



PRICE:
£225.00



Made for a need but never achieving its potential, Pietta's Spiller & Burr muzzle-loading revolver is a fine reproduction for classic shooters

SOUTHERN BELLE

Derek Landers re-visits an attractive reproduction of a Confederate revolver from Pietta

The fact that the American Civil War lasted as long as it did is a testament to the bravery and doggedness of the Confederate troops, and the skill of their leaders. From the start, their resources of manpower and weapons were far inferior to those of the Union forces. But for four years, three weeks and six days they doggedly resisted the might of the Northern Army. Finally, on April 9th, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia, realising that to continue would achieve nothing more than a further loss of life on both sides.

Brassed off

With the major government arsenals, along with private manufacturers such as Colt and Remington, based in Union territory, the North had little difficulty equipping its troops. The South on the other hand, would virtually have to start from scratch to build the factories needed. Purchases of revolvers from dealers, along with importations from Europe, provided a stopgap, but the need for production facilities was paramount to the war effort.

Businessmen Edward Spiller and David Burr decided to help and enlisted the aid of James

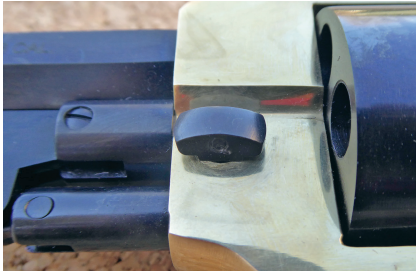
H. Burton, Superintendent of Armouries for the CSA. He had considerable expertise in the manufacture of arms, as before the War he was Master Armourer at Harper's Ferry Arsenal, and prior to that worked at the RSA factory at Enfield. In November 1861, he negotiated a contract with the government for Spiller & Burr to manufacture 15,000 revolvers with the War Department providing \$60,000 for the building of a factory and purchase of machinery. They also provided a Colt 1851 Navy revolver as a pattern for their requirements, with the agreement that, because of a shortage of materials, the frames could be made from brass.

On the move

The new factory was built in Richmond, Virginia and by May 1862 was almost ready to begin,

but by the end of that month, the Union Army had advanced, only a few miles from the city. So, they moved everything further south to Atlanta, Georgia, meaning that they were not ready to start producing until September, with the first few revolvers, probably no more than a dozen or so, being delivered to the war department in December 1862.

The next batch of 40 was not delivered until the spring of 1863 and most of these were rejected as faulty. Modifications were made but deliveries were very slow and the government bought the factory in January 1864 and moved it to Macon, Georgia. By December of that year, the Northern Army was knocking on the door again and the machinery was once more packed up. Production of the Spiller & Burr never resumed. Total output is estimated at less than 1,500 pieces, a far cry from the 7,000 per year



Cross pin button – note mark (letter Q) to indicate position, facing down to remove arbour



Small capping cut-out and Remington-style hammer



Top – Colt 1851 Navy, bottom – Spiller & Burr, note the generous loading cut-out and the feature that means balls cannot be loaded above the cylinder face

agreed in the 1861 contract. Quite why the revolver turned out to be a brass-framed copy of the Whitney rather than an 1851 Colt, as originally requested, is open to speculation.

Small but nicely formed

The large inventory of Pietta percussion revolvers includes accurate reproductions of many 19th century American pistols, alongside a number of what might be termed "fantasy" models. This latter group includes short-barrelled examples, or Sheriff models, of some of the more popular offerings by Colt, alongside brass-framed versions of the same models. While the guns have no basis in history, they are nevertheless popular with many Western fans. One brass frame that adheres strictly to its historical ancestry is the Spiller & Burr.

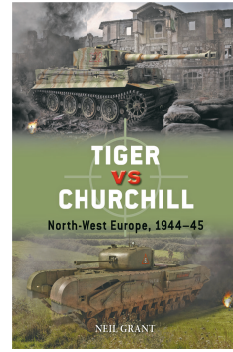
Slightly smaller than the normal .36 calibre revolvers of the period, the Spiller & Burr is a neat little offering showing one or two commendable design features. Unlike the original, Pietta has the luxury of a permanent, high tech production facility, which enables them to concentrate on product quality, rather than speed of manufacture. The black of the barrel, cylinder and loading lever, with

clear cut edges to the barrel flats, contrasts well with the polished brass of the frame, grip straps and trigger guard. The Remington-style hammer has a case-hardened finish. The trigger guard is a separate entity, but the frame and straps are cast as one piece in the style of the Remington Army revolver, and this design necessitates a two-piece wood grip rather than the one-piece of the Colt models. Matte-finished walnut is used here and the two halves are held by a screw through a pair of brass escutcheons and the fit is excellent with only a hint of raised edges. The black screws and trigger make for a very attractive package overall.

Well thought out

The frame has a rather small capping cut-out on the right side of the shield, but to be fair the nipple recesses are fairly wide so capping by hand is not a problem, unless the weather is really cold. The rear sight is a V-groove, cut into the rear of the gutter in the frame's top strap, the front, a conical brass bead which looks to be soldered in. The front of the frame shows a very clever interpretation to prevent one of the common

BOOKSHELF



TITLE: Tiger Versus Churchill
AUTHOR: Neil Grant
PUBLISHER: Osprey Books, Oxford
ISBN: 9781472843883
PRICE: £14.99

On the face of things, it would seem that pitting the Churchill tank, weighing less than 40 tons, against the 56-ton bulky might of the Tiger tank, with its 88mm gun, was a foregone conclusion in favour of the Tiger. Yet, despite such uneven odds, the British tank crews still engaged the nemesis of the battlefield. One such engagement, as featured in this gripping work, was Operation Jupiter (10th-11th July 1944) at the site of Hill 112, southeast of Caen. Despite the bravery of the 7th and 9th RTR, it was a one-sided affair, with 39 Churchill tanks destroyed for 6 Tigers lost; a loss ratio of more than 6:1. Using comparison charts and diagrams to compare the two tanks, the author puts forward opinions, supported by the operational capabilities of each design, along with variation in operational roles. Readers will find this a thought-provoking work and the conclusion is the subject of many debates.



TITLE: Walther Pistols
AUTHOR: John Walter
PUBLISHER: Osprey Books, Oxford
ISBN: 9781472850843
PRICE: £14.99



During WWII, one of the most sought after souvenirs was the German-made, P08 pistol, known to the Allied soldiers as the 'Luger'. Whilst still in service, it had largely been supplanted by the Walther P38 pistol, the series design which is the subject of this well-illustrated work. Produced in several countries, including Hungary, Turkey and the then state of East Germany, in a range of calibres from .22 to 9mm, the various designs of Walther pistols are all included here in a single volume. This makes it a perfect reference work to use in helping to build a display of what has become an iconic weapon in its own class. The P38 was used in many post-war conflicts, such as Indo-China and even revolutions. The author points out identification marks and some unusual models, such as gold-plated presentation pieces, which collectors can only dream about.



Rear sight



Front sight



Rear of cylinder is similar to the Remington

mistakes made when loading this type of revolver. On most percussion revolvers, should you fail to ram a ball fully home, leaving it slightly proud of the cylinder face, the mistake may not be realised until a couple of chambers later when that proud ball will not rotate past the forcing cone of the barrel, be honest guys, we've all done it!

The left side of the frame on this model butts right up to the cylinder face, meaning that a ball has to be rammed fully home before the cylinder can be rotated to the next chamber. Simple, but very clever and preventing a problem in the heat of battle, when such mistakes would likely occur.

Whitney-inspired

Another simple but efficient piece of design is the method for holding the combined cylinder arbour (cylinder pin) and loading lever assembly in place, likely copied directly from the Whitney revolver. The combined cylinder arbour, loading lever and ball rammer are removed from the pistol as one unit. The arbour has a semi-circular cut-out on its underside close to the front, and the cross-pin in the front of the frame, fitting in this notch, holds it in place. There is a corresponding cut-out in the cross-pin and turning it through 180° and dropping the loading lever, allows the arbour to slide out and the cylinder can be removed from the frame.

There is a mark on the cross-pin button to indicate which position is engaged. About on par with the Remington for ease of use and much better than Colt's transverse wedge arrangement. The lever is held in place with a standard, muzzle

catch and latch setup as found on most percussion revolvers of the period. The rear of the cylinder uses a Remington-style ratchet to turn it and has notches cut between each nipple recess where the nose of the hammer can be rested as a safety device when the pistol is carried fully loaded.

Big enough?

Those with larger than average hands may find the grips on this pistol a little on the small side, but for most there will not be a problem. The barrel is an inch shorter than the Colt Navy and the pistol weighs around six ounces less. The depth of each chamber is around one eighth less than the Colt, but I was able to get 22-grains of Henry Krank fine black powder, along with a thin grease cookie, behind the .375" lead ball. Ignition came from Remington percussion caps, and this combination proved very comfortable in use. Even with the shorter lever than other models, ramming the ball home was effortless.

Cylinder lock-up and timing is good with only a minuscule lateral movement. Trigger pull was a shade on the heavy side, but could easily be improved with a little work. Accuracy was equal to the larger Colt revolvers, with the slightly smaller powder charge obviously reducing muzzle velocity, but it would still have got the job done on the battlefield. The solid frame design meant that there were no spent caps falling into the hammer channel as sometimes happens with the Colts. I only managed around 30-shots, before I felt the effect of fouling beginning to bind the cylinder, so had to strip it out and give everything a wipe over, no big problem with the above-mentioned system. Mating a Remington-style solid frame with the Colt internal mechanism gives the Spiller & Burr the best of both worlds. All in all, this was a pleasant re-acquaintance with this revolver, and I would recommend it to anyone looking for something just that bit different from the norm. **GM**

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION (as tested)

- Name:** Pietta Spiller & Burr
- Type:** 6-shot percussion revolver
- Calibre:** .36"
- Barrel:** 6½"
- Length:** 13¾"
- Weight:** 1.1kg
- Frame:** Brass
- Sights:** Fixed V-notch and pin
- Price:** £225.00*
- Distributor:** Henry Krank & Co Ltd - henrykrank.com

*Please check with the distributor for current prices



Stripped showing rammer system, arbour pin and cylinder. Closed-framed revolvers are stronger than the Colt, open-frame types