



Figure 1. (Above) Colt's Award.

Figure 2. (Left) The Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

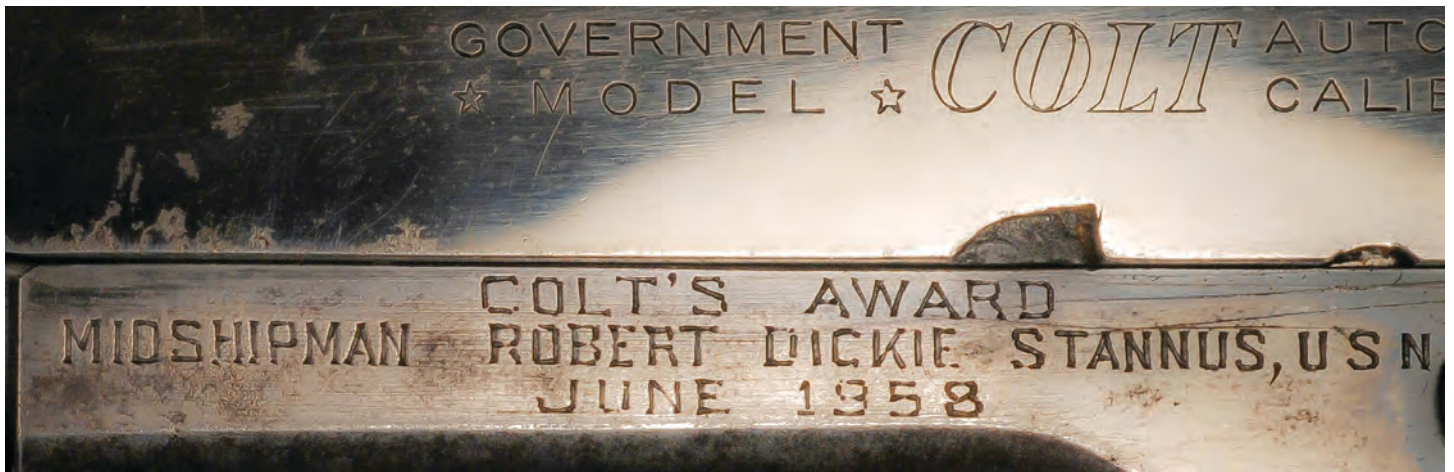


Figure 3. Close up of the left side of the frame and slide of Colt S/N 280368-C.
Colt's Award to Midshipman Robert Dickie Stannus, USN.

COLT'S AWARD TO ROBERT DICKIE STANNUS

by Michael Carrick

I saw this Colt M1911A1, Government Model pistol (Figure 1 and 3) listed on an Internet site.¹ The engraving on the pistol “Colt’s Award / Midshipman Robert Dickie Stannus, U.S.N. / June 1958” intrigued me. I had not heard of a “Colt’s Award” pistol.

The appearance of the engraving did not seem to be factory quality, but the seller indicated a Colt Factory Letter accompanied the pistol. I asked for a copy of the letter (Figure 5), and the letter confirmed the exact text of the engraving and showed the pistol shipped on April 23, 1958 to the Office of the Superintendent, United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland.

I decided to Google Robert Dickie Stannus and was surprised to find that he had been awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal “For heroic conduct not involving actual conflict with an enemy. . .” —posthumously!

The text of the citation reads:

Navy and Marine Corps Medal

Awarded for actions during the Cold War.

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy and Marine Corps Medal (Posthumously) to Ensign Robert D. Stannus, United States Navy, for heroism at the risk of life not involving conflict with an armed enemy in sacrificing his own life in an attempt to save the life of another, while serving as Officer of the Deck on board the U.S.S. BEXAR (APA-237) on 9 August 1959. When a shipmate was swept overboard from the BEXAR into the heavy seas by a huge wave, Ensign Stannus voluntarily entered the hazardous waters in a daring attempt to effect a rescue. After a safety line had been passed to the victim, Ensign Stannus swam toward the ship, but was dragged beneath the surface of the water by a heavy roll of the vessel and was drowned. ²

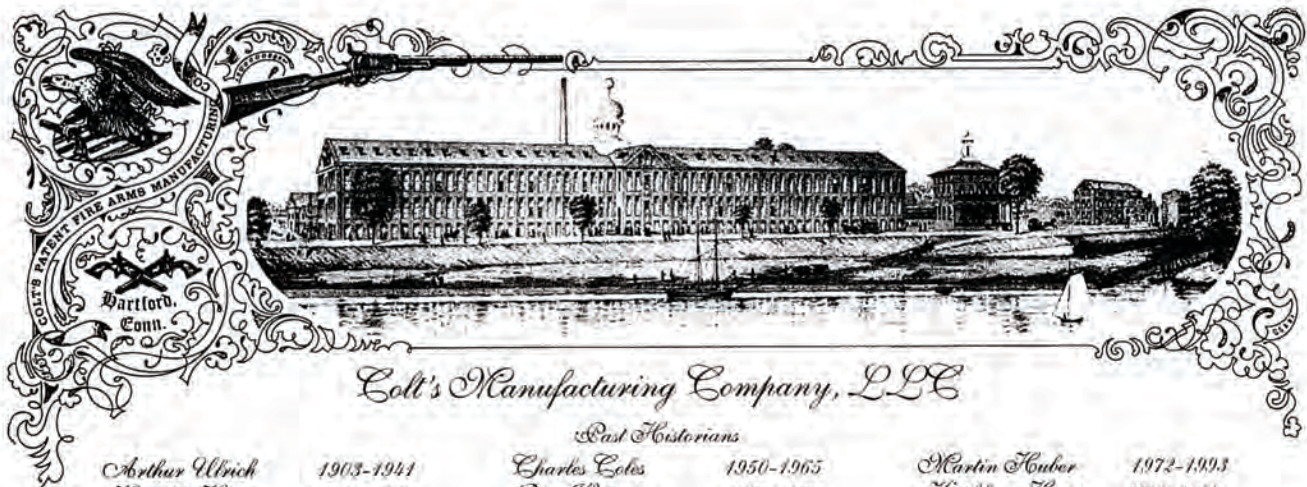


Figure 4. Ensign Robert Dickie Stannus, USN.

WHAT IS A COLT'S AWARD PISTOL, AND WHO WAS ENSIGN STANNUS?

According to Jennifer Bryan, Ph.D., Head of Special Collections and Archives, USNA, “The Colt’s Award was given for proficiency in operations and navigation, gunnery, and engineering during the First Class summer cruise. It seems to have been first awarded in 1956.”³ The summer cruise was a training voyage taken by First Class Midshipmen (Seniors) during their final year at the Academy.

Robert Dickie Stannus, from San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, was an outstanding Midshipman. He was Editor-in-Chief of the Log (the Brigade Newspaper), on a championship water polo team, Class Officer, and 9th Co.



June 13, 2011

Dear Mr.

Colt, by means of this letter, is proud to authenticate the manufacture of the Colt firearm with the following serial number:

COLT GOVERNMENT MODEL AUTOMATIC PISTOL

Serial Number:	280368-C
Caliber:	.45/c
Barrel Length:	5"
Finish:	Blue
Type of Stocks:	Not Listed
Factory Engraved:	"Colt's Award/Midshipman Robert Dickie Stannus, USN/June 1958."
Shipped To:	Office of the Superintendent United States Naval Academy
Address:	Annapolis, Maryland
Date of Shipment:	April 23, 1958
Colt Factory Order:	# 9271
Number of Same Type Guns in Shipment:	1

We trust you will find the historical information, retrieved from the original Colt shipping records, to be of interest.

Sincerely,

Beverly Jean Haynes
Beverly Jean Haynes
Historian

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Office of the Historian, Colt Archive Properties LLC P.O. Box 1868, Hartford, CT 06144



Figure 5. Colt's factory letter.



Figure 6. USS BEXAR

Commander, while at the Academy. On the U.S.S. *Bexar* he was editor of the ship's publication "The Roundup."

On August 9, 1959, the U.S.S. *Bexar* was en route to Okinawa, Japan, when it ran afoul of Typhoon Ellen. Seas of 60 to 90 feet were reported, and one huge wave hit the *Bexar* smashing seven sailors and Marines against the bulkheads and anchor windlass. Two were killed and two washed overboard. The *Bexar* was an attack Troop Transport ship, and 1,500 Marines were on board.

Of the two washed overboard, one sailor disappeared and one Marine clung to a piece of ship's gear also washed overboard. It was this Marine, Cpl. H.J. Henning, that was saved by Ensign Stannus. Stannus, Officer of the Deck, with a rope around himself and another rope for Henning was able to secure the rope to Henning and shepherd him back to the ship where Henning was pulled safely aboard. Meanwhile, Stannus was still in the water when another huge wave hit the ship, and rolled the ship over onto Stannus, killing him.⁴

USNA Archivist Bryan tells us the first Colt's Award was given at the Academy in 1956, but not when the last was awarded. I wonder if Colt presented a similar award to a high-ranking Cadet at the USMA, West Point?

Are there any Colt collectors in our association that know of other "Colt's Award" handguns?

NOTES

1. www.handgunsoftheworld.com
2. U.S. Navy publication: ALL HANDS, December 1959, page 58
3. email March 12, 2014
4. Commentary taken from Official Medal Citation, U.S.S. *Bexar* ship's website, Bexar Reunion website, and emails from men onboard at the time. There is not uniformity in these sources. The Captain was relieved of command that night. The ship returned to Yokusuka for a disciplinary hearing, and the Official Records are sealed. The U.S.S. *Bexar* had five changes of Command between 9 August and 1 September 1959.