

CLASSIC MILITARY RIFLES: The R



Remington shipped
of countries includ
Denmark, Egypt,
Puerto Rico,

By John Marshall

The single-shot Remington Rolling Block Rifle was simplicity itself. Its hammer, when released, rotated under the breechblock above it, preventing its movement. When the hammer was cocked, the breechblock could rotate down freely to access the breech.

So strong, simple and reliable was this design that it was adopted in the 19th Century as a military weapon by many nations, including, on a limited basis, the United States. Frontiersmen used it for protection in both rifle and pistol form. Hunters found its qualities attractive and rolling blocks were employed in great numbers as the magnificent herds of bison on the Great Plains were almost totally eliminated.

Target versions were also made and used widely. This remarkable action was utilized for almost all black powder cartridges used in the late 1800s, and some smokeless cartridges as well. Replicas of the original guns are still made today, and it's proven to be an enduring and classic design with an interesting history.

That history began in 1862, when Philo Remington, eldest of three sons of Eliphalet Remington II (only son of Remington's founder Eliphalet) began a search for an effective single-shot breech mechanism. In his search he uncovered a promising patent for a lock invented by Leonard M. Geiger. He then looked to employ both the patent rights and the inventor. Unfortunately, Geiger had already sold part interests in his patent to two other gentlemen. After some complicated horse trading, a three-way royalty agreement was worked out,

and Geiger was persuaded to come to work for Remington at its plant in Ilion, New York.

The Geiger carbine, a joint effort of Geiger and Remington Plant Supervisor Joseph Rider, was used in limited numbers by the North in the Civil War. While the action worked well enough, the split-breech design had numerous weaknesses.

Accordingly, an improved Geiger-Rider design translated into some prototypes that were hurriedly presented to U.S. Army officers at Springfield Armory in early 1865. They were tested against 65 other designs, but found wanting. Rider then went back to work at the factory to correct the defects. In the winter of 1865-1866, Rider's efforts had resulted in the very first Remington Rolling Block Rifle. Subsequently, the design received the silver medal, the highest award for military and sporting arms, from the Paris Exposition of 1867. The Remington Rolling Block had been unanimously selected as the best rifle in the world!

The rotating hammer and its interlocking rotating breechblock were made of solid pieces of premium steel, .69 of an inch thick. This made it nearly impossible to blow the breech. No stronger locking arrangement could be imagined. The arm was almost immediately recognized as the best single-shot arm available, and a natural for military contracts.

Operating the action was so quick that an expert could load and fire 17 shots per minute. At the proving house in Liege, Belgium, a .50-caliber rolling block was loaded with 750 grains of powder (normal charge 75 grains), forty balls, and two wads. When it was fired "nothing extraordinary