



Figure 1. "1862 Police" .36 caliber percussion pistol. Note round barrel, "creeping" ramrod, and fluted cylinder. Frame, grips, back strap, triggerguard and other parts are common with the "Pocket Model of Navy Caliber" in Figure 2. *Robert B. Berryman photograph.*



Figure 2. "Pocket Model of Navy Caliber" .36 caliber percussion pistol. Note octagon barrel, hinged ramrod, and round, roll engraved cylinder. As noted in Figure 1, other parts are common with the "1862 Police." *Robert B. Berryman photograph.*

# Colt's Small Frame .36 Caliber Percussion Pistols and "The Conventional Wisdom" An Examination of the Pistols called by Collectors The "1862 Police" and the "Pocket Pistol of Navy Size Caliber"

John D. Breslin

"Conventional Wisdom" is a funny thing. According to the "Conventional Wisdom" at the time:

- The Earth was flat.
- The Japanese would never attack Pearl Harbor.
- Chairman Mao was an agrarian reformer

We now know those statements to be incorrect.

The two pistols in question are shown in Figures 1 & 2. The "Conventional Wisdom" has always been that these two pistols were numbered in the same serial number range. That statement also is incorrect.

Perhaps the first to state this belief was John E. Parsons, in 1955, in *New Light on Old Colts*. Parsons wrote: "The Police Model was introduced in 1861, and during the war was issued with round or octagonal barrels in the same series of numbers."<sup>1</sup>

Another reference was made in 1957, by P. L. Shumaker in his book: *Colt's Variations of the Old Model Pocket Pistol 1848 to 1872*. When discussing the 1862 Police and the Pocket Pistol of Navy Caliber, he stated: "Lacking evidence to the contrary, it seems probable that because of the similarities of the two models (?) they were produced within the same serial number grouping system."<sup>2</sup>

Nearly all others who have written about Colt percussion revolvers have reiterated that conclusion. R.Q. Sutherland and R. L. Wilson, in *The Book of Colt Firearms*, stated: "Among the Colt arms introduced in 1861 were two types of 36 caliber pocket pistol: The Model 1862 Police and the Model Pocket Pistol of Navy Caliber. The latter for many years was erroneously known as the Model 1853 Pocket Navy (more correctly it should be termed the Model 1862 Pocket Navy). Research has shown the two models were manufactured as contemporaries, and were serial numbered within the same range."<sup>3</sup>

The trouble is, a detailed examination of these two models does not support the conclusion that they were numbered in the same serial number range.



Here is the (supposedly joint) serial number range:

Year	Published serial Number at start of Year <sup>4</sup>
1861	1
1862	8500
1863	15000
1864	26000
1865	29000
1866	32000
1867	35000
1868	37000
1869	40000
1870	42000
1871	44000
1872	45000
1873	46000-47000

(Note the level reached (26,000) at the end of 1863/beginning of 1864)

Nothing that follows should be interpreted as a criticism of the gentlemen quoted above. The contribution of each of them has been enormous. Mr. Parsons was a pioneer in research on Colt Pistols. Mr. Shumaker's book was a landmark in using collected data to understand a specific model's history. *The Book of Colt Firearms* is probably the greatest single book on Colt firearms ever written, and Mr. Wilson's many books on Colt and Colt engraving have added immeasurably to our fund of knowledge.



Figure 3. New Model Breech Loading Pocket Pistol. With loading gate, newly made as a cartridge pistol from modified percussion parts. *Robert B. Berryman photograph.*

Unfortunately, none of them had the advantage of the research on the two .36 caliber pistols that this paper represents. As someone wiser than I said, "We see further because we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us."

Bill Pirie, David Price, and I did extensive research on Colt small frame breechloaders, and the percussion pistols that were converted to them, in preparation for our book on the subject.<sup>5</sup> Most collectors call all of these guns "small frame conversions" but, in fact, over 60 percent of them were made as cartridge pistols from the start. We learned a lot about these guns, based in large measure on our survey of nearly 1500 specimens, and our extensive research in Colt Factory records. Fortunately, many of the converted Pocket Pistols of Navy

Caliber had been engraved, which allowed us to confirm that such pistols were in fact converted, and not made originally as cartridge guns. The conversion cuts pass through the previously finished engraving. That led to the discovery that converted guns have the *serial number* on the arbor (as they did as percussion guns) but guns made originally as cartridge pistols have the *assembly number* on the arbor.

That, in turn, allowed us to separate octagon barreled Pocket Model breechloaders with gates, (Figure 3), as a separate type from those without gates (Figure 4). All octagon barreled Pocket Model breechloaders *with* gates were originally made as cartridge guns; all such guns *without* gates were converted from percussion.



Figure 4. New Model Breech Loading Pocket Pistol. Without loading gate, converted from a previously finished "Pocket Model of Navy Caliber.". *Robert B. Berryman photograph.*

That is where the puzzlement began. The *converted* Pocket Models of Navy Caliber had serial numbers ranging from as low as 2000 up to about 21,200. The vast majority were between 15,000 and 21,000, and there were about 1800 of them in that range. All of them were converted in early 1875.

If these Pocket Models of Navy Caliber were produced concurrently with, and shared the serial number range of, the 1862 Police Pistols as published,<sup>6</sup> then these 1800 left over pistols, with serial numbers between 15,000 and 21,000, would have had to be produced before mid-1863 during a period when The Colt Company could sell anything that would shoot! That 1800 pistols made in the midst of the Civil War were still in factory inventory in 1874 does not seem likely.

The “New Model Pocket of Navy Size Caliber”, as Colt called it, was still being advertised and sold in 1872<sup>7</sup>, even though, as we shall see, domestic serial numbers never exceeded 21,400.

From this it seems clear that original factory stock of *Pocket Pistols of Navy Caliber* existed in the early 1870s with serial numbers in a range that, in 1863, had already been used for 1862 *Police* pistols.

Since our survey for the small frame breechloaders had been so successful, a survey of the small frame, .36 caliber percussion pistols was started. I had some vague idea that I could learn something from survival rates and perhaps find some duplicated numbers.

It was about this time that I saw a comment in one of the photo captions of R. L. Wilson’s *Colt Engraving* regarding an article by John F. Dussling.<sup>8</sup> This comment referred to an article in the November 1976 *Monthly Bugle* published by the Pennsylvania Antique Gun Collectors Association, Inc. The caption indicated that Mr. Dussling’s article suggested that the Model 1862 and the Pocket Navy revolvers might have been produced in separate serial number ranges.

That prompted a letter to John Dussling and he sent me a copy of his article, “Colt Model 1863”.<sup>9</sup>

In that article, John Dussling noted “*Mr. Frank Sellers, in his descriptions in the book of The William Locke Collection identifies the Old Model Police as the ‘Model of 1863’, a name not used before . . .*”<sup>10</sup>

What most collectors may have dismissed as a typographical error, was, in fact, the first printed reference to a separate time frame for what Colt collectors call the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber. In personal conversation with Frank Sellers, he stated that he and Mr. Locke felt that a separate serial range was used, and that the pistol was probably introduced about 1863.

John Dussling based his article on engraving patterns used on factory engraved guns. At this point it is necessary to understand something about engraving patterns and their his-

tory at Colt. From 1852 until about 1863, or 1864, Gustave Young and his shop were the primary engravers of Colt Factory Arms. The Gustave Young scroll is shown in Figures 5 & 6. In about 1864, a new style of engraving was employed. John Dussling called this “fine line” when he wrote the article in 1976 but R. L. Wilson refers to it as “late vine”<sup>11</sup>, the term most collectors use today. This is illustrated in Figures 7 & 8.

John Dussling presented a table showing eleven New (1862) Police pistols up to Serial 25624, all engraved in the Gustave young scroll, and six New (1862) Police pistols between serial no. 29172 and 30726, engraved in the fine line or late vine style. By contrast, he found *no* “Old Police” (Pocket Model of Navy Caliber) with Gustave Young scroll, but seven pistols between serial no. 2378 and 17613 engraved in the fine line or late vine style.<sup>12</sup> From this, Mr. Dussling concluded, “. . . *there was strong evidence that the two guns were not made in the same serial range . . .*”<sup>13</sup>

Because of John Dussling’s findings, my survey was expanded to include engraving style, barrel address, back strap and trigger guard material, presentation inscriptions, British proof marks, and anything that seemed significant.

I also exchanged information with Mr. Philip H. A. Boulton of Southampton, England, and with his most gracious help, the survey has grown to over 1400 examples of the “1862 Police” and the “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber.”

That is between 2% and 3% of the total pistols produced—depending on whether you believe there are one or two serial ranges. In either case it is a reasonable size sample—more than twice the percentage used by P. L. Shumaker for the landmark book on Old Model Pocket Pistols previously mentioned.<sup>14</sup>

At this point, a little background seems in order: *The so-called “1862 Police”* (Figure 1)

This pistol was first shipped in 1861; sixty-six serials under 100 were shipped in January of that year.<sup>15</sup> It was manufactured until about 1873. About 4000 leftover pistols were converted to cartridge between 1874 and 1882.<sup>16</sup>

Serial numbers start at 1 and go up to about 48,000.<sup>17</sup> (Factory records include a very few conversions with numbers above 48,000).

The survey includes 1038 surviving specimens. Of interest, the survival rate is much higher for the period of 1861 through 1864, than it is for the period of 1865 through 1873, perhaps reflecting the increased emphasis on exports in the latter period.

There are 821 survivors from the first 29,000 pistols produced (through the end of 1864) for a survival rate of 2.8%. For the balance, 15,000 (19,000 minus the 4000 pistols converted), there are only 219 survivors for a survival rate of only 1.5%



Figure 5. Gustave Young engraving on the frame of an Old Model Pocket Pistol. Note stippled background. *Darrow M. Watt Photograph, Courtesy of Mr. Watt and Robert M. Jordan.*



Figure 6. Gustave Young engraving on the barrel of an Old Model Pocket Pistol. Note stippled background. *Darrow M. Watt Photograph, Courtesy of Mr. Watt and Robert M. Jordan.*



Figure 7. "Late Vine" engraving on the barrel of an Old Model Pocket Pistol. Note plain background. *Darrow M. Watt Photograph, Courtesy of Mr. Watt and Robert M. Jordan.*



Figure 8. "Late Vine" engraving on the frame of an Old Model Pocket Pistol. Note plain background. *Darrow M. Watt Photograph, Courtesy of Mr. Watt and Robert M. Jordan.*

*The so-called “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber” (Figure 2)*

The first shipment of this pistol has not previously been established and is the subject of this study. This pistol was manufactured until about 1871. Approximately 2000 were converted to cartridge in 1875.<sup>18</sup>

Serial numbers also start at 1 and go on up to about 21,400. There is another small group of pistols in the 37,000 serial number range. This entire latter group has London addresses, British Proofs, iron back straps and iron trigger guards. (Statistically we can estimate this high serial numbered London group at 250 pistols.) There are 373 surviving specimens in the survey, which represent a survival rate of 1.7%

That background will permit us to examine the results of the survey.

*Dated presentations of 1862 Police pistols*

In an effort to validate published years of production, a table of dated presentations of 1862 Police pistols was prepared. A pistol could be presented long after it was produced, but it is hard to present it before it is manufactured.

There are a large number of presentations of pistols during the Civil War, but very few are dated.

This table provides reasonable confirmation for the published dates of 1862 Police manufacture.

If the Pocket Pistol of Navy Caliber was “produced in the same serial number range”, we should be able to present a similar table of Civil War presentations for it. We should be able to, but we cannot—no dated presentations of this pistol during the Civil War were discovered. Either it was unpopular or it did not exist. Only one dated presentation of this model was located—Serial #16619 - July 1868.

*Barrel addresses*

Although the normal address for pistols during the Civil War was “ADDRESS COL. SAM<sub>L</sub> COLT NEW-YORK U.S. AMERICA,” at least 60% of the first 2100 “1862 Police” produced in 1861 had the address “ADDRESS SAM<sub>L</sub> COLT HARTFORD, CT.” (The percentage was probably higher, because not all sources used for the survey indicated the barrel address.)

The 1851 Navy, the 1849 Old Model Pocket Pistol, and other pistols were also being so marked in 1861.<sup>20,21</sup> Again, if the Pocket Pistol of Navy Caliber was “produced in the same serial range” we could expect a similar proportion of Hartford addresses for it. We would be disappointed. No Hartford addresses were encountered anywhere in the entire run of these pistols. Either there was no die available for octagon barrels guns—(not so—the 1849 Old Model Pocket Pistol was being so marked in 1861), or the model was not yet in existence when the balance of the Colt line was so marked.

*Iron back straps and trigger guards*

At least 52% of the first 1100 “1862 Police” had iron back straps and trigger guards. (The percentage was probably higher, because the material of the back strap and trigger guard was not always noted.) If the Pocket Pistol of Navy Caliber was “produced in the same serial range” we could expect a similar proportion of iron trigger guards and back straps for it in the early production, but we would not find them. All back straps and trigger guards of the first 1100 Pocket Pistols of Navy Caliber were made of brass. Either supplies of the iron parts were limited (not so—several thousand of the same size parts were used on 1849 Old Model Pocket Pistols in this same time period.<sup>22</sup>), or the model was not yet in existence.

*Engraving patterns*

These present some of the most important evidence of all. A very significant element of this is yet another engraving pattern (or

**Table I**

**A brief survey of Colt 1862 Police by serial number and presentation date**

Year	Published Serial Number at Start of Year <sup>19</sup>	Serial Number Presented	Presentation Date
1861	1	781	January 30, 1861
		2179, 2294	April 1861
		4459	August 6, 1861
		6495, 6497, 6511, 8501	November 1861
1862	“8500”	5410, 11527	September 1862
		14640	1862
1863	15000	16013	July 1863
		18355	1863
		26653	December, 1863
1864	“26000”	18771	July 1864
		23200	April 1864
1865	29000		
1866	32000		
1867	35000		
1868	37000		
1869	40000	41503	March 1869
1870	42000		
1871	44000		
1872	45000		
1873	46000–47000		



Figure 9. “Heavy Scroll with Punched Dot Background on a converted “1862 Police,” Serial Number 42646 ECN, engraved as a percussion. Note heavy, wide scrolls. *John D. Breslin Collection, Paul Goodwin Photograph.*

patterns) used only in 1869-70, one that R. L. Wilson has designated the “Heavy Leaf Scroll” (and “Heavy Scroll with Punched Dot”) pattern.<sup>23</sup> (see Figures 9 and 10).

In order to benchmark the transition from Gustave Young Scroll to the Late Vine style, and then to the Heavy Leaf Scroll, a study of engraved Colt 1860 Armies was made. The results of this study are shown in Table II.

**Table II**  
**A brief survey of Colt 1860 armies by serial number and engraving style**

Serial Number at Beginning of Year <sup>24</sup>	Serial Number	Style
1863-85000	100359; 100362;	Scroll
	110380; 111592;	
	111594; 140649;	
	147593	
1864-150000	150163; 151388;	Late Vine
	151389; 151695;	
	151718	
1865-153000	154301; 155350	Late Vine
	155433	Scroll
1866-156000	158895	Scroll
	159800; 159808	Late Vine
1867-162000	163678; 166307;	Late Vine
	166465; 169075;	
	169537; 169559;	
	169837	
1868-170000	173507; 173629;	Late Vine
1869-177000	177481; 181684	Late Vine
	183225, 183226; 183227;	Heavy Leaf
1870-185000	185335;	Heavy Leaf
	187285; 187300;	
	187311	
1871-190000	187265; 187277, 187365;	Heavy Scroll with Punched dot
	187366	



Figure 10. “Heavy Scroll with Punched Dot Background” on a converted “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber,” Serial Number 20150 E, engraved as a percussion. Again note heavy, wide scrolls. *John D. Breslin Collection, Paul Goodwin Photograph.*

It can be seen that the Late Vine style was not used for the 1860 Army before 1864, but was used almost exclusively from 1860 until 1869-70. About 1870, the new Heavy Leaf and Heavy Scroll styles of engraving were introduced for what may have been only a few months.

Another benchmark was provided by Robert M. Jordan, the author, with the late Darrow M. Watt, of *Colt’s Pocket ‘49, It’s Evolution Including the Baby Dragoon and Wells Fargo*. Mr. Jordan stated in personal correspondence that Serial no. 262190 E, manufactured in 1864, was the earliest Late Vine engraved Old Model (1849) Pocket pistol that was encountered in their research for the book.

As part of a discussion of engraving styles, we should point out that at Colt, guns intended for engraving were specially marked with a “dot” or “apostrophe” or the letter “E”. These guns received special polishing, prior to engraving. Thus the engraving took place near the time the piece was manufactured.

With that background we can now examine a comparison of engraving patterns on the “1862 Police” and the “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber”. This is similar in concept to the earlier study done by John Dussling but covers nearly seven times as many examples and includes pistols factory engraved as percussion and later converted to cartridge. The present comparison also includes examples with Heavy Leaf Scroll and Heavy Scroll with



**Table III**  
**Survey of Colt 1862 Police Pistols by serial number and engraving style**

Serial Number at Beginning of Year <sup>25</sup>	Serial Number	Style
1861-1	13 Pistols between serial no. 206 and no. 3419	All Gustave Young Scroll
1862-“8500”	9 Pistols between serial no. 8797 and no. 14303	All Gustave Young Scroll
1863-15000	41 Pistols between serial no. 15524 and no. 26378	All Gustave Young Scroll
1864-“26000” (probably at least 26700)		Only engraved specimens between no. 26492 and no. 28940 were four in Nimschke style
1865-29000	1 Pistol, serial no. 29085 13 Pistols between serial no. 29172 and no. 30081	Gustave Young Scroll Late Vine
1866-32000	None	
1867-35000	None	
1868-37000	13 Pistols between serial no. 37847 and no. 38908 1 pistol, serial no. 38549 1 pistol, serial no. 39220 IE	Late Vine Gold Inlaid Gustave Young scroll, always associated with Pocket Navy no. 17986 IE <sup>26</sup>
1869-40000	5 Pistols between serial no. 41304 and no. 41384	Late Vine
1870-42000	1 Pistol, serial no. 42304 IE 1 Pistol, serial no. 42646 ECN Two Pistols, serial no. 43335E and no. 43371 *	Late Vine Heavy Scroll with punched dot Heavy Leaf
	*Back strap only	

Punched Dot engraving. There are so many examples that a summary is presented in Table III.

There are several key things to observe in this table: 1) until the beginning of 1865, all engraved “1862 Police” pistols were done in the Gustave Young Scroll; 2) the Late Vine style was used almost exclusively from the beginning of 1865 until 1870, when a few specimens of “Heavy Leaf” and “Heavy Scroll”

were produced; 3) The exceptions, manufactured in 1868, are a gold inlaid revolver Serial 38549, and Serial 39220, the only “1862 Police” engraved by Gustave Young after 1865. This last item, Serial 39220, is extremely important in our study and will be referred to later.

To summarize table findings, *there is no evidence of the Late Vine style of engraving prior to 1864.*

Please recall that, except for a small group in the 37,000 range, the serial numbers for the “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber” end at no. 21,400. Since all factory engraved “1862 Police” pistols below serial no. 29,000 have the Gustave Young scroll, it would seem that all “Pocket Models of Navy Caliber” should also have that scroll, if they share the same serial number range.

If not all, how about some? If not some, how about one? Yes, there is one, and it is important. Table IV lists the results of the survey of engraved “Pocket Models of Navy Caliber”, also including percussion pistols that were converted to cartridge *after* engraving.

Item	Serial No. 39220 IE “1862 Police” <sup>28</sup>	Serial No. 17986 IE “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber” <sup>29</sup>
Barrel Address	Address Col. Colt London (hand engraved)	Address Col. Colt London (hand engraved)
Trigger Guard and Back strap	Silver Plated Iron	Silver Plated Iron
British Proofs?	No	No
Engraving grade	Exhibition	Exhibition
Hammer spur	Hand checkered	Hand checkered
Cylinder	Extra engraving	Extra engraving

**Table IV**  
**Survey of Colt Pocket Model of Navy Caliber Pistols by Serial Number and Engraving Style**

Year	Serial Number	Style
?	41 Pistols between Serial no. 2044 E and no. 16616	All Late Vine
Probably 1868	One Pistol Serial no. 16619 E	Late Vine, Presented July, 1868
	5 Pistols between Serial no. 16623 and no. 17613	All Late Vine
	One pistol Serial no. 17986 IE.	Only known Pocket Navy with Gustave Young scroll engraving, always associated with '62 Police no. 39220/IE <sup>27</sup>
Probably 1869	7 Pistols between serial no. 19894 and no. 20002	All Late Vine
1870	3 Pistols between serial no. 20105 and no. 20127	All Heavy Leaf
	2 Pistols, serial no. 20147 E and no. 20150 E	Both Heavy Scroll

There are a few key things to observe in Table IV. 1) With one exception, all “Pocket Pistols of Navy Caliber” were engraved in the Late Vine style up until the last few were done in the Heavy Leaf and Heavy Scroll styles; 2) the exception, serial no. 17986 IE is not just the only Gustave Young engraved “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber”, it also helps unravel our mystery. In the previous table regarding “1862 Police” engraving we mentioned that Serial no. 39220 IE was important.

Let us examine these two pistols (see the table on the previous page and Figures 11 and 12).

These guns have apparently always been kept together and were in the collection of former Colt employee James Bryant. Mr. Bryant was with the company for many years, and later passed the pistols to his son, Henry G. Bryant, who also was a long time Colt employee.<sup>30</sup>

Apparently Gustave Young engraved these guns for show purposes, probably for London, and obviously at the same time.



Figure 11. Serial #39220 IE Model 1862 Police, elaborate exhibition grade Gustave Young engraving, hand engraved barrel address ADDRESS COL. COLT LONDON, iron trigger guard and backstrap. (Reproduced from *Fine Colts from the Dr. Joseph A. Murphy Collection* by R. L. Wilson Used with permission of the Author.)

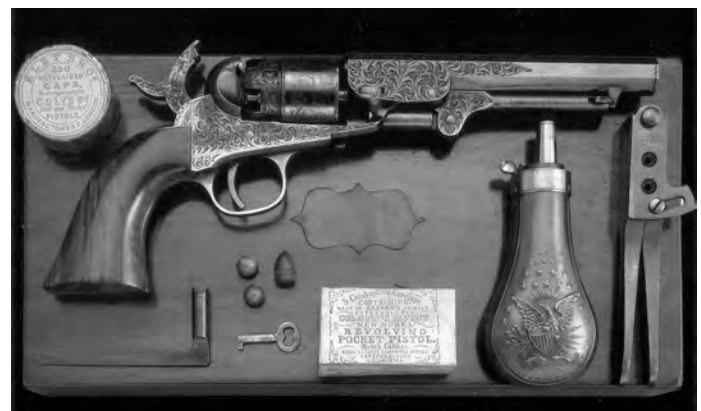


Figure 12. Serial #17986 IE Pocket Navy Model elaborate exhibition grade Gustave Young engraving, hand engraved barrel address ADDRESS COL. COLT LONDON, iron trigger guard and backstrap. (Reproduced from *Fine Colts from the Dr. Joseph A. Murphy Collection* by R. L. Wilson Used with permission of the Author.)

From Table III we know that serial no. 39220 IE was made in 1868, and the inescapable conclusion is that serial no. 17986 IE was *made at the same time*.

The Heavy Leaf, and Heavy Scroll with punched dot style were used for an extremely short period of time only in 1870, yet a few factory engraved specimens of the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber are found in the low 20,000 serial number range. Colt factory records confirm that these are factory engraved. This is important, because the engraving pattern used on the two Heavy Scroll engraved Pocket Pistols of Navy Caliber (nos. 20147E and

20150E) is **so identical** to that used on the Heavy Scroll engraved 1862 Police (no. 42646 ECN) as to lead to the conclusion that they could have been engraved on the same day by the same person “(Please refer to Figures 9&10)”. Since that engraving style was used so briefly in 1870, and, since pistols to be engraved were specially processed in manufacturing, one must conclude that the five Pocket Pistols of Navy Caliber engraved in the Heavy Leaf and Heavy Scroll styles, and the three 1862 Police pistols engraved in those same styles, *were made at the same time*.

#### *Serial number duplication*

If these two pistol models had separate serial number ranges, then some duplication should occur. Except for the few pistols in the 37,000 range, the highest serial number for the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber is about 21,400.

There are 358 such pistols in that range in our survey, not counting conversions.

Of the 1862 Police pistols in the survey 648 are also below no. 21,400. Although that seems like a lot, it can be shown that *if these are separate ranges*, the most likely probability is to have 11 duplicates. In fact *19 pairs of duplicates* were located. Two of these pairs are interesting:

*Serial no. 1 1862 Police* seems to be an experimental piece since it has a round roll engraved cylinder, also with serial no. 1,<sup>31</sup> but serial no. *1 Pocket Model of Navy Caliber* is a normal model, standard in all regards.<sup>32</sup>

*Serial no. 3 1862 Police* also seems to be an experimental piece since while it has a fluted cylinder, it has a dragoon shaped barrel and a jointed loading lever.<sup>33</sup> Again, *Serial no. 3 Pocket Model of Navy Caliber* is standard in all regards.<sup>34</sup>

Also, as part of the research for our book, Bill Pirie and I catalogued *conversions* of Pocket Models of Navy Caliber from book “A” of the Colt Factory records for the Colt Company. The list included 879 serial numbers between 18200 and 21200. Of course, not all of the Pocket Models of Navy Caliber in that range were converted, many were sold as percussion guns. However, the 879 listed numbers represent 29.3% of the 3000 Pocket Model of Navy Caliber pistols produced in that serial number range. These are all guns produced as percussion pistols and converted to cartridge in 1875. It provides a very concentrated group to compare for duplication. The survey contains 74 *1862 Police* pistols between those serial number limits. In separate serial ranges, 29.3% of 74, or 22, would be the number of duplicates with highest probability, and 22 were identified.

#### *The evolution of terminology*

Before discussing how terminology developed and changed, and the confusion that resulted, it is necessary to point out that the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber was an *economy model*. In 1867, the 1862 Police was priced \$0.75 higher, no doubt due to the more complex machining involved. (That differential had increased to \$2.50 by 1872) This is also

**Table V**  
**Pistol Prices in 1867<sup>35</sup>**

Barrel length	“New Model Police Pistols”	“New Pocket Pistols Navy Size Caliber”
4½”	11.75	11.00
5½”	12.15	11.40
6½”	12.50	11.75

**Prices of Parts in 1867<sup>36</sup>**

Parts of Arms	Police, 36 cal.	N. Pock't 36 cal
Barrel	Per inch .83	Per inch .78
Cylinder	2.74	2.44
Lever	1.25	.52
Rammer	.25	.20

reflected in the higher prices charged for Police Model *parts* as shown in an 1867 price list (Table V).

Because of these price differences, there was *no* indiscriminate mixing of these models in Colt records. All documents examined after both models were definitely on sale clearly differentiated between them. Internally at Colt, the 1862 Police was known as “Police,” or “Police 36 cal.” and the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber was called “New Model Pocket 36/cal” (or, more frequently, “N. M. Pkt.36/cal,” which is another source of possible confusion since the 1855 Root is known as “N. M. Pkt.” At times the “36/cal” is omitted, but the barrel length is normally enough to differentiate between the two models).

#### **1861**

Part of the confusion about these two models can be traced back to the Colt Company itself. They seem to have been unclear about what to call the small frame .36 caliber fluted cylinder model when they introduced it in 1861.

In an advertisement dated January 1, 1861,<sup>37</sup> Colt referred to:

**“PATTERNS ENTIRELY NEW  
OF INCREASED CALIBER  
WITH PATENT CREEPING RAMRODS ATTACHED”**  
“NEW MODEL POCKET PISTOL  
Caliber . . . 265-1000ths of an inch . . . ”  
“NEW MODEL POCKET PISTOL  
Caliber . . . 31-1000ths of an inch . . . ”  
**“NEW MODEL POCKET PISTOL  
Caliber . . . .36-1000ths of an inch . . . ”**  
(EMPHASIS MINE)

The only small 36-caliber pistol “with patent creeping ramrod attached” is the “1862 Police” (The other two are “Root’ Models). Parsons tells us that, in fact, early references to this pistol were “36 cal Small” or “New Model Small”.<sup>38</sup>

In November 1861, The Colt Company presented some pistols to General J. K. F. Mansfield. The presentation reads in part:

*“Col. Colt presents his compliments to General J. K. F. Mansfield and requests him to accept as a token of Col. C’s high regards and esteem the accompanying specimens of his most recently improved revolving breech Holster, Belt, and Pocket pistols . . . ”* (emphasis mine)

Those pistols are on display in the Connecticut Museum of History, on loan from the Middlesex County Historical Society. The “Pocket” pistol referred to is serial no. 6510, a four and one-half inch barrel “1862 Police” standard in all respects except for the engraved presentation.

Sam Colt himself did not seem to suffer from this confusion. In the Colt Factory records portion of the archives of the Connecticut State Library, there is a small book entitled Orders & Col. Colt. It records what must have been Col. Colt’s verbal orders to the factory, as well as other orders of management after

Colt's death. On September 18, 1861, Colt issued a series of thirteen orders covering every firearm in the line, such as "N. M. Holster pistols. Add 10,000 at a time and keep up perpetual fires on essential parts", "O.M. Holster pistols. I want no more of these arms for the present." etc. The list includes the following entry:

"Order #3: Police pistols. Put 5000 in works at a time and keep forging tools constantly employed when not interfering with Holst.<sup>39</sup>"

Again on October 10, 1861 Colt ordered:

"Police Pistols 36/cal. Order stock for 15,000 pistols at once"<sup>40</sup> (Please see the Photostat of the actual 1861 page).

Nowhere above is there any mention of any other small "36/cal" pistol.

### 1862

By 1862, the Colt Company seems to have settled on the name "Police" for their new, small, .36 caliber pistol. An index to production for the year 1862 lists entries for 4 1/2 inch, 5 1/2 inch, and 6 1/2 inch Police pistols.<sup>41</sup> The index also includes entries for Root models, 5 shot and 6 shot Pocket Models (1849) in various barrel lengths, Old Model (1851) Navy pistols, New Model (1861) Navy Pistols, New Model (1860) Army Pistols, and Old Model (Dragoon) Army Pistols. There is no mention of a New Model Pocket "36/cal".

### 1863

The previously cited journal of management orders, *Orders & Col. Colt*, contains entries ordering production of many of the items in the Colt Company product line. Among the entries are:

"August 21: 2000 4 1/2 inch Police  
3000 5 1/2 inch Police"<sup>42</sup>

"November 30: 2500 4 1/2 inch Police"<sup>43</sup> (Please see the Photostat of the page for 1863, 1864, and early 1865).

R. L. Wilson in his book, *Colt Engraving, Volume I*, quotes factory records regarding the number of pistols engraved in 1863.<sup>44</sup> The list includes 300 (1860) Army Pistols, 303 Old Model (1851) Navy Pistols, 294 New Model (1861) Navy Pistols, 72 Old Model (1849) Pocket Pistols, 243 Police (1862) Pistols, and 112 Root (1855) Pistols.

There is no mention in any of the above of a New Model Pocket "36/cal".

### 1864

The book, *Orders & Col. Colt*, contains only one entry for 1864, an order dated January 27 for "5000 O.M. Navy" (pistols) The fire that destroyed the Colt Factory in February 1864 stopped all production of pistols until the building and machinery could be replaced.

Apparently some pistols had been prepared for engraving, because, as above, R. L. Wilson, quotes Colt Factory records regarding pistols engraved in 1864 in *Colt Engraving, Volume I*.<sup>45</sup> The list includes 98 (1860) Army Pistols, 66 Old Model (1851) Navy Pistols, 28 New Model

(1861) Navy Pistols, 218 Old Model (1849) Pocket Pistols, 96 Police (1862) Pistols, and 32 Root (1855) Pistols. Again, there is no mention of a "N.M. Pkt. 36/cal."

### 1865

It seems that operations were beginning to get back to normal in early 1865, because, according to *Orders & Col. Colt*, on February 8th management ordered "4000, 4 1/2 inch Police Barrels 5000, 5 1/2 inch Police Barrels 5000, 6 1/2 inch Police Barrels"<sup>46</sup>

**On March 1, 1865, we find the first mention in any Colt records of the pistol now known as the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber!** On that date, according to *Orders & Col. Colt*, orders were placed for

"1000, 4 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c Barrels  
1000, 5 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c Barrels  
2000, 6 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c Barrels"<sup>47</sup>

This was followed, on May 16, by orders for

"1000, 4 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c Barrels  
1000, 5 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c Barrels  
1000, 6 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c Barrels"<sup>48</sup>

**On July 13, 1865 the first orders were issued for finished pistols:**

"1250, 4 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c  
1250, 5 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c  
2500, 6 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c"<sup>49</sup>

**This was followed by another order on August 3:**

"1250, 4 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c  
1250, 5 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c"<sup>50</sup>

The next requirement was much larger than the previous ones. **On October 11, orders were placed for:**

"5000, 4 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c  
5000, 5 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c  
5000, 6 1/2 inch N. M. Pocket 36/c"<sup>51</sup>

(These orders can be seen on the Photostat of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1865 page of orders)

The above orders for "N. M. Pkt.36/cal." total 22,500 pistols. You may recall that total production of the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber went to Serial no. 21,400, plus about 250 pistols that were numbered in the 37,000 serial number range, so the above orders authorized the entire production run of this pistol.

At my request, Mr. Herbert G. Houze was kind enough to research *Colt's Patent Manufacturing Company Sales Journal B* (August 1, 1863 to June 30, 1869) for the first mention of a "New Model Pkt 36/cal". He found no mention of the pistol prior to April 1865. He noted that "The earliest entries for this model (listed below) refer to the "6 1/2 in 36/c Navy Pistol" later described as a "Pocket Pistol".<sup>52</sup> (The actual entries are slightly abbreviated for clarity.)

"Tuesday, April 25, 1865

Thomas J. Fales

[For] 2. 6 1/2 in. Navy Pistols & all appendages"<sup>53</sup>

“Friday May 5, 1865

Wm. Read & Sons

[For] 1. 6 1/2 in. 36/c Pocket Pistol M & W  
(Mould and Wrench)”<sup>54</sup>

“Monday July 17, 1865

Thomas J Fales

[For] 1. 6 1/2 in. 36/c Navy Pistol M & W

“ 1. 4 1/2 in. “ Police “

The same having been charged to

Mr. Fales June 8, '65 with wrong

prices and canceled by entry of this date in

Day Book”<sup>55</sup>

Mr. Houze points out: “The William Read & Son sale is of importance since it is combined with normal monthly entry reading ‘For Invoice of Pistols as per Consignment book.’ When the Police Model was introduced samples were recorded in exactly the same manner (i.e., one or two Police pistols following a standard billing). This strongly suggests that the ‘New Pocket Pistol’ was introduced near that date.”<sup>56</sup>

The inescapable conclusion from all of the above is that The “New Model Pocket Pistol of *Navy Size Caliber*” was not introduced until 1865. Furthermore, it was numbered in it’s own serial number range, and was not co-mingled with the “1862 Police”. (Of interest, the first orders for the “Police” pistol to be issued following the 1864 fire, were not made until March 3, 1866, perhaps indicative of the more difficult machining processes that had to be re-established.)<sup>57</sup>

The earliest dated advertising reference that has been located with a listing for the “New Pocket Pistols *Navy Size Caliber*” is dated August 1865.<sup>58</sup> (In fairness, it should be noted that a retyped copy of an undated Colt price list, listing this pistol, is shown in *The Colt Revolver* by Haven & Belden, with the notation that it was issued “about 1863”<sup>59</sup> I suppose “about” could be stretched to plus or minus two years.)

#### *Speculation*

The 1864 Fire was devastating to the Colt Company. The *Scientific American* of February 20, 1864 said, in part: “The building was used solely for the manufacture of pistols and revolving rifles. Most of (the contractors) lost all of their tools and succeeded in saving very little of the work they had in hand.” And later: “Said one of the chief managers of the concern ‘If some one had come to us yesterday and offered us four million for what is destroyed, we shouldn’t have looked at it.’ Very much of the machinery was manufactured on the spot, the patterns of which were destroyed, and a long time would be required to replace that which is lost. Three years, at least, of faithful labor, would hardly place the works in the order they were.”<sup>60</sup>

It appears quite likely that the “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber” or “New Model Pocket—.36 Caliber” as the Colt Company called it, was an expedient designed to get the company back into the small frame, .36 caliber, pistol busi-

ness as quickly as possible following that factory fire. Evidence supporting that conclusion is as follows:

- The 1849 Old Model Pocket Pistol was one of Colt’s most successful products. It would make sense to get *it* back in production as soon as possible.
- As previously noted the machining of the barrel, cylinder, and loading lever of the 1862 Police was rather complicated when compared to octagon barreled pistols with roll engraved cylinders.
- The loading lever of the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber is not only simpler to manufacture, but in fact is identical to the one used on the 1849 Old Model Pocket Pistol.
- The same equipment used to manufacture barrels, cylinders, and most other parts for (1849) Old Model Pocket Pistols, could, with only minor modification, produce parts for a small frame, .36 caliber, pocket pistol.
- Jim Eplen has made a detailed comparison of the parts of the Pocket Model of Navy Caliber and the 1849 Old Model Pocket Pistol. in the February 2000 issue of *The Gun Report*.<sup>61</sup> His study clearly points out the similarity of parts for the two pistols, even including the same die to roll-engage the cylinders
- Although *barrels* for the *Police models* had been ordered in 1864, it must have been obvious that the pistols themselves could not yet be produced, since production of actual pistols was not ordered until 1866.
- Accordingly, in 1865, the company ordered production of octagon barrels, and later 22,500 complete pistols of the “N. M. Pkt. .36/cal.”

#### **Unfinished business**

The survey indicates that, statistically, there were approximately 250 of these “New Model. Pocket. 36/cal” pistols with serial numbers in the 37000 range. All of the early writers were correct; the pistols were numbered in the same serial number range with the “1862 Police” but only for 250 guns! Why this was done calls for some additional speculation.

- These guns all had London addresses, and those that have survived all have iron back straps and trigger guards.
- Please recall the pair of Gustave Young engraved pistols described earlier: these guns were Serial no. 39220 for the “1862 Police” and 17986 for the “New Model. Pocket .36/cal” These guns both had elaborate embellishments, London address, and iron back straps and trigger guards. It is safe to say that these were produced in 1868.
- The survey also reveals that there was a small group of “New Model. Pocket .36/cal” pistols with London addresses and iron mountings in the high 17,000 serial number range.

- There was also a group of “1862 Police” pistols with London addresses and iron mountings in the low 38,000 serial number range.
- It seems clear that a major English promotion of small frame 36 caliber pistols was planned for 1868. We can speculate on two possibilities:
  - requirements changed after frames and iron mounts had been dedicated to “1862 Police” pistols in the 37,000 serial number range, and these guns were finished up as “New Model. Pocket .36/cal” pistols,
- or a conscious decision was made to use a block of numbers from the “1862 Police” for these London “New Model. Pocket .36/cal” pistols in order to make it appear that they were more successful.

#### CONCLUSION

Regardless of the reason, the evidence is clear. The “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber” did not exist before 1865, and, except as noted above, could not have been numbered in the same serial number range as the “1862 Police.”

It seems that we can now introduce

**Colt’s Last Percussion Revolver,  
The 1865 New Model Pocket .36 Caliber  
(see Figure 13)**



Figure 13. The “1865 New Model Pocket .36 caliber.” Or, the “1865 Pocket Navy.” John D. Breslin Collection, Paul Goodwin Photograph.

I have always disliked the name “Pocket Model of Navy Caliber”—it takes too long to type. I would like to suggest “1865 Pocket Navy.”

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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his photographs. Sincere appreciation must be expressed for the gracious research help provided by Herb Houze who searched for the first mention of the “New Model Pocket 36/cal” in Colt Sales records. Finally, I extend most sincere thanks to Philip H. A. Boulton who unselfishly exchanged information with me and provided hundreds of serial numbers for the survey.

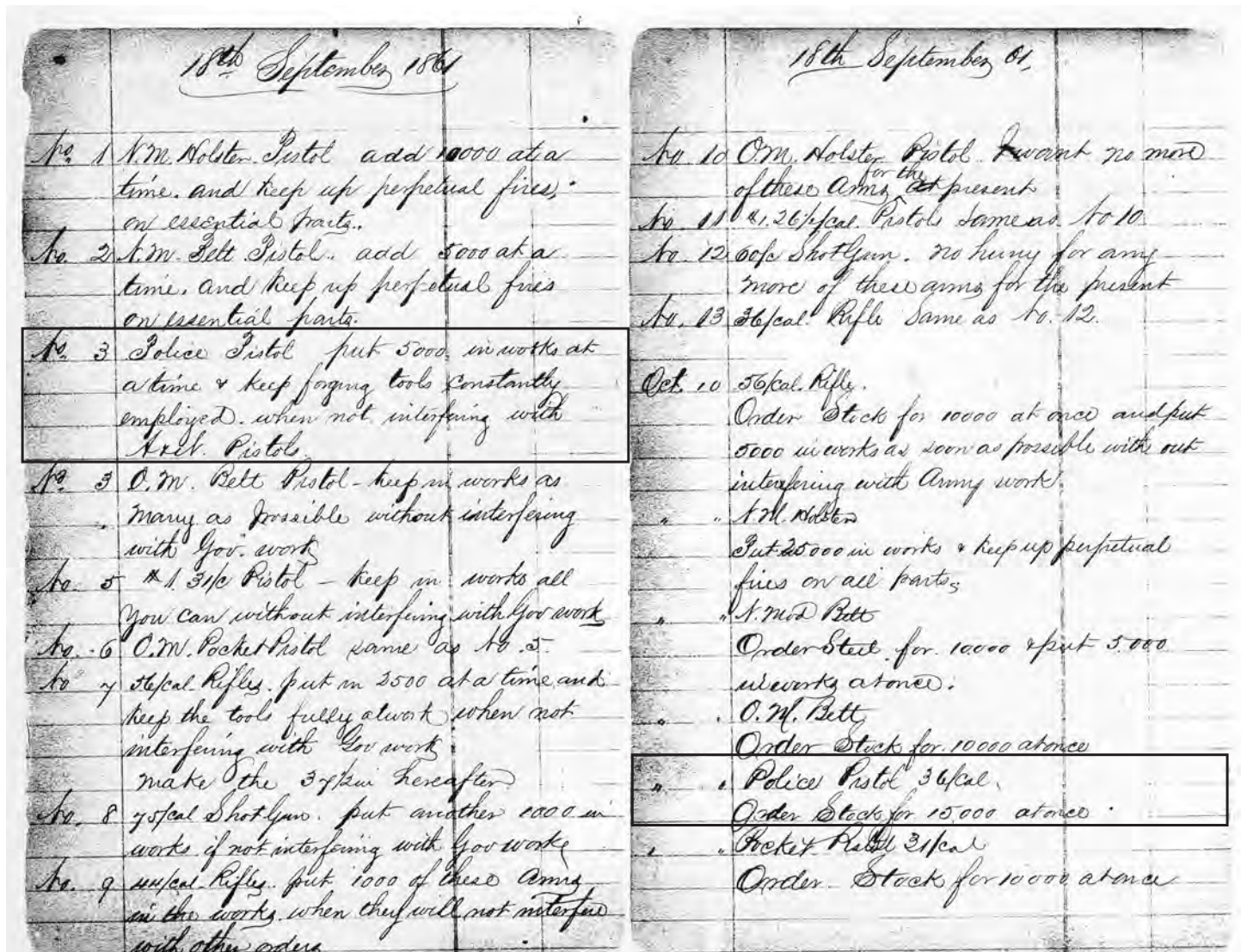
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Photostat of 1861 page of "Orders and Col. Colt" showing The Colonel's actual instructions to the Factory. Courtesy the Connecticut State Library

1863		1863	
Feb 25	10000 N. M. Army	Nov 16	3500-6in 3000-5in 3500-4in
March 6	5000 O. M. Navy 5000-4in 5000-5in 5000-6in	31	2500 4pin Polia
May 11	5000 N. M. Army	Dec 15	5000 N. M. Pocket 3pin
32	10000 do do	1864	
June 1	5000 O. M. Navy	Jan 17	5000 O. M. Navy
June 11	6000-6in 6000-5in 5000-4in	1865	
Aug 1	5000 Navy - O.M.	Feb 8	4000-4pin Polia Barrels 5000-5pin " " 5000-6pin " " Other parts to balance due above
31	2000 4pin Polia 3000-5pin "	March 1	1000 4in N. M. Pocket 36p Barrels 1000-5in " " " " 2000-6pin " " " "
28	10000 N. M. Army	May 16	1000-4pin N. M. Pocket 36p Barrels 1000-5pin " " " " 1000-6pin " " " "
Sept 25	5000 O. M. Navy	33	2437 N. M. Pocket Lock Frames - Barrels 3pin Other parts up to 6000 on hand & ordered
Oct. 8	5000 N. M. Navy		
31	5000 O. M. Navy		

Photostat of part of 1863, 1864 and part of 1865 pages of "Orders and Col. Colt" showing the first actual reference to "N.M. Pkt. 36/c," when barrels were ordered. Courtesy the Connecticut State Library

July 13	1250-4pin New Pocket 36p 1250-5pin " " " 2500-6pin " " "	Nov 14	4000 N. M. Army Bullet Molds
21	5000 O. M. Navy - except Frames	15	5000-4in O. M. Pocket 5000-5in " " 5000-6in " "
29	3000 N. M. Army - except Levers	1866	
Aug 3	1250-4pin New Pocket 36p 1250-5pin " " "	Jan 5	3500 N. M. Army - 2500 Barrels no Levers 5000 O. M. Navy
8	5000 Small longlinders 5 shot 8 5000-4in 5000-5in 5000-6in		8000-4in O. M. Pocket 5000-5in " " 5000-6in " "
15	5000 N. M. Navy	12	5000 N. M. Navy
Sept 21	2000 N. M. Army	Feb 6	2500 N. M. Pocket - 2000-3p-500-4pin
Oct. 11	5000-4pin New Pocket 5000-5pin " " 5000-6pin " "	Mar. 3	4000-4pin Polia 3300-5pin " 2700-6pin "
		April 14	5000 O. M. Navy

Photostat of balance of 1865 page and part of 1866 page of "Orders and Col. Colt" showing the first actual order of "New Pocket 36/c" as well as the first post-fire order (in 1866) of "Police" pistols. Courtesy the Connecticut State Library



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