

Leech and Rigdon Revisited

By Kent Wall

On February 22, 1862, at Camp Lee near Savannah, Georgia, Pvt. William Henry Hood of the Georgia Infantry wrote a letter to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. P. Hood, who lived near Cartersville, Georgia:

Dear Father and Mother,

I take the pleasure this morning of dropping (sic) you a few lines to let you know I am still numbered among the living and in the engagement of good health with the exception of a very bad cold. We have been laboring very hard for the last two weeks throwing up breastworks around Savannah on every road leading into the city that the Yankees can come in at by land. We have to walk seven or eight miles to work every morning and night. It's hard but right.

We have got our battle ground cleared off three miles below Savannah on the Shell Road from the beach to Thunder Ball. We have cut close every tree and bush oft (sic) about five or six hundred acres of land and got log pens built for one mile and a half on each side of the road.

It is reported that Govanur (sic) Brown is going to let us go home when our time is out but I don't believe it actual. I am coming home when my time is out. I volentered (sic) for six months and I am perfectly willing to serve my time out and then I want to come home and stay awhile and go again but I don't want to be forced into it. I want to go with a free good will.

Your effectionate (sic)

Son till Death,

W. H. Hood¹

William H. Hood (Figure 1) got his wish and on May 3, 1862, at Camp Harrison, “near Cartersville,” he re-enlisted for “three years or the war” in Captain Leak’s Company (shown in the roster records variously as Company G and D), 1st Georgia Cavalry Regiment. Thus, Mr. Hood, having served honorably for six months in the infantry, came home, stayed awhile, and went again, this time as a cavalryman. He served with this regiment until the end of the war, rising to the rank of sergeant, was wounded during the Chickamauga Campaign, and participated in all the major campaigns and many raids of the western armies until paroled in Charlotte, North Carolina on May 3, 1865, in “accordance with the terms of a Military Convention entered into on the 26th day of April, 1865, between General Joseph E. Johnston, Commanding Confederate Army and Major General



W. T. Sherman, Commanding United States Army in North Carolina”.² At some point along the way in 1864, Sergeant Hood came into possession of a .36 caliber, Navy model, iron frame, 6 shot revolver, serial number 1282 (Figure 2). The barrel flat is stamped ‘LEECH & RIGDON CSA’, and ‘S. C.’ is stamped on the bottom of the wood grip. Sergeant Hood personalized his ownership of this gun by scratching his initials ‘WHH’ on the brass butt strap and carving ‘WHH’ and ‘1864’ on the left side of the grip.³ It is doubtful that Sergeant Hood knew much, if anything, about Leech and



Figure 1. Sergeant William Henry Hood, 1st Georgia Cavalry, 1862-1865, on the horse he rode during War.



Figure 2. Leech and Rigdon revolver #1282 identified to Sergeant Hood with "LEECH & RIGDON CSA" barrel stamping.

Rigdon, where his revolver was manufactured, or even cared about such things. After all, his primary purpose was to fight the Yankees and his main interest in the gun was whether or not it would function when the time came. Today's Confederate gun collectors, however, do have an interest in the when and where concerning Leech and Rigdon and much, much more.

The story of the wartime adventures of Leech and Rigdon as they struggled against nearly insurmountable odds to supply arms to the Confederacy has been previously documented. New information has recently been uncovered which makes a re-examination necessary.

During the great war for Southern independence, 1861-1865, many private enterprises sprang up throughout the Confederacy, all engaged in various tasks to support the military effort. These activities ran the gamut from the production of accoutrements to the fabrication of swords, pikes, side knives and firearms. While much in the way of war material came through the blockade primarily from Europe, or was produced in the various government controlled armories and arsenals, revolver development and production initially began with private involvement and to a great degree remained that way throughout the conflict.

Two of the well known private firms producing revolvers were Griswold & Gunnison and Leech & Rigdon, later known as Rigdon, Ansley and Co., names which are well known to many in the Civil War fraternity and others who enjoy history and arms collecting. Compared to their northern counterparts, the total production of these two firms was paltry, but none-the-less, the effort was valiant and the surviving specimens continue to provide collectors with a small trove of wonderfully enticing examples and an endless number of unanswered questions and unresolved theories. While a great deal is known about those firms, much still remains a mystery to this day, especially the enterprise of Leech & Rigdon.

Griswold & Gunnison, located in Griswoldville, Georgia, developed and produced the largest number of

round barrel, 6 shot, .36 caliber, brass frame model revolvers. Based on the highest known serial number, total completed gun production was around 3,600.⁴

The second ranked producer of completed revolvers operated initially in Memphis, Tennessee, under the name of Thomas Leech and Company before relocating to Columbus, Mississippi, in the spring of 1862, where a new partnership named Leech and Rigdon was formed and revolvers were advertised for the first time. After eight months, the firm relocated to Greensboro, Georgia, where revolver production was restarted and continued until late 1863, when the partnership was dissolved. In early

1864, operating under a new copartnership with the name of Rigdon, Ansley and Company, revolver production was moved to Augusta, Georgia, where it continued until near the end of the war. Total production of the various enterprises and partnerships of a round barrel, .36 caliber, 6 shot, iron frame revolver was just under 2,400 based on records of the surviving serial numbered guns.⁵

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the generally accepted version of the wartime activities of the various partnerships, and an examination of recently found material and its impact on some older ideas and theories that either support or refute accepted facts. In other words, in light of the new material, it's time to revisit what we think we know.

In this undertaking, I have been assisted immeasurably by a number of dedicated and diligent predecessors, who, over the years, were able to open the window on the activities of the various partnerships as well as their accomplishments. Among these earlier stalwarts are Bill Albaugh, Ed Simmons, Fred Edmunds, Ted Meredith, Bill Gary and Bruce Kusrow. Ted Meredith's May 1995 article in the *ASAC Bulletin* provided an excellent synopsis of the various revolver markings and transitional details of the Leech and Rigdon/Rigdon and Ansley guns. Since then, nothing further has been published.

As with many things historical, little by little, more information comes to light, which may roll back the curtain of mystery and fill another gap. Or the new material may be judged to be of no use and the quest continues. With this in mind, I commissioned a re-examination of all related documents and correspondence in the National Archives and Records, Washington, DC, to determine whether or not any information on Leech and Rigdon/Rigdon and Ansley had been overlooked by earlier writers and researchers. That effort proved to be fruitful. Further, I was privileged to be granted access to the largest compilation of serial numbers,

related barrel stampings and die sizes for most known Leech and Rigdon/Rigdon and Ansley revolvers. To say the least, this presented a wealth of material.

The story begins in pre-war Memphis, Tennessee, a thriving town on the Mississippi River. In 1854, Thomas Leech, an Englishman by birth, moved there and shortly after opened a cotton brokerage business at 35 Front Row Street, financed by himself and four partners, all from Liverpool, England. Presumably, the cotton brokerage business flourished and as war clouds began to darken the horizon, Leech seized the opportunity and opened the Memphis Novelty Works for the sale of military equipment in August 1861. In effect, Thomas Leech had become a military outfitter.⁶ On August 29, 1861, the following advertisement appeared in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*, under the name of “Thomas Leech and Company”:

Wanted 10,000 lbs. of old zinc, copper and brass immediately for military purposes. Send it in from the country, we will pay a full price.

35 Front Row Street.⁷

On September 18, another much more descriptive advertisement appeared in the same paper:

Manufacturers of Army cutlery and brass castings of all kinds. We are prepared to receive and fill orders for the following, viz: Infantry swords, cavalry swords and sabers, cutlasses and knives. Bowie knives of every description. Bayonets for shotguns and rifles. Artillery ames, stirrups and spurs of the latest and most approved patterns. Bullet moulds of all kinds, Brass mountings for Gunsmiths, Brass mountings for Saddlery. Special attention paid to the repairs of printing presses, light machinery and machine blacksmithing generally. We have engaged the services of competent workmen and will warrant our work to give complete satisfaction. All orders will meet with prompt attention. We will pay a high price for all the old copper and brass you can send us. Memphis Novelty Works/Thomas Leech and Co.⁸

Throughout the fall of 1861, while he continued to apply his considerable energy to the outfitting of Confederate military personnel through private sales via the Memphis Novelty Works, Thomas Leech was also selling swords to the C. S. Government. The records of the Military Store Keeper (MSK) in Memphis, Captain John E. Logwood, show receipts in November and December from Thomas Leech and Company of 404 cavalry swords and 800 artillery swords, 300 of which are noted “with belts”.⁹ Within the Confederate procurement system, the MSK was the official receiving officer for materials produced under contract with the government.

Interestingly, there is no surviving record of any such contract between Thomas Leech and the government during this time period. This circumstance was about to change.

Enter upon the stage, the second principal player in the drama unfolding—Charles H. Rigdon. Frank Graves, in his excellent article in the Jan/Feb 2010 issue of *The Gun Report* writes that Charles Rigdon was a resident of St. Louis, Missouri in 1854, when Abel Shawk, of Cincinnati, Ohio, sold one of his horse-drawn, steam-powered fire engines to the city of St. Louis and journeyed there to demonstrate it. Rigdon was a scale maker by trade and also the engineer on the new fire engine. It is likely that through this association the two men became acquainted.¹⁰ Shawk began production of Navy style revolvers in Carondolet, Missouri in 1858, and Frank Graves speculated that perhaps some of the revolver machinery used in the production of the Shawk and McLanahan revolvers might have been supplied by Rigdon.¹¹ While entirely plausible, no corroborating evidence has yet come to light.

In July 1861, by a court order, the enterprise of Shawk and McLanahan was terminated.¹² Prior to this dissolution, Charles Rigdon moved to Memphis and was listed in the 1860 city directory as a scale maker.¹³

To this day, there are several schools of thought among historians and collectors and many unanswered questions concerning Rigdon’s activities from the time he left St. Louis to the development of a business relationship with Thomas Leech—a period of about two years. Did Rigdon bring with him to Memphis some, or all of the Shawk and McLanahan machinery, or did this equipment actually belong to him? Did Rigdon assist Leech with his efforts to produce swords and other military equipage? Did Rigdon know anything about developing revolver making machinery and/or producing finished revolvers? When and how did Leech and Rigdon meet and for what purpose? What led the two men into a partnership? The record remains frustratingly silent on these questions.

What is known about this period is that in early January 1862, Thomas Leech secured a contract with the government to manufacture 5,000 cavalry swords and scabbards at the rate of 200 per week for the price of \$20 each. This contract was given to Thomas Leech and Company and secured by a promissory note guaranteed by the government on behalf of Thomas Leech and two partners, all of Memphis, neither of whom was Charles Rigdon.¹⁴ This is the first surviving contract for military equipment between Leech and the government.

About this same time, Major William R. Hunt, Confederate Nitre and Mining Bureau, acting under orders from General P. G. T. Beauregard, met with the Board of the City of Columbus, Mississippi, on February 25, and proposed

that a vast complex composed of an armory, foundry and machine shops be built on three squares of land south of Main Street adjoining the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. On February 26, the Board purchased the land and shortly thereafter, was reimbursed by the Confederate Treasury.¹⁵ Work began almost immediately on what would be called the Briarfield Arsenal. On March 13, also in Columbus, two adjacent squares of residential land, belonging to Thomas B. Bailey and located between Frances Street and the railroad, across from the land that would be the site of the new Briarfield Arsenal, were sold to Thomas Leech and Charles Rigdon.¹⁶ From these records, it would seem that sometime between the early January sword contract (with Thomas Leech and Company) and the Columbus land purchase in mid-March, Leech and Rigdon became partners, the exact nature of which remains a mystery since no documents to that effect have yet been found.

Beauregard's orders to Hunt regarding the arsenal in Columbus were part of a broader plan to evacuate all government operations and as many of the private enterprises engaged in supporting the war effort as could be persuaded from west Tennessee, including Memphis. This decision was made necessary by military events on the northern border of Tennessee in early February, which culminated in the capture of Forts Henry and Donelson by Union forces, followed soon after by the occupation of Nashville, the state capitol. With this change in fortunes, Memphis was outflanked and in danger.

Sometime after the March land purchase, Leech and Rigdon must have turned their immediate attention to starting a Columbus manufactory because by May 1, a period of about six weeks, this advertisement in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* made clear the company was turning out swords:

Swords! Swords! Swords!

A large lot of fine infantry and field officer's swords just received from our manufactory in Columbus Miss. and for sale at the Memphis Novelty Works, corner of Main and McCall Sts. Seven or eight brass finishers wanted immediately at the Novelty Works.

*Leech and Rigdon.*¹⁷

This advertisement is important in better understanding the evolution of the firm because it is the first known commercial reference to a 'Columbus Manufactory' and the first public mention of the new partnership. Further, the wording of the ad seems to make a distinction between the Memphis operation (Memphis Novelty Works) and the Columbus Manufactory (Novelty Works).

Not only was the firm busily engaged in the Columbus manufactory, it was also maintaining the private sales effort in Memphis, as well as fulfilling the terms of the sword

contract. Regarding the latter, Captain Logwood's receipt records for the period January through early March continued to reveal this recurring curiosity—artillery swords:

Receipts, 1862

January to Early March¹⁸

Cavalry Swords	770
Artillery Swords	111
Artillery Swords With Belts	342

Perhaps the sword contract was modified to include artillery swords or there was a separate contract, but if so, no record has survived. Or maybe Logwood had received instructions to accept and authorize payment for most any high quality war material for the records offer ample evidence that the firm was selling such to the government.

By early May, near panic must have swept through Memphis as evidenced by the wording in this *Memphis Daily Appeal* announcement of May 8:

Notice! Swords! Swords!

*A few more infantry and field officer's swords, which will be sold cheap if application be made today at the Novelty Works. All persons who have swords left for repairs are hereby notified to call for them today, as we are going to start for Columbus Miss. Friday morning. Leech and Rigdon.*¹⁹

This was the point at which Leech and Rigdon abandoned their Memphis roots and headed to Columbus, not to return until after hostilities ceased some three years later. The Memphis Novelty Works was now closed.

From mid-March until May, Captain Logwood's receipt records show no deliveries of swords or any other material from the firm. Either Logwood was also transitioning to Columbus or sword delivery was disrupted temporarily or both. When deliveries did begin again in mid-May, Logwood was once again at his post as MSK, this time in Columbus. Receipts from Leech and Rigdon were initially slow, then picked up in June, July and August but by September had begun to tail off. The variety of material received had increased markedly:

Receipts, 1862

Mid-May to Mid-November²⁰

<i>Cavalry Swords</i>	
Finished	707
Finished w/Belts	12
Refinished	108
Scabbards Only	174
<i>Artillery Swords</i>	
Finished	373
Finished w/Belts	270
Sergeant's Swords	18

Sabre Bayonets

Finished425
Unfinished394
Scabbards519
Sets of Gun Mountings1,289½
Spurs and Straps (Sets)800

During the summer of 1862, while the manufacturing of swords and other war material was in full swing, another important chapter in the Leech and Rigdon history was heralded for the first time in an August advertisement in the *Memphis Daily Appeal* (published at that time in Granada, Mississippi). This advertisement, discovered in the late 1990s, is headlined ‘Novelty Works’ with the principles noted as Thos. Leech and C. H. Rigdon. Midway in the advertisement is this startling news:

We have further increased our capacity and are now manufacturing a very superior Navy Repeater on the same plan and fully equal to Colt's patent (Figure 3).²¹

This was a truly remarkable achievement, because in a relatively short period of time, from the land purchase in March to the August advertisement, complicated further by the relocation to Columbus, the partners were sufficiently far enough along in the development and production process to

offer .36 caliber repeaters for sale to the public. How had such an accomplishment come about? Unfortunately, the records do not exist to be able to piece together any of the details. As with many things about the activities of Leech and Rigdon, I am left with a strong measure of speculation.

I believe that with the March land purchase, the partners had always planned the production of revolvers would take place in Columbus at a suitable location. Regarding the equipment, it may have been developed and/or purchased in either Memphis or Columbus but again, it makes sense that the location was Columbus. It is equally unclear as to who may have been the driving force behind such an undertaking. Charles Rigdon probably had the technical and mechanical background and experience to be able to apply his considerable skills to revolver development and manufacturing. Clearly, Thomas Leech did not. Perhaps there was some other individual or individuals that assisted in the effort but if that were the case, their name(s) and contribution(s) have been lost to history. Most writers and collectors have the opinion that the credit belongs to Rigdon and this may well be the case. Since nothing definitive has come to light, C. H. Rigdon remains the most logical choice. Further support for this hypothesis is to be found as this narrative unfolds. You will note that although Leech did not stay involved until the end, Rigdon did and remained the one constant presence through the many disruptions that would continue to plague their revolver manufacturing efforts until the end.

Regardless of the obstacles that had to be overcome or who was/were the brains and hands behind the enterprise, the partnership was firmly in the revolver business offering a well-made, .36 caliber, 6 shot, round barrel, iron frame model with an octagonal top barrel housing and a recoil shield with no cap release groove. The bore featured seven lands and grooves with a right hand clockwise twist. The post front sight, backstrap and triggerguard were brass; the one piece wood grip was walnut and all other parts iron. The few surviving examples of the early guns clearly show the firm was still in the process of attempting to standardize specifications—one example involves barrel length. Serial number 26 (Figure 4) has a slightly longer barrel (by nearly ¼ inch) than does number 25 (with the standard 7½ inch barrel).²²

The early guns had a loading lever with a ball type end. Around serial number 121, this was changed to a ball and pin type end, which would serve as the standard until serial number 1500. The reason for the change was to better secure the loading lever when the gun was discharged. The ball type end had proved unsatisfactory in this regard because when fired, the shock to the frame caused the loading lever to become unseated from the catch and drop, not a happy circumstance. Another important feature was the use of safety pins on the shoulders of the cylinder between the



Figure 3. *Memphis Daily Appeal*, ad, Aug/Sept 1862, NOVELTY WORKS, Thos. Leech, C.H. Rigdon.



Figure 4. Leech and Rigdon revolver #26, Columbus, MS production, “LEECH & RIGDON” barrel stamping.

nipples and a slotted hammer face with which to engage these pins.

The barrel flat stampings serve as another useful clue into the activities of the firm during the early days. Serial numbers 11 and 15, as well as one gun without a serial number, believed to be early production, carry a barrel stamping LEECH & RIGDON NOVELTY WORKS CSA in small size letters. This stamping was changed at some point before number 25 to simply LEECH & RIGDON and this wording remained in use until sometime after number 457. The use of only NOVELTY WORKS in the early stamping supports the theory of Columbus production, since after the move, the partners were no longer using Memphis as part of the firm name. This change is also noted on the cavalry swords where Memphis was dropped from the stamping on the guard and only “Novelty Works, Thos. Leech and Co.” in two lines remained.

For many years, it was widely believed as an article of faith that Columbus production did not exceed 75 completed revolvers. This conclusion had been advanced by some early writers, and repeated through the years, based upon a November 26, 1862, letter from Leech and Rigdon to General John C. Pemberton, Jackson, Mississippi:

Columbus Miss Nov 26/62

*General Pemberton
Jackson Miss
General,*

We are manufacturing Navy Repeaters (Colt's Patent) and have written to Col. Gorgas respecting a contract with the government offering to furnish at \$55.00 each. Do not expect reply for the next 10 days. In the meantime we are busily at work, turning out from 25 to 30 per week. Having no contract we would ask if our hands will be interfered with by the action of the “Conscript Laws” or whether they are exempt by virtue of their employment - would feel very much obliged by a distinct answer from you.

We have on hand about 75 pistols which are ready to turn over to the department at the above prices, at any time.

Major Downer of the Arsenal at Richmond reports very favorably of our work. We think it fully equal (with the exception of a little show) to Colt's.²³

Because of the late 1990s discovery of two *Memphis Daily Appeal* advertisements [one with an August 1862 date (cited earlier) and another from September], this long held assumption regarding the extent of Columbus production is in need of re-examination. If one were to assume a rather conservative number for the average weekly production (for example,

20 completed revolvers) and further, a total of 15 weeks production time (August through late November), you might conclude the total Columbus production, up until the time of the Pemberton letter, was closer to 300 and perhaps, even more. I believe this higher number is, in all likelihood, the reality. This new theory about the Columbus phase will have important ramifications not only in the examination of the total production, but also regarding the number of revolvers produced at the later manufacturing locations.

The letter to Pemberton makes clear the partners were still hopeful of securing a government contract. Therefore, with the exception of the few samples submitted to the Richmond Arsenal for evaluation, all Columbus production, over 300 guns, ended up as commercial sales to individuals. To further support this conclusion, Captain Logwood's records show no receipts for pistols/revolvers from Leech and Rigdon at any time, either in Memphis or Columbus.

Many mysteries remain surrounding the Columbus phase, but one of these has been at the top of the list for years—the location of the pistol manufactory. The March land purchase by the partners was for adjacent residential property, likely unsuited for arms production. Further, since there is no record of any other land purchase by the partners, there remains the prospect of rental or leased property that would have access to steam or water power. Again, there is no such record. The only other possibility, and the most logical one, is that Leech and Rigdon had access to space in the newly completed Briarfield complex. This possibility is further supported by the action taken by the partners as a result of events in late 1862 when Major Hunt, now in command of Briarfield, received orders from Colonel Josiah Gorgas, C. S. Ordnance Department, to relocate all ordnance stores and production equipment to the arsenal in Selma, Alabama—an undertaking made necessary by the threatening movements of Union forces under the command of Major General

William T. Sherman.²⁴ Leech and Rigdon, realizing the impact to their operation by the impending move of their Briarfield support system and lacking another suitable location in Columbus, made their own plans to follow suit. During December, the partners' decision to relocate is borne out by Captain Logwood's receipt records for that month reflecting a variety of materials, equipment and miscellaneous items turned over to him by Leech and Rigdon:

Receipts for December²⁵

Sword Handles & Guards	15
Repaired Enfield Rifle	1
Spurs & Straps (Prs.)	225
Sword Scabbards	12
Grind Stones	3
Materials (lbs)	
Poted Iron	3,155
Bundled Iron	937
Scrap Iron	1790
Cast Iron	2,400
Steam Engine	1

Sometime in the December/January time frame, the massive undertaking to relocate the Briarfield machinery, equipment and stores to Selma was begun. The Leech and Rigdon operation in its entirety was probably a part of the same move. Although no hard evidence about the move has been found, Bill Albaugh speculated that it likely occurred in several stages. First by rail to Mobile, Alabama, a distance of 175 miles, where everything was off-loaded to riverboats for the move to Selma, another 175 miles. For reasons unknown today, the machinery and other equipment of Leech and Rigdon continued on by rail 150 miles to Atlanta and then another 75 miles to Greensboro, Georgia, where they stopped and began to reestablish their manufactory.²⁶ The next chapter in the Leech and Rigdon story was about to begin.

As an aside, for many years, some collectors have held the opinion that during the move from Columbus, Leech and Rigdon set up operations in Selma for some undetermined amount of time before moving on to Greensboro. In fact, some unmarked short swords and/or naval cutlasses have been unofficially classified by collectors as Selma production done by Leech and Rigdon. The correspondence cited below makes it unmistakably clear that by early February, after a move of nearly 600 miles in just over a month, the partners were ready to restart production in Greensboro. Therefore, any support for Selma operation is rendered impossible simply because there was not sufficient time in the chronology.

The following letter was sent by the partners to Major W. R. Hunt at Selma, in early February 1863, from their new location, advising him of their present circumstances:

Greensboro Ga

Feby 6/63

Major W.R. Hunt

Selma Ala

Dear Sir:

We have located at this point and have more room and power than we can use on our pistol contract. We can devote one floor 36 x 45 (well lighted) to the repair of guns and have power to spare for all of the necessary machinery.

Should be pleased to make satisfactory arrangements with Briarfield Arsenal for such work, hands and machinery. Your kind offices to this end are solicited.

In addition to our extra power, we have 4 acres more ground than we can use and this is one of the best locations that can be selected, being on the Georgia R. Rd, midway between Atlanta and Augusta. Leech & Rigdon.²⁷

Among the informative details, perhaps the most important revelation in the correspondence to Hunt is the matter of the long awaited pistol contract. By early February, it was clearly in hand and was followed soon after by a receipt for funds advanced found recently in the Archives:

Received Augusta Ga, March 6, 1863, of Lt. Col. Geo. W. Rains CSA Ten thousand dollars being the amount advanced under contract with the Confederate Government for the manufacture of pistols.

Leech and Rigdon²⁸

Unfortunately, no copy of the referenced contract has been found, so important details such as quantity, delivery schedule and duration remain unknown. However, a recently discovered document authorizing payment to Leech and Rigdon, dated January 4, 1864, confirmed that the price was indeed \$55 per pistol, less 25% for advanced funds, thereby providing confirmation of the price.²⁹

With their arrival in Greensboro, the partners must have felt their circumstances were most promising. The operation was now located deep in the interior, presumably safe from the threat of the Union Army. The site was a good one—on the railroad line with access to materials and equipment from the arsenals in both Atlanta and Augusta. There was a satisfactory facility in which the revolver manufacturing could flourish with abundant power and room to expand. Importantly, there was a contract in hand and advanced funds in the bank.

In the spring of 1863, the partners seem to have decided to exit the sword making business and offered for sale a variety of material that would likely have been associated with such activity. These materials were detailed in this advertisement dated April 21 (publication name unstated but probably the Greensboro *Argus*):

For sale 200 lbs choice barness leather, 400 lbs spelter solder, 200 lbs sheet steel, 150 lbs iron wire, no's 12-24, 500 lbs German steel, 10lbs brass and copper wire, 50 fine leather belts.

*Leech and Rigdon
Greensboro, Ga³⁰*

With the sale of these materials, the sword making business of Leech and Rigdon passed into history, and full attention was turned to revolver production and to the extent possible, arms repair.

Revolver manufacturing (Figure 5) continued unabated until December 1863, when for reasons unknown, the partnership was dissolved. The record of this dissolution is located in the files of Greene County, Greensboro, Georgia, and states that for the sum of \$10 and other valuable considerations, Charles H. Rigdon deeded his entire interest in the Greensboro property to Thomas Leech.³¹ The last delivery of Greensboro production to Captain Isadore P. Girardy, military store keeper at the Augusta Arsenal, must have occurred sometime in late 1863. A document dated January 4, 1864, and signed by Colonel George W. Rains authorizing payment for "117 pistols @\$55.00 each less 25%" was found in a recent Archives search. The payee is the firm of Leech and Rigdon.³²

The activities of Thomas Leech post-dissolution remain cloudy but not so with Charles Rigdon who, in January 1864, formed a co-partnership, announced in the *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel* dated January 27:

The undersigned have formed a copartnership under the name and style of Rigdon, Ansley and Co. for the purpose of manufacturing pistols (Colt's Navy Repeaters) under contract with the Government of the Confederate States. Said partnership to date from January 1, 1864 and continue five years. Office at 300 Broad Street.

Signed, Charles H. Rigdon, J.A.

Ansley, A.J. Smith, Charles R. Keen³³



Figure 5. Leech and Rigdon revolver #895 near the end of production, Greensboro, GA., LEECH & RIGDON CSA barrel stamping, from the estate of Gen. George G. Meade.

Further insight into the business of the new enterprise is found in a court transcript from early that spring in the case of J. A. Ansley regarding his status vis-a-vis the Conscript Laws:

Charles H. Rigdon testified that he is a member of the firm of Rigdon, Ansley and Co. carrying on a contract with the government for the manufacture of pistols, known as Colt's Repeaters; engaged to produce a certain number each month, said contract bearing date January 1, 1864 and binding the said firm to carry out a contract made by Leech and Rigdon with the government dated March 6, 1863.³⁴

Captain Wescom Hudgins, C.S. Ordnance Department and, among his other duties, inspector at the manufactory, testified at the same proceeding that the operation currently employed 60 hands and was planning to add nearly 200 more.³⁵

These court records establish that the January contract was an extension of the original contract (March) awarded to Leech and Rigdon, and with that, the new firm was bound to continue producing the standard model revolver. In order to accomplish this, Charles Rigdon and his partners would require the Greensboro machinery and as many of the old hands as could be persuaded to move to Augusta. On both counts, Rigdon must have been successful because revolver production was quickly restarted with the only interruption occurring as a result of the movement of the entire Greensboro operation to Augusta. The Augusta location for the manufactory was secured in February/March and was identified in a lease for waterpower as being "between the second and third levels of the canal and on the west side of Marbury St."³⁶

The reasons Rigdon moved to Augusta remain unclear to this day. Perhaps he wanted to be closer to the support system that the Augusta Arsenal provided; maybe he needed the help of his new partners to manage the business; or maybe with Sherman's army preparing to strike for Atlanta, Augusta would be that much further away from the coming campaign than Greensboro. Regardless, he had arrived in that city and would remain there until the end.

For many years, collectors and Civil War enthusiasts have debated the twin questions of the total number of Leech and Rigdon revolvers produced, and the matter of the split between the Greensboro and Augusta locations. The most widely held view was first advanced by Albaugh/Steuart in their 1953 work *The Original Confederate Colt* and again, in 1963 by Albaugh/Benet/Simmons *Confederate Handguns*. Their conclusions have been echoed by other writers and collectors since that time. The theory was

that since few revolvers were produced in Columbus (the 75 pistols mentioned in the November 1862 correspondence), the total Leech and Rigdon production must have been around 1,500 revolvers—the majority at Greensboro (1,000 revolvers) and the balance in Augusta (500 revolvers) (Figure 6).

Support for their theory came from an examination of barrel stampings and related serial numbers. The early writers knew the highest serial number with LEECH & RIGDON CSA barrel stamping was number 1481 and the lowest numbered Rigdon and Ansley revolver was 1490, with barrel stamping ADDRESS C H RIGDON AUGUSTA GA. (Recently, several other revolvers have turned up that are also in this serial range and structurally the same layout as 1490, though not marked in exactly the same manner.) Therefore, they accepted the notion that this point in the numbering sequence (around 1490) marked the end of the Leech and Rigdon production. They concluded the original contract must have called for a total of 1,500 revolvers. In light of newly discovered material, this conclusion needs to be examined.

The flaw in this part of the theory is uncovered by the realization that Columbus production was more likely in the 300s and none of this production was shipped to the government. If one assumes Columbus production was only 300 revolvers and serial number 1490 marked the end of the Leech and Rigdon production, then the total Leech and Rigdon contract production was actually in the neighborhood of 1,200 revolvers or less, not 1,500.

Another way to look at the same issue is to examine the size of the die stamp used for the firm name at various stages in the production. Beginning with the earliest production, a smaller die stamp was in use until around number 377 when a larger size die stamp is first noted in the sequence. I believe that the die stamp change probably occurred at the time of the move from Columbus to Greensboro when it was

either broken or lost. This finding, which further supports the previously described Columbus production reexamination, leaves little doubt that Columbus production ended in the 300 serial number range. By picking the mid point of that range, 350 revolvers produced (admittedly, somewhat arbitrary), the total Leech and Rigdon contract production would have been around 1,140 guns completed. Therefore, on the low end, the number produced was 1,140 guns and on the high end 1,200 guns.

Regarding the second question of Greensboro versus Augusta output, I believe that the early theory is also incorrect and that by examining a change made in revolver specifications, one may discover the answer to this puzzling question. Number 895, with the safety pins, is one of the last to exhibit this specification, for beginning with serial number 903, the use of the six safety pins on the rear of the cylinder was discontinued. The no safety pin cylinder remained the standard until near the end of the 1400 range when the transition to the 12 stop cylinder began to appear (the Rigdon and Ansley model).

Corroborating evidence is found in orders issued by Colonel Gorgas to Captain Wescom Hudgins dated February 22, 1864, in which Hudgins was instructed, among other duties, to visit Augusta “for the purpose of inspecting pistols manufactured by Rigdon, Ansley and Co”. The orders specifically addressed the issue of the lack of safety pins in the (current production Leech and Rigdon model):

In the pistols made by Rigdon, Ansley & Co., the use of the safety pins has been abandoned without introducing a substitute for them; the parties propose the use of another set of check notches in order to prevent the cylinders revolving when the hammer is not upon the cap.³⁷

It is evident from this letter the operation was located in Augusta and that the no safety pin cylinder was the standard in use. Therefore, it seems reasonable that circa 903 was the point at which Leech and Rigdon model production moved to Augusta for completion by the new Rigdon, Ansley and Company.

If you accept that the total Leech and Rigdon contract production (i.e., post Columbus) was only 1,140 completed revolvers (the low end of the production estimate) and that production at Greensboro began around serial number 350 (it could have been even higher at 377) and continued until around serial number 900 when production was moved to Augusta, then Greensboro production (under Leech and Rigdon) would have been around 550 completed guns. Further, if serial number 1481



Figure 6. Rigdon and Ansley revolver #1613, Augusta GA production, AUGUSTA GA CSA barrel stamping.

marked the end of the 6 stop cylinder model, the production at Augusta (under Rigdon and Ansley) would have been around 590 guns for a total of 1,140 completed Leech and Rigdon revolvers delivered to the government against the contract. This conclusion represents a different way of looking at what has been for collectors the important question of the output and related serial number ranges of the standard model (6 stop cylinder) of these two companies.

There is another matter dealing with the progression and changes to the barrel flat stamping both in die size and wording. As noted earlier in this work, at some point before serial number 25 and continuing until around 375, a small size die was in use with the wording LEECH & RIGDON. Around number 377, a larger size die came into use but the wording remained LEECH & RIGDON. At some point after number 457, the wording was changed to LEECH & RIGDON CSA and this remained in use until the late 1400 number range. There is reason to believe the addition of CSA held some significance and perhaps, was meant to indicate these guns were the property of or were produced for the government, i.e., contract guns. You will soon note that the use of CSA in the stamping continued until production ceased lending additional support to the theory that CSA meant government contract guns.

The serial number range from 377 to 457 contains only a few surviving examples of revolvers stamped with the large die and the wording LEECH & RIGDON, guns which were likely assembled at Greensboro after the government contract. Why these revolvers were not stamped CSA remains a mystery. While there are a variety of possible explanations, one might be that the die with CSA was not available during this phase of production, and, another might be that the partners were waiting approval from the Ordnance Department to make this change in the stamping. Regardless, the decision must have been not to delay turning out finished revolvers. From this faraway point in time, the real reason may never be known.

Number 457 remains the highest numbered surviving example of the LEECH & RIGDON large die stamping, but there is, unfortunately, a gap of nearly 40 revolvers before the earliest known revolver marked LEECH & RIGDON CSA using the large die is noted after serial number 496. Within these missing numbers lies an important clue—the point in the numbering sequence when the CSA marked guns were phased into production at Greensboro. Until one of the missing revolvers comes to light, number 496 continues to hold that position in the Greensboro phase of the Leech and Rigdon history.

The transition to the standard model Rigdon and Ansley revolver began between serial numbers 1482 to 1500 with the introduction of the 12 stop cylinder and continued to number 2375, the highest serial number known to date.

These well-made, .36 caliber, iron frame revolvers featured the new cylinder specification, cap release groove in the recoil shield and the Colt type loading lever end. The large size die stamp was used to mark the barrel flat, initially AUGUSTA GA CSA, until changed to CSA in the late 1600/early 1700 range and continued to be the standard until the end. The reason for this change is unknown but the most likely explanation is that the die stamp broke or was otherwise rendered unusable. The size of the die stamp used for the numerals was also changed to a larger size circa number 1970 and remained in use until 2375. Based on these facts, the early writers concluded, and I agree, that total production of the Rigdon and Ansley model revolvers was around 900 completed guns before the deteriorating military situation intervened and work was halted.

In the serial number range of the Rigdon and Ansley production, there are two additional revolver markings that are worthy of some discussion. The first bears on the inspector's cartouche, which is stamped into the bottom of the wood grip. The first version, WH inside a diamond, began to appear in the latter part of the Leech and Rigdon range (serial number 1285) and then appeared later as a WH inside a parallelogram, the standard found in the serial number range of the Rigdon and Ansley model revolvers. The inspector, in this instance, was none other than Wescom Hudgins and it should be noted that his stamp is not found on all Rigdon and Ansley model guns. The explanation for this is straightforward. Hudgins' duties, as detailed by Colonel Gorgas, were to perform inspections at the Cook and Brother arms manufactory in Athens, as well as the Rigdon and Ansley facility in Augusta. Since his visits to Augusta were random, the guns produced during his absence were simply not subjected to his inspection and stamping.

The second mark involves an unknown number of revolvers that were stamped on the bottom of the wood grip with a South Carolina designation, which appears variously as S. C. or S. Ca. These marks are found randomly from number 971 to nearly 1300. There are a number of exceptions. Revolver number 1061 is stamped S. CAR., and yet another gun, in the Rigdon and Ansley 2300 serial range, is stamped S. C. Number 1282, the W. H. Hood revolver, is stamped S.C. The reason for these South Carolina marks has never been determined although some collectors have believed that Rigdon and Ansley must have had a contract with South Carolina to produce a certain number of revolvers and these guns were so marked. If a contract existed, a copy has never been found nor has any reference to a contract ever surfaced. Lacking a definitive explanation for these marks, I believe that the South Carolina mark was intended to identify either acceptance by, or issuance from the C. S. Ordnance Department at the arsenal in Columbia, South Carolina.

Regarding acceptance, it seems rather unlikely that some guns would have been selected randomly for shipment to Columbia rather than received at the arsenal in Augusta. If the mark was used to identify the issuing arsenal (after receipt from the Augusta Arsenal), it is strange that no other arsenal marks (i.e., Richmond, Macon, etc.) have been encountered. Until further evidence comes to light, the South Carolina mark must remain another mystery among many.

In November 1864, military affairs for the Confederacy continued to deteriorate and as General Sherman approached from the west, the decision was made to dismantle the arsenal at Augusta and move everything to a safer location. Apparently, much of this vast array of stores and equipment did not make it out of the city. Some reportedly reached the safety of Athens, Georgia, while some simply disappeared.³⁸

Charles Rigdon, on the other hand, seems to have kept his machinery and workers in hand until at least late November when the Rigdon Guards, part of the local defense force that had been formed in June 1864, was called out to fight at Griswoldville, Georgia, on November 22. In the action that followed, the Guards suffered eight wounded (several seriously) and three missing. The Guards were called into action once again at Grahamville, Georgia on December 4. Casualties, if any, were not reported.³⁹

During this time of chaos and uncertainty, Captain Hudgins continued to make his rounds as he had been ordered by Colonel Gorgas back in February. His last recorded visit to Augusta was on January 27, 1865, and since he did not return again, this is likely the point in time that marked the end of the Rigdon and Ansley operation.⁴⁰

And what of Thomas Leech? After the dissolution of the partnership in December 1863, Leech may have continued to turn out revolvers although, if he did, with what equipment and workers is not known. The surviving evidence of such an effort may be a .36 caliber revolver stamped LEECH & CO CSA bearing serial number 125. No other such revolvers are known. At some point, Leech returned to Memphis and was listed in an early post-war city directory as a Cotton Broker located on Front Street. His name continued to appear in the directory until 1874, after which time he was no longer listed.⁴¹

By 1866, Charles Rigdon was once again listed in the Memphis city directory as a machinist. His death was reported in the Greensboro *Argus* on October 5, 1866:

*Died; Charles H. Rigdon, on Monday evening at 7 1/2 O'clock, of inflammation of the bowels; age 43 years . . .*⁴²

He is buried in the Elmwood Cemetery, Greensboro, Georgia.⁴³

This ends the remarkable odyssey of Thomas Leech and Charles H. Rigdon and all their associates during the

great Civil War. I am hopeful that over time more information about their endeavors will surface and that someone will step forward to fill in a few more of the gaps. In the meantime, perhaps collectors of these wonderful revolvers will want to re look at the serial numbered guns in their possession and revisit the subject of just when and where their guns were likely produced and what it took to do so.

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