

A Symposium on Union Cartridge Boxes of the Civil War

Led by Harry A. Repman

(Editor's note: Some time prior to this meeting there had been discussion about the feasibility of having members join in a round-table type discussion on some subject in which several have expertise. Harry Repman volunteered to break the ice by chairing such a group at the New Orleans meeting. He was assisted by Lee Bull, Gerald Denning, Maurice Garb, Bill Gerber, Dick Johnson, Bill Moore, and Henry Stewart. The adjacent pictures give some idea of the attention and interest generated by the symposium. Some flaws in the location and facilities for the presentation were discovered, as might be expected at the first one, but nonetheless it was a highly successful experiment. Harry's modest summary follows.)

We did a lot of work on Civil War Union cartridge boxes. We had fun talking about them and I believe the small group present enjoyed the discussion, but to have new information worthy of presentation to the American Society of Arms Collectors, there was not enough.

Mr. Frederick P. Todd has written an excellent book on *American Military Equipment—1851-1872*. While there are a few things we don't agree with, by and large he has it all there and we referred to it constantly.

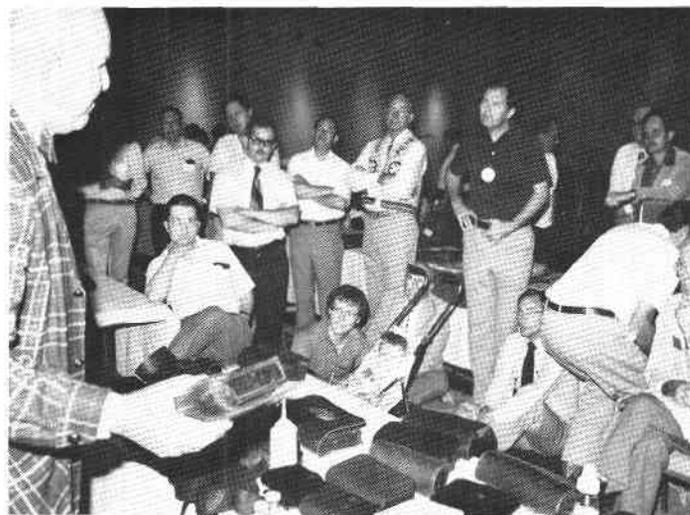
Of the Infantry boxes there is the standard .58 caliber box, Model 1855, with a large brass US plate attached. Late in the war these boxes were made with US embossed in the leather. In 1860 the Government made a .69 caliber box with brass US plate attached—this was like the .58 cal. box, but larger. All of these are well described in Todd's book. These boxes were used for the many different rifle-muskets of the war, taking .69 cal. and .58 cal. ammunition.

We were able to display three Blakeslee boxes for the Spencer rifles and carbines, .52 cal. These were the so-called "quick loading boxes" and there was one of 6 tubes, one of 10 tubes and one of 13 tubes. There was also a small rectangular box with two scalloped edges, described in Todd's book, which took packets of Spencer cartridges.

We could display no box that we were certain took the Sharps .52 cal. cartridge and no one had any idea what the Greene underhammer rifle used.

There was a box, smaller than Todd describes and only two inches deep. The belt loops are too small to take the Cavalry Saber belt and there is a provision to accept an over-the-shoulder belt. It would attach to the bottom of the box by 2 brass studs rather than the usual buckles. Inside is a block bored to take 40 calibre .44 cartridges and we felt that this was for the Henry rifle.

Lee Bull talked on Navy boxes and displayed his almost one-of-a-kind box for the Plymouth Navy Rifle. This is a .69 cal. box of the same size as the Infantry .69 cal. but is embossed USN and under the front flap, where the implement pouch usually is, was a small curved pouch for caps; two small implement pouches were also on the inside front of the box, one on each side of the cap pouch. There was a smaller box with the same curved cap pouch sewn in the same place. This was embossed USN and there was a tin insert which would take six packages of pistol ammunition. This we felt was for the Colt Navy pistol, cal. 36.



Maurice Garb reviewed the Mann Patent boxes, which are pretty well covered in Todd's book.

Bill Moore had the really difficult part, a discussion of the Cavalry Carbine boxes. He was able to definitely identify the Merrill box because he still had some of the cartridges in the box. This is also described by Todd. There was then a great variety of boxes, most about 10 inches long and 3 inches high. All had two wide belt loops and many had buckles to accept over-the-shoulder belts. All had wooden blocks bored to accept .52 to .58 cal. metallic cartridges and we were unable to really connect any of these boxes with any of the great number of carbines used during the war. It was our conclusion that while perhaps the carbine maker would have a definite box for his gun, the Government would not necessarily buy the boxes with the guns but would have the soldier use the box he happened to have. There are pictures and drawings which show the car-

tridges being carried loose in any box, or even in the soldier's pocket. I was at Gettysburg recently with Ralph Arnold and, in the Visitors' Center, there is the complete equipment of a local cavalryman donated by his family. There is a Sharps carbine, Remington pistol, saber and belt, pistol cartridge box—the whole works—but on the belt is what is obviously a .69 cal. musket cartridge box and this is where he carried his carbine cartridges.

One final word. In Todd's book, p. 195, Fig. 50, is what he calls "Pouch for Revolving Pistol Cartridges." This is correct but the inside view should show an extra flap of leather on each side of the inside of the box. These are fairly common items even today at gun shows, a small flat box, and we think these are Civil War items for three packets of Colt pistol cartridges (or Remington), the smaller for the .36 cal. Navy, the larger for the .44 cal. Army pistol.



Enlisted men of Company C, 8th Texas Cavalry, from Gonzales County, Texas. This is the same unit from which Col. Shannon of the Shannon Scouts came. Left to right are: Peter Kendrum, W.A. Lynch, Felix G. Kennedy, Thomas S. Burney, W. Wood. NOTE THE FOLLOWING: two troopers dressed in Union cavalry overcoats with attached capes; two, perhaps three '51 Colt navy pistol butts, worn in the correct cavalry holsters; one Colt pistol worn in the overcoat front; one soldier wearing 1851 U.S. sword belt with regulation sword belt plate; and, most important, four of the troopers wearing black hats with silver Texas stars on the crowns. These stars are made from Mexican silver pesos.