

COLT ARMY CONVERSIONS

Part 1

By Long Johns Wolf

Three options for Modern Colt Army Conversions: This is going to be a personal and very subjective talk with a few drops of semi-scientific window-dressing. So, shake well before swallowing.

"You can never have enough 1860 Armies" voiced a wise US pard, and he is right. Like him, I enjoy the graceful lines of this great cap & baller and add ... "particularly as a period correct quality conversion shooting smokeless inside lubed .44 Colt cartridges."

If you want a modern made Colt Army conversion these days, it seems you only have three options:

#1: Have one custom made by one of the conversion artists around

in the USA or Europe. They will convert the C&B replica revolver of your preferred manufacturer. What you are getting after a few months, and sometimes years, is usually a period correct, esthetically pleasing display pistol, or a shooter, or both. Of course, this will all depend on your wish list, the responsiveness of the gunsmith to your requests, and the *dinero* you are prepared to spend. For such a piece of art like the Colt Richards of actor Tom Selleck as Cavalryman and would-be-homesteader in "Last Stand as Saber River," be prepared to invest a lot.

This relatively young market niche for newly made conversions might have been initially triggered by demanding US Cowboy Action



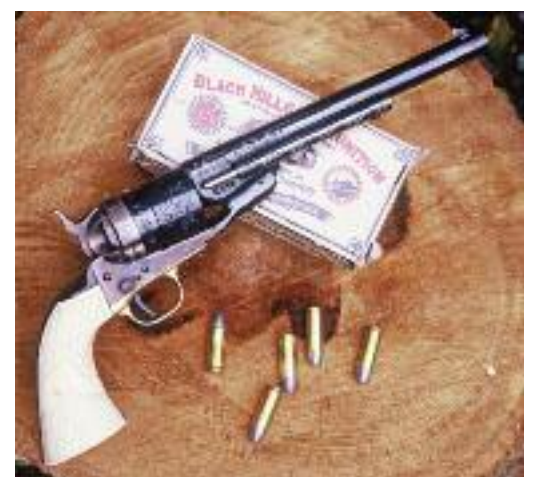
Three Belgian Centaure "1960 NEW MODEL ARMA" C&B pistols converted by Austrian master gunsmith Karl Nedbal. Shown from the top down—Richards #4079, Richards-Mason #6176, Thuer #7266

Shooting™ competitors searching for revolvers matching their 1870s characters better than the venerable Colt SAAs or a pair of simple C&B revolvers. The number of smiths capable of such work has been steadily growing in the USA since the 1980s. Good news for the shooters and collectors on the Eastern bank of the big pond, there are also a few now in Europe, too.

#2: Do-it-yourself using a commercially available drop-in cylinder with or without loading gate on your replica. If you are in the USA and are technically talented, you will eventually have a functional shooter resembling a Colt conversion of the 1870s ... from a distance like below non-gated Army conversion without ejector housing.

The pardes & pardettes in the European arena are suffering from the many and different gun regulations in their countries. To comply with their national laws, they will probably have to muster the services of a knowledgeable gunsmith for such an installation. Once the smith has fitted the cartridge cylinder to the C&B pistol, the clients must cross their fingers the local proof houses will finally apply their stamp of approval to the conversion.

#3: When in a hurry, you can buy a conversion revolver made by a rep-



Second generation Colt Army masterly converted by US conversion artist Kenny Howell

(picture courtesy Mike Beloiveau Etter / PA USA)

utable cowboy gun manufacturer. You're getting a very functional shooter "on steroids"* with factory warranty. (*respectfully adopted quote from Michael Venturino!)

Regarding option #3 and to the best of my knowledge, currently only Uberti in Gardone/Italy, subsidiary of the Beretta folks, makes conversions of Colt Army, Navy, and Remington clones, or the Open Top in various calibers, grip, and barrel configurations. The other major maker in that market was Armi San Marco. They dropped out of the race around the turn of the century after quality issues.

I own a few of these Uberti conversions in the modern inside lubed
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.44 Colt caliber and love them. Why? Because they are rugged and reliable shooting irons. I used a pair of their long barreled Open Tops with Army grips as main match pistols during the 2008 season. They worked well for me.

My 2002 vintage Uberti Richards-Mason Army and Richards Transitional or RII of 2003 production are getting their regular diet of my light Cowboy Action Shooting™ nitro reloads behind 200 grainers.

The modern 1860 type pistols of quality makers will hit what you are aiming at . . . once you have bottomed out the arbor and adjusted the sights to correct height.

Although these Uberti conversions look like C&B revolvers converted to fire cartridges, they are actually constructed as cartridge fir-



**Comparative barrel view—
Centaure R1 (left) and
Uberti RII (right)**



Italian 1860 repro with non-gated five-shot drop-in cylinder in .45 Colt
(picture courtesy Mike Beloiveau Etter/PA USA)

ing pistols for regular loads (no P+, please!); hence, their beefed-up frames, cylinders, and barrels. These strengthened parts will not interchange with the respective C&B revolver models and vice versa. The steel used in the making of these conversions is harder than the alloy of their C&B brethren for a reason.



**Front view of
conversion cylinders—
Uberti (left) / Centaure (right)**



Close-up of the drop-in cylinder
(picture courtesy Mike Beloiveau Etter/PA USA)

Uberti is probably well advised to stick to that concept of beefing-up critical parts, using harder steel like for their SAAs and state of the art production technology. That provides for conversions and Open Tops that are considerably stouter than their originals from the 19th century, which in turn keeps the customers happy and the lawyers off their backs. In addition, it provides a simple platform to make these pistols in other, possibly more powerful, but not historically correct, calibers like .45 Colt or .44 Special. Because their cylinders are scaled up, they will not only accommodate six rounds of .44 Colt, there is now enough diameter for six rounds of wider rimmed .44 Russian and .44 Special, the fatter .45 S&W, or the larger .45 Colt. ⚡



**Top view of
same conversion cylinders.
Note gas ring of Uberti (left)
compared to period correct
Centaure without one (right)**



**My Uberti Richards Transitional #X04444 in .44 Colt caliber ...
before the politically correct long ejector rod was installed in 2007**

The three Belgian *Centaure* "1960 NEW MODEL ARMY" percussion revolvers featured in this article were converted into:

- **Richards Army Conversion**
- **Richards-Mason Army Conversion** and
- **Thuer Army conversion**

by Austrian master gunsmith

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If you like to know more about these Belgian cousins of the Hartford Colt Army 1860 visit www.1960nma.org.

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