

GENERAL GRANT'S MAGNIFICENT SET OF LOST REMINGTONS!

by S.P. Fjestad

Remington revolver images by Douglas Sandberg Photography.



When Cotton Was King

The year was 1863 – a pivotal time in the Civil War. America had emerged as a deeply divided country of 20 Union and 13 Confederate states, anything but united with secession and slavery politically and socially paralyzing both sides. The longer than expected and unrelenting bloody battles had already resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties, and many citizens were convinced the country might never get back to its pre-war constitutional elements— a land of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The location was war-ravaged Louisiana, which was in a complete state of chaos and anarchy outside the capital of New Orleans. Throughout the 19th century, the cotton trade was one of the world's largest industries, and most of the raw cotton was harvested in the deep American South by slave labor. Prior to the war, most of this cotton was exported to Britain, where its dominant textile industry consumed millions of pounds annually. Once the Civil War erupted at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, Britain declared its neutrality a month later, the Union Navy quickly blockaded the Atlantic seaports and shortly thereafter, the Gulf of Mexico. Confederate commerce with England was drastically reduced, creating a major loss in revenue for a

Undiscovered for more than a century and not photographed until only recently, this is the finest cased set of Remington revolvers known and was originally presented to General Ulysses S. Grant by O.N. Cutler and W.C. Wagley during the height of the Civil War, circa 1863. Having surfaced only recently, this national treasure showcases a historically significant pair of Remington 1863 New Model Army revolvers (serial numbers 1 and 2) in .44 cal., with elaborate engraving and extremely rare, ultra-high relief carved ivory grips featuring portrait busts of General Grant and American eagle motifs – both attributed to famed American engraver L.D. Nimschke. Set accessories include: compartmentalized rosewood case with unfaded lining, a very unusual gold finished Remington dog and bird powder flask, a tin of Eley Bros. percussion caps, pewter oil canister, cleaning rod, bullet mold, and nipple wrench. Both revolvers remain in near mint, unfired original condition with only light drag lines between the cylinder lock up notches and some minor oxidation on the backstraps around the inscriptions. Such a significant rare find constitutes the Holy Grail for any historian and gun aficionado!

desperately needed war chest. Despite large pre-war reserves, England ran out of cotton in late 1862, as did the North. As a result, the price of cotton, which had been approximately 10 cents a pound in 1860, skyrocketed to \$1.89 a pound in the North during 1863 - *if* it could be successfully shipped to the East Coast for the multitude of Union Civil War uses.



Revolvers on top of the bound, deluxe rosewood case with scalloped brass corners – this is the correct style for a presentation case from this time period. Original plaque on case has been removed at an earlier date and has been replaced. Accessories are all proper, but the powder flask is extremely rare, since most were dipped in purple lacquer, and this one is gold finished, making it unique.

This high priced “white gold” quickly resulted in a large variety of drastically war altered entrepreneurial activities in the cotton producing southern states, but especially in Louisiana. While New Orleans fell into Union occupation in May of 1862, the rest of the state was a mixed bag of isolated Union outposts and scattered rebel strongholds where lawlessness was the rule. At the time, it was still possible to buy cotton for as little as 20 cents a pound in this war-torn state, even though the Confederacy had ordered the destruction of all cotton (and whiskey) that might fall into Union hands. Confederates destroyed 15 times more cotton than what the Union confiscated during the entire Civil War.

Multiple obstacles occurred for cotton speculators, however. With the Confederacy controlling the states surrounding Louisiana, shipping by rail wasn't possible, nor were sea shipments up the Atlantic corridor. The only remaining solution was to try and ship this bulky cargo by boat up the Confederacy controlled Mississippi River. President Lincoln had declared Vicksburg the “key” to liberating the “Father of Waters”, and it wasn't until Vicksburg, Mississippi (defeated by Grant's troops) and Port Hudson, Louisiana fell to the Union in July of 1863 that shipping cotton became easier and more predictable. Even so, on any given night on the

Mississippi, nothing was guaranteed on either side for safe passage until late 1863.

“Up-the-River” Gambling

To begin with, purchasing raw cotton was not easy, as it had to be paid for in federal cash (typically “greenbacks,” not backed by gold or silver), and the unreliable sources included rogue elements of the Confederate government, rebels needing federal cash, and loyalist citizens wanting their income back. Once purchased, this “white gold” needed to be packed, loaded, and transported (always risky) to the Mississippi River to be shipped upstream to Union controlled Memphis, a distance of approximately 400 miles. While the potential monetary rewards were unequalled at the time, the risks were also exceedingly high, with graft and corruption becoming central elements in most negotiations. Yet, if everything went according to plan, it was possible to make up to \$175,000 in one shipment! One observer noted that the “mania for sudden fortunes in cotton” meant that “Every [Union] colonel, captain, or quartermaster is in secret partnership with some operator in cotton.” The lure of sudden cotton wealth would entice white Northern civilians and Union soldiers south both during and after the war.



Artistic embellishments on metal, usually in the form of engraving, have always been the most important part on any firearm(s) destined for presentation. Louis D. Nimschke, based in New York City, is attributed for the engraving on this Remington set as evidenced by his trademark, perfectly executed American style scrollwork (he was also capable of performing fine/delicate English scroll). Nimschke is ranked as one of America's foremost and most prolific firearms engravers of the 19th century. During his lifetime (1832-1904), it is estimated he engraved over 5,000 firearms for over 100 manufacturers, plus other objects, including a dog collar! Note vivid fire bluing on trigger, indicating this set might be unfired, even though there is a slight drag line between the cylinder lock up notches.

The best way to ensure a successful cotton shipment to Memphis was to get cooperation and assistance from Union forces. This meant forming an alliance and having contracts with high ranking Union officers stationed in Louisiana. General McPherson was such a person – a first-in-his-class West Point graduate who was commander of the Union occupied New Orleans district. One of his most important cotton sources was William C. Wagley, who served as 2nd Lieutenant in the 3rd Dragoons during the Mexican-American War. Major William H. Polk was in Wagley's regiment, and received a pair of silver mounted Colt revolvers from his brother, President James K. Polk, delivered circa 1847. Wagley was a plantation owner in the area, but also plundered the nearby abandoned plantations for their unpicked cotton crops. He was responsible for establishing contracts approved by McPherson to deliver unpicked and abandoned cotton and was also mentioned in Abraham Lincoln's letters. This cotton was processed when delivered on government transports at the contractor's expense. The sizeable profits were divided equally between the Union and contractual parties.

Otis Nelson Cutler was a veteran and Captain of the Mexican-American War, but like Wagley, did not serve during the Civil War. He was originally from Maine and had already established himself as a swashbuckling adventurer who led a company of 40 men from Massachusetts to California in 1858

to capitalize on the new Gold Rush. A few years later, he helped build the Hannibal and St. Joseph railroad in Missouri, establishing himself as Assistant Superintendent. When the war broke out, Cutler was appointed as Special Treasury Agent by Treasury Secretary Fessenden and stationed in New Orleans. After the war, he became a banker in New York and later, a member of the New York Stock Exchange.

The Perils of the "Cotton Beggars"

In his position and with considerable financial backing available, Cutler typically took over Wagley's interest in these cotton contracts. One of the early documented shipments was especially doomed for failure. This 1863 contract specified Wagley to deliver 268 bales of cotton weighing 113,900 pounds to Lake Providence for future shipment up the Mississippi to Memphis. The court documented price paid was 25 cents per pound. Wagley then assigned his interest to O.N. Cutler due to his financial connections. While the load of cotton was being stored at Lake Providence awaiting shipment to Memphis, General Grant, who had the final say on what the Union shipped on the river, required transportation for his army across the Mississippi River below Vicksburg. To accomplish this, steamboats were needed to run through the enemy held river blockade. Grant and his quartermaster seized Cutler's cotton and positioned it on the steamer *Tigress* to protect the boat's machinery from lethal enemy cannon fire from Vicksburg. The *Tigress* tried to run the blockade, but her precious load of cotton was lost on the voyage. In 1868, the government finally reimbursed Cutler \$50,000 for this lost shipment.



Certainly one of this Remington set's most historically significant features is the two-line inscription on both backstraps reading "From Your Friends O.N. Cutler, W.C. Wagley." Both Cutler and Wagley were engaged in "Civil War profiteering" in Louisiana, with King Cotton being the commodity most in demand. Both were also greatly indebted to Generals McPherson and Grant, who helped get the cotton shipments up the Mississippi to Memphis, where they were transported to the East Coast for processing. Note the detail of Grant's hair and beard in the oversized carved ivory grip!

After Confederate control of the Mississippi ended during mid-1863, cotton shipments to the East Coast became both more frequent and reliable thanks to the Union's "delivery protection service," but only if the right people were involved. A 50/50 profit sharing arrangement between the Union and cotton suppliers was the norm for these contracts. This lucrative arrangement generated massive amounts of revenue for both the Union and Cutler/Wagley, and no doubt, Generals McPherson and Grant.

The Remington Set Gets Ordered

Indebted to both Generals, what better way of expressing gratitude to both McPherson and Grant than to present each of them with a set of highly embellished cased revolvers. A well-documented, exquisite pair of ornately engraved Colt Model 1861 Navy revolvers (serial numbers 11756 and 11757) was presented to General McPherson first, with the inscription on both backstraps "From his Friends, O.N. Cutler and W.C. Wagley." These famous Colts were formally part of both the William M. Locke and Dr. Joseph Murphy collections. Interestingly, until the sale of the Murphy collection in 2009, no one had ever established the historical Civil War connection

between O.N. Cutler and W.C. Wagley. When both men decided to reward General Grant for similar Civil War services, it was only fitting they chose the latest and most up-to-date revolver – Remington's New Model Army that went into production of June 1863, chambered for .44 cal. Over 100,000 revolvers were contracted to the Union and manufacture was completed by war's end.

During this turbulent period of American arms manufacture, perhaps the best and most expeditious way of getting a cased presentation set of Remington revolvers custom made was to place a special order with the New York City based firm of Schulyer, Hartley, and Graham, America's largest gun retailer and wholesaler in 1860. The firm was responsible for maintaining a robust inventory of currently manufactured firearms, which was very unusual at the time. After Cutler and Wagley placed their order, the well-known merchant would have started by purchasing the commercial revolvers from Remington, which offered special order arms removed from the normal production line. Serial numbers were within their own separate series, and research indicates that fewer than 100 of these revolvers were made during the Civil War. A well-documented, almost identical, embellished set of New Model Armies was thought to have been presented to the Czar of Russia after Stephen Lisovski of the Russian Imperial Atlantic Fleet sailed into New York City's harbor in September of 1863. Most locals thought the fleet's arrival indicated Russia's show of support for the Union.

The next step would have been to have the arms properly embellished "in the white", and the pattern and execution of the engraving style indicate this most important creative



Easily the most recognizable feature of this Remington set are the oversized, ultra-high relief carved ivory grips featuring lavish portrait busts of General Grant and American Eagle motifs. During the Civil War, not that many craftsmen were capable of performing this level of execution in carving ivory with such detail. Observe the details of Grant's buttons and stars on his uniform, as well as his facial features. Grips are also numbered to the individual revolvers.



Relief carved American Eagle motif with "stars and bars" shield, olive branch, and three flags. Similar motifs have also been encountered on other presentation firearms from this time. Note grip screw, which was originally fire blued, but now shows oxidation, yet has never been "amateurly" removed or damaged.



Nimschke engraving detail on the upper rear grip strap, back of frame and recoil shield with stars and bars in shield. Unfaded case colors on hammer also indicate this set has not been used or exposed to sunlight.

This is a standard barrel address for a Remington New Model Army, but note how it has been surrounded by engraved ribbon banners. Also observe engraved geometric designs on the barrel flats.

process was done by the firm of L. D. Nimschke, also from New York City. Once finished, the guns would have been polished, blued, and finally fitted to a deluxe presentation case with proper accessories by an established case maker. Easily, this set's most stunning features are the elaborately carved ivory grips featuring high relief portrait busts of Grant and American eagle motifs, also attributed to Nimschke. The overall cost of the extravagant gift was no more than \$400, with the revolvers' original value at about \$12 each. The set could have either been picked up or delivered to a specific location as per Cutler and Wagley's request.

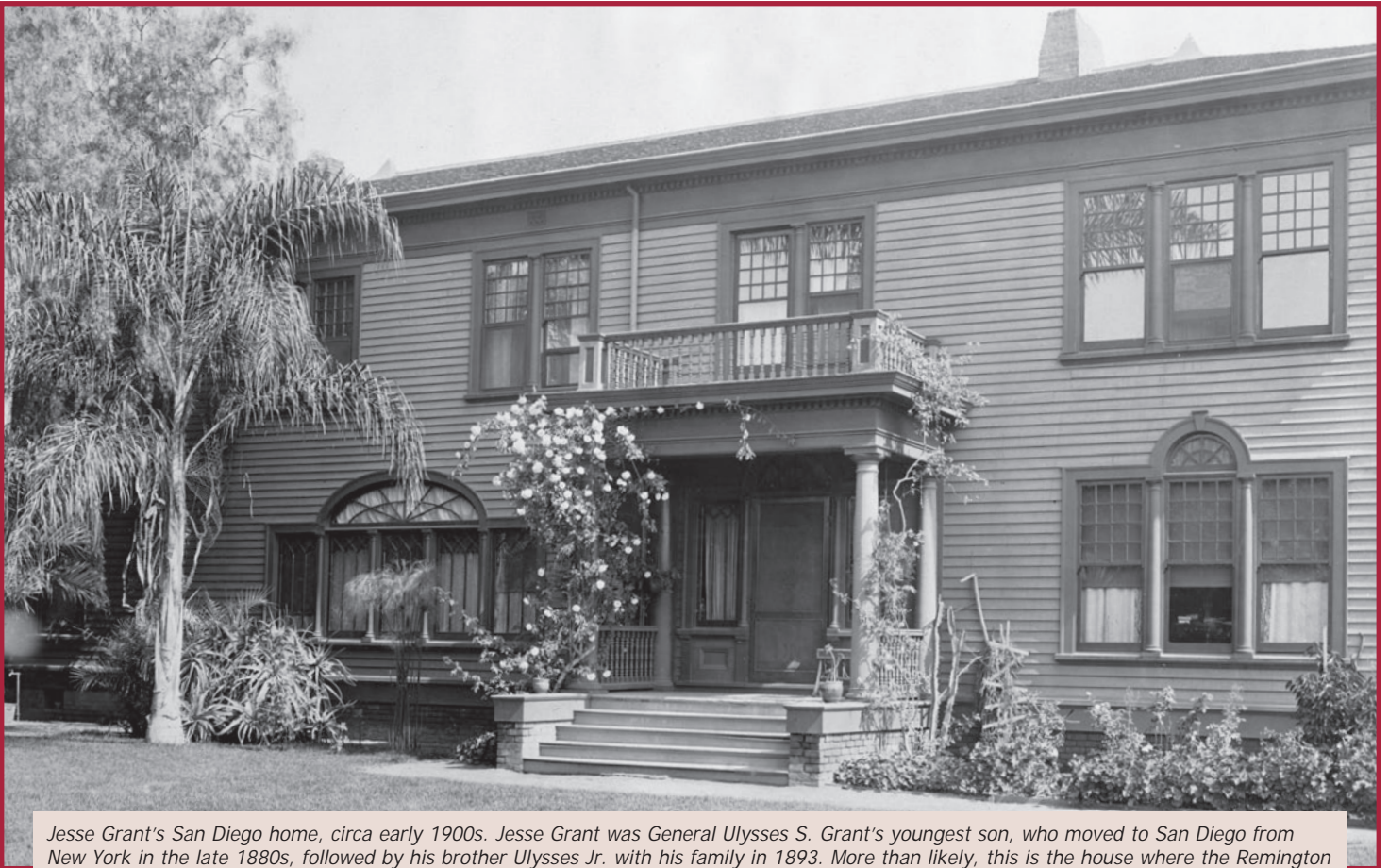
From New York City to San Diego

Unfortunately, it is not known exactly when or where this set of Remington revolvers was presented to General Grant, but considering the economic windfall both parties were enjoying, it was most likely a low-key event wherever Grant was stationed. Neither Grant nor his wife Julia lead lavish lifestyles, so the set was probably stored out of sight with little fanfare at their post-war house located at 3 East 66th Street in New York City.

Grant's children were Frederick (oldest), Ulysses Jr., Jesse, and Nellie. Jesse Grant (the General's youngest son) and his family moved to San Diego in the late 1880s, and his brother Ulysses Jr. followed with his family in 1893. Along with the family's other possessions, the Remington set apparently headed West with one of them. Thriving financially, Ulysses Jr. built the U.S. Grant Hotel in San Diego during 1910 as a tribute to his father, and Jesse helped him with the management. Both brothers were very active politically, and well-known within San Diego society for their philanthropy and real estate ventures. Additionally, Jesse was a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1908.

As the set's condition indicates, these lavish revolvers were not exposed to sunlight, which would have degraded the finish and adversely affected the lining within the case. The Remingtons must have remained in a secure place with the family in virtual obscurity until Jesse passed away in 1934. Jesse Grant's second wife, Lillian Wilkins, has been credited with helping to save many of the Ulysses S. Grant artifacts. Grant V, the grandson of Jesse, became custodian of the many items and artifacts, including the late president's letters and will, and most likely, the Remington set. The legacy of the magnificent Remington presentation revolvers belonging to various Grant descendants remained intact.





Jesse Grant's San Diego home, circa early 1900s. Jesse Grant was General Ulysses S. Grant's youngest son, who moved to San Diego from New York in the late 1880s, followed by his brother Ulysses Jr. with his family in 1893. More than likely, this is the house where the Remington set was kept in relative secrecy for decades. Both brothers were real estate tycoons and well-known philanthropists in the San Diego area. Jesse passed away in 1934. His second wife, Lillian Wilkins, was credited with helping to save many of the Ulysses S. Grant artifacts.



An early color postcard of the famous and luxurious U.S. Grant Hotel in San Diego, built by Ulysses Jr. and finally opened on October 15, 1910 after five years of construction at a staggering cost of \$1.9 million. Still retaining its rank as one of the West Coast's premier hotels, no appointments or expenses were spared on its opulent rooms, 9th floor ballroom, and fixtures. Ulysses Sr. and Ulysses Jr. had lost all their money after Grant's two-term presidency in a complicated embezzlement scheme by a former business partner. Jesse Grant, Ulysses Jr.'s younger brother also helped out in managing this property.



These macro images showing the serial numbers indicate they were not engraved, but put on using roll dies. At the time, Remington had established a separate se-rial range for special orders for civilian use. Less than 100 of these special order guns are thought to have been manufactured, and these two 1863 New Model Armys were the first two picked for this important and significant presentation.

The Set Is Finally Sold!

When the Jesse Grant home needed repair work, a handyman for the family received this set of Remingtons as payment for his services. The current owner's father, who was a gun fancier and friend of the handyman, found out about the presentation set during the 1950s. While the handyman stubbornly refused to sell the guns for ten years, a sale was finally transacted in the amount of \$1,500, as documented in a copy of the sales receipt. Incredibly, just like the Grant family, the purchaser never showed anyone the set, and it remained unknown to historians and collectors. The Remingtons were passed down to his son in 2013.

Decades earlier, his father had previously purchased items from noted antique arms specialist Greg Martin through the *Shotgun News* and kept all his receipts. Going through his father's paperwork, the current owner came across Mr. Martin's phone number and decided to call him to see if he was still in

business. Picking up the phone, the veteran dealer heard "I have in my possession a cased pair of Remington revolvers that were presented to a general and was wondering if you might be interested in them." Taken by surprise, Greg Martin didn't ask who the general was at first, but let the current owner discuss the set more in detail. After the conversation finished, the two arranged to meet and view the set together and discuss a possible sales arrangement. Upon opening the promising looking deluxe rosewood presentation case, the experienced dealer instantly realized who the general was, as he described a carved bust of Grant was "staring him in the face." After more than six months of further negotiations, the owner agreed to place the Grant revolvers on consignment because his son was going to college, and he felt the time had come to part with his heirloom.

One more very important obstacle quickly became a major consideration for the set to make its first debut in over 125 years. All parties had to assure the California Fish & Wildlife

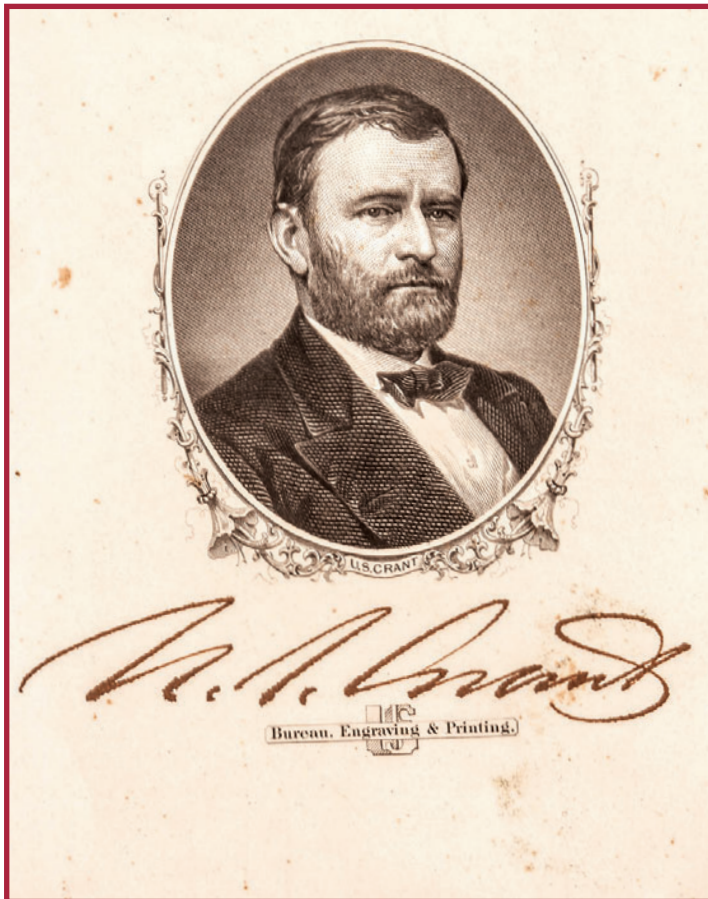


One of the busiest ports in the United States during the 1860s was New Orleans, as it was the gathering point for all cotton shipments needing to go north up the Mississippi or across the Atlantic to England by steamship and schooner. Millions of pounds of this Southern "white gold" were transported in this manner, making Louisiana the "King of Cotton" state. During the Civil War, both England and the Union states ran out of cotton in late 1862, with prices going from 10 cents to \$1.89 per pound - if it could be successfully delivered to the East Coast for processing.

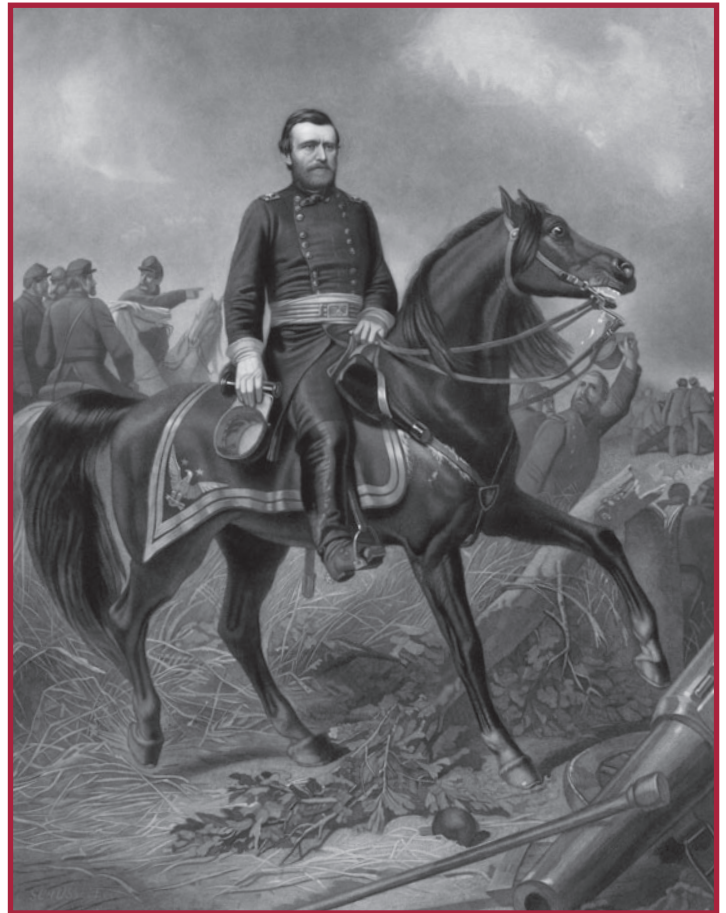
Department that the ivory grips (also numbered to the revolvers) were antiques and at least 100 years old. To overcome this potential legal hurdle, an experienced and qualified ivory expert was hired to examine the grips, and obtain a certificate from the state, certifying the type of ivory, its origin, and age. After all necessary licenses were in place, General Grant's Remingtons were displayed at the Las Vegas Antique Arms Show in January of 2018. Without a doubt, these cased Remingtons constitute the most elaborate and historically significant set of currently known revolvers manufactured during the Civil War. ■

S.P. Fjestad is the author and publisher of the Blue Book of Gun Values, with over 1.8 million copies in print worldwide.

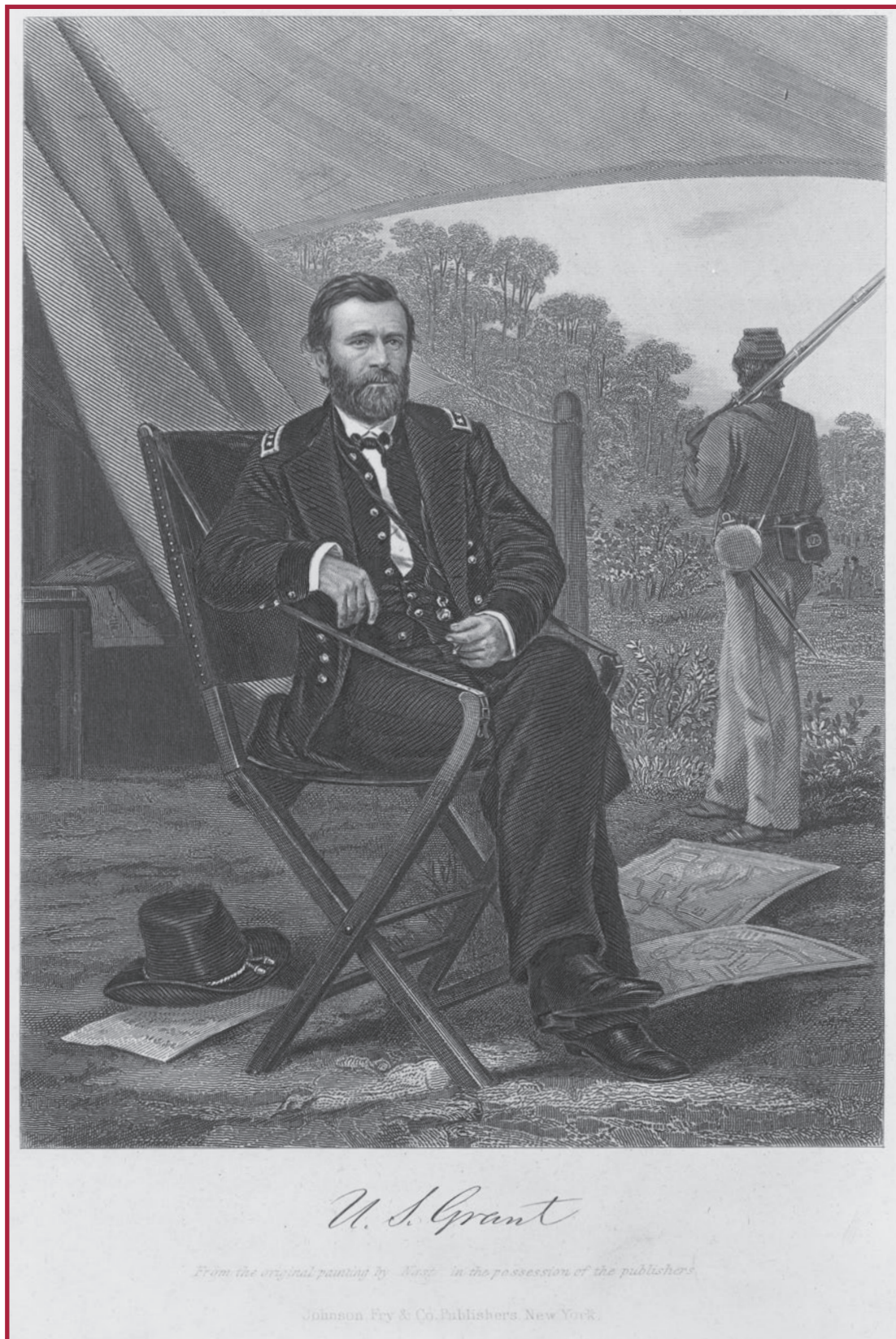
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Engraved image of President Grant from the U.S. Bureau, Engraving & Printing. Grant served two terms as president from 1869-1877. Inspired by Around the World in 80 Days written five years earlier by Jules Verne, Grant and his wife Julia embarked on an extensive two-year world tour which lasted several years, with reports that "their feet seldom left the red carpet." He was the first U.S. President to visit Jerusalem in February 1878.



General Grant, who distinguished himself in horsemanship while attending West Point, is depicted with his most famous Civil War horse, Cincinnati, a large thoroughbred and a gift from a St. Louis admirer. Cincinnati was immortalized as Grant's steed during the Confederate surrender at the Appomattox courthouse on April 9, 1865. His life-size bronze with famous owner also appears at the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Memorial in Washington, D.C. Grant, a long-time cigar smoker, died in July of 1885 from throat cancer – just days after completing his two-volume set of memoirs, published by his friend, Mark Twain. His funeral in New York City remains the largest in American history.



Thomas Nast, noted political cartoonist and good friend of General Grant, was commissioned to do this B&W drawing of Grant in a field tent during the Civil War. A national hero in the time of the most intense crisis in American history was honored in many ways, including presentations of firearms and swords. An en-graved, gold inlaid and monogrammed S&W Model 1 ½ New Issue Revolver pre-sented to President Grant in 1870 is well documented and appeared on the cover of the January 1968 issue of the American Rifleman. A cased presentation Man-hattan Fire Arms Mfg. Co. Navy Model Revolver was also presented to Grant dur-ing the Civil War. Remaining undiscovered is a cased deluxe embellished pair of Colt Model 1860 Army revolvers also custom made for the Union's General. For-tunately, this set of revolvers had been shipped to Tiffany & Co. in New York City only days before the Colt factory in Hartford burned down on Feb. 4, 1864.