The J. and F. Garrett Revolvers

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Figure 1. The only two known Confederate revolvers by J. and F. Garrett

Since the 1963 publication of *Confederate Handguns* by William Albaugh, III, Hugh Benet, Jr. and Edward Simmons, this single shot brass framed pistol has been referred to, collected, and sold as a J. and F. Garrett pistol (Fig. 2). However, Mr. Albaugh himself later discounted this attribution and for several decades those dealers and collectors who stayed closely tuned to the market have doubted the attribution. The very dealers who knew enough not to believe that they were made by the Garrett brothers perpetuated the myth in selling them as Garrett pistols. Some stood on the shaky ground of selling them as "attributed to" Garrett, and others through ignorance or greed sold them as unqualified Garrett products. These guns were in fact made in the North out of rejected parts for the civilian market (Fig. 3). It has been variously reported that examples have turned up with "A.Waters" markings.

Figure 2. The J and F Garrett Pistol that never was. This is more likely a product of Asa Waters.

The authors of *Confederate Handguns* knew that the Garrett brothers made pistols from an 1862 article in *DeBow's Review* which stated: "The Messrs. Garretts have commenced the manufacture of sewing machines, pistols, guns etc." The Messrs. Garretts referred to consisted of forty-one year old James M. Garrett and thirty-nine year old Franklin Garrett; these two made up the J and F, but another brother, Edward T. Garrett worked with them

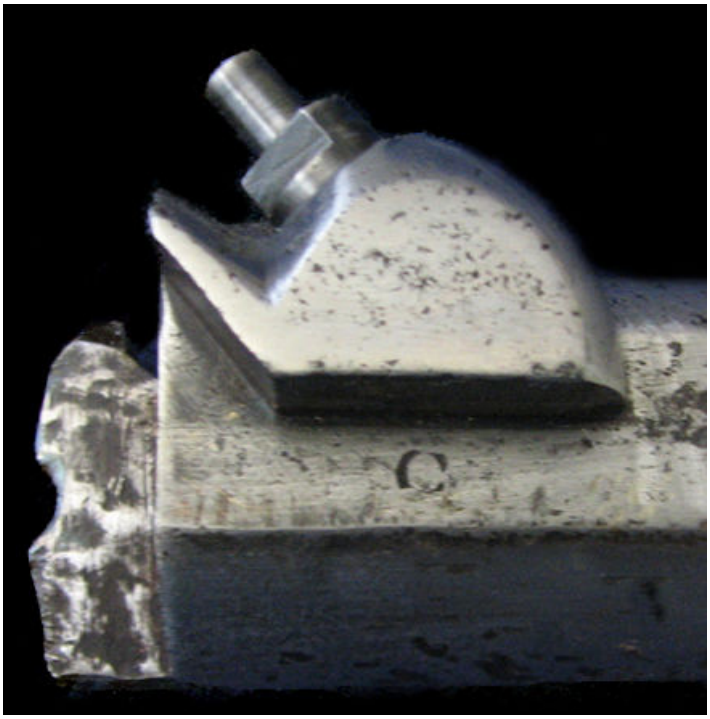

Figure 3. Note the "C" stamped into the Waters barrel designating it as condemned.

also. This third brother is not mentioned in their ads or letterhead, but his signature is found on some J. and F. Garrett receipts. But how did Albaugh, Benet and Simmons come to identify this brass variation similar to the U.S. Model 1842 as a J. and F. Garrett product? The authors do not say where they got the information, but judging by the similarity to the real J. and F. Garrett pistols, they must have somewhere read a vague description, though the knowledge of where and by who died with the authors.

What many believe to be the true Garrett pistol was identified

through collaboration between fellow American Society of Arms Collectors (ASAC) members and authors William Ivey, Michael Briggs and Greensboro Historical Museum Director Bill Moore. The first two Garrett pistols that came to their attention were the property of the Greensboro Historical Museum where they were displayed with the late Dr. John Murphy's Confederate Collection as J. and F. Garrett Pistols, until they were stolen in 2009. So far they have not been recovered.

In his article *The J and F Garrett Pistol*, Michael Briggs noted the oversized roll that Guilford County played in North Carolina's effort to produce weapons for North Carolina and the Confederacy, pointing out that Mendenhall, Jones & Gardner, Clapp, Gates & Company, H. C. Lamb & Company, Gillam & Miller, Searcy & Moore, the North Carolina Armory at Florence, James and Frank Garrett and Jeramiah H. Tarpley were all located in Guilford County. The pistol Messrs. Briggs, Ivey and Moore's research and personal experience pointed to as the true Garrett pistol was one very much like the brass framed variant that William Albaugh and his co-authors had believed to be a Garrett pistol. Like the variant similar to the Model 1842 it was a single shot, had a brass frame with side plate access and a rounded butt (Fig. 4). This similarity is why I believe William Albaugh, and his co-authors had somewhere read a description of the Garrett pistols. Most works written since *Confederate Handguns* have repeated the assertion that the Garrett's produced 500 pistols. However Mr. Albaugh quite reasonably estimated Garrett's production, "Judging from the serial numbers seen," but he was referring to the serial numbers found on the now discredited variant similar to the Model 1842?

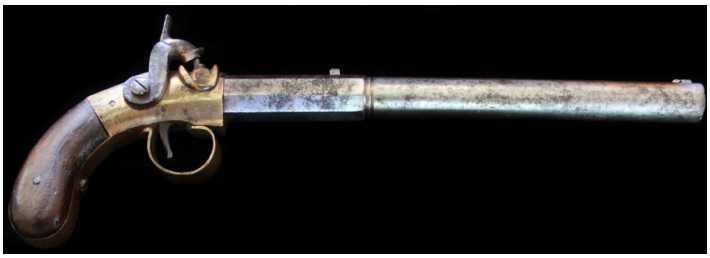

Figure 4. The Type II pistol made by James, Franklin and Edward Garrett.

Even though the Garrett brothers often advertised their various enterprises four, five and even more times in a single issue of the *Greensboro Patriot* they never advertised their pistols. In fact no other reference appears specifically mentioning their making of pistols or revolvers after the mention in *Debow's Review*, even though dozens of mentions of their manufacturing of the Tarpley Carbine can be readily found. In my opinion the Garrett brother's pistol and revolver making enterprise never really got past the experimental or prototype phase of production. I will address this supposition later in the article. I strongly suspect that their pistol production never got out of the single digits.

There are four known examples of the Type I Garrett pistol that Mr. Briggs refers to in his article (Fig. 5), all of which are .36 caliber, have spur triggers and are rifled with seven lands and seven narrow grooves in a similar manner to the Guilford County made longrifles (Fig. 6). Three of the pistols retain their original tiger-striped Maple grips affixed by a single screw. None of the four have any markings.

Figure 5. The Type I pistol made by the Garrett brothers.

Figure 6. Note the seven broad lands and seven narrow grooves. This style of rifling is a Guilford County Gun maker Hallmark.

Figure 7. The J. H. Tarpley carbine made by the Garrett Brothers caused Museum Director Bill Moore to refer to the Type II Pistol as a "Tarpley Pistol".

The Type II Garrett pistol that Mr. Briggs addressed in his article was a single shot pistol that had been found at an estate sale in neighboring Alamance County (Fig.4). When Michael was first called about it by Greensboro Historical Museum Director Bill Moore, he described it as looking like a Tarpley carbine and at first glance you can certainly see the resemblance (Fig. 7). The only marking on the pistol is an 1861 date stamped into the top barrel flat. This date is the only original marking found on, or in, any Garrett pistol or revolver. The .36 cal. barrel is octagonal for three inches, and then it has a small ring cut by a lathe into the otherwise smooth, round barrel (Fig. 8). This Type II also has seven lands with seven rounded grooves in the corners. Like the Tarpley it uses a flat sided hammer and a separately made thin triggerguard

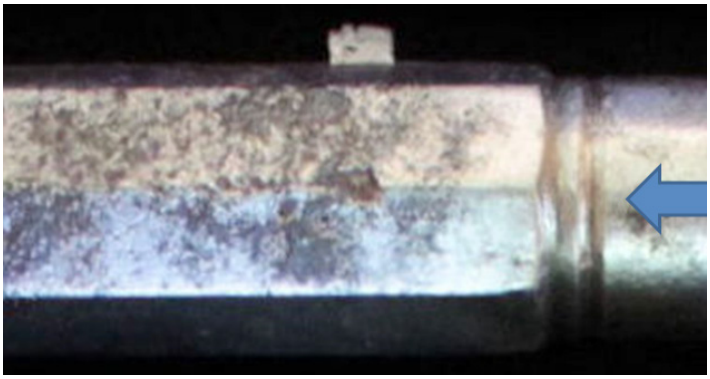

Figure 8. Another hallmark of the Guilford County Gun Makers is the partial octagonal barrel, followed by a narrow ring cut by a lathe.

screwed to the exterior of the brass frame. In Michael's book, *The Longrifle Makers of Guilford County*, he reports that nine pistols have surfaced that have been attributed back to the Guilford County longrifle makers, three of which were signed by the makers. Most of these are of the under-hammer design, and a commonality of all but one is that the barrels are for the first two or three inches octagonal and then have a small ring cut by a lathe into the otherwise smooth, round barrel like that found on the Type II Garrett pistol.

Figure 9. The J. and F. Garrett & Company's attempt at revolver making.

I had seen Michael's work on the Garrett pistols and had seen those in the Greensboro Museum. I had also been given the opportunity to hold and examine Bill Ivey's Garrett pistol, so I was stopped in my tracks by the striking resemblance to the Garrett pistols when I saw a very unusual brass framed revolver at the 2016 Baltimore Antique Arms Show (Fig. 9). Though having collected and dealt in Confederate revolvers for nearly thirty years it was unlike any revolver I had seen before, but based on my previous experience, I had no doubt that it was produced in the Confederacy during the War Between the States. The seller represented it as being Confederate; in fact it was published in the *Texas Gun Collector Journal* in the 1950s when it belonged to early Confederate collector Harry Brooks (Hayes Otoupalik, personal communication).

I could see that it had an unusual triggerguard of iron affixed externally to the brass frame and a rounded tiger maple butt like the Type I and II J. and F. Garrett pistols. I had a hunch that it was made by the Garrett brothers. My good friend and author Bill Ivey was at the show so I was able to draw on his expertise. Having owned a Garrett pistol previously he recognized the same similarities that I had noticed and added that the Garrett pistols also had the same type of side plate access and the same unusual .36 cal. bore with seven lands and seven narrow rounded grooves as this revolver. After reviewing the similarities we both believed it to be a J. and F. Garrett

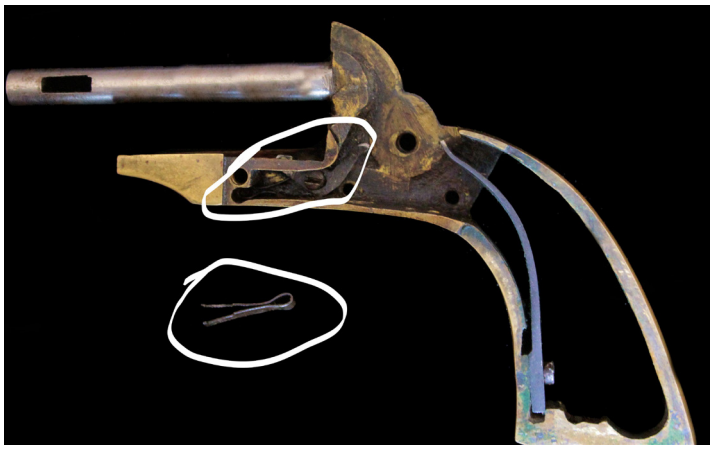

Figure 10. The unusual "U" shaped spring the Garrett brothers used for the cylinder bolt spring and another of the same shape as a trigger return spring.

manufactured revolver. Subsequently I purchased the revolver, primarily for the opportunity to study it further.

I was as anxious as a kid at Christmas to get home and take it apart in hopes of finding something distinguishing inside that would end any lingering doubt as to the maker. On arriving home I took it all to pieces, examined it in detail and found several unusual characteristics unique among Confederate revolvers. The most unusual of which was the use of "U" shaped springs for both the cylinder bolt lock and the trigger return spring (Fig. 10).

Figure 11. The J. and F. Garrett revolver flanked by the company's Type I Pistol below and Type II above.

At this point I was unaware that no one had previously disassembled a Garrett pistol, and I assumed that they had internal markings, so I was a bit disappointed that I did not find any markings inside of the revolver. I was slightly heartened by the uniqueness of the springs inside the revolver and held out some hope that the Garrett pistols used similar springs. I called Michael Briggs to ask what internal markings the Garrett pistols bore and to find out if the springs happened to be "U" shaped. Michael informed me that he had never taken his pistols apart, but he was as curious as I, so he graciously volunteered to drive four hours one way with his pistols in tow.

Michael, true to form was right on time and with few preliminaries, he laid his pistols out on the table beside my revolver (Fig. 11).

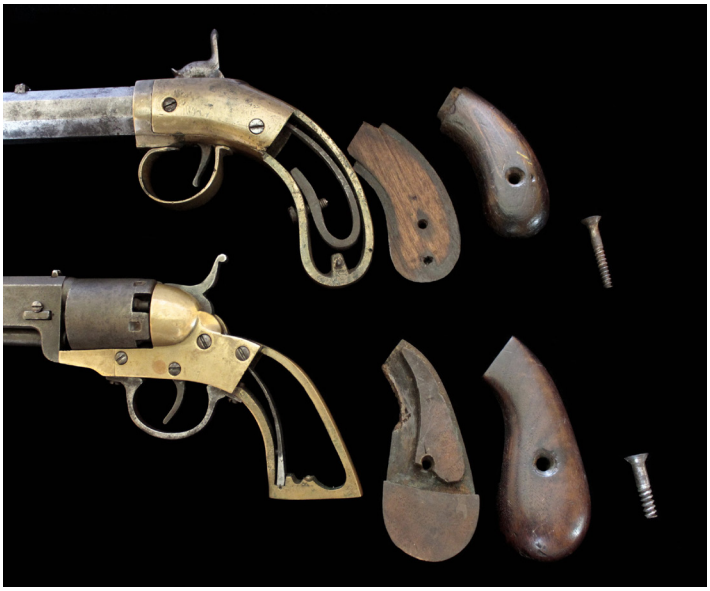

Figure 12. Both the Garrett Type II Pistol and their revolver had hand tooled, rounded slab grips fastened together by passing a wood screw through one countersunk slab grip and screwed into the opposite slab.

Figure 13. J. and F. Garrett gave the Tarpley, (not shown) and the Type I, Type II and Revolvers 1 and 2 the seven broad lands and seven narrow grooves of rifling commonly found in Guilford County Rifles.

The resemblance was striking. Both the Garrett Type II and the revolver had hand tooled, rounded slab grips fastened together by passing a wood screw through one countersunk grip and screwed into the opposite grip without passing all the way through (Fig. 12). I was also surprised to see the mainspring in that same unusual "U" shape. Both the Garrett Type II and the revolver used side plate access to get to the mechanical assembly. The Garrett Type II, the revolver and the Tarpley used externally attached trigger guards. All three of the handguns used that unusual .36 cal. bore with seven lands and seven narrow rounded grooves (Fig. 13). Examining the Type II pistol's mechanics I found that it too used the "U" spring trigger return (Fig. 14). By now we were thoroughly convinced that Garrett made the revolver.

During my search I had been told that ASAC member Hayes Otoupalik owned an identical revolver. In a remarkably generous gesture Hayes sent his revolver to me, even giving me permission to take it apart as long as I could put it together again.

Earlier I mentioned that I thought that these revolvers were prototypes. I will be getting into the reasons for that assumption now. Neither weapon was serial numbered, so for the sake of clarity I will refer to my revolver, shown on the top as number one, and Hayes' revolver shown on bottom, as number two (Fig. 15). As you will see later, this choice of order is not random.

Figure 14. Note the "U" shaped springs used for the trigger return and even for the mainspring.

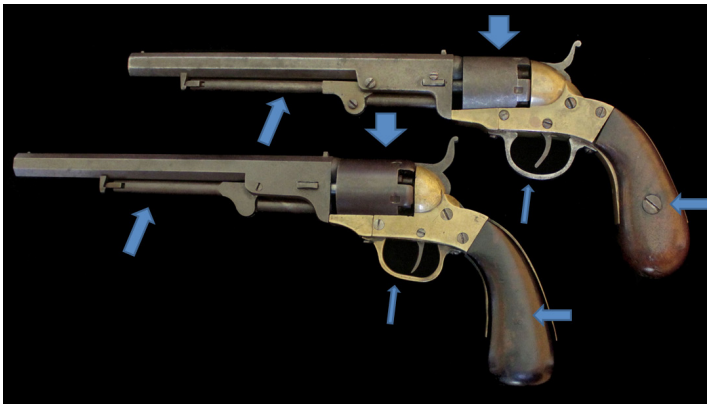

Figure 15. Note the slight differences between revolvers 1 and 2, including the rammer lever, the cylinder, the trigger guard and the reversed grip screw.

Laying the revolvers side by side three differences came ready to mind. First, the loading lever on number one is longer than that on number two; second, the triggerguard on Number 1 made of iron and Number 2 of brass. Third, the stock screw on Number 1 enters from the left and that in Number 2 from the right, and fourth, the cylinder of Number 2 is much longer than the one found on Number 1.

Comparing the side plates from both revolvers we see that one of the screw holes in the revolver designated Number 1 had to be plugged and re-drilled further to the right (Fig. 16), while the central hole in the side plate of the revolver designated Number 2 was drilled correctly the first time, they still had a problem (Fig. 17). This suggests a progression in design. Moving to the inside we see another reason that I designated these Number 1 and Number 2 in the order that I did and also the most obvious reason for believing that these are prototypes. Number one was cast, the screw holes drilled and it was then found that the lower hole would not work where it had been placed, so it was plugged and the hole re-drilled as mentioned earlier. Also the interior of the shoulder had

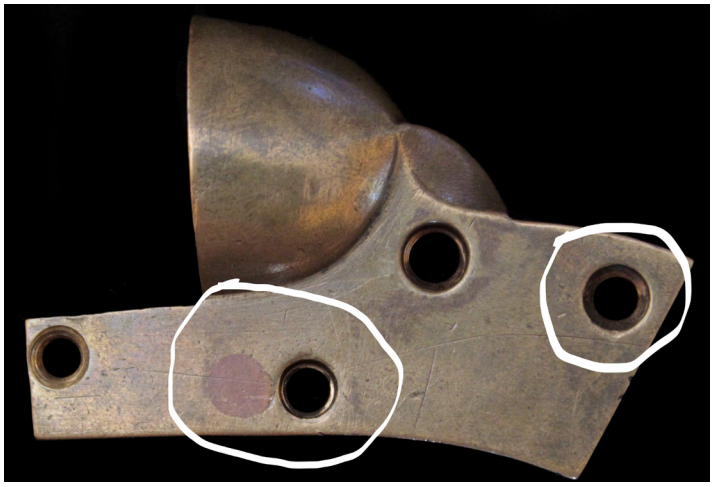

Figure 16. The side plate of Number 1 would not work where the center hole was originally drilled. Rather than cast a new plate, the Garrett's chose to fill the hole and re-drill.

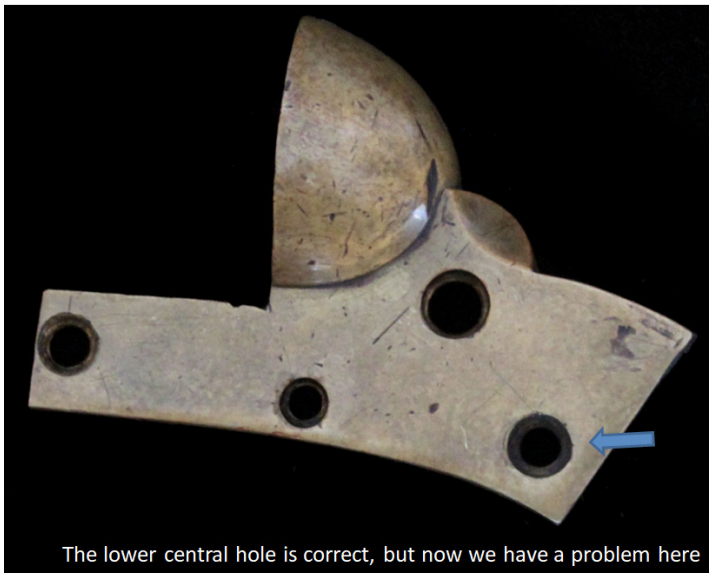

Figure 17. The central hole in the side plate of Number 2 was drilled in the proper place the first time. The rear hole still needed work.

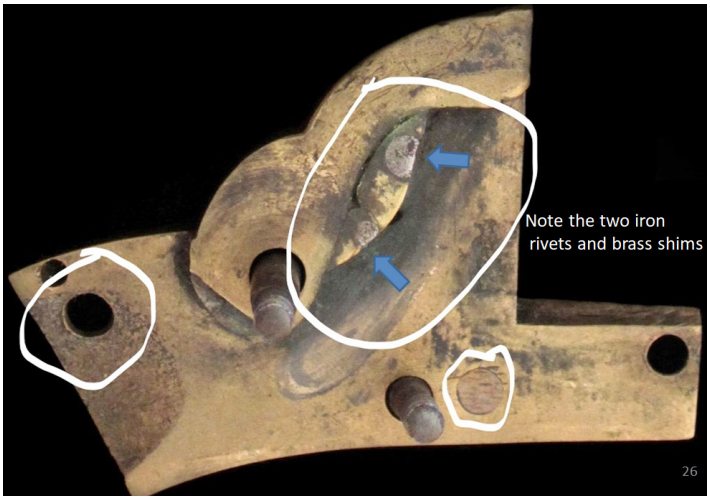

Figure 18. The interior of Number 1's side plate has had two shims of brass riveted in place with iron, which were then filed to get the proper profile.

two different shape changes made by riveting brass shims in place with iron rivets (Fig. 18). By careful examination it can also be seen that the shims were filed and reshaped after being installed in an attempt to get just the right angles. This was necessary because before mass production could begin, a working model, from which the parts could be cast, had to be made. Sam Colt had the good sense to make his pattern out of wood, but you can readily see that the Garrett brothers were not Sam Colt's equal.

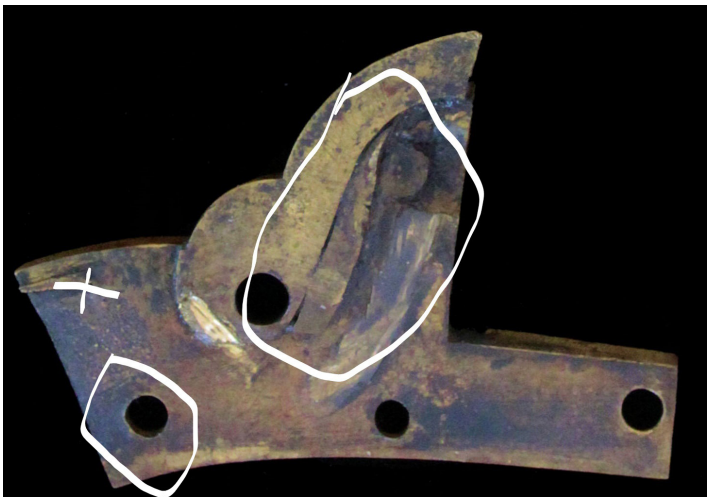

Figure 19. The rear hole of Number 2's side plate has been moved from top to bottom and a single shim has been added. After having to file the iron rivets in Number 1 they had the good sense to use brass rivets this time.

Note the positon of the left most screw holes as we move to number two (Fig. 19). You will readily see that the leftmost screw hole has been moved to the bottom of the side plate and the central hole was drilled in the right place the first time. Note also that the shim is a single piece of brass, smaller than the two previous shims. Also, the brothers realized how hard it was to file iron rivets in such a confined space and had the foresight to rivet this one with brass. On this too it is obvious that they filed the shim after it was in place. If they could only get one side plate to work the first time they could cast as many as they wished with little effort; however, they still weren't there (Fig. 20). Note the screw in the lower part of the photograph; it has had the unique alteration of having half of its diameter filed away. This is because when they moved the rear screw from the top to the bottom of the side plate, it blocked the mainspring from fully compressing. At the same time that they were trying to get the side plate correct, they were working on the hammers and hands. The hand on number one is longer than on number two and the hammer shape is different. It must be kept in mind that I named these one and two, but they may have been three and five. There are so many small changes between these two revolvers that it would stand to reason that they did not all occur from one prototype to the next. For example when examining number two notice the mortice cut into the grip frame (Fig. 21). It appears that the mortice was to receive a wedge that would tighten the mainspring, but instead it created a weak place and caused the grip to bend forward. Number one used a screw set into the grip strap which when tightened caused the spring to apply more pressure to the hammer (Fig. 22). Next, notice the reversed steady pins between number one (top; Fig. 23) and number two. Even the cylinders are a different length to allow for a larger powder charge in number two (Fig. 24). The rear sight is more refined on number two (Fig. 25). Both of the revolvers have the same pin style front sight as that found on the Garrett pistol Type I.

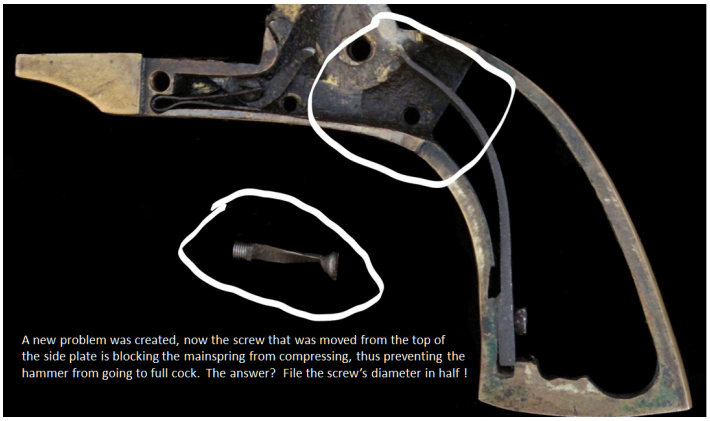

Figure 20. A new problem was created, now the screw that was moved from the top of the side plate is blocking the mainspring from compressing, thus preventing the hammer from going to full cock. The answer, file the screw's diameter in half!

Figure 22. The original idea was to create a spring that could be adjusted with a tension screw.

Figure 24. Both revolvers are .36 caliber, but the difference in powder charge was substantial.

Figure 21. Creating a dovetail for an adjustment wedge also created a weak place.

Figure 23. Number 1 above set the steady pins in the frame, in Number 2 the pins were set in the leg.

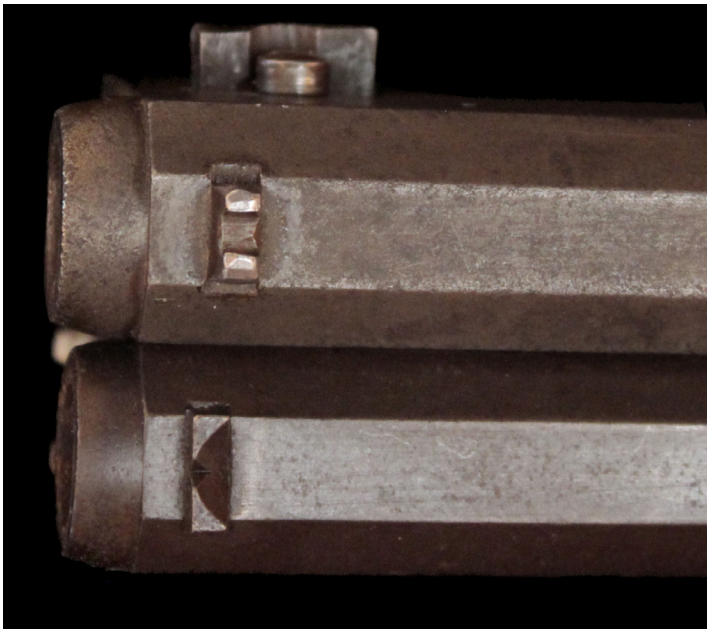

Figure 25. The rear sight of Number 1 was a crude, inaccurate affair, Number 2 used a refined modern sight.

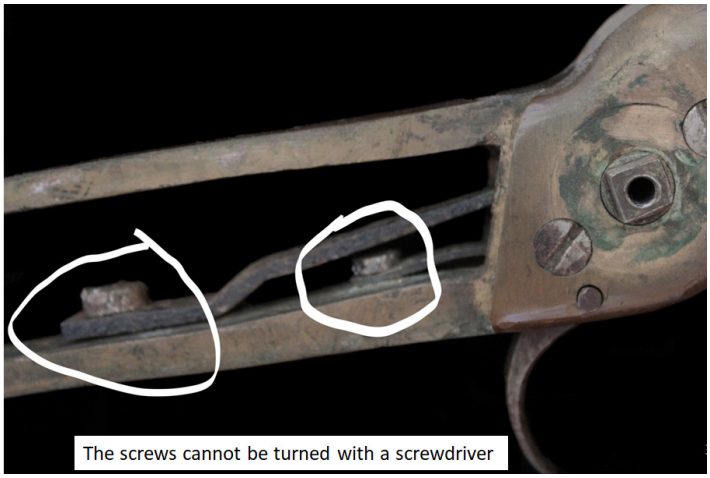

Figure 26. Both the Tarpley Carbine and Revolver Number 2 have the oddity of having mainspring screws with slotted heads, though neither can be accessed by a screwdriver.

Figure 28. Revolver No. 1 and two are identical in this respect.

I next asked my friend and ASAC member Dr. Steve Basheda to send his Tarpley Carbine down for my inspection, which he graciously agreed to do. The Tarpley was manufactured by the Garrett brothers and was likely the reason they gave up their pursuit of mass producing the revolver. I had hoped to find some "U" springs inside the Tarpley but there were none to be found. There were some similarities though. Both the Tarpley (Fig. 26) and the revolver number two (Fig. 27) used screws that could not be accessed with a screwdriver to attach the mainsprings. In other words, even though each screw was slotted for a screwdriver, they could not be accessed by a screwdriver and had to be tightened with pliers. As alluded to earlier, the Tarpley Carbine used the same type of exterior mounted metal triggerguard as the Garrett pistol and the revolvers; the same brass blade set into an iron block front sight as found on the Garrett Type II pistol and the same unusual rifling as found on the Garrett pistols and revolvers. In an era in which guns

Figure 27. The inaccessible screw head found in Number 2.

Figure 29. Tangs on the Tarpley Carbine.

Figure 30. Right side of revolver designated Number 1.

Figure 31. Left side of revolver designated Number 2.

usually had rounded or shaped tangs, the Garretts went against the trend and no effort was wasted simply for appearance sake. Whether making handguns (Fig. 28) or the Tarpley Carbine, (Fig. 29) all tangs were simply squared.

I would like to think more of these revolvers (Fig. 30) will eventually turn up, but realistically I doubt that more will come to light, simply because the Garrett's never produced more than a few prototypes. Hopefully I am wrong and few more examples will turn up to answer some of the unanswered questions these two tauntingly beautiful Confederate revolvers leave us with (Fig. 31).

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