

Murray Willis' Pleasant Surprise

Last week, I received a telephone call from a fire-arms collector on the mainland who told me that he knew of another collector who was trying to sell a couple of 20 round Thompson magazines. He gave me the name and telephone number and I consequently made contact. Sure enough he did have a couple of XX magazines and a few other 'Thompson' items, and as Thompson magazines don't grow on trees like they do in the USA, I agreed to purchase "sight unseen" at a fair "local" price.

He had described them as a "Patent date magazine" and a "Blank magazine" but believed the latter to be a WW2 blank magazine. He admitted his knowledge on all things Thompson was limited. The two magazines duly arrived in the mail together with a nice WW2 Thompson instruction book and I was happy with my purchase.



I cleaned them up a bit (they were soaked in oil) and placed the "Patent date" magazine with some other similar magazines I have in my collection. It was a correct

“Patent date” magazine - 24 Aug 1920 24 August 1920 11 Jan 1921. It is nice to have another “Patent date” magazine in the collection.

I was a bit disappointed that it wasn't an incorrect patent date magazine, but when you are buying 20 round Thompson magazines here in New Zealand “beggars can't be choosers.” However, it was in good condition considering its 83 years of age, so I thought it deserved some white highlight paint in the lettering. I did just that and it looked great.

Next I picked up another of my “Patent date” magazines to put some paint on that, then laid it down alongside my latest acquisition. Then the fun began!



This new magazine looked different. On went the glasses; you know, the ones I should have worn at the TCA shoot in August. The lettering was different, deeper it seemed, and the hyphen between “PATENTED & AUG was sloping up, not straight like my other patent magazines.

Out came Doug Richardson's 1995 magazine book and there on page 39 was the same lettering with the sloping hyphen. I don't believe this, I thought, with trembling hands

I removed the plate and spring. Sure enough, on the strip, under 80 odd years of dirt and oil were the letters MSCO...I could not believe my eyes.



It seems that I have acquired an engraved prototype Colt magazine.

According to Doug, only one is known to exist; yet here is another in New Zealand.

If so, how could it get down under?

I now believe that the answer is relatively simple and relates to the fact that nearly all of the Colt 1921 Thompsons in New Zealand, ten or so, are three digit serial numbers of which I own four.

These guns came from a sale in the 1980's by Weller and Dufty of Birmingham, England, of Thompsons captured in Ireland. Most are Rorke guns off the Eastside shipment and the serial numbers are all low.

Weller and Dufty were also selling "C" and "L" drums in the 2 and 3 digit range, and many XX magazines. And all of the guns arrived in New Zealand with XX magazines fitted.

I also own three Colt blank magazines which all came with the “Irish Swords”.

According to Doug, the blank magazines predated the engraved prototype magazine, and that was followed by the patent date stamped.

It could be possible that some of those early Rorke guns were in fact shipped with this prototype magazine.

What was originally one prototype engraved magazine has turned into two... there could be more – so, go and have a close look at your patent date magazines

The funniest side of the story is that the “blank” magazine that arrived with the prototype magazine turned out to be a 1960’s Japanese toy magazine. Still, it shoots real well and is nearly as rare!