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Countless revolver variations found their way into the hands of soldiers, both North and South, during the Civil War. From the diminutive Smith & Wesson Model 1 to the heavy-handed LeMat and everything in between, they all looked very similar to one another.

That's what makes the revolvers produced by C. S. Pettengill unique. In an era dominated by single-action revolvers with external hammers, the New Haven-based inventor created a double-action revolver with an internal hammer. Of course, there were other double-action models available (like those from Cooper), but none of the others were what we call "hammerless."

The hammerless design, coupled with an equally unique grip frame shape, made for a revolver with no rival. The patent and production of the guns was unconventional, as well. Pettengill secured the initial patent in 1856. Two years later, in 1858, Charles Robitaille and Edward A. Raymond received patents for improvements on the design. All three men's names are found on the revolvers, but none of men actually produced the Pettengill. Rogers, Spencer & Co. of Willow Dale, New York, manufactured the revolvers, but the company's name is nowhere to be found on any of the guns.

Pettengill's design owes everything to Henry S. Rogers, and not just because his company made the guns. It was with Rogers' help that the Secretary of War instructed the Chief of Ordnance to order 5,000 of the .44 caliber, six-shot Pettengill Army Model revolvers at a price of \$20 each. It was a slightly lower price than the original military contract for the popular Colt 1861 Navy revolver which rang it at \$25 a piece.

Unfortunately, the guns did not fare well in military trials. They fouled quickly with blackpowder residue, which gummed up the inner workings and prevented them from cycling properly. More political wrangling reduced the contract to 2,000 instead of cancelling it outright; the individual price remained at \$20.



Lot 421: U.S. Pettengill Army Model Percussion Revolver

True to the deal, Rogers, Spencer & Co. delivered a total of 2,001 revolvers to the US military. At least six different units were issued Pettengill guns, with the 3rd Michigan Cavalry receiving a quarter of the entire contract production. Other units from Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, and Missouri received the remaining revolvers.

All told, approximately 3,400 Pettengill Army Model revolvers were made, most between June 1862 and January 1863. Within a year, almost all of the guns had been removed from service. The government held onto the sub-par pistols for more than a decade before selling them at a tremendous loss. In 1876, 196 Pettengills were sold for \$1.75 each; in 1882, another 525 were sold for 27 cents each.

Even though Pettengill's revolver failed to make a lasting impression, their story is still important to arms development. His hammerless design was an excellent idea, but it needed other advancements (such as smokeless powder) to come along and make it truly successful.



Lot 2327: Civil War Era C.S. Pettengill Army Model Percussion Revolver

More than a century and a half later, this failure to launch has turned out to be a beneficial to modern day collectors. Because so few were made and even fewer survived, they are highly sought after today. The standard guns are valued at a high price, and those with military inspection markings have an even more value.



Lot 416: Rare Military Inspected Civil War U.S. Contract Pettengill Army

Luckily, the February Regional Auction has multiple opportunities for you to add one to your collection. Three different lots, to be exact. Two of the guns have inspector stamps on the left side of the barrel and frame, and one has the aforementioned stamps and an inspection cartouche on the left grip. Each gun is in a different grade, so there are Pettengill revolvers available at different price points.

Whether you're just starting out or you are a seasoned collector, the upcoming Regional Auction has a Pettengill that will fit right into your collection of double actions or Civil War revolvers.