


THE BRASS FRAMED CONFEDERATE COLTS  
SPILLER & BURR  
AND  
GRISWOLD & GUNNISON

AT THE OUTBREAK OF THE CIVIL WAR, THE SOUTH FOUND ITSELF FACING A SEVERE SHORTAGE OF ARMS MANUFACTORIES WHICH COULD EQUIP ITS LOYAL SONS WHO WERE RALLYING TO "THE CAUSE," TO DEFEND THEIR HOMELAND.

SAM GRISWOLD, FORMERLY A CONNECTICUT YANKEE, WHO MOVED TO GEORGIA IN 1822, AND ESTABLISHED A FACTORY FOR THE MANUFACTURE OF COTTON GINS, UNDERTOOK THE TASK OF PRODUCING HANDGUNS FOR THE CONFEDERACY. THE GRISWOLDVILLE MANUFACTORY RETOOLED ALMOST OVER NIGHT, AND USING SOME SLAVE LABOR, BEGAN THE MANUFACTURE OF THE GRISWOLD & GUNNISON BRASS FRAMED REVOLVER, COPIED FROM THE COLT NAVY PATTERN. THE FIRST REVOLVERS WERE PRODUCED IN JULY OF 1862, AND CONTINUED TO BE MADE UNTIL THE LATTER PART OF NOVEMBER 1864, WHEN THE FACTORY WAS DESTROYED BY YANKEES IN THE BATTLE OF GRISWOLDVILLE STATION.

 GRISWOLD & GUNNISON WERE THE MOST PROLIFIC OF HANDGUN MANUFACTURERS FOR THE CONFEDERACY, PRODUCING SOME 3500 BRASS FRAMED REVOLVERS DURING THEIR OPERATION. THEY ARE THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE OF THEIR CONFEDERATE HANDGUN BRETHERN, AND EVEN THOUGH THEIR MORTALITY RATE WAS EXTREMELY HIGH, THERE ARE MORE SPECIMENS KNOWN THAN ANY OTHER MAKE.

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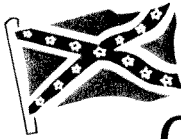
EDWARD SPILLER, A BUSINESSMAN FROM BALTIMORE, BUT A STRONG SOUTHERN SYMPATHIZER, BECAME A PARTNER, WITH A VIRGINIAN, FROM RICHMOND, DAVID BURR, A BUILDER OF STEAM ENGINES, TO PRODUCE HANDGUNS FOR THE CONFEDERACY. TEAMING UP WITH A LIEUTENANT COLONEL IN THE CONFEDERATE ARMY, JAMES HENRY BURTON, SPILLER AND BURR OBTAINED A CONTRACT WITH THE CONFEDERATE GOVERNMENT TO SUPPLY THE 15,000-.36 CALIBER HANDGUNS. SUCH GUNS WERE TO BE OF THE COLT NAVY PATTERN.

APPARENTLY, AT ABOUT THIS SAME TIME, ONE SAMUEL ROBINSON, FROM RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, SOON TO BECOME THE RENOWNED MANUFACTURER OF THE ROBINSON "SHARPS" CONFEDERATE CARBINE, HAD PLANNED TO MANUFACTURE HANDGUNS OF THE WHITNEY NAVY PATTERN, FOR THE CONFEDERACY.

IT IS BELIEVED THAT COLONEL BURTON, WITH SPILLER & BURR ACQUIRED THE ROBINSON HANDGUN MACHINERY AND BEGAN MANUFACTURING A .36 CALIBER REVOLVER MODELLED ON THE WHITNEY NAVY RATHER THAN THE COLT. THEY BEGAN THIS OPERATION IN ATLANTA GEORGIA, DUE TO BURTON'S TRANSFER THERE BY THE CONFEDERATE GOVERNMENT.

THE SPILLER & BURR FACTORY IN ATLANTA, AFTER TURNING OUT SOME 600 REVOLVERS, SOLD OUT TO THE CONFEDERATE GOVERNMENT WHICH MOVED THE MANUFACTORY TO THE MACON ARMORY AT MACON, GEORGIA, WHERE AN ADDITIONAL ESTIMATED 700 REVOLVERS WERE PRODUCED OR ASSEMBLED. NO MORE THAN 1300 SPILLER & BURR REVOLVERS WERE PRODUCED, MAKING THEM EXTREMELY RARE AND HIGHLY SOUGHT AFTER CONFEDERATE PRIZES.

FREDERICK R. EDMUNDS



THE  
Confederate States  
ARMORY & MUSEUM

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SPILLER & BURR CONFEDERATE HANDGUN # 421

made in Atlanta, Georgia, in late 1863.

BACKGROUND

Edward N. Spiller left Baltimore and moved to Richmond at the outset of the War Between The States, being a Southern sympathizer. There he met Richmond native, David J. Burr, who was engaged in building steam engines at the time.

Spiller & Burr became acquainted with CSA Lt. Col. James J. Burton, who was Superintendent of Armories for the Confederacy, and a gifted and knowledgeable armsmaker, and an authority in small arms and ordnance of the period.

The three men entered an agreement with the Confederate Government in late November of 1861, to supply 15,000 revolvers, to be delivered within a 27-month period. The revolvers were to be .36 calibre and "of the Colt's pattern". Burton was to superintend the entire manufacturing operation: Spiller, more or less "the front Man", and Burr, the general foreman.

Also in Richmond at that time was a gentleman named Samuel C. Robinson, who had prepared plans and patterns, and had secured machinery for the manufacture of pistols of the Whitney revolver pattern. However, the "Robinson Revolver Factory", never got off the ground, because Spiller & Burr bought him out, "lock, stock and barrel". Robinson then went on to making the well-known copies of the Sharps Carbine, which we refer to as either the "Robinson Sharps", or the "Confederate Sharps".

Thus it was, that Spiller, Burr and Burton were to set up their factory to produce Robinson's Whitney-pattern revolvers rather than those "of the Colt's pattern": the South needed small arms badly enough that as long as they were functional, they would be acceptable. Thus, the brass-framed Whitney was born!

The earliest Spillers were exact copies of the Whitney and were rejected upon inspection because the brass frame was not thought to be thick enough at the point where the barrel screwed into the frame: the top strap also needed to be thicker. The exact Whitney frame configuration, with its iron construction, would not suffice for the Spiller, thus, the Spiller frame was widened so that at the place where the barrel was screwed in, there was solid brass all the way back to the end: the top strap was also thickened.

Burton was transferred to the Atlanta area to establish a large Armory, so the Spiller & Burr manufacturing plant was set up there: Burton was key man!

There were approximately 600 Spiller & Burr revolvers

## Spiller &amp; Burr # 421 Cont'd.

made by the firm in Atlanta. Production was painfully slow, so in January of 1864, the Confederate Government bought out the firm, and moved the entire operation to Macon, where Burton had finally established an armory (Atlanta property was too highly priced!)

The Confederate Government continued to fabricate and manufacture the same pistol without a break in serial number sequence, from sometime in January, 1864 to mid-November, with some interruptions due to the proximity of Sherman's Army causing the dismantling and relocation of production machinery. No pistols were made after November of 1864. All in all, only some 1300 were produced, the number falling far short of the 15,000 contracted!

## PART-BY-PART DESCRIPTION OF SPILLER # 421:

## FRAME:

"421" stamped on right inside lower section, beneath trigger guard: also on butt flat.

## CYLINDER:

"421" stamped on outside surface, approximately halfway between two of the cylinder stops, reading from muzzle to breech: there is an obvious left twist to metal.

## BARREL:

6 and 1/16's inches long, measured from edge of frame, octagonal, and rounded at muzzle: a small brass cone sight is centered about 5/16's of an inch from the muzzle; loading lever catch is Colt-style, and is original. "421" stamped on bottom flat of the barrel, near the frame, reading from muzzle to breech.

## HAMMER ARM:

"421" stamped on top flat surface, muzzle to breech.

## PLUNGER:

Not stamped or marked on Spillers, but original.

## TRIGGERGUARD:

"421" stamped crossways on underside near screw hole.

## BARREL ARBOR:

"1" roughly stamped on top flat.

## HAMMER:

Original, no markings.

## BACKSTRAP:

Integral with frame (see FRAME) but additionally, stamped with two "E"'s upside down on the left inside front.

Spiller & Burr # 421 Cont'd.

GRIPS:

Original two-piece walnut with brass escutcheons and original grip screw: "W" stamped on butt of right side: pencilled-in #421 inside top of each side.

MAINSRING:

Original.


REMAINDER OF PARTS:

After careful examination, it is believed that all screws and internal parts of #421 are original.

CONCLUSION:

Spiller & Burr #421 is original in every respect, still showing some traces of its original blue finish. Its brass shows a fine aged patina, some casting flaws, and the ever-present machine-tool marks typical of Spiller manufacture and Confederate items in general.

The gun's overall appearance and excellent-plus condition make it a collector's prize!

  
Frederick R. Edmunds, Curator.