

A. Le Mat & Co.: P. G. T. Beauregard and the American Le Mat Revolver

Doug Adams

“Hero of Sumter,” “Napoleon in Gray,” “Defender of Charleston. . .” These are a few of the titles by which Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard is known. The life and exploits of this charismatic New Orleans Creole has been detailed in numerous forms, with one notable exception: his relationship to the notorious Confederate Le Mat revolver and its inventor, Jean Alexander Francois Le Mat, M.D.

Dr. Le Mat disembarked from the *Bourdeaux Packet* in New Orleans in February 1844 at the age of twenty-three. He was fresh from eighteen months of work at the Bourdeaux Military Hospital, his first post following completion of medical training. Le Mat quickly broke into the Creole social elite, of which Beauregard was a member. Within five years, he was not only involved in the importation of tobacco and cotton for the French government, but was also married to the daughter of Jean Baptiste Lepretre, the most influential Creole planter/banker in New Orleans, and as a result, became a cousin of Beauregard.

But something else happened during those five years, as evidenced by Le Mat’s subsequent familiarity and invention in the military and arms arena. Dr. Le Mat had somehow obtained first hand working knowledge of these fields.

It is likely that at least some of this experience was gained by involvement in the United States’ war with Mexico from 1846 to 1848. New Orleans was the staging point for many medical and non-medical aspects of the conflict.



Volunteer physicians accompanied many volunteer and some regular army units. Beauregard, already known to Le Mat, played a high profile role in several major campaigns. Le Mat was a single, trained military surgeon. These forces likely came together to place him in a position where experience with cannons, fortifications, ordnance and most importantly, small arms, could be gained.

In the field of small arms, the Colt Dragon made its dramatic debut in the later parts of this conflict. Its firepower gave the United States troops significant advantage over their Mexican counterparts. Also notable in the fighting was the effective use of artillery, both shot and grapeshot.



Major P. G. T. Beauregard (left), Dr. J. A. F. Le Mat and the pistol that they produced.
(Photos Courtesy of Doug Adams/Cliff Young/Fred Edmunds)

Somewhere in the context of these events, the fertile mind of this French physician conceived of a combination of these two forces: grapeshot and the multi-shot revolver. Translating this idea into reality became Beauregard's lifelong pursuit.

That G. P. T. Beauregard was ambitious is undisputed and he expertly parlayed political savvy into the roles he desired. The position that he occupied in the mid 1850s, supervisor of the construction of the New Orleans Customs House, had been achieved with no little effort. He also sat as part of an influential government board charged with maintaining the ocean-going waterways of the Mississippi.

His relationship with Dr. Le Mat may have begun in Mexico, as a consequence of familial events or in the context of the social network of the Creole community in New Orleans. Beauregard's adoption and eventual championing of his friend's combination revolver and shotgun was gradual, and may have gotten a boost from another invention which Le Mat patented in an area relevant to Beauregard. In addition to the revolver patent, #15,925 filed on October 21, 1856, Le Mat also filed United States patent number 14,365 on March 4, 1856.

This patent was for a flotation device and related to an issue with which Beauregard struggled in the maintenance of New Orleans' waterways. Two barriers to this traffic existed in the mouth of the Mississippi. The first was the simple deposit of silt at various locations, which decreased water depth. The second was so-called "mud lumps" or pressure-lifted silt and mud which, sometimes overnight, randomly appeared in the river at recorded heights of fifteen feet. These two hazards obviously played havoc with boat traffic.

Beauregard himself had sought patents for a solution to these problems, but without success. Le Mat's proposal in

patent 14,365 appears sound and may have caught Beauregard's attention. However, there is no record that it was ever put to use.

Whether it was this invention, a true appreciation for the "Grapeshot Revolver" concept, or the ambitious perception that such a weapon might raise his political profile, Beauregard embraced this physician and his gun, using his contacts and influence to bring it to the attention of the right people.

The relationship was at first informal and the first official notice of the piece was a report of the Inspector General Churchill, dated January 26, 1857. Nothing followed on this report, however, until March 1859, when Beauregard was able to use his influence in setting up an official military trial of the piece in New Orleans on March 2. The attendees at this trial included Winfield Scott, Braxton Bragg, Beauregard and others, representing all branches of the military. The praise for the piece could be termed effusively positive, and this response was apparently what Beauregard was looking for.

Less than one month later, he and Le Mat formed "A. Le Mat & Co." for the purpose of production and promotion of the weapon. The partnership was based on a twelve article contract in which the specifics of production, patent rights, financing and promotion were spelled out. Curiously, Le Mat retained 75 percent of the patent rights and Beauregard 25, even though the \$5000 fee for financing the patent process was paid entirely by Beauregard, who accepted responsibility for expenses incurred by Le Mat in the promotion process.

The Major was not slow in fulfilling his own promotional obligations. His personal papers at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge include letters of endorsement of

Dr. Le Mat from John Slidell and Judah P. Benjamin. These two United States Senators, whose political origins were the same New Orleans Creole elite as Beauregard and Le Mat, were at the height of their national influence. These letters and several others were directed to then Secretary of War, John B. Floyd and precipitated the convening of an official Military Board, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Joseph E. Johnston on May 9, 1859 at the Washington Arsenal for an official evaluation of

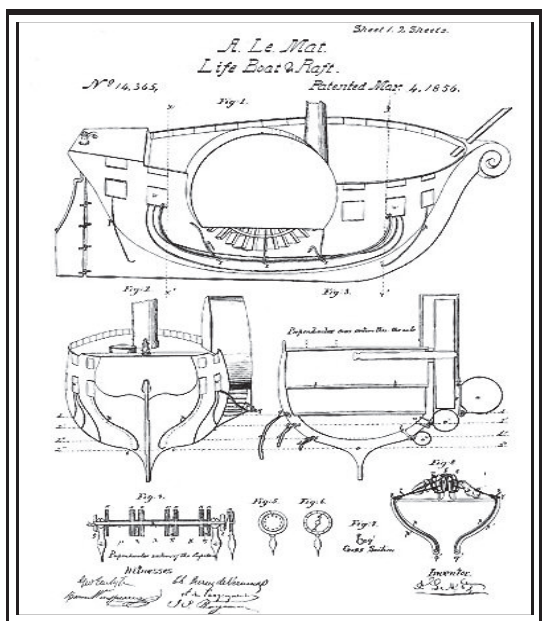


Figure 1. Patent drawing for US Patent #14,365. (Courtesy of U.S. Patent Office.)

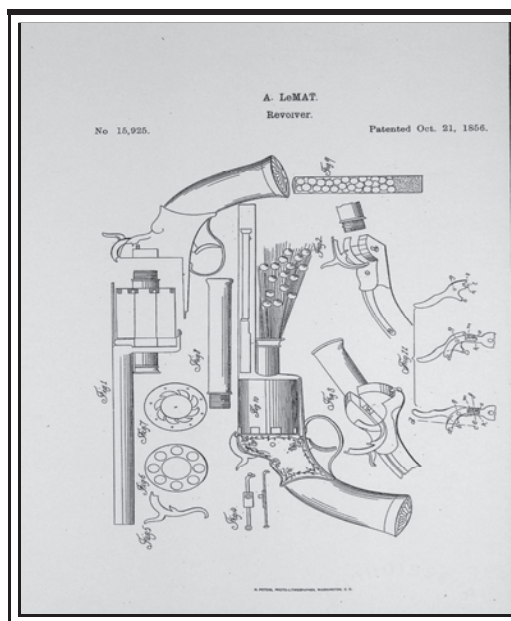


Figure 2. Patent drawing for US Patent #15,925. (Courtesy of U.S. Patent Office.)

(Copy)

New Orleans March 2nd 1859.

We the undersigned have examined & tried the Grape Shot Revolving Pistol of Mr. A. Le Mat of this city, and feel no hesitation in stating that after a close examination of said arm, we consider it a great and important improvement on Colt's revolver; containing as it does, three additional extra shots in the revolving cylinder, and one stationary extra barrel for the discharge of an ounce ball or of a cartridge, containing 15 Bussot shots. The central barrel and revolving cylinder can be used independently of each other their arrangement being both simple and ingenious and remarkably, to get easily out of order. ~~never~~ ^{never} the whole weight of this revolver is one quarter of a pound less than Colt's Cavalry pistol, altho' it carries nearly the same Calibre of a ball, besides having 3 more shots at each revolution of the cylinder and a central barrel for the discharge of grape or an ounce ball, as already stated.

We consider this arm far superior to any one we have yet seen for the use of Cavalry, acting against Indians, or when charging on a square of Infantry or a battery of field pieces. - It is also indispensable for Artillerists in defending their pieces against such a charge, and for Infantry defending a breach. - Indeed it is probable that had the Riflemen at the Sabastoff been armed with Le Mat's Pistols, the French would never have been able to enter that town or to maintain themselves in it.

Its advantages in the naval service in boarding or repelling boarders is too obvious to require any thing but a passing notice.

It is more than probable that the introduction and use of this pistol in the Cavalry service would give to the latter the preponderance over the Infantry, if not armed in like manner, for what would become of a line or square of Infantry after its fire should have been drawn by the Cavalry, when the latter coming up to within a few paces,

Figure 3. The handwritten text of the New Orleans trial of the pistol produced by Le Mat and promoted by Beauregard. (Courtesy of LSU Libraries.)

the piece. Dr. Le Mat, made an aide de campe Colonel on April 10, 1859 at the order of the Governor of Louisiana, must have been thrilled by this turn of events.

The pistols used in this and later trials have been an enigma until recently. In June 2004, Greg Martin Auctions consigned a piece out of a family collection, originating in northern France. The pistol bears the barrel address "JOHN KRIDER & CO., PHILADELPHIA MAKERS COL. A. LE MAT'S GRAPE SHOT REVOLVER PATENT NO. 2." John Krider was a well-respected gun maker in Philadelphia in the early and mid-nineteenth century. At the time of this discovery, several things were known about similar pieces. First, a nearly identical pistol, labeled "MADE BY JOHN KRIDER. PHILADA. LE MAT'S GRAPE SHOT REVOLVER PATENT," and bearing the serial "No.1" had been sold to the Liege Arms Museum in Belgium in 1891 by the estate of Auguste Francotte. Mr. Francotte was a prominent gun maker in the early and mid-

would pour 10 shots into their very faces? What would have been the fate of the celebrated French Squares at the battle of the Pyramids, or of the English Squares at the battle of Waterloo, & under such a supposition? They would have melted away like snow before the sun.

We earnestly recommend that this arm should be introduced in our military and naval services, so soon as the Government will find it practicable to do so.

"Signed by"

<p>H. Beauregard Capt. U. S. Army</p> <p>D. T. Beauregard B. V. Maj: U. S. Army</p> <p>F. C. Prime 1st Lt: U. S. Regt</p> <p>F. B. Evans Lieut. U. S. Army</p> <p>Braxton Bragg late Lt Col: U. S. Army</p> <p>A. S. Evans Capt U. S. 2nd Cavalry</p> <p>Capt. C. R. Smith 2nd Cavalry U. S. A.</p>	<p>A. C. Myers Lt Col. U. S. Army</p> <p>J. R. Smith late Capt: U. S. Army</p> <p>S. M. Law 2nd Lt: A. S. C. So General in Chief</p> <p>We the undersigned have examined Mr Le Mat's Revolver of fully concur in the above opinions and recommendations.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I think highly of the above weapon.</p> <p>Winfield Scott P. A. Hebert, late Capt Col. U. S. A. 1st Lt: Co: of Louisiana</p> <p>J. R. Smith Capt. U. S. 2nd Cavalry.</p> <p>W. H. Stevens A. J. Evans U. S. A.</p>
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Signatures Continued

J. R. Duncan
late U. S. Artillery

J. P. Huger
Lt. Com: of U. S. Army.

nineteenth century known for his quality and his ability to produce what were politely known as "brevettes" or copies. Second, five similar pistols, some with Belgian proof marks, were known to exist. Third, these seven guns were seen as conceptually similar but structurally different than the several hundred other Le Mat revolvers known. It had been assumed that these represented a continuum of production. The distinction between these later Le Mat revolvers and those under examination here will be commented on below.

Close examination of the Krider No. 2 yields some interesting information. Most significantly, it offers nine .41 caliber revolver shots and an 18-gauge shot barrel, considerably more firepower than its competitor the Colt. Further, it is well made and functions well even today. Third, it is structurally identical to Krider No. 1. Finally, in comparison to three of the five unlabelled pistols it reveals subtle but striking differences in

Etats Unis d'Amérique
Etat de la Louisiane, Ville de la Nouvelle-Orléans

Après avoir vu et examiné par moi, mil huit cent cinquante
 . l'un des quatre-vingt-troisième année de l'ère
 . républicaine américaine.

Présent à l'acte de l'acte, notaire public, de mon
 commissionnaire pour cette ville et la Paroisse de l'Orléans, et
 résidant sur les lieux des lieux ci-dessus nommés et
 susdits.

Et comparé.

Monsieur Alexandre Le Mat demeurant par cette ville
 lequel a déclaré qu'en considération
 des sommes rendues par moi par Monsieur Fontaine
 Beauregard, major de l'armée dans l'Orléans des
 Etats Unis, il vendra et fera porter, dès maintenant
 et toujours, sous toutes les facultés de droit, avec subite
 et libre fabrication à tous des droits, taxes, impôts et
 autres.

On dit bien Monsieur Fontaine
 Beauregard, de cette ville, a ce présent d'acquiescer
 pour lui, ses héritiers et ayants cause.

Après avoir vu et examiné les droits, taxes et
 privilèges résultant de la forme des brevets d'invention
 ou des patentes nationales obtenues par lui dit bien
 Monsieur Le Mat, pour sa invention, soit du Gouvernement
 des Etats Unis soit du Gouvernement étranger, pour
 l'usage exclusif des moyens et procédés par lui inventés
 pour la fabrication des "Grape Shot revolving Pistol"
 ainsi décrit au bureau des Brevets à Washington le
 21. 1845. Comme par son brevet et
 maintenant par son brevet de "Grape Shot revolv-
 ing pistol" de Monsieur Le Mat le 21 Octobre 1856. et
 par le Colonel J. P. Benjamin secrétaire de l'intérieur
 de l'Etat de Louisiane commissaire des brevets, le 21.

weight, balance, design features and machining characteristics. From these examinations, it is clear that the three are of the same manufacturing site—Belgium—as two of the three bear Liege proofs. They are distinct from the “Krider No. 2” piece and its partner “No. 1,” however, which are American made by Krider.

Shedding further light on this conundrum are two findings in the Beauregard papers, a receipt from John Krider for “patent pistols,” and a notation in Beauregard’s expense listing for the monies paid to John Krider for these “model revolvers.” Putting this together leads one to conclude that John Krider made patent pistols for “A. Le Mat & Co.,” and that these pistols, at least two of which are represented by Krider pieces 1 and 2, were likely used for trials and promotion.

The barrel address of Krider No. 2 contains another find. The word “Col.” is clearly an addition made after the original address. Its depth and wear indicate that it is contemporary in era but clearly different in font and appears to have been placed in the only available space left on the barrel. Given that Le Mat was made a Colonel in April 1859, it would seem a logical conclusion that this piece was made prior to that, making it available at the time of the military trials. Perhaps a bit more fanciful is the question of who would have added this title. Article Nine of the contract between Beauregard

Figure 4. The first page of the contract between Le Mat and Beauregard for production, promotion and sale of the “Grape shot revolving pistol.” (Courtesy of LSU Libraries.)

69. S. 1859
 File No. 47 of 1859
 New Orleans April 28-1859

Hon J Slidell
 Introducing & recommending Mr
 Alexander Le Mat - who
 has invented a valuable fire arm
 he is desirous of presenting - etc
 enclosed - from Hon Geo Custis
 and Hon J P Benjamin - for
 the same -
 (one enclosure)
 J. B. - May 7. 1859
 B. B. 8/ 3859.

New Orleans 28th April 1859.

Hon. John B. Floyd.
 Secretary of War

Dear Sir

I take great pleasure in
 introducing Col. Le Mat of New Orleans
 who is about visiting Washington for
 the purpose of exhibiting to the War
 Navy department a weapon of his
 invention. Col. Le Mat is a gentleman
 in whose success a large number of persons
 here will take a great interest and a
 kind notice at your hands will be
 most gratefully appreciated by
 your obt servant
 Geo. Custis

I take much pleasure in recommending
 Col. Le Mat to the Hon. John B. Floyd,
 Secretary of War and will highly appreciate
 any attention he may render him -
 J. P. Benjamin

and Le Mat stipulated that “all weapons shall bear the name of the inventor, A. Le Mat.” This Krider piece certainly meets that criterion. Why and who would add the title “Col.” unless it was the person who actually bore that title? The origins of the piece from northern France, the area Le Mat retired, raises further speculation as to whether or not this was indeed the personal weapon of J. A. F. Le Mat.

As for the other five Belgian pieces, it would seem that these were brevets manufactured in Belgium, possibly by Auguste Francotte. They were patterned after the piece he had come to own and offered on the open

Figures 5 and 6. Letters of endorsement for Alexander Le Mat and his pistol by John Slidell and Judah P. Benjamin to John B. Floyd, United States Secretary of War. (Courtesy of LSU Libraries.)



Figure 7. Krider engraved No. 2. This spectacular find represents the efforts of Le Mat and Beauregard in the field of small arms. This nine-shot, .41 caliber revolver and 18-gauge shotgun offered considerably more firepower than its Colt competitor. (Photos by Doug Adams, Courtesy of Cliff Young.)

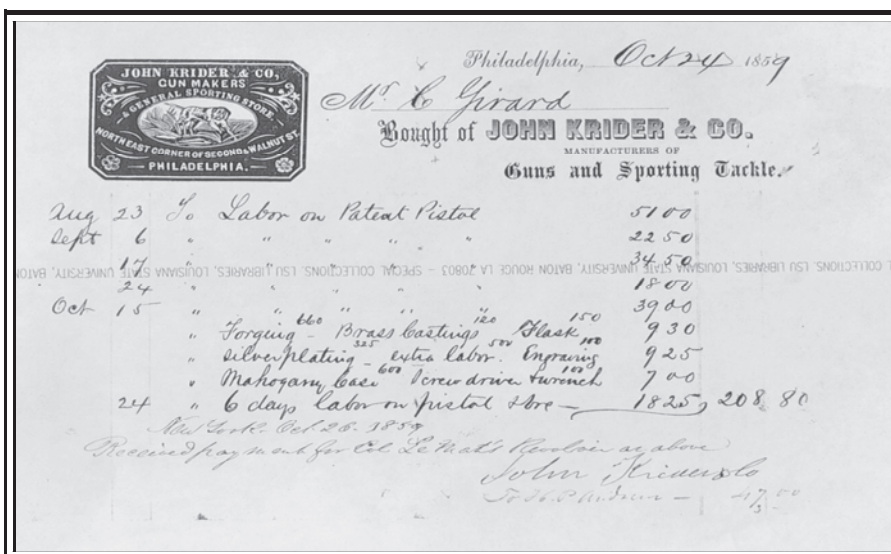


Figure 8. Receipt to John Krider for "Patent Pistol" in the amount of \$208.80. (Courtesy of LSU Libraries.)

market. One of these guns found its way into the hand of Captain Conley of the 16th Maine, who received it as a Christmas present from his men in 1863. As these pieces do not bear the contractually stipulated "A. Le Mat," it is unlikely that they were made with the knowledge or permission of "A. Le Mat & Co."

Patent data for these guns is abundant. United States 15,925 (1856), Belgian 5173 (1857), British 1622 (1859), and the first filing of French # 41,694 (1859) all capture the concept, and the drawings for the British and French patents are identical.

Large-scale production of these weapons was never pursued, likely for several reasons. Most significantly, at the time of

May 21 - To others in 3 papers of Gov. trial of steel -	9-
April 11 - Amie's Direct for contract	15-
Oct 26 - " John Krider & Co of Phila for model revolver	208.00
Nov. 15 th - H. P. Adams for expense to various arr. Remington -	50.00

Figure 9. Portion of Beauregard's expenses in the partnership. Note the expense for the "Model Revolvers." (Courtesy of LSU Libraries.)

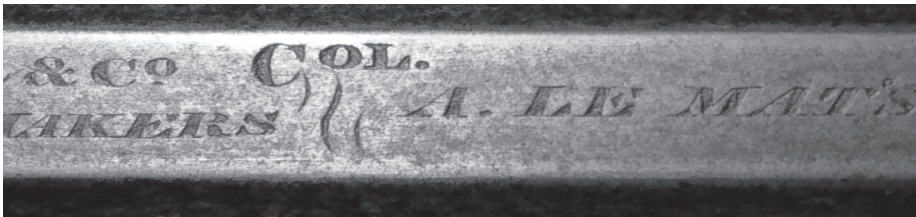


Figure 10. Close up of the "Col." On the barrel address, illustrating its contemporary but later addition. (Photos by Doug Adams, Courtesy of Cliff Young.)

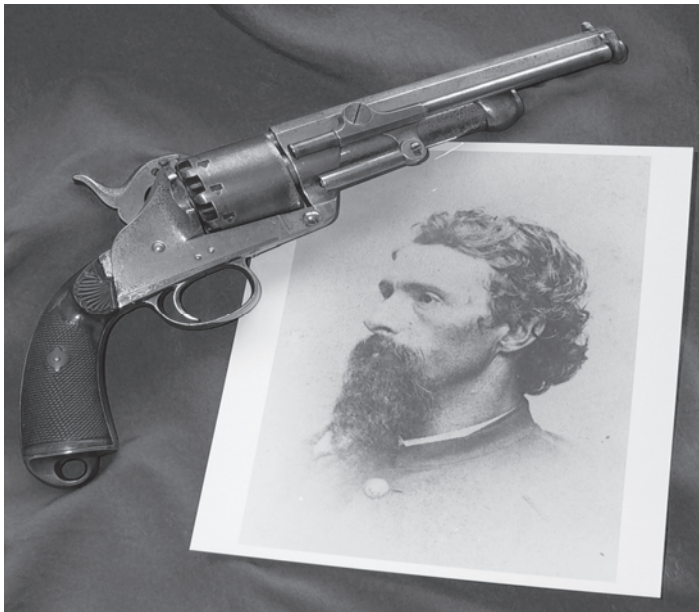


Figure 11. The Conley piece. This Le Mat is the only known "Yankee" Le Mat, give to Captain Conley (pictured) by his men on December 25, 1863. Note the subtle differences from the Krider piece: hammer shape, trigger position, grip engraving, frame-locking device. More significant differences in machining, weight, balance and overall feel cannot be appreciated until compared side by side with the Krider. (Photos by Doug Adams, Courtesy of Cliff Young.)

introduction, it was peacetime and weapons expenditures during peace are notoriously low. Further, these pieces were heavy, cumbersome, and similar in size and feel to the Colt Dragoon. By 1859, lighter, more manageable pieces were becoming available. Last, the specter of patent infringements may have been raised because the cylinder rotating and locking mechanism of these pieces is similar to that of Colt's revolvers.

With guns in hand, Col. Le Mat and Major Beauregard proceeded to the Washington Arsenal for the May 9, 1859

trial. This too was a success and concluded with ". . . the Board respectfully recommends that this arm be subjected to trial in the hands of troops in actual service in the field."

A flurry of promotional activity followed on this conclusion. Articles detailing the pistol, its characteristics and the results of these two trials were published in *The New Orleans Crescent*, *The Delta Bee* and *The True Delta*. Records indicate that during the fall of that year, Beauregard visited many of the major arms makers in this country to seek a manufacturer of the piece. The list of those he visited included Manhattan Firearms Co., Bacon & Co., Davis & Co., Chicopee Falls Co., Muzzy and

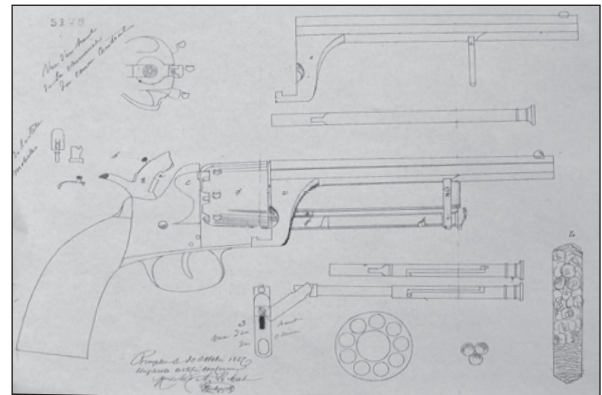


Figure 12. Patent drawing from Belgian patent number 5173, filed by Le Mat in 1857. (Courtesy of Belgian Patent Office.)

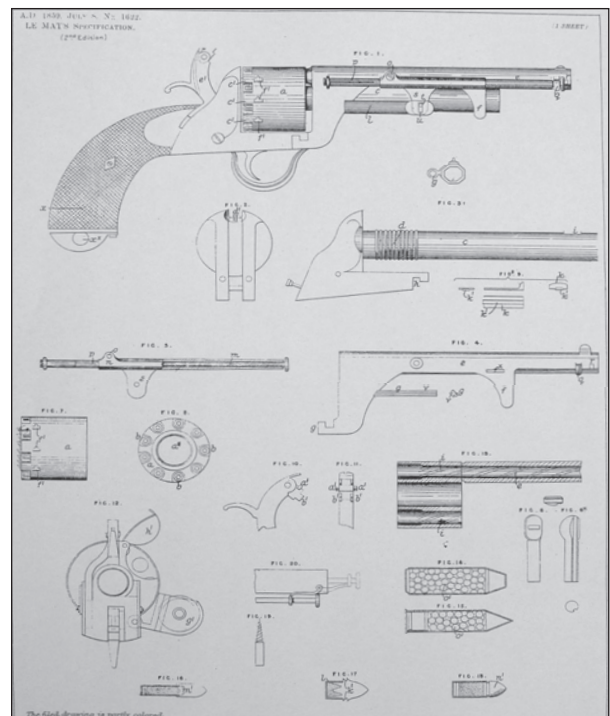


Figure 13. Patent drawing from British Patent # 1622, filed by Le Mat on July 8, 1859. (Courtesy of British Patent Office.)

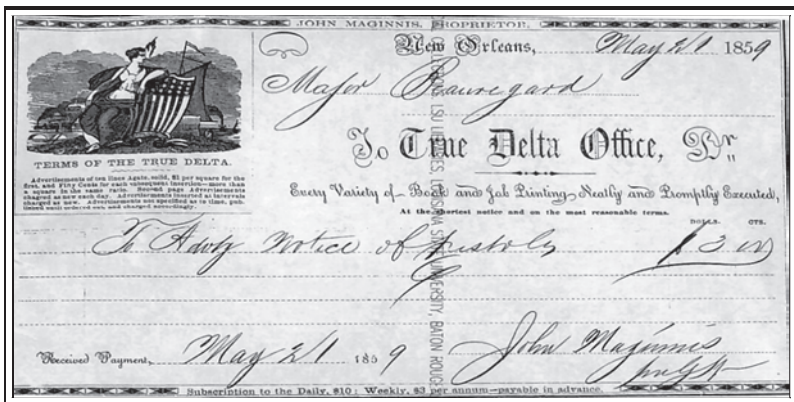


Figure 14. Receipt for placement of “. . . notice of pistols” in *The True Delta* by Major Beauregard. (Courtesy of LSU Libraries.)

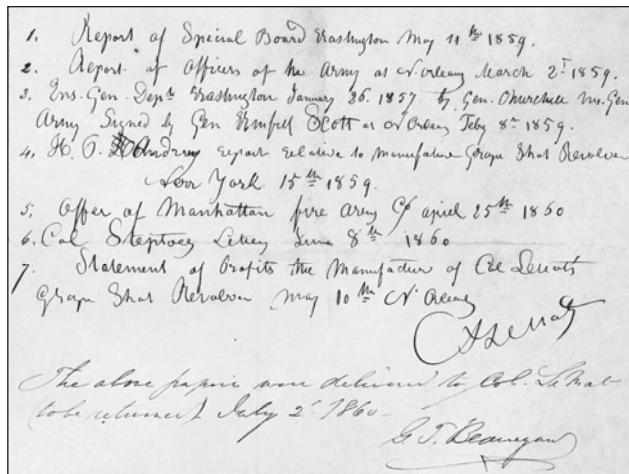


Figure 15. Listing of papers given to Col. Le Mat by G.T. Beauregard on July 2, 1860. (Courtesy of LSU Libraries.)

Co., and Springfield Arms Co. No record of any contract to manufacture exists although a response from the Manhattan Firearms Co. is noted in these papers.

Le Mat, as the European emissary for the partnership, exerted the same efforts with similar results. During this time he also enlisted the help of a fellow physician, Dr. Charles Girard, as his “special agent” in the endeavor. Girard must have been involved to some degree on the domestic front, however, because the Krider invoice for the patent pistols noted above bears his name as well.

The contractual appointment of Beauregard as the United States representative and Le Mat as the European representative apparently worked well for a period of time. Trouble began for the partnership in early 1860 however, as indicated by a letter from Beauregard to Le Mat dated March 20. The tone of the letter is paternal and

seeks to smooth ruffled feathers on the part of Le Mat and Girard. The specifics of the offenses are unclear, but apparently some correspondence between Beauregard, Le Mat and Le Mat’s patent attorney in Belgium had taken place without Girard’s involvement. Additionally, Le Mat had somehow lost an opportunity to sell one-quarter of the patent rights for \$20,000 (currently the equivalent of approximately \$400,000) due to an inability to prove patent holdings. Beauregard concludes the letter with the suggestion that the relationship continue with bygones being bygones.

In correspondence dated April 10, 1860, Beauregard and Le Mat sought to correct the problem that had sabotaged this previous sale opportunity. The Beauregard papers contain a list of documents given to Le Mat by Beauregard, which



Figure 16. The more commonly recognized Le Mat revolvers: first model (left), transitional model (upper right) and second model (bottom right). These pieces were made under the Le Mat and Girard partnership, using later patents and differ significantly from the pieces made by “A. Le Mat & Co.” (Photo by Doug Adams.)

included patent papers, the reports of the New Orleans and Washington trials and other miscellaneous documentation.

Beauregard must have anticipated that this provision would have addressed the issues, but that was not the case. The next correspondence between he and Le Mat, dated July 2, 1860, contains a listing of the expenses he incurred during the partnership and an inventory of all documents pertaining to the corporation.

More significantly, accompanying these documents is a letter in which he consented to the sale of 75% of the patent rights to Girard and cedes his 25% back to Le Mat as long as all of his incurred expenses are reimbursed. Eight days later, Le Mat and Girard officially partnered in the corporation "Girard & Cie."

This partnership began the saga of the more familiar Le Mat revolvers, made for the Confederacy of the United States. Although conceptually similar to the pistols made by Le Mat and Beauregard, they are structurally very different in size, caliber, material, and internal mechanisms. The designs for these pistols are found in additional patents filed by Le Mat and Girard: Belgian number 11,208, the first and second additions to French number 41,694 and British number 1081, all filed between 1861 and 1865.

The irony of this series of events is that Le Mat, to pacify Girard and facilitate production, gave up control of the pistol's production. The quality of the pieces produced at Girard's Paris factory, however, was inconsistent and lay at the heart of the difficulties that the Confederacy "officially" had with the piece. In spite of these difficulties, records indi-

cate that the piece continued to find its way "unofficially" into the hands of Confederate soldiers.

The tension that these quality concerns created may have led to the dissolution of Girard and Cie in mid-1866 and the eventual jailing of Girard in Debtor's prison at the hands of Le Mat and his attorney.

J. A. F. Le Mat and P. G. T. Beauregard partnered for one year to produce a weapon which they felt would revolutionize individual combat. The guns they designed were officially trialed and well received. They were thought to be a significant contribution to the arms field. Failure in efforts at subsequent production appears to have been a matter of timing. Krider pieces No. 1, in the Liege Arms Museum and No. 2, in private hands, are the only known official derivatives of this partnership and as such remain a tribute to their efforts, memory, and the role they played in the military history of the United States.

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