

Southern Pocket Pistol
2nd Place, Freshman Category

The late 1860's produced a very unique pistol often referred to as the "Southern Pocket Pistol" or "Double Derringer". This little .41 caliber Derringer was the choice gun for women and criminals in the late '60s and '70s. It was an easily concealed weapon, ready to be whipped out at a moment's notice. About 150,000 of this model circulated and were actually in production for a long time as compared to other derringer pistols. They were known to be in the region of the south. This pistol holds an interesting title and an interesting story in its history. The Southern Pocket Pistol is worthy of mention and placement in a museum for the unique story it holds, including; the criminals who used it, the women who relied on it, and the very design of this individual pistol.

Derringer pistols came in over 60 calibers and each had an interesting story and start. One of the things that Derringer is most famous for is the pistol that Booth used to assassinate Lincoln. This was a single action Derringer, and just adds to the fame of the title "Derringer". In the late 1990's the "Lady Derringer" was invented by the direction of Elizabeth Saunders, who very effectively advertised for The American Derringer Co. The Double Derringer as well has an interesting story, and was invented many years after the company started, and for the unique purpose of a pistol having a double action barrel. This basically meant that a person could shoot off a round, rotate the stacked barrels, and shoot again. This made the weapon especially effective.

The Derringer .41 caliber pistol was a later model of the Henry Derringer pistols. These types of pistols were invented by William Elliot who worked for Remington. The .41 calibers were a double-barreled ("Double Derringer"), single-action pistol, which means that the hammer had to be cocked before the trigger was pulled each time the gun was used. The pistol's small

size and its region account for its interesting and fitting nickname of “Southern Pocket Pistol”. Even though the pistol was easy to pull out without hesitation, it was not easy to use, or all that effective out of close range encounters. This is because it had to be cocked every time and because the bullet reportedly moved slowly. This also added to the criminality of the pistol, as it was used often across card tables, or in ‘business’ meetings that had gone sour.

Despite this, the pistol’s easy conceal ability factor led to criminal activity surfacing around the .41 caliber. For example in 1934 a .41 caliber double derringer was confiscated from John Dillinger when he was arrested in Arizona (he kept it hidden in his sock). Dillinger was a very famous criminal in the early 1900s that was killed just six months later. He was a famous gangster known for robbing banks. Dillinger got really popular recently with the movie *Public Enemies*, which starred Johnny Depp as Dillinger. After the release of this movie, it came into the light that a man in Arizona (the state where Dillinger got his double derringer confiscated) has been in possession of the .41. He sold it at auction for almost double it’s estimated worth. This goes to show the length collectors will go to, to attain one of Derringer’s pistols. As well, a criminal by the name of Holliday was arrested in Texas in the late 1870s for gambling. He was found with a .41 caliber derringer pistol. When a man he knew was later asked to describe Holliday, he reported Holliday’s quickness to pull this pistol out of his vest pocket.

This pistol was just as commonly used in defense as in criminal activities. It was a favored weapon by women because it could easily be concealed in a handbag, or even on their persons. What’s great about the double derringer is that it very effectively aided women in safety because of its small size and effective capability in shooting. Though it had to be loaded and cocked and all, there are no reported cases of a Derringer pistol failing. Derringer always strived

to produce the best, and not let copyright bootleggers make his guns better than his company could.

Indeed in this period when Derringer pistols were first becoming a hot commodity there were many who ignored the patent copyright and attempted to reproduce Derringer pistol designs. This is also why Derringer is spelled the way it is, as the name was not originally spelled that way, but changed in attempt to identify real Derringer pistols from knockoffs.

There are a great many interesting facts about how the Derringer Company got its start, and all of the very unique pistols produced while the company thrived. The Double Derringer is just one of Derringer's incredible stories that have added to history. It is remarkable to be able to look back and see, in this pistol in particular, the contradiction of a single pistol used effectively both in defense and in offense. The criminal stories are interesting to read, and the clear knowledge that this pistol aided the safety of women is a comfort in that good came of these pistols. In any way that one looks at the situation, the compact .41 caliber Double Derringer pistol added to history with its unique story and design.

References

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