the purchaser owns the gun. New Colt factory parts were altered to duplicate the original parts, with each hand-fitted to the gun. Using various grades of stones on seven surface areas, Eddie removed any internal friction points. This optimization didn't require the use of Colt's heavy springs, so Eddie used Peacemaker Specialists' own mainsprings, sears and bolt springs to increase the efficiency of

the action. These springs are manufactured exclusively in compliance with Eddie's tight tolerances, and they're heat-treated one at a time, by hand, for optimum performance. Peacemaker Specialists springs are the highest-quality SAA springs

available. The result is a Colt action that feels like it's running on ball bearings.

Of course, the pistol had to be as visually accurate as possible, with the correct lettering, engraving and perfectly fitted, pre-ban ivory grips. On that subject, it's worth mentioning that Patton cut three notches into the grips of his Colt to signify the bandits he dispatched, but they're absent on the Peacemaker Specialists Colt. When asked why, Eddie said the owner could decide to cut the ivory grips in such a fashion.

The finer details that really set this project apart from other replicas are in the revolver's workmanship and smooth action. The incredible attention to detail, precise mechanics and attractive features of this gun have made it one of the most desirable replicas of Patton's 1916 Peacemaker ever produced. ★