

### Known Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Revolvers – marked “C. L. Dragoons”

17235# - has Iron Backstrap- barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons” – 7 1/2 inch barrel- with iron shoulder stock

17514# - has Iron Backstrap – barrel lug “C.L. Dragoons”- 7 1/2 inch barrel

18511# - has Brass Backstrap – barrel lug “C.L. Dragoons” – 8 inch barrel

19495# - has Brass Backstrap—barrel lug “C.L. Dragoons” – 8 inch barrel

19512# - has Brass Backstrap-- barrel lug “C.L. Dragoons” - 8 inch barrel

19579# - has Brass Backstrap-- barrel lug “C.L.Dragoons” – 8 inch barrel

19581# - has Brass Backstrap—barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons” – 8 inch barrel

### Known Colt 1851 Navy Revolvers – Marked “C.L. Dragoons”

94814# - barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons”

94865# - barrel lug “C.L. Dragoons”

94981#- barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons”

## Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Revolvers with Iron Backstraps and Brass Triggerguards

There were between 1200 and 1500 Iron backstrap and Brass trigger guard cut for stock Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoons were produced. They were manufactured late in the Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Revolver Production during 1858 to 1859. They had a 7 ½ inch barrel length. These Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Revolvers were produced to use the 3<sup>rd</sup> style or variation of Colt shoulder stock and most of these had a Iron yoke and buttcap.

In the Sutherland Collection is a Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon – 7 ½ inch barrel – Serial Number 17022# with an iron backstrap and brass triggerguard. It is cut for stock and has an iron mounted shoulder stock also Serial number 17022#. Sutherland felt this was a very rare revolver with iron mounted shoulder stock and it is pictured three times in book.

In Sutherlands Book he writes that Iron backstrap Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoons are known in the 17000# serial number range and in the 19000# serial number range.

In Flaydermans Book he writes that Iron backstrap Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoons are known into the 19000# serial number range and are quite rare.

Total Production of Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoons was 10,700 with production ending in 1860 in the 19700 serial number range.

Known Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Revolver- 8 inch barrel – Brass Triggerguard

18511# - has Brass Backstrap – barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons”

18548# - has Brass Backstrap – not cut for stock

18552# - has Brass Backstrap

18579# - has Brass Backstrap - not cut for stock

18770# - has Brass Backstrap

19432# - has Brass Backstrap and is cased – near mint condition

19495# - has Brass Backstrap – barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons”

19511# - has Brass Backstrap

19512# - has Brass Backstrap – barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons”

19562# - has Brass Backstrap

19579# - has Brass Backstrap – barrel lug “C.L. Dragoons”

19581# - has Brass Backstrap – barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons”

Separate Iron 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Stock – Known

16943/16944# -

Known Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Revolvers Iron Backstrap and Brass Triggerguard  
7 ½ inch barrel

16801# - has Iron backstrap

16866# - has Iron backstrap and iron mounted shoulder stock 16867/16868

16958# - has Iron backstrap

17022# - has Iron backstrap and iron mounted shoulder stock 17021/17022#

17235# - has Iron Backstrap –barrel lug “C.L. Dragoons” – 7 ½ inch barrel – with iron shoulder stock

17362# - has Iron backstrap

17462# - has Iron Backstrap

17503# - has Iron Backstrap

17510# - has Iron Backstrap

17514# - has Iron Backstrap – barrel lug “C. L. Dragoons”

17562# - has Iron Backstrap with iron mounted shoulder stock 17565/17566#

17587# - has Iron Backstrap with iron mounted shoulder stock 16761/16762#

17762# - has Iron Backstrap

17779# - has Iron Backstrap

17812# - has Iron Backstrap

18170# - has Iron Backstrap

18184# - has Iron Backstrap with brass Canteen shoulder stock 18221#

19155# - has Iron Backstrap with iron mounted shoulder stock

## Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoon Revolvers with Iron Backstraps and Iron Triggerguards

These are an extremely rare variation of Colt 3<sup>rd</sup> Model Dragoons. They were made very late in the production of these revolvers with 8 inch barrels. Some of these 8 inch barrel revolvers were also cut for a shoulder stock. It seems that production may have been only 20 revolvers with serial numbers known between 18610 and 18630. They were probably experimental production by Colt and led to the development of the 1860 Army Revolver with an 8 inch barrel standard.

18613# - Pictured in William Locke Collection 1973

18621# - Known in the Gun Luminary Collection – White Plains, NY

18622# - Known in the Gun Luminary Collection – White Plains, NY

18623# - Known in the Gun Luminary Collection – White Plains, NY –Cut for stock and has adjustable sight on top of barrel

18624# - Metzger Collection – Texas A&M University

18626# - Bobby Vance Collection - Pictured in William Locke Collection 1973

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# The GUN REPORT

C. L. Dragoons  
by  
Walter L. Anderson

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# The "C. L. Dragoons"

by Walter Anderson, Jr.

This article will focus on the hand engraved marking "C. L. Dragoons" found on certain Colt revolvers. To date, most authorities have attributed the marking to indicate "Connecticut Light Dragoons." In the fall of 1989, a Model 1851 Colt Navy revolver with the "C. L. Dragoons" marking and the name "S. McIver" scratched into the undeniably authentic patina of the brass buttstrap was offered for sale in Norm Flayderman's catalog. This is the first time a person has been connected with the "C. L. Dragoons" and McIver's name provides a historical link to an Alabama Civil War cavalry company. The following will trace the history of the men and arms of that cavalry company, the Crocheron Light Dragoons.

## The Men of the Crocheron Light Dragoons

When Northern forces captured Ship Island off the Mississippi coast in 1861, the port city of Mobile feared imminent Union invasion. Since most Alabama volunteers for the Confederacy had been transported to the front in Virginia, only a few raw troops, commanded by Brigadier General Jones M. Withers remained in Mobile. Worried city officials appealed to Alabama Governor A. B. Moore for additional troops to protect the coast. Although Moore received letters weekly from citizens throughout the state offering companies strictly for service along the coast of Alabama, the only way Moore would accept a "state service" company was if the company provided their own arms.

While most Alabamians were loyal to the Confederate cause, many Alabama men felt obligated to fight only for the State's defense. For this reason, some citizen groups and even wealthy individuals willingly financed the private arming of companies for state service. One such individual, Robert W. Smith, wrote Governor Moore from Selma, Alabama, on October 26, 1861, and offered a company, "for coastal service for 12 months". Smith, orphaned at age 17, left Virginia in 1834 and set out for Alabama to make his fortune. He joined the "Montgomery True Blues" in 1835 and served in the Seminole Wars. In the Mexican War of 1846, he attained the rank of Lt. Colonel with Colonel Jones Withers' 1st Alabama Regiment. He

accumulated a fortune in excess of \$200,000 as a Mobile commission merchant in cotton bagging and rope from 1846 until his retirement in 1858 at age 37. He then moved to his cotton plantation at Pleasant Hill, just south of

Selma. (By comparison, the average non-slaveholding farmer in the South had a net worth of \$500. Samuel Colt, considered one of the wealthiest men in the North, was worth more than \$335,000 in 1854.)

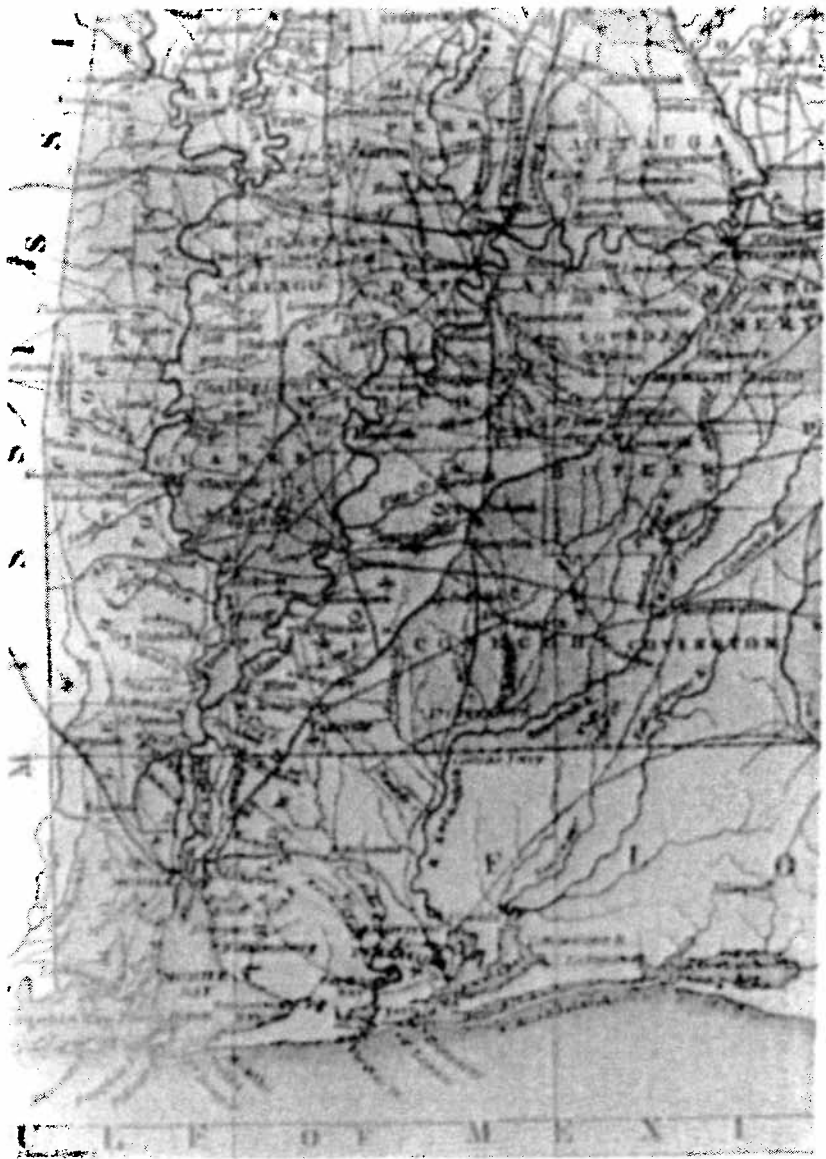


Photo 1. Map of the Southwest quarter of the State of Alabama just prior to the Civil War. Dallas County is located in the center, top one-third of the map. Mobile is located in the left, bottom one-third of the map. The Dog River is south of Mobile between Springhill and Mobile Bay. Ship Island is four islands west of Mamacre Island off the coast of Mississippi.

While awaiting his commission from the Governor, Smith recruited men throughout the Dallas County area. When Smith's commission arrived in early November, General Withers sent boats up the Alabama River to transport Smith's company to Mobile. The original muster roll, dated November 21, 1861, Mobile, Alabama, shows that each of the men furnished his own mount. None of the men had suitable arms, however, because Governor Moore had purchased or confiscated all arms throughout the state during the spring and summer of 1861. Smith planned to purchase arms upon arrival in Mobile from the only remaining arms source, the blockade runner.

Smith was capable of using his own funds to arm his company, but a prominent Dallas County planter, John J. Crocheron, wanted to help support the Southern cause. Crocheron, who had come to Alabama from Staten Island, New York around 1820, was one of many French Huguenots to settle on the Alabama River below Selma. He built a magnificent plantation, "Elm Bluff", on the east bank and by 1860, had amassed over \$125,000 from his warehouse business and plantation. During his years in Dallas County he was active and influential in politics. John Crocheron was 65 years of age when the war began and was too old for active service. He had never married and had no sons to fight for the South. In fact, his only living relatives were "Yankees" in New York. Funding the purchase of arms was the only contribution he could make to the South that he had come to love. Therefore, Crocheron's funds were used to purchase revolvers for Smith's men in Mobile in January 1862. Each revolver was hand engraved on the left top flat near the breech end of the barrel with the inscription "C. L. Dragoons". By January 14, 1862, the well-armed and drilled cavalry company, now named the Crocheron Light Dragoons (or the CLD's) joined other recently formed companies protecting the nervous citizens of Mobile.

After 2 months of leading the CLD's on routine scouting patrols of the Dog River area of Mobile Bay, ambitious Capt. Smith was growing restless with camp life. In March of 1862, Brigadier-General Braxton Bragg passed through Mobile from Pensacola en route to his new command in Corinth, Mississippi. Smith offered the CLD's as personal escorts and couriers to the General, who immediately accepted. In offering the CLD's for service with Bragg, Smith

disregarded the fact that the men had enlisted for one year of State service, and apparently hoped the men shared his desire to see more action. In his memoirs, *Sketch of the Crocheron Light Dragoons*, Sergeant Ben Reynolds recalls the evening Smith explained to his company what he had done. Smith asked for all men willing to go to the front with him to ride 6 paces forward. Only about 10 of the 109 men rode forward! Smith exploded with anger and although he had acknowledged the fact that the men had enlisted for State service, said he would be damned if he would not take the whole company to the front. Orders were issued and the CLD's followed Bragg to Corinth that same month. After arriving in Corinth, the CLD's were engaged in early April at the bloody

Battle of Shiloh. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, states that Bragg singled out his escort company and Capt. Smith in particular for "personal gallantry and intelligent execution of orders, frequently under the heaviest fire...". The day following the battle, Smith was promoted from the CLD's and appointed Civil and Military Governor of Corinth. The company was reorganized without Smith in Tupelo in June of 1862. Most of the company re-enlisted at this time for the duration of the war, but in response to Smith's involuntary placement of them in Confederate service outside of the state, they voted all other original officers out and elected a school teacher from Selma, Edwin M. Holloway, as Captain.



Photo 2. Robert W. Smith (photographed after promotion to Colonel) (Photo courtesy of Mrs. John Morton and Mrs. Carlton Sexton)



Holloway, who was originally from Massachusetts, attended West Point but never graduated. He served as an engineer in the Mexican War and was chosen Captain because he was the only other man in the company, other than Smith and the ousted officers, who had previous military service. The CLD's, along with four other independent companies of cavalry, became the 3rd Alabama Cavalry. The CLD's, now called "Holloway's Company of Independent Alabama Cavalry", remained on permanent detached duty from the 3rd Alabama and continued as escorts and couriers for Bragg, in the Battles of Perryville, Murfreesboro, Chickamauga, and Chattanooga.

Samuel B. McIver, whose name is scratched in the buttstrap of the "C. L. Dragoons" revolver referred to in the beginning of this article, was living in Dallas County, Alabama when Smith formed his company in November of 1861. Instead of joining Smith, however, McIver chose to muster into Company I, 2nd Alabama Cavalry formed by his brother, Capt. Alex M. McIver in March of 1862. Over time, McIver advanced from private to the rank of sergeant. In March of 1864, at Madison Station, Mississippi, Sgt. McIver was detached indefinitely because of a disabled horse. By April 30th he had found a good mount and transferred to Holloway's company (the CLD's), near Chattanooga. Since there were no openings for a sergeant in Holloway's company, McIver joined as a private.

When General Joe Johnston replaced Bragg after Chattanooga, Holloway's company continued for him in the same capacity. When Confederate President Davis, impatient with Johnston's tactics replaced him with Hood, the CLD's remained as Hood's escort at the Battle of Atlanta. Hood's army, all but destroyed by General Thomas at the Battle of Nashville, was again returned to the command of Joe Johnston who then fought Sherman through Georgia and the Carolinas. On March 4, 1865, McIver was furloughed with acute cystitis and he returned home to Selma. A little more than a month later, on April 28, 1865, Holloway's company along with the rest of Johnston's army, surrendered and were paroled at Greensboro, N.C.

#### The "C. L. Dragoons" Marked Colt 3rd Model Dragoon Revolver

By 1860, after 12 years of production, the popularity of Colt's 3rd Model Dragoon revolver, was waning. Colt began to ship his New Model Army

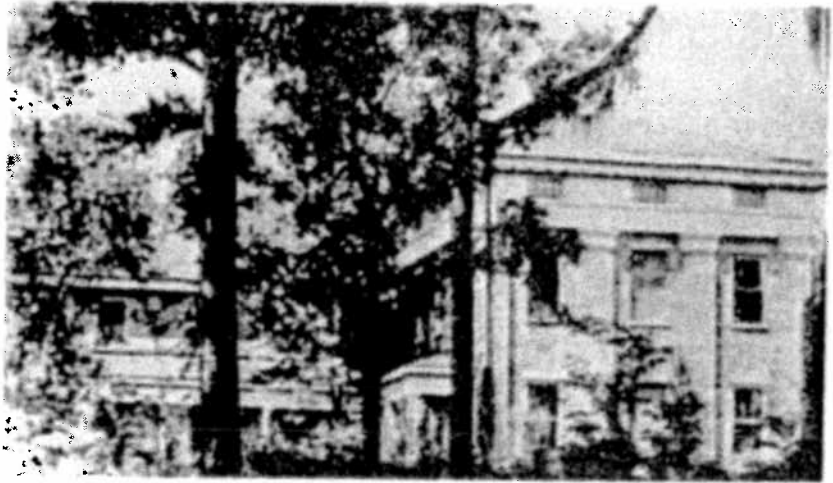


Photo 3. "Elm Bluff", home of John Crocheron, is located due west of Pleasant Hill on the Alabama River. Crocheron died in September of 1864 and the plantation was left abandoned. Although this plantation was once a busy steamboat stop, after the war the railroads captured the river traffic, and this now remote location is glimpsed only by an occasional hunter. (Photo courtesy of Selma Public Library)



Photo 4. Grave of Samuel B. McIver, located at the Carlowville Baptist Church, approximately four miles southwest of Pleasant Hill.

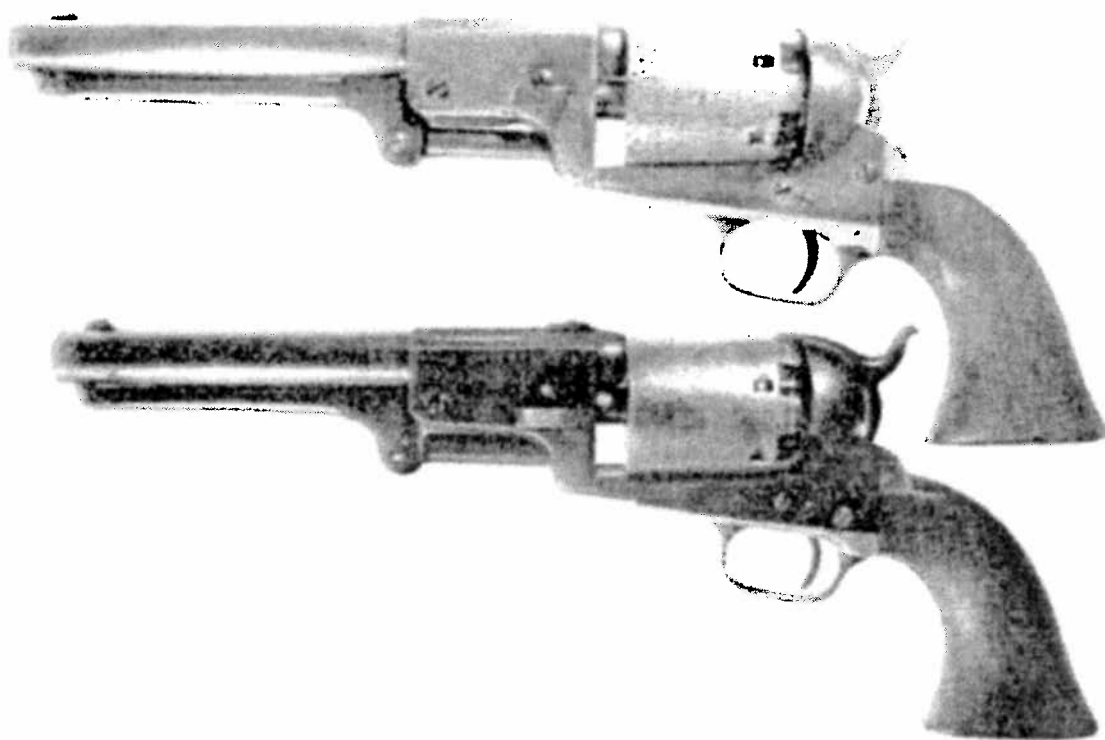


Photo 5. "C. L. Dragoons" marked 3rd Model Dragoons. Surviving examples of these guns are about equally divided between the 2 subvariations shown. (Top) #19579 with 3 screw frame and rare 8" barrel. (Bottom) #16870 with 4 screw cut for stock frame and 7 1/4" barrel. (Dragoons courtesy of Damon Mills)

revolver, known today as the Colt Model 1860 Army, in October of 1860. This new revolver was superior because it fired a .44 caliber bullet and weighed 40% less than the old dragoon. An examination of the Colt revolver purchases by the U.S. Government from April 1861 to March 1866 confirms that the Army considered the 3rd Model Dragoon an obsolete weapon after the introduction of the New Model 1860 Army revolver. Only fourteen 3rd Model Dragoons were purchased during this time in contrast to 129,145 Model 1860 Army revolvers purchased during the same period. Although the Northern market for the 3rd Model Dragoon had dried up, demand for any type of weapon continued to outstrip supply in the South. Not surprisingly, some of the obsolete inventory that had begun to accumulate at Colt's factory and his northern dealers began to find its way south.

The Northern blockade of the port of Mobile was not 100% effective and blockade running supply vessels were still able to enter the harbor. Since arms and military equipment were high profit items for the blockade runner, weapons and equipment were available in Mobile

at exorbitant prices. For example, biographical records show that Colonel Zac Deas outfitted the 23rd Alabama Infantry in Mobile at the same time the CLD's were in Mobile trying to find cavalry weapons. Deas purchased 800 Enfield rifles for \$28,000 in gold from his own funds. This amounted to paying \$35 apiece for what was, outside of the South, a \$16 gun.

Although no records can be found of the CLD's weapons purchase in Mobile, several facts suggest that Smith armed his company in Mobile in early January, 1862 with 3rd Model Dragoon revolvers run through the Northern blockade. First, a Colt factory letter, obtained by Herb Glass, Jr., states that a "C. L. Dragoons" marked 3rd Model Dragoon, serial #16577, was 1 of 16 shipped to New York dealer Cooper and Pond on December 15, 1861. Second, surviving Confederate States of America ordinance records show that Capt. Smith first began drawing quantities of all types of military equipment on January 14, 1862 and in particular, one of the January 14th requisitions was for 2000 rounds of Colt pistol cartridges.

Since the 3rd Model Dragoon, serial

#16577, from Cooper and Pond ultimately wound up in CLD hands it would appear that this revolver and, probably a quantity of Cooper and Pond's obsolete stock of 3rd Model Dragoons, were run through the blockade into Mobile and were subsequently purchased by the CLDs. Supporting this conclusion is the fact that six other surviving "C. L. Dragoons" marked 3rd Model Dragoons also originated from Cooper and Pond. Since cartridges were first requisitioned by the CLDs on January 14, 1862, it appears that these guns had been acquired by the CLDs sometime before January 14, 1862.

The author has been able to locate 12 "C. L. Dragoons" marked 3rd Model Dragoon revolvers (see chart #1). The first muster roll of the CLD's for the period ending December 31, 1861, shows that the company consisted of 105 enlisted men and 4 officers. Assuming that a 3rd Model Dragoon was purchased for each enlisted man, the survival of 12 of 105 3rd Model Dragoons would mean an 11.4% survival rate. This rate could reasonably be compared to the survival rate of the heavily used, and highly tracked Colt Walker model (Of the 1100

Walker models manufactured, there are approximately 170 known survivors in collections today, which represents a survival rate of 15.4%). With the exception of the "C. L. Dragoons" marked Navy, the only guns that have been found with the "C. L. Dragoons" marking have been Colt 3rd Model Dragoons. This one model of marked guns, coupled with the reasonable 11.4% survival rate, supports the theory that all of the 105 enlisted men were armed with 3rd Model Dragoons rather than a mixture of guns. Why then, does one Navy appear in this group of 12 "C. L. Dragoons" marked 3rd Model Dragoon revolvers? The answer is that the Navy was originally an officer's gun.

#### The "C. L. Dragoons" Marked Colt Navy Revolver

In the latter part of 1860, before gun shipments to the South were halted, Governor Moore purchased 600 Colt Navy revolvers for the State of Alabama. In appreciation of this purchase, Sam Colt presented an inscribed Navy, serial #95844, to Governor Moore in December of that year. Early in the Civil War, Governor Moore typically issued each officer of an Alabama formed company

one of these Navy revolvers. The author can document more than 25 officers in 10 different companies that received Colt Navies from Governor Moore. The author has also examined a Navy that Pickett family documents show as being passed down from Captain A. H. Pickett, 3rd Alabama Infantry. This is very likely a gun issued by the Governor since

the Pickett Navy is only 958 digits lower than the serial number of the Navy presented to Governor Moore. The "C. L. Dragoons" marked Navy, serial #94981, is also most certainly a Navy issued by Governor Moore to one of the officers of the CLD's, as it is just 863 serial digits below Governor Moore's Navy and 95 digits above the Pickett Navy.

#### CHART 1

##### Surviving "C.L. Dragoons" marked Colt 3rd Model Dragoon Revolvers

Production Year	Serial number	Frame type	Barrel length
1868	*16577	4 screw	7 1/2"
	*16870	4 screw	7 1/2"
	17136	4 screw	8"
	17136/37	stock	
	17228	4 screw	7 1/2"
	17331	4 screw	7 1/2"
	17514	4 screw	7 1/2"
	18511	3 screw	8"
	19538	3 screw	8"
	*19579	3 screw	8"
	19594	3 screw	8"
	19605	3 screw	8"
	19631	3 screw	8"

\* The author has only examined the three 3rd Model Dragoons mentioned in this article. The remaining guns came from catalogs, conversations with other collectors and similar sources.

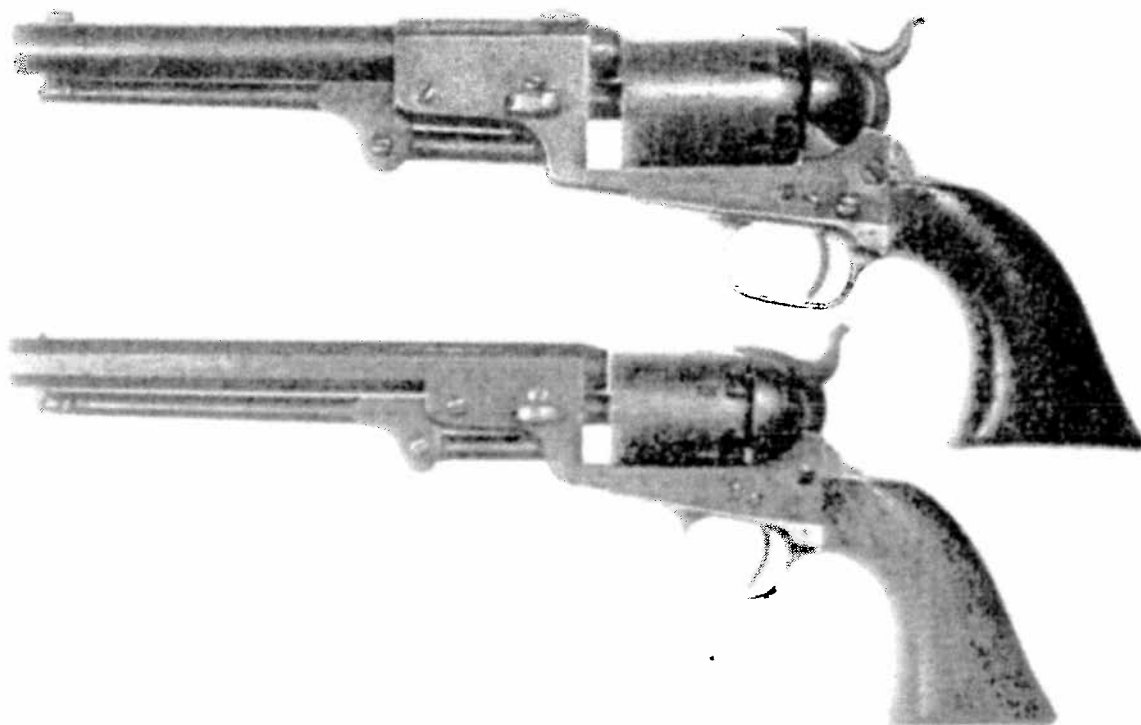


Photo 6. (Top) .44 caliber Colt 3rd Model Dragoon weighing 4 pounds 2 ounces in contrast to the .36 caliber Navy weighing only 2 pounds 9 ounces. (Dragoon #16577 courtesy of Herb Glass, Jr.) (Bottom) Colt 1851 Navy #94981 is the only known surviving Navy with hand engraved marking "C. L. Dragoons"

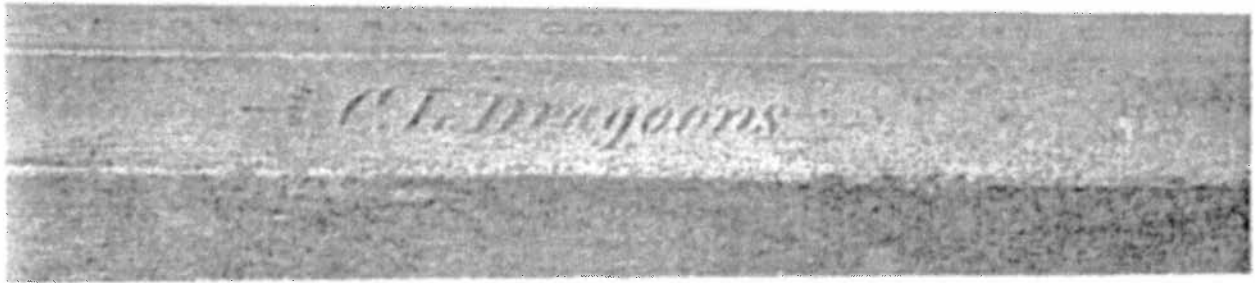


Photo 7. Close-up of Colt Navy #94981 showing hand engraved marking in upper and lower case italics. Compare the execution of the upper case characters C, L and D to the same characters on the close-up of the 3rd Model Dragoon.

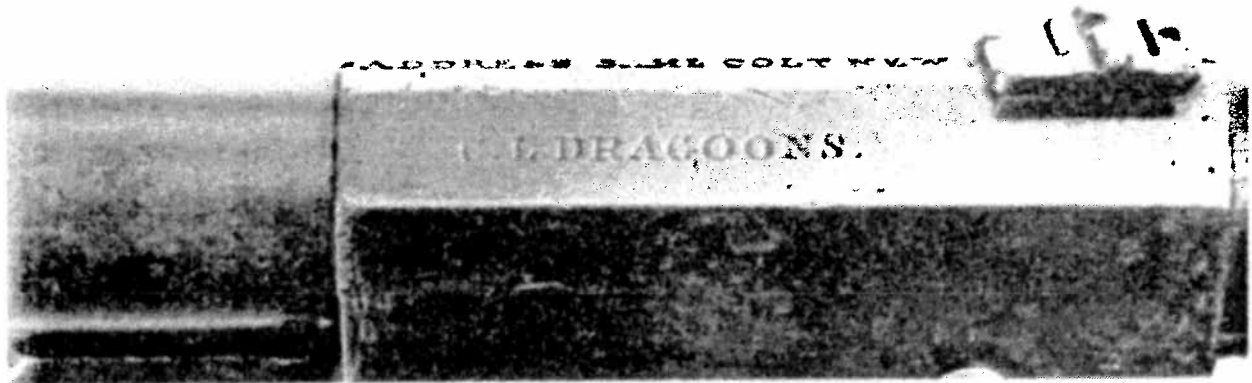


Photo 8. Close-up of 3rd Model Dragoon #16870 showing hand engraved marking in block capital letters by the same engraver who engraved the "C. L. Dragoons" marked Navy. (Dragoon courtesy of Damon Mills)

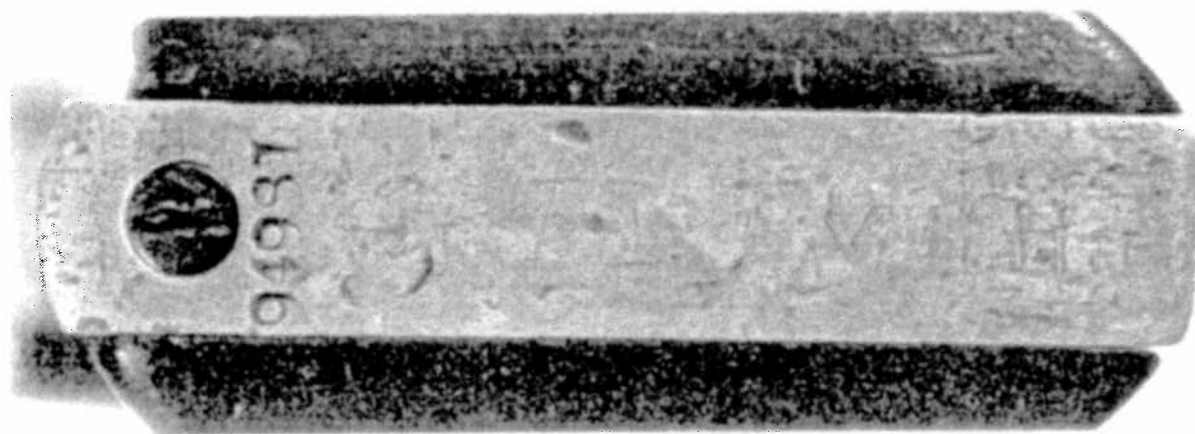


Photo 9. Close-up of buttstrap of C. L. Dragoons Navy #94981 showing crudely scratched name "S. Melver" under the undeniable authentic patina of the brass.

The 3rd Model Dragoon revolvers were inscribed to indicate company ownership and to honor the CLD's benefactor. Probably all of the CLD officers also had their state issued Navies marked with the company's name. The "C. L. Dragoons" Navy is hand engraved with the same abbreviations in the same location on the barrel flat as the 3rd Model Dragoons. While the 3rd Model Dragoons are all hand engraved in block capital letters, the Navy model is hand engraved with italic capital and lower case letters, indicating a distinction between the two models. The engraver would have probably made this distinction between the officer's and enlisted mens guns and this would account for the enhanced engraving on the Navy. While there is little question that the CLD Navy was an officer's gun, there is the question of, "How did an officer's gun end the war in the hands of Private McIver?" The answer is that the officer's gun stayed in the CLD unit after the officer left and was eventually passed down to McIver.

When the CLD's reorganized in Corinth and voted out their old officers, the ousted officers resigned from the company and returned home. These officer's guns belonged to the State of Alabama and were probably collected and reissued within the CLD's. The South faced such an acute shortage of weapons that it is highly unlikely that any officer or enlisted man would have been allowed to leave military service without turning in their weapons. Apparently someone else must have used this officers gun after the officer left the CLDs and then it was issued to McIver when he joined the CLD's in the spring of 1864. The fact that McIver obtained the "C. L. Dragoon" marked Navy would seem to indicate that when he was discharged from the 2nd Alabama Cavalry for want of a horse, he also had to leave his weapons with the 2nd Alabama. When McIver became ill and was given sick leave on March 4, 1865, he apparently took his CLD Navy with him, because he was expected to return. Just over one month later however, on April 9, General Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia and McIver never returned to service.

#### Conclusions

The unraveling of the provenance of the "C. L. Dragoons" marked Navy provides important new information regarding Colt firearms history and opens new areas for research and collecting. The link to the Alabama Cavalry unit adds a new dimension to the roll

Colt firearms played in arming Southern forces. It also opens a previously unexplored area in collecting "Alabama guns". Most importantly the history of this gun conclusively ends longstanding speculations about the meaning of "C. L. Dragoons".

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Note: In order to continue my research on this subject I would appreciate hearing from anyone with information about the "C. L. Dragoons" or their arms. Address all correspondence to the author at P.O. Box 36974, Birmingham, Alabama, 35236.

**Acknowledgements:** The author wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Pat Anderson, Herb Glass, Jr., Damon Mills and the staff at the Alabama State Archives for their help with this article.

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