

Collecting Heavy Metal

By Hayes Otoupalik

Editor's comments: Hayes Otoupalik gave an exciting presentation at our Santa Fe meeting that started with his interesting comments and ended with a DVD produced under his guidance and on his property, entitled *America's First Battle Tank*. The enthusiasm generated by the talk and the DVD led us to enclose a copy of the DVD for your viewing pleasure.

I started collecting in 1959 at the age of eleven. In my hometown of Missoula, Montana, there was an old western and Indian relic trading post called Hellgate Trading Post. On exhibit outside were two Civil War three-inch field guns that had been disposed of for scrap metal during World War II from a local army post. Fortunately for the cannons, the scrap dealer sold the cannons to the owner of the trading post instead of having them melted down for scrap.

During the Civil War Centennial of 1961-1965, like tens of thousands of World War II "baby boom" boys, I was launched on the path of becoming a Civil War collector. I was fascinated with these two Civil War cannons. I learned that they were for sale and my father encouraged me to purchase them. There was only one problem—where was a young lad to get his hands on \$1,000!?!? Meanwhile, my father kept telling me to tie the seller up with a small deposit before an outside collector purchased the cannons and hauled them away. He convinced me that if I didn't purchase them, it would cost me more than the purchase price to get one cannon moved to Missoula, Montana from elsewhere, and then I would also face the purchase price of the cannon. Finally, in December 1963 I made an appointment with Roy Malcolm, the seller of the two cannons. I paid a \$60 deposit. It would take me two and a half years to pay off the balance and take possession. The acquisition was very satisfying.

The fuse for collecting had been ignited, and 46 years later that passion is as vibrant as it was in 1963. From 1973-1974, I was finishing my college career when I met a fellow collector at the University of Montana. While my interest had expanded from the Civil War to include the American Indian Wars and the Spanish American War, my new friend Paul J. Schulz introduced me to the field of World War I collecting, and another new passion was ignited.

I thought, if I am going to collect World War I weapons and memorabilia . . . why not also acquire a World War I cannon or a tank? Almost immediately I saw one for sale in the pages of *Shotgun News*. I inquired immediately, but found it had been sold to the West Point Museum.



The search was on for a World War I tank for my collection. It would take 14 years to purchase, and an equal number of years to find the 37 mm cannon for the turret. Why so long? Because only approximately 25 light tanks from World War I survived. Of these, only 8—in all ranges of condition—are privately owned.

Our U.S. M1917 tank came from the estate of John Furrer's World War I Museum in Picacho Peak, Arizona. Since 1922, it had belonged to M. C. Bradley Military Studios in Hollywood, California, where it had served in the Laurel and Hardy films and was painted as a Japanese tank for the John Wayne film, *Sands of Iwo Jima*.

The 37 mm one-pounder gun came from Walter Sietz of Kenfix Arms who had purchased it from the famous Colonel Jarrett of New Jersey and Maryland. It is the only 37 mm tank gun privately owned.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE 37 MM TANK GUN

The M1916 37 mm one pounder infantry gun was developed by Major Garnie of the French Artillery. These light, portable guns were necessary to provide light mobile field artillery for infantry units. They had to be transported over various terrain and offer rapid artillery fire for knocking out enemy machine gun nests and pill boxes.

Each gun was composed of two elements: (1) the gun on a tripod capable of being set on wheels, and (2) a light ammo cart/limber for carrying ammunition, spare parts and

accessories. The gun ammo cart/limber were pulled by one horse or mule. However, when near the enemy, they were separated and moved forward by hand.

This was the smallest field artillery gun used by the United States Army during World War I. The United States government obtained 620 field artillery guns from the French Army. They were made at Puteaux Arsenal in France. Another 2,597 were ordered in the United States, but only 1,210 were completed because of the Armistice on November 11, 1918. These were made by Poole Engineering and Machine Company of Baltimore, Maryland.

Four types of ammunition were provided for these guns. The low explosive one pound projectile was found to be ineffective and was replaced by the 1-1/4 pound high explosive round. Additionally, they manufactured canister and smoke rounds for infantry support.

Due to the small size of the turrets of the French FT-17 and/or U.S. Model 1917 tanks, they were fitted with the M1916 37 mm infantry cannons. These guns were easily adapted as a M1916 37 mm tank cannon. Approximately 1,800 of the French tanks and 325 of the U.S. tanks were equipped with these 37 mm guns. When the United States entered World War I, General John J. Pershing found his troops embroiled in a war of fixed and heavily fortified positions, so the fledgling U.S. Tank Corps was forced to rely on tanks supplied by the allies.

The Renault FT-17 was the world's first modern battle tank and pioneered the basic concept that tanks have followed from 1917 to date: Driver to the front, engine to the rear, and a fully transvertible turret. The FT-17 was the brainchild of French General Jean Baptiste Estienne. 3,747 were made in France, of which 514 were purchased by the United States during the course of World War I.

Four FT-17 Renaults and a set of plans were rushed to the United States in 1917. After quick evaluation, the U.S. Ordnance Department ordered 4,440 of these two-man, six-ton tanks from Van Dorn Iron Works, Maxwell Motor Company and C.L. Best Tractor Company. Because of the Armistice, only 950 were completed at a cost of \$14,138 each.

As members of the American Society of Arms Collectors, we are all arms collectors. The inventiveness and innovation of combining weaponry, automotive engines and mechanics, the American-designed Caterpillar crawler track system, and face hardened Boiler plate into the all-new development of the

traveling pill box cannot escape our attention. The armored tank broke the stalemate of trench warfare in World War I, and gave back mobility to the battlefield.

This innovation was not lost on these Union and Confederate veterans that visited the U.S. Tank Corps Training Center at Camp Colt (Gettysburg), Pennsylvania in 1920.

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