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# CORNELL PUBS TRIVIA

## February 2012

### Colt

1. "Abe Lincoln may have freed all men, but Sam Colt made them [what?]."
2. Colt has been around for 173 years. How many revolvers, pistols, and rifles bearing the Colt name have been produced?  
*3 million, 30 million, or 300 million?*
3. Samuel Colt had a brilliant idea that he patented for his first firearm. What was it? If you know the answer, then how did he come up with the idea (i.e., what did he observe that gave him the idea for his invention)?
4. Colt firearms sold sluggishly at first. In fact, Sam Colt briefly shuttered his gun business to focus on waterproof ammunition, underwater mines for harbor defense, and, in association with the inventor Samuel F. B. Morse, the telegraph. What happened to reignite interest in his firearms?
5. People often referred to Sam Colt as "Colonel" Colt. Why?
6. Sam Colt was only 47 when he died in 1862. Towards the end of his life, the Civil War became official.
  - 6a. Colt sold firearms to the Union forces, but did he also sell to the Confederate forces?
  - 6b. How many guns did he sell while he was alive (hint: he sold guns for about 25 years)?
  - 6c. When he died, how much money did Sam Colt have?
7. After Sam Colt's death, Colt Firearms began a long relationship with John Moses Browning. This relationship was positive for both companies, and gave rise to what very famous model?
8. Colt introduced the AR-15 in what year?
9. Has Colt always been a successful privately-owned company? Who owns it now?

## 1. "Abe Lincoln may have freed all men, but Sam Colt made them [what?]."

**Equal.** There are many references to this popular frontier saying, which has taken numerous forms over the years. Other variations include "God created men, but Sam Colt made them equal," "God created men, Colonel Colt made them equal," and "Some men are big, some men are small, but Sam Colt made them all equal."

On message boards, at least one contributor wrote that using Google Books he found a reference to the quote in 1927, but the earliest we could find was from 1941 in this snippet from *The Art of Handgun Shooting* by Captain Charles Askins:

"Every man packed a Colt and he hung it on for the express purpose of providing an equalizer. It has been said over and over again that 'all men are not born equal — Sam'l Colt made 'em that way.' A fast handling of the big .45..."

Similar versions of the quote have probably been around for a long time. For example, in a section regarding a sharp blade in the book *Folded Hills* (published in 1934), Stewart Edward White writes:

"Sure you could," agreed Murray heartily. "It's a knack, and it's got that knife trick of yours skinned a mile." He patted it affectionately. "That little darling makes all men equal," said he.



*Sam Colt*

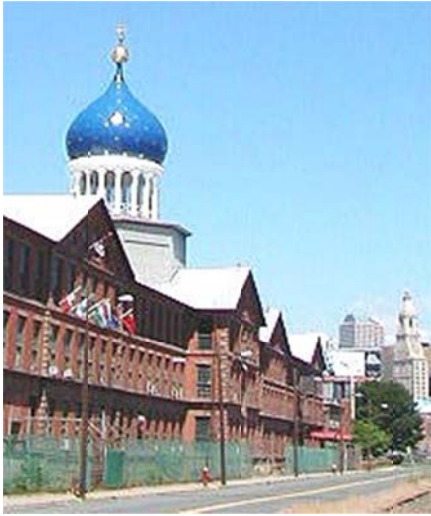
### *Additional references*

Colt website, history section,  
<http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>  
Askins, Charles, *The Art of Handgun Shooting*, 1941.  
White, Stewart Edward, *Folded Hills*, 1934.

## 2. Colt firearms has been around for 173 years. How many revolvers, pistols, and rifles bearing the Colt name have been produced?

**30 million**, and nearly all of them were made in plants located in the Hartford, Connecticut, area. For comparison, it's estimated that 75 million AK-47s have been produced, and 100 million AK-type rifles. Keep in mind that the AK is a post-WWII rifle, and Colt has been around for nearly three times as long as the AK has been made. For another comparison, Apple Computer sold over 30 million iPhone 4s

models in the first quarter the phone was available.



*Colt Factory*

*Additional references*

Colt website, history section,

<http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>

Military Channel website (by Discovery Channel),

<http://military.discovery.com/technology/weapons/rifles-01.html>

Venturebeat, <http://venturebeat.com/2011/12/09/apple-sells-30-million-phones/>

### **3. Samuel Colt had a brilliant idea that he patented for his firearm. What was it? How did he come up with the idea?**

Samuel Colt created the revolver, for which he received a patent on February 25, 1836. He was only 21 years old. Before his invention, only one- and two-barrel flintlock pistols were available.

To view the patent yourself, go to Google Patents [www.google.com/patents](http://www.google.com/patents) and search for 9430X, which is the number later assigned to Sam Colt's patent. You'll see copies of the original drawings and record of the patent's issuance. You might also be interested in searching for other notable firearms inventors such as John Browning. On a related note, we enjoyed reading a blog by a patent attorney who is also a scientist and historian: [patentpending.blogspot.com/patent\\_pending\\_blog/firearms\\_patentstechnology/](http://patentpending.blogspot.com/patent_pending_blog/firearms_patentstechnology/)

To answer the second part of the question, from the Colt website <http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>:

The Colt revolving-cylinder concept is said to have occurred to

Sam Colt while serving as a seaman aboard the sailing ship *Corvo*. There he observed a similar principle in the workings of the ship's capstan. During his leisure hours, Sam carved a wooden representation of his idea. The principle was remarkable in its simplicity and its applicability to both longarms and sidearms. Nevertheless, Colt's idea was not an instant success. At the outset, many people preferred the traditional flintlock musket or pistol to such a novel weapon.



A capstan is used on ships to apply force to ropes, cables, and hawsers.

**4. Colt firearms sold sluggishly at first. In fact, Sam Colt briefly shuttered his gun business to focus on waterproof ammunition, underwater mines for harbor defense, and, in association with the inventor Samuel F. B. Morse, the telegraph. What happened to reignite interest in his Colt firearms?**

Colt's firearms performed well versus Indian forces, creating demand in the field. In 1845, units of the U.S. Dragoon forces and Texas Rangers engaged in fighting the Indians in Texas credited their use of Colt firearms for their great success in defeating Indian forces. U.S. War Department officials reportedly were favorably impressed. As a result, when the Mexican War began in 1846, Capt. Samuel H. Walker, U.S. Army, traveled East, looked up Sam Colt, and collaborated on the design of a new, more powerful revolver.

The U.S. Ordnance Dept. ordered a thousand of the newly designed revolvers, which Sam Colt called the "Walker." Suddenly, Colt was back in the firearms business but without a factory. He turned to Eli Whitney, Jr., son of the famous inventor of the cotton gin, who had a factory in Connecticut. It was there that the order was manufactured and shipped by mid-1847.



*Colt Walker*

We wonder if there is a connection with the Walker pistol and the name for the television program Walker Texas Ranger. We could not find any authoritative sources linking the two, but our research led us to an interesting aside about Samuel Walker, who

is a member of the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame.

[http://www.texasranger.org/halloffame/Walker\\_Samuel.htm](http://www.texasranger.org/halloffame/Walker_Samuel.htm) His story is quite fascinating:

Samuel Hamilton Walker was born in Maryland in 1815 and came to Texas in 1836. Walker served in Jack Hays' company of Rangers in San Antonio in 1836. In 1842, as a scout for Captain Jesse Billingsley, he fought against Woll and his Mexican troops in San Antonio. Walker was among those captured during the attack on Mier and was marched in chains across the desert.

Caught after an attempted escape, he drew a white bean in Santa Anna's infamous "Black Bean" incident, in which seventeen men were executed. Successfully escaping a second time, he rejoined Hays in San Antonio. During the Mexican War, Walker served with Taylor's Army on the Rio Grande in 1846, and later with General Winfield Scott's Army. His discussions with inventor Samuel Colt led to the introduction of the "Walker" Colt in 1847, a revolver superior to those already in use.

On October 9, 1847, Walker was killed while leading a charge into Huamantla, Tlaxcala, Mexico.



*Sam Walker*

Sharp-eyed readers will note that Sam Walker was only 32 when he died, and had

collaborated with Sam Colt the year earlier. We don't mean to get off topic, but invite readers to learn more about Sam Walker by reading this [http://www.texasranger.org/dispatch/Backissues/Dispatch\\_Issue\\_09.pdf](http://www.texasranger.org/dispatch/Backissues/Dispatch_Issue_09.pdf). Search for the term "black bean" to learn more about the above-referenced incident and some of the extreme experiences Sam Walker endured.

*Additional references*  
Colt website, history section,  
<http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>

## **5. People often referred to Sam Colt as "Colonel" Colt. Why?**

It was an honorary title. Business success brought Colt fortune and fame. He became one of the ten wealthiest businessmen in the U.S and was awarded the honorary title of "Colonel" by the Governor

of the State of Connecticut in return for political support.

*Additional references*  
Colt website, history section,  
<http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>

## **6. Sam Colt was only 47 when he died in 1862. Towards the end of his life, the Civil War became official.**

### **6a. Colt sold firearms to the Union forces, but did he also sell to the Confederate forces?**

Colt sold to Confederate forces until the war became official, then stopped. Samuel Colt's health began to fail late in 1860 as the country moved toward Civil War. Prior to the actual declaration of war, Colt continued to ship his product to customers in southern states, but as soon as war was official, Colt supplied only the Union forces. The Armory was running at full capacity by year-end 1861, with more than 1,000 employees and annual profits exceeding \$250,000.

### **6b. How many guns did he sell while he was alive (hint: he sold guns for about 25 years)?**

Samuel Colt died on January 10, 1862, at the age of only 47, having produced in his lifetime more than 400,000 guns.

### **6c. When he died, how much money did Sam Colt have?**

His estate was reportedly worth \$15 million, a fantastic sum for the time.

*Additional references*  
Colt website, history section,  
<http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>

**7. After Sam Colt's death, Colt Firearms began a long relationship with John Moses Browning. This relationship was positive for both companies, and gave rise to what very famous model?**

**The Colt .45.**

No other U.S. company produced as many fully automatic rifles, best known as machine guns, as did Colt Firearms. In large part, this was due to Colt's long and profitable relationship with John Moses Browning. As early as 1891, Colt Firearms worked with Browning to produce a gas-operated, air-cooled (later water-cooled) machine gun. That gun was first delivered to the U.S. Navy in 1897 and was destined to play a major role in both the Boxer Rebellion and the Spanish-American War.



*Colt .45*

The Colt-Browning relationship included not only his machine guns and the well-known Browning automatic rifles (BAR) but also the world-famous Colt .45 semiautomatic pistol. Because of its effective stopping power, the Colt .45 was purchased in large quantity by the Department of the Army and, as the Model 1911A1, became the standard-issue sidearm during both World War I and World War II. Colt delivered approximately 2.5 million

Colt .45 pistols to the U.S. government alone and also offered the pistol for sale commercially with tremendous marketing success. During both World Wars and subsequent military actions by the U.S. Armed Forces, Colt was a major producer of sidearms, rifles, machine guns, BARs, and anti-aircraft guns for the U.S. Department of Defense.

The Internet is full of information about the Colt 45. We found two resources that we think you might enjoy exploring. First, <http://www.sightm1911.com/> is dedicated to all things Colt 45, and includes an extensive history and information on the Colt 45. Second, we were riveted by this essay <http://www.morolandhistory.com/Related%20Articles/Legend%20of%20Colt%2045.pdf> discussing the Colt 45 in the context of a people we had never heard of: the Moro people, who were Muslims of the southern Philippine Islands and against whom the US waged war from 1902-1913. From the website:

“It was the [United States’] first sustained encounter with a volatile mixture of nation building, insurgency, counterinsurgency, and militant Islamism. To the American public of the early 1900's, for a time, it was as much in the news and public consciousness as Afghanistan and Iraq are a century later. For policy makers and the military leadership, opinion was equally divided and contentious.”

<http://www.morolandhistory.com/>

*Additional references*

## 8. Colt introduced the AR-15 in what year?

In 1960, based on a design by Eugene Stoner. It was followed shortly thereafter by the M16 military full-automatic version. Involvement of the United States in Vietnam again put heavy demands on Colt to supply arms for the troops. On the commercial side of the business, Colt's commemorative line of firearms was introduced.

On Amazon, we saw 2,149 books for sale under the category books/history/"AR15". We suppose you could spend a lifetime reading about the AR-15.

### *Additional references*

Colt website, history section,  
<http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>

## 9. Has Colt always been a successful, privately-owned company? Who owns it now?

**No, not always, and we believe Donald Zilkha owns it.**

The company had a complicated history in the last half of the 20th century. Colt's fortunes were closely tied to wars, and by 1955 the company was losing money. That year, Colt was purchased by the Penn-Texas Corporation (controlled by Leopold D. Silberstein). Penn-Texas also Pratt and Whitney Company of West Hartford. In 1959, a group of investors took control of the Penn-Texas, dismissed Mr. Silberstein, and changed the name of the company to Fairbanks Whitney, reflecting its acquisition of the Fairbanks Morse Company of Chicago. In 1964 the parent company reorganized under the name Colt Industries and the firearms subsidiary became Colt's Inc., Firearms Division.

In 1988 Colt lost the government contract for M16 rifles. And in 1990, as part of a deal to end the UAW strike, Colt Firearms Division was sold to a three-party consortium that included private investors, the union employees and the Connecticut State Employees' Pension Fund.

But just two years later, Colt firearms entered Chapter 11 bankruptcy. As you might imagine, lawyers fought over rights to the Colt name and trademarks. While still in Chapter 11, the company closed the Hartford Armory and relocated the entire business to the West Hartford manufacturing facility from which it operates today. Additionally, Colt was awarded a sole source contract to supply nearly 19,000 of its new M4 carbines to the U.S. Army and to joint Special Forces personnel. In 1994, the assets of Colt were purchased by Zilkha & Co, a financial group owned by Donald Zilkha.

We should mention that owners of firearms manufacturers often avoid publicity. We found a 2009 article [http://www.hartfordinfo.org/issues/documents/history/htfd\\_courant\\_011509.asp](http://www.hartfordinfo.org/issues/documents/history/htfd_courant_011509.asp) that mentions Zilkha as the current owner, but we were unable to verify that he is the current owner.

Also, the proper name for the company that serves the civilian market is "Colt's Manufacturing Company,"

while “Colt Defense” serves law enforcement and military.

*Additional references*  
Colt website, history section,  
<http://www.coltsmfg.com/About/History.aspx>

## Conclusion

For our readers who would like to learn more about the history of Colt firearms, consider visiting the Connecticut State Library the next time you are in Hartford. I first went with my parents when I was eight years old, and enjoyed the collection of antique firearms (in a library!) and numerous volumes documenting the history of this important piece of American history.

<http://www.museumofcthistory.org/colt.asp>



Images courtesy of cslib.org

If I’ve gotten something wrong, then please let me know and, if possible, cite your source. My goal is to help preserve history and I strive to get it right!

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