

COLT 1860 THUER CONVERSION

SERIAL # 178577

MANUFACTURED 1869

---

FROM: Bruce McDowell Collection

## COLT 1860 ARMY THUER CONVERSION (1869)

#178577 is a Colt Model 1860 Army Thuer Conversion that was purchased in March 2005 from the James D. Julia Auction.

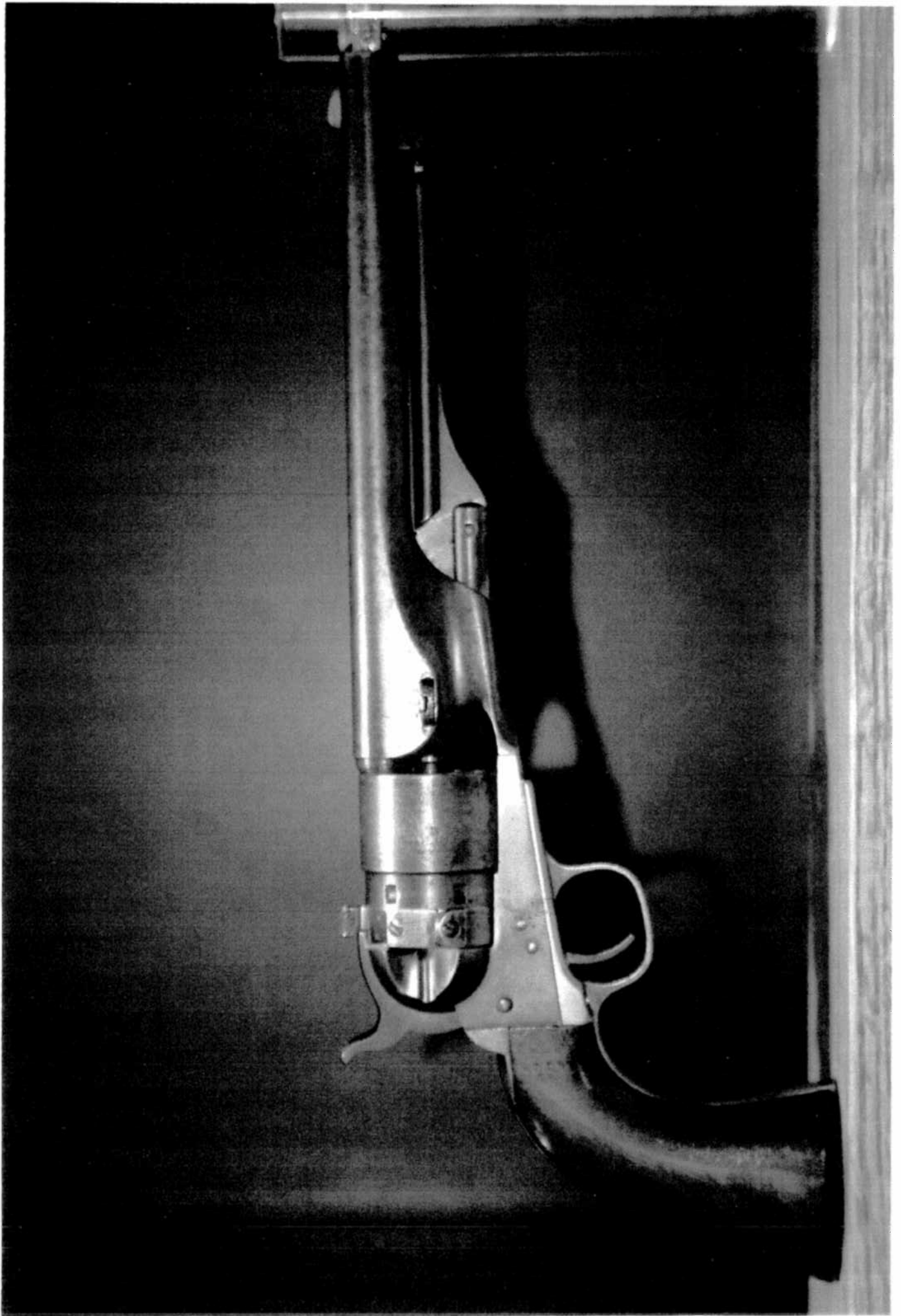
It was previously in the McDowell collection and is pictured at pages 82, 85, 86, 119, 120 and 125 of McDowell's book, A Study of Colt Conversions. It is also pictured in color on the cover of the book (the bottom of two guns).

The Thuer conversion was the first production Colt revolver to be produced for use with metallic cartridges. Because Smith & Wesson held a patent on metallic cartridges inserted from the rear, Colt's Thuer model utilized a tapered cartridge that was loaded from the front of the cylinder and pushed in with the old percussion rammer. These guns could also be used with the old percussion cylinder as well and were therefore at somewhat of an advantage on the frontier where metallic cartridges were difficult to obtain.

Shortly after the Thuer was introduced, the Smith & Wesson patent expired and in 1871 Colt then introduced its first rear-loading cartridge revolver, the Richards model of the 1860 Army. The Thuer quickly became obsolete.

Although the exact numbers of Thuers produced is unknown, production was very limited and they are very rare. A number of fake Thuers have been created out of 1860s. However, #178577 is the real thing with a pedigree from McDowell, the foremost Colt conversion expert. Thuers are very rarely seen at gun shows or auctions and this is a very special piece.

Pages from McDowell's book are attached.



A Study of

# COLT CONVERSIONS

and Other Percussion Revolvers



- First single source for Colt & other conversions
- Extensive research from factory archives
- More than 800 informative drawings & photographs

R. Bruce McDowell

## Chapter 4

# Colt Thuer Conversions

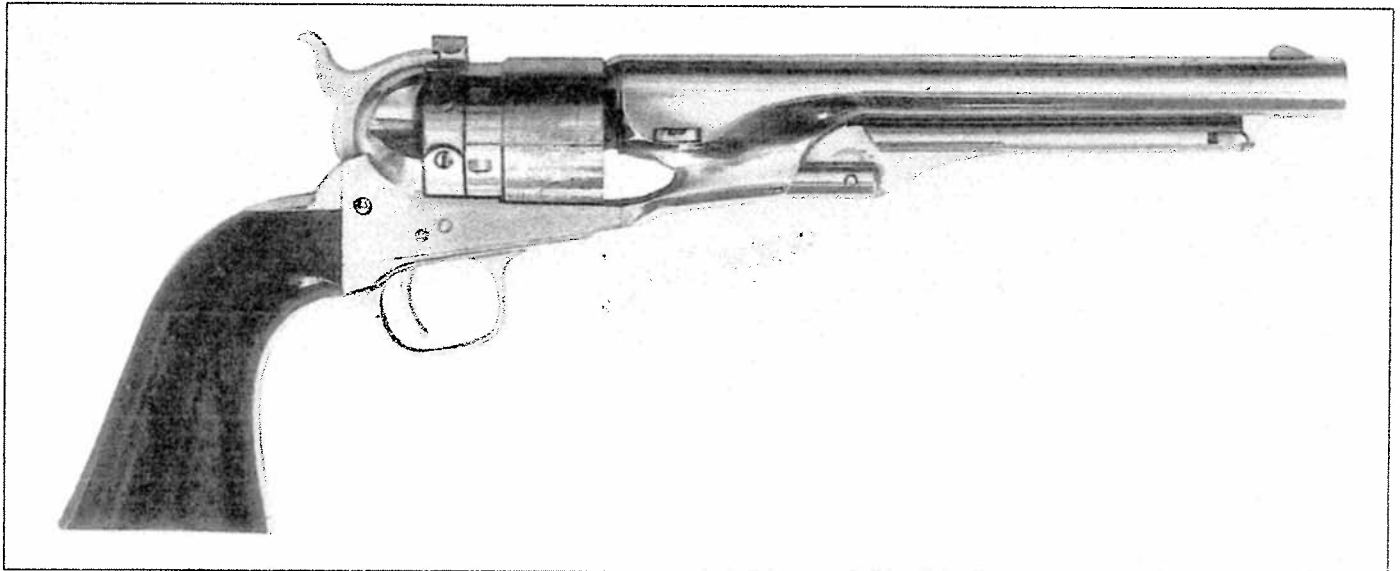
Because of the limited number produced, the Colt Thuer conversion is the rarest and most sought after by advanced Colt collectors. "Thuers" have historically brought high prices compared to their percussion counterparts. Consequently, many exist that are not Colt products, but rather were converted by unscrupulous individuals who applied original Colt Thuer cylinders and conversion rings to percussion Colt Army or Navy models, or even turned these conversion parts out themselves. The parts and assemblies descriptions outlined here should help distinguish the real Colt Thuer conversions from others.

Basically, the conversion or "Alteration" (the term used in Colt Journals and correspondence) consisted of turning down the breech end of the percussion cylinder to a stem or shaft having the original ratchet for rotating the cylinder. A separate conversion ring, containing a re-

bouncing firing pin, a two-piece cascade ejector mechanism and a spring-loaded position detent is then placed over this stem and allowed to rotate. Each chamber of the cylinder is precision reamed to a slight taper.

The plunger of the percussion rammer is drilled and threaded at its inner center (see Fig. 4-2) to accept the Thuer priming punch (Fig. 4-23) and the loading channel at the right side of the barrel lug is milled deeper to allow easy loading and cartridge ejection (see Figs. 4-3 through 4-5 and Fig. 4-72).

The normal depth of the 1860 Army percussion revolver barrel lug channel is illustrated in Fig. 4-3. The 1860 Hartford Thuers have very shallow cartridge channels as compared to those of the 1860 London Thuers. Then, on the 1861 Hartford Navy the channels are cut deeper than on the London 1861 models. On both the Hartford and the London 1851 Navy Thuers, these chan-



*Fig. 4-1 Hartford Colt Model 1860 Army Thuer Conversion, blued and color case hardened with wood grip. Serial number 178577. (Author's Collection)*

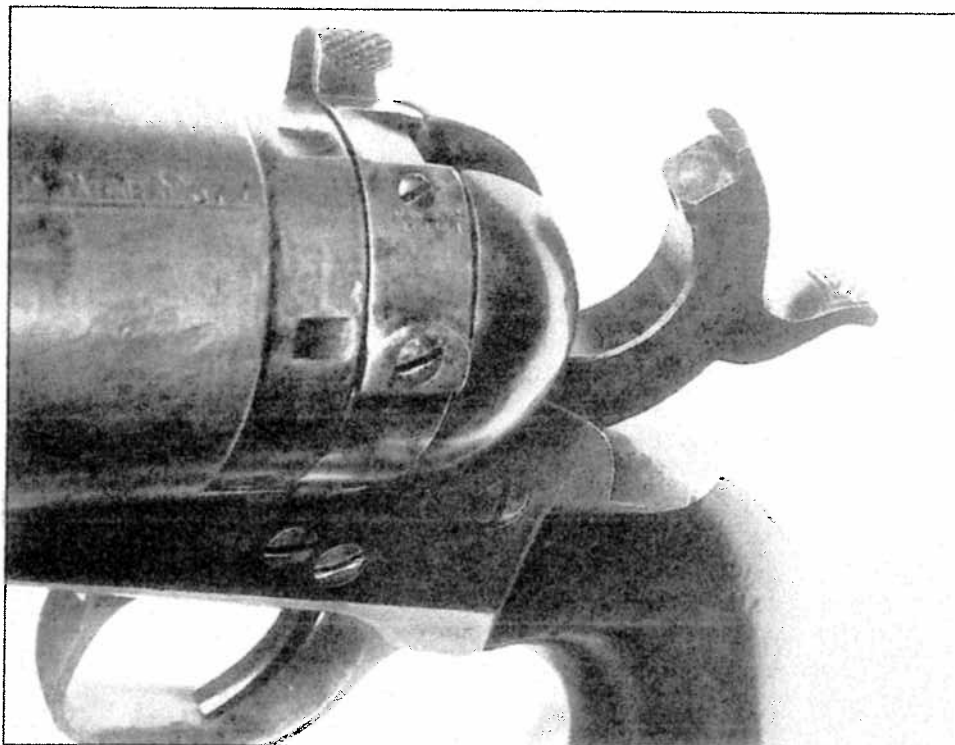


Fig. 4-6 Hardened disc inserted into face of Hartford Colt Model 1860 Army Thuer conversion hammer.

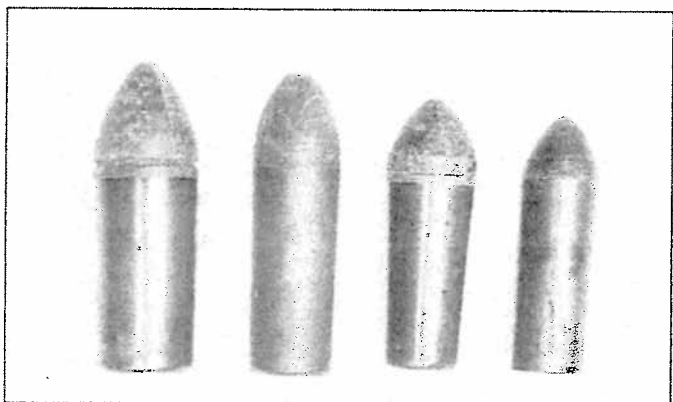


Fig. 4-7 Four basic sizes of Thuer metallic centerfire cartridges. Left to right: .44 Army, .36 Navy, .36 Pocket Navy and .31 Pocket. (Courtesy Francis E. "Bud" Firth)



Fig. 4-8 Cover of "Navy Size" Thuer cartridge box. (Courtesy Mark Aziz)



Fig. 4-9 Display of "Navy Size" Thuer cartridges, original box and Thuer primers. (Courtesy Mark Aziz)

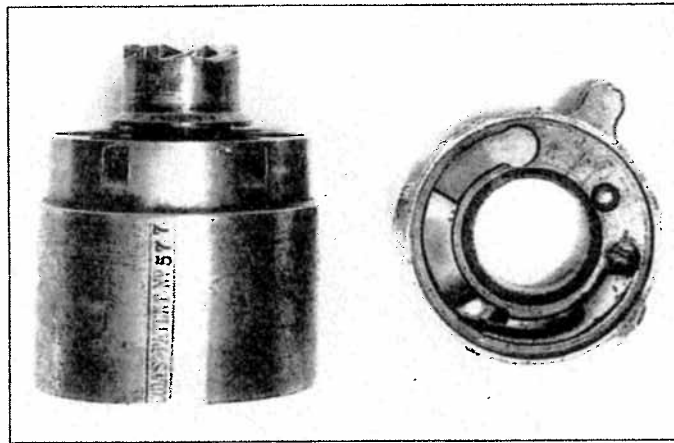


Fig. 4-10 Thuer conversion cylinder and ring for 1860 Army Colt Thuer conversion, serial number 178577.

ends with a gray wax. The orange label was glued to the paper wrapping. Thirty-one caliber Thuer cartridges are also found in this same type container, but are more difficult to find.

The .44 caliber Thuer cartridges are extremely rare, and are found only in cardboard boxes. They are known to have both Hartford labels (yellow with black lettering) and London labels (orange with black lettering). Fewer than 10 complete Hartford .44 caliber Thuer boxes and only one Frankford Arsenal box have been reported to this author. All boxes, except Frankford Arsenal have been wrapped in a dark green cover paper and without felt padding as previously outlined.

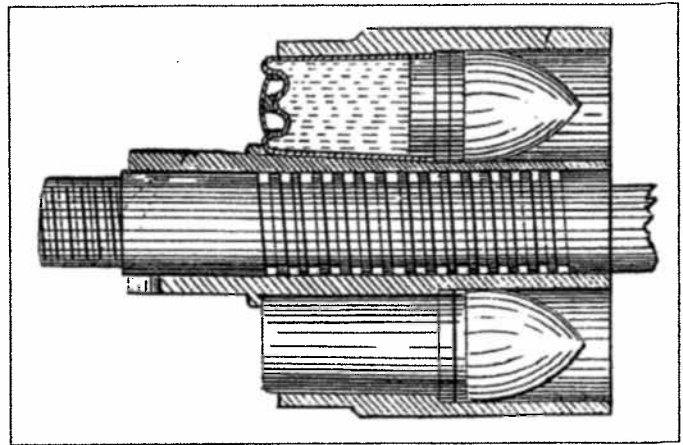


Fig. 4-11 Cut-section of Thuer conversion 1860 Army cylinder showing cartridge position. (Modified from patent drawing)

Colt factory Day Journals indicate Colt ordered all labels from outside Hartford sources and subsequently diversity could exist.

Figure 4-10 pictures the side of an 1860 Army Thuer conversion cylinder and the inside of its matching conversion ring. Note the tapered ring that remains as part of the cylinder shaft, and the slight space between the front face of the ring and the rear face of the cylinder. This ring serves two separate purposes. First, the taper matches that cut at the center opening of the conversion ring, and acts as a bearing surface between the two parts. This reduces the wear on the protruding lip around the circumference of the conversion ring. Secondly, the front

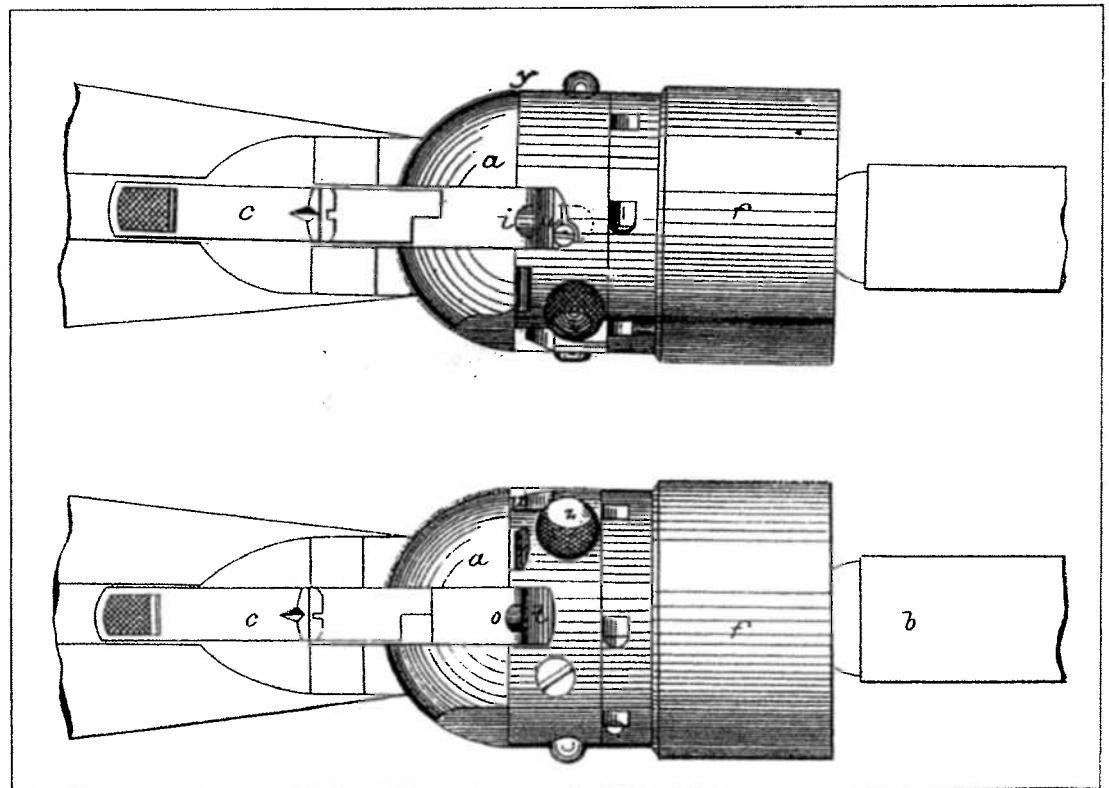


Fig. 4-12 Top view of frame, cylinder and conversion ring showing two positions of conversion ring. (Modified from patent drawing)

cartridge and the priming punch from the set of Thuer cartridge loading fixtures. The cartridge box is missing.

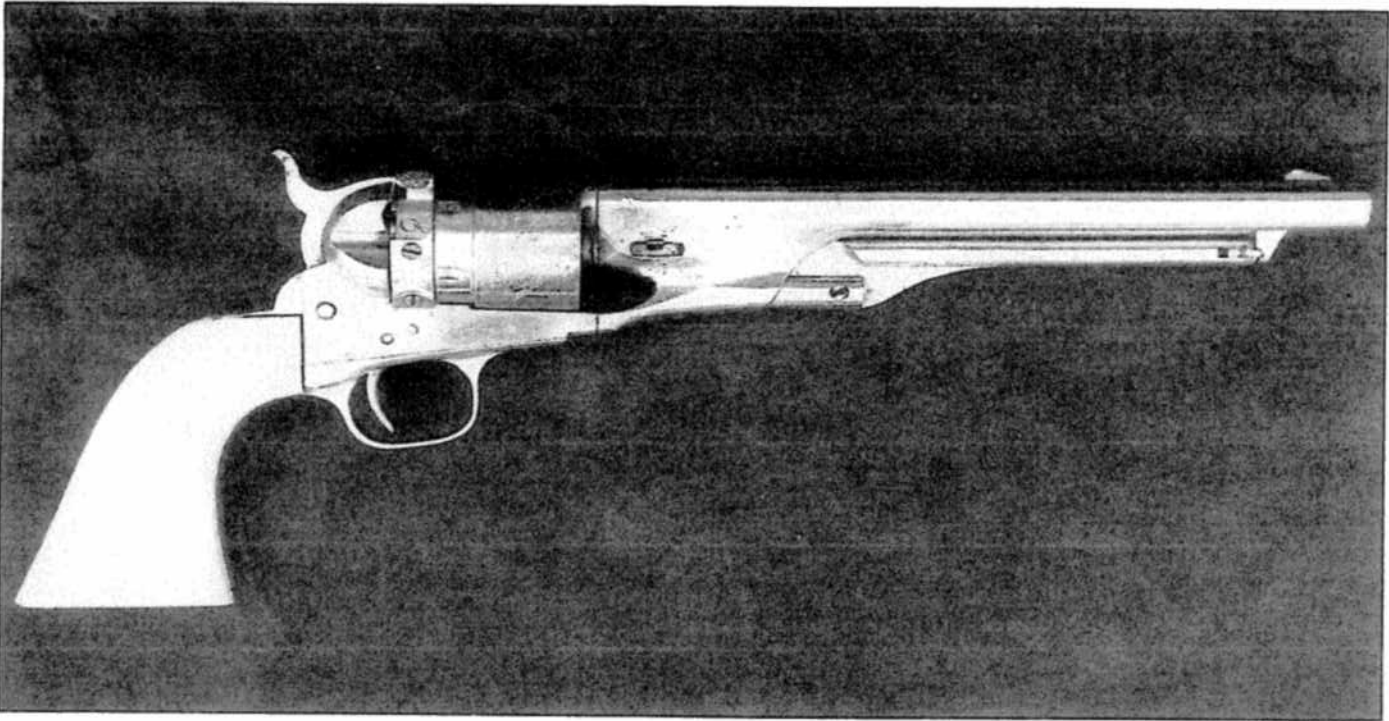
Though most Thuer Army conversions were made for the European markets, principally England, quite a few do exist without foreign proof marks. There are the American Thuer conversions that were generally made by the factory or by private gunsmiths using factory-produced conversion rings.

One such American Thuer Army conversion is pictured in Figs. 4-65 and 4-66. This Colt 1860 Army Thuer conversion is serial numbered 185214 with all numbers matching. It has crisp cylinder scene and markings and a good tight action. The gun is completely nickel plated and has a single piece ivory grip. Thuer conversion rings

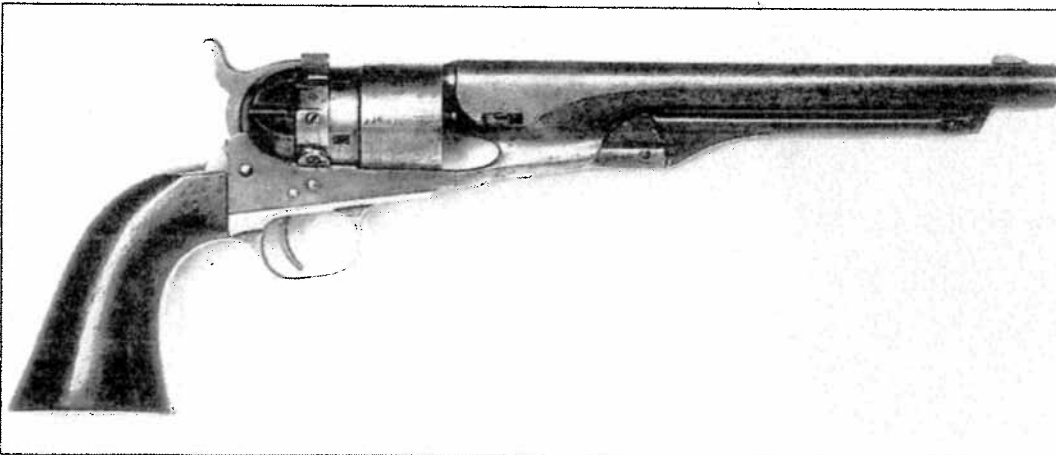
are generally found to be finished in blue, but in this case it is also plated.

Another American Thuer Army conversion is shown in Figs. 4-67 and 4-68. This revolver is serial numbered 178577, all matching, and is finished in blue with color case hardened frame, lever and hammer. The grip is one-piece varnished walnut.

A close-up of the frame, cylinder, conversion ring, hammer, trigger and brass triggerguard is shown in Fig. 4-68. From this it can be seen that all the standard Colt percussion markings remain, with the only addition being the patent date stamped on the Thuer conversion ring.



*Fig. 4-66 Right side view of Hartford Colt Model 1860 Army Thuer conversion, serial number 185214. (Courtesy John H. Thillmann)*



*Fig. 4-67 Hartford Colt Model 1860 Army Thuer conversion, blued and color case hardened with wood grip. Serial number 178577. (Author's collection)*





Fig. 4-68 Close-up of 1860 Army Thuer conversion action showing markings. Serial number 178577.

Still other finishes are found on Thuer conversions. The near-mint Colt 1860 Thuer Army conversion pictured in Fig. 4-69 is serial numbered 177634 and is nickel plated with a gilded cylinder. The grips are single-piece varnished walnut. This type finish is generally found on only engraved and cased specimens.

There are differences between the London Thuer conversions and those converted at Hartford. The London conversion cylinders were usually not serial numbered, and the deeper loading channels cut into the right side of the barrel lugs are more noticeable on the London conversions. These distinct differences further substantiate the popular concept that London guns were not

shipped back to the Hartford factory for conversion; rather, the work was performed in-house or in one of the gun shops in the London area.

A good example of a Colt 1860 Army revolver that was apparently sold in England in its percussion form and later returned to the London sales office for conversion by the Thuer system, is pictured in Figs. 4-70 and 4-71. Note in Fig. 4-70 that the cylinder has no cylinder serial number stamping. It can be clearly seen in Fig. 4-71, and again in Fig. 4-72, that the loading channel of the barrel lug is sharper, particularly at its top, as is generally found on the London conversions.

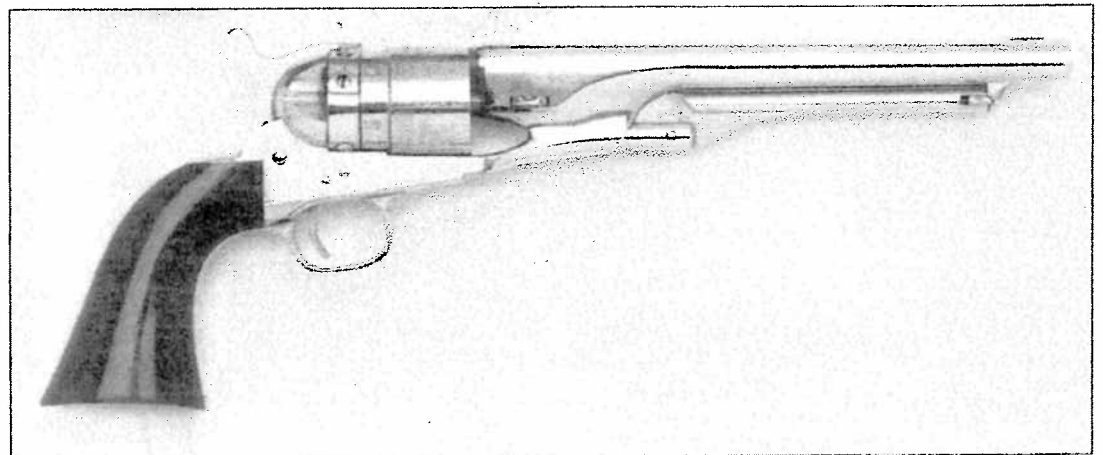
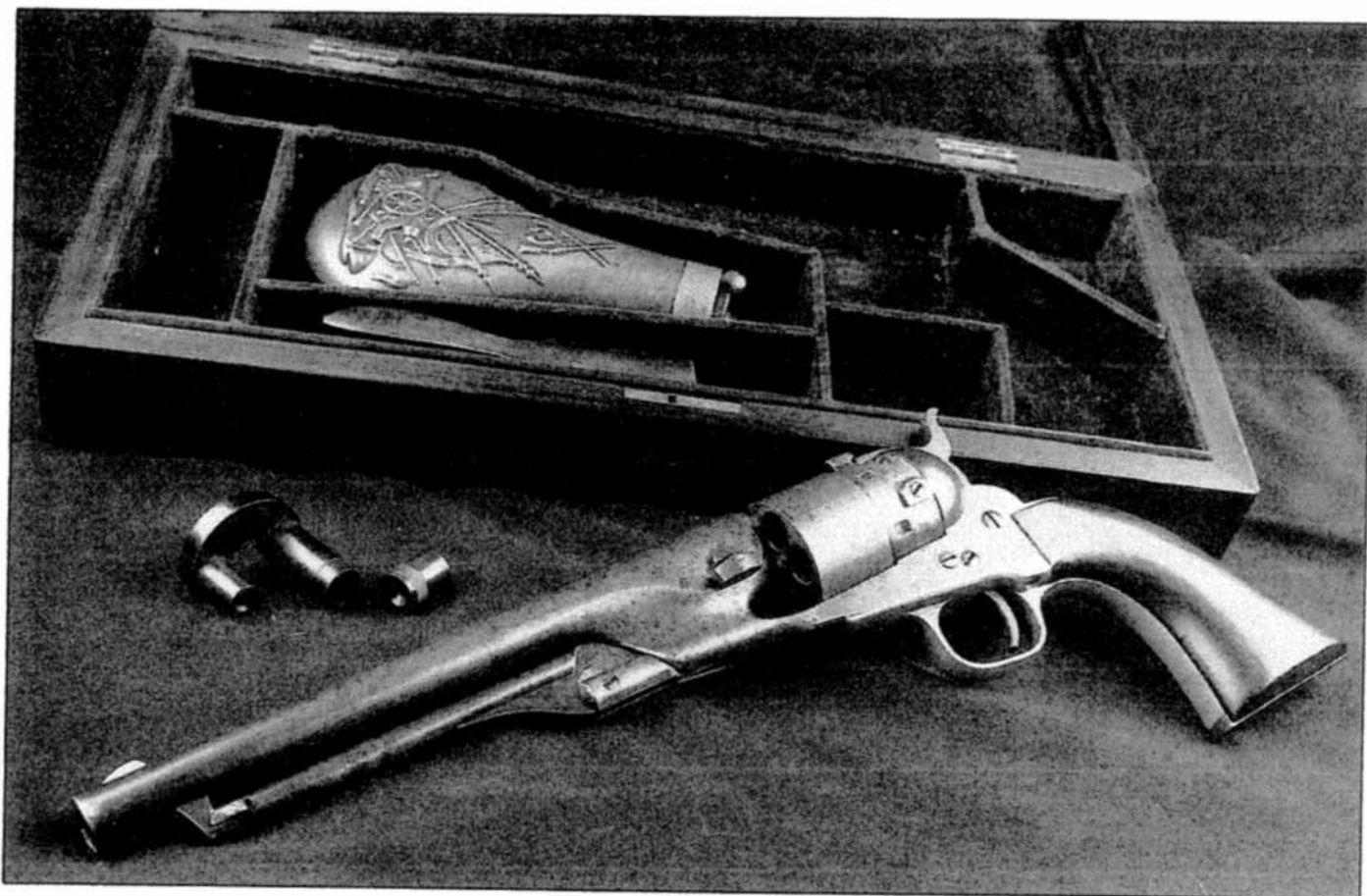
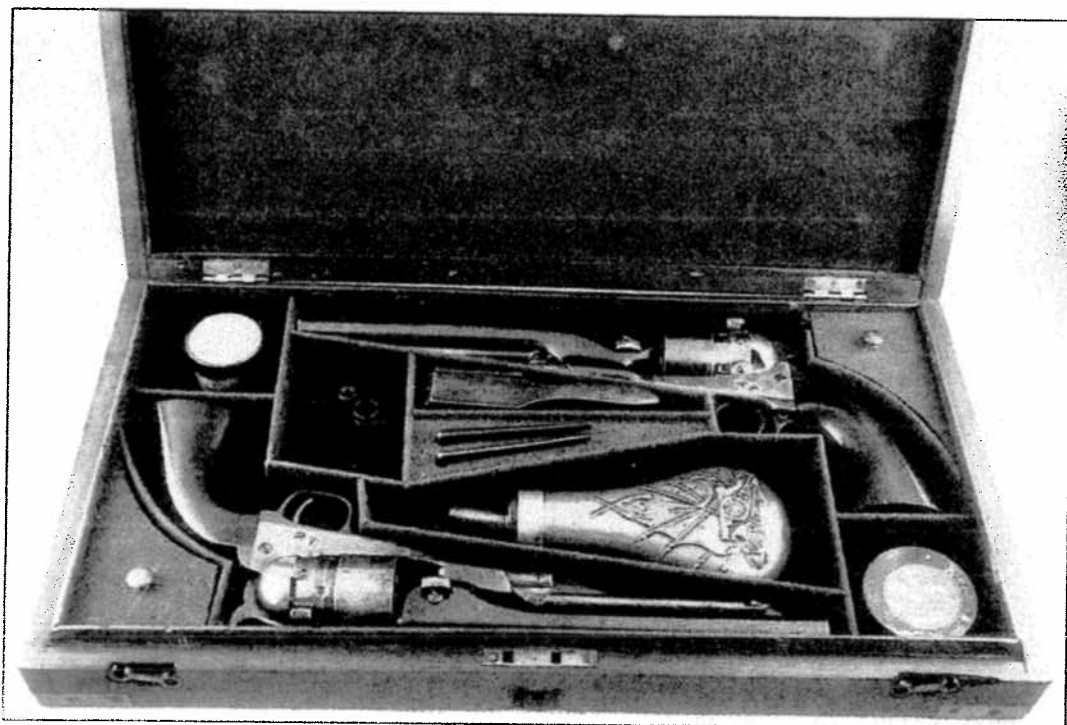


Fig. 4-69 Colt Model 1860 Army Thuer conversion with nickel plating and gilded cylinder. Serial number 177634. (Courtesy Butterfield and Butterfield)



*Fig. 4-77 American-cased Colt Model 1860 Army Thuer conversion with Hartford barrel address. Serial number 178577. (Courtesy Francis E. "Bud" Firth)*



*Fig. 4-78 Very rare cased pair of Colt 1860 Army Thuer conversions, serial numbers 156347/L and 156360. (Courtesy Francis E. "Bud" Firth)*