

On the Centennial of the Sinking of the Battleship *Maine*, We Take a Look at the Arms Used in America's First 'International' War.

By Philip Schreier

It was the morning of July 1, 1898, and the United States of America debuted upon the world stage in one of the opening acts to the 20th century. The scene was set near Santiago, Cuba, along San Juan ridge and the adjoining Kettle Hill. In the mid-afternoon, a collection of cowboys, store clerks and Harvard and Yale men, led by a political adventurer, had carried the Spanish trenches and made their way into the history books as heroes. By nightfall, the sun had set on the Spanish Empire; morning would bring the dawn of the American Century.

The Battle of San Juan Hill is the most famous event of the Spanish-American War, and now, 100 years after that event, renewed interest in the arms and equipment of the "Rough Riders," their compatriots and enemies has created a boom market for the trappings of that "splendid little war." Here are some of the tools of the trade that men like Roosevelt, Pershing, Wheeler and O'Neil used to dismantle the once formidable Spanish Empire:

The GUNS

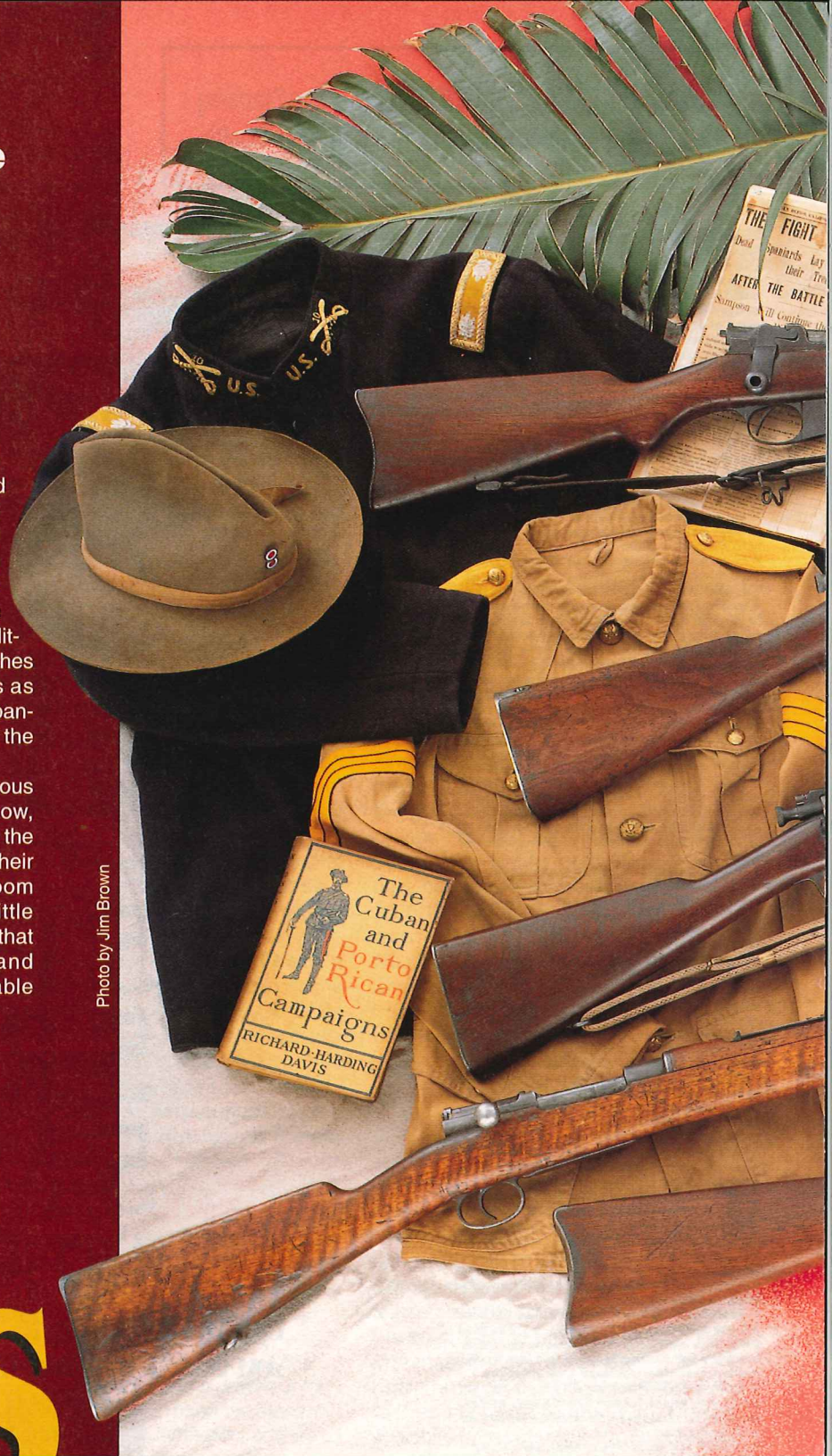
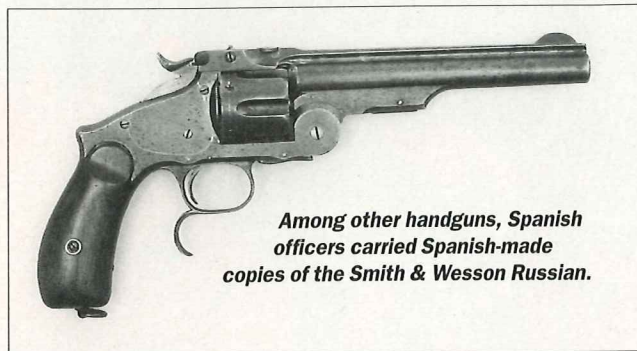


Photo by Jim Brown



The arms used by the Americans and Spanish in Cuba were an amalgamation of modern and older designs. The major arms were (t-b, l-r) Model 1895 Lee Navy, M-1896 Krag Jorgensen Carbine, Model 1896 Krag-Jorgensen Rifle, Model 1893 Mauser, Model 1888 Trapdoor Springfield, Spanish copy of S&W Russian, "Artillery Model" Colt Single Action Army and Colt New Model Army & Navy DA. Guns and accessories courtesy of The National Firearms Museum, John Plimpton, Collector's Armoury and Garry James.

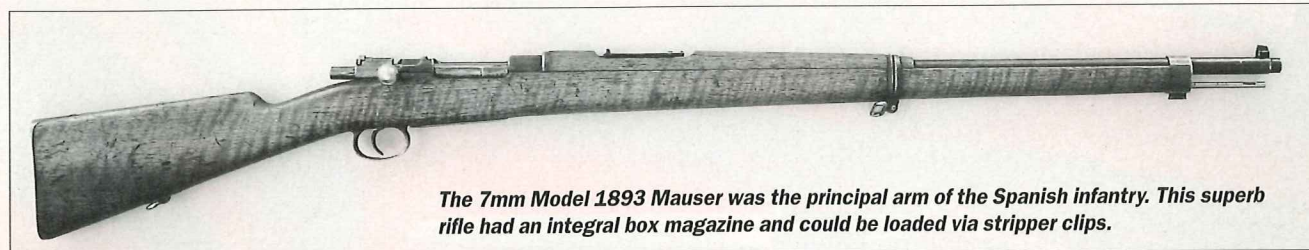
The Guns of the Spanish-American War



Among other handguns, Spanish officers carried Spanish-made copies of the Smith & Wesson Russian.



These Spanish guerrillas are armed with 11mm Rolling Block rifle, with the exception of the officer who is holding a Model 1891 Mauser.



The 7mm Model 1893 Mauser was the principal arm of the Spanish infantry. This superb rifle had an integral box magazine and could be loaded via stripper clips.

UNITED STATES

The standard rifle and carbine of the United States at the outbreak of the war with Spain was the "U.S. Magazine Rifle (or Carbine), .30 caliber, Model 1896" or, as we commonly refer to it, "the Krag," short for Krag-Jorgensen. Designed by two Norwegians, Hermann Johannes Krag and Erik Jorgensen, the Krag ushered in a new age in firearms history. The list of firsts associated with the Krag is impressive—it was the first U.S. rifle to fire a small-caliber smokeless cartridge, the first repeating magazine rifle to be widely issued to our infantry and the first bolt-action rifle adopted by the U.S. Army.

The advent of smokeless powder allowed for the development of small-caliber cartridges capable of firing projectiles further and with more accuracy than their large-caliber, black-powder cousins. The development of the bolt-action magazine rifle, invented by Paul and Wilhelm Mauser some 20 years earlier, combined with

Krag from becoming official until mid-1893. (America would not have a standard service rifle designed by an American until the adoption of the M-16 in the 1960s. The 1903 Springfield was a licensed copy of the Mauser 98; the M-1 Garand was designed by a Canadian.)

The first rifles made by the Springfield Armory of this design were designated "Models of 1892" and first issued to troops in 1894. By 1896, the list of manufacturing changes to the 1892 had grown to more than 30, so a new model rifle and carbine that incorporated the numerous changes was ordered and named the Model of 1896. Prior to the war with Spain, most of the 25,000 1892 rifles that had been made were upgraded to supplement the 62,000 model 1896s that had been manufactured.

Another list of changes to the 1896 prompted a revised rifle and carbine designated U.S. Magazine Rifle, .30 caliber, Model 1898. However, the first of

sure that his men received the new smokeless-powder rifles. Using his political connections, having recently resigned as assistant secretary of the Navy, he was able to equip his men with Model 1896 carbines. The gun shortage became so acute that at one point newcomers to the Rough Riders could not secure government carbines, so Roosevelt lent one soldier his personal Winchester 1895 carbine. Others managed to acquire additional Winchesters of the same model because they fired the same .30 Army cartridge that the Krags fired. (Also called the .30 Government and the .30-40 Krag.)

American Marines carried one of the most curious rifles ever issued to U.S. troops, the M-1895 Lee. This gun, the brainchild of James Paris Lee, featured what was popularly called a straight-pull action, but was, in fact, more correctly a camming one. When the bolt handle was pulled to the rear, it rocked backwards, forcing a stud from an aperture on the

The Guns of the Spanish-American War

the Boxer rebellion. The Lee Navy weighed 8.32 pounds, measured 47.75 inches (with a 28-inch barrel) and had sights marked to 2,000 yards.

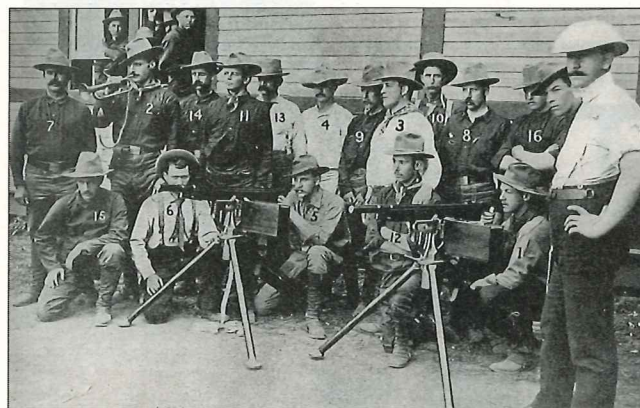
The government may have had a shortage of Krags when the war broke out, but the arsenals were well stocked

noting the flip-up, breechloading action of the venerable .45-70. Close to half a million Trapdoor rifles and carbines had been manufactured by 1898, and a great many found their way into the hands of units heading to Cuba and the Philippines. A check of the Springfield

Research Service's serial-number index to Trapdoors indicates that tens of thousands of these guns were re-issued in 1898 to units from every corner of the country. Roosevelt writes in his volume on the war, *The Rough Riders*, how units using the old black-powder cartridges that the '73 Trapdoor handled were easy marks

for the Spanish snipers, who found that the lingering clouds of black powder made fine targets. Photographs of the time period reveal that soldiers were equipped with all models of the 1873 for service overseas. From the original Model 1873 to the Model 1884 with the "Buffington" rear sight and, finally, the Model 1888 with its distinctive rod-bayonet, the Trapdoor began its career on the American plains and ended its useful service life in Cuba and the Philippines. Two important notes to those who wish to collect Trapdoors: The first is that there was no "Model 1878" manufactured; the Trapdoor breech marks that seemingly read 1878 are actually from a deeply struck 1873 die. Secondly, the Model 1888 was never marked as such. All guns marked Model 1884 with rod bayonets and serial numbers above 500,000 are actually Model 1888 rifles!

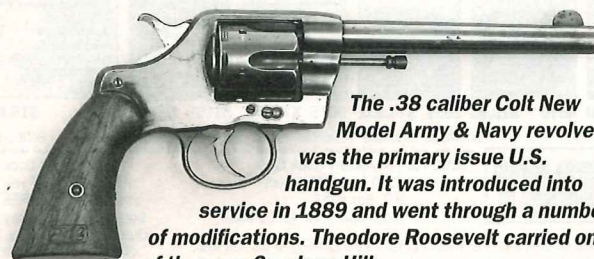
The standard sidearm of the U.S. military was the Colt Army & Navy .38. First introduced as the 1889 Navy DA, this revolver was purchased by the U.S. Army as the Model 1892 and upgraded as the Models 1894, 1895 and 1896. A number of these revolvers were recovered from the USS *Maine* as she lay in Havana Harbor. Theodore Roosevelt's brother-in-law,



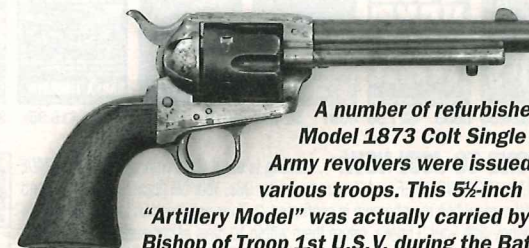
Sgt. William Tiffany (sighting the right gun) brought a pair of Colt Model 1895 "Potato Digger" machine guns as gifts to the Rough Riders. Caliber was apparently 7mm Mauser.



The U.S. Krag-Jorgensen was the first small-bore repeater in U.S. service. It had a side-mounted box magazine that held five rounds. Shown is an M1896 with tropical sling.



The .38 caliber Colt New Model Army & Navy revolver was the primary issue U.S. handgun. It was introduced into service in 1889 and went through a number of modifications. Theodore Roosevelt carried one of these up San Juan Hill.



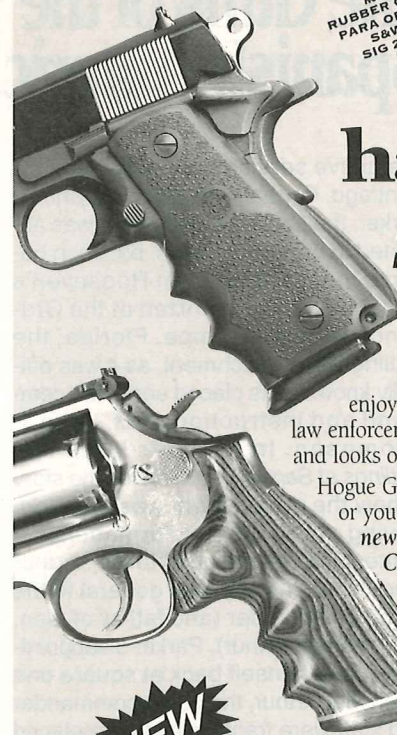
A number of refurbished Model 1873 Colt Single Action Army revolvers were issued to various troops. This 5½-inch "Artillery Model" was actually carried by Louis Bishop of Troop 1st U.S.V. during the Battle of San Juan Hill.



These Yanqui regular infantrymen sport their .30-40 Krag rifles. Uniforms are of wool, which were not particularly well suited to the Cuban climate.

Naval Capt. William S. Cowles, acquired one of the revolvers, had it refurbished and presented it to Roosevelt before the Rough Riders left Tampa, Florida, for Cuba. Roosevelt used the double-action .38 during the Cuban campaign and the Battle of Kettle and San Juan Hills, dispatching more than one Spaniard with it. (The revolver, serial number 16334, was stolen in April of 1991 from the Roosevelt home in Oyster Bay, New York, the Sagamore Hill National Historic Site. Rumors that the gun was recovered in a Pennsylvania gun buy-back program are false, and the gun remains missing as of this writing.) Capt. Allyn Capron, commander of Company L, 1st U.S.V. (The Rough Riders), carried a revolver of the same make and model as Roosevelt's. His gun is in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Serial numbers on guns manufactured prior to the battles in Cuba run to approximately 90,000.

Also issued was the Colt Model 1873 Single Action Army revolver as altered by the Springfield Armory to what collectors now call the "Artillery Model" single action. These U.S.-marked guns in .45 Colt were originally fitted with 7½-inch barrels. They were returned for re-



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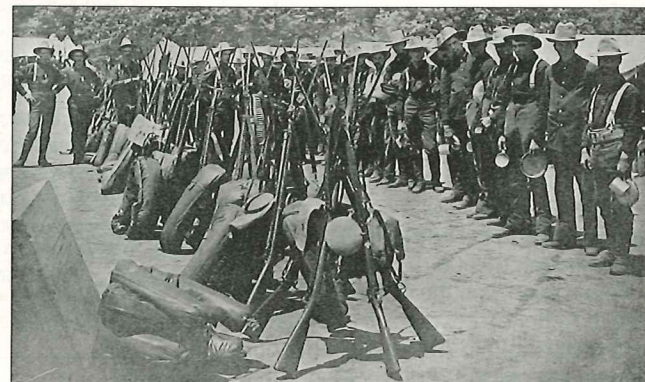
barrage of overhead machine-gun fire would greatly aid the advancing troops by decimating the enemy em-

placements and increasing the morale of the charging attackers. Parker found a kindred spirit in Thompson, who soon had orders cut for Parker to command a battery of four newly arrived Colt M-1895 Gatlings that fired the .30-40 Government cartridge. So was born the Gatling Gun Detachment! (Thompson rose in rank to become a brigadier general. His interest in machine guns never waned, and in 1921 he was awarded the first of numerous patents for the submachine gun that now bears his name.) The Gatlings provided such valuable service to the advancing troops charging up Kettle and San Juan hills on the first of July that Roosevelt stated that if ever in battle again, he would not want to be without them.

Roosevelt had even higher praise for the two Colt/Browning Model 1895 machine guns that Sgt. William Tiffany brought as gifts to the unit. Tiffany, the well-heeled son of the famous New York jeweler, presented the Rough Riders with a brace of "potato-diggers" and was placed in charge of the Rough Riders machine-gun detachment. This gas-operated, belt-fed, air-cooled gun was capable of firing nearly 500 rounds per minute. Tiffany's guns were chambered

see active service during the fight for Santiago. Organized under Lt. John H. Parker, the Gatling detachment was assigned to 5th Army Corps, but soon became inseparable from Roosevelt's Rough Riders. Organized at the Ordnance Depot in Tampa, Florida, the Gatling Gun Detachment, as it was officially known, was placed under the command and instruction of Lt. John T. Thompson. In Parker's book *The Gatlings at Santiago*, he relates the story of how the detachment was founded. Having advocated the formation of a "battery" of Gatling guns to Col. Arthur MacArthur, the adjutant general to the corps commander (and father of Gen. Douglas MacArthur), Parker disappointedly found himself back at square one when MacArthur, the corps commander and staff were transferred and replaced before any action had been taken. But tonholing the ranking ordnance officer, Lt. Thompson, over a dish of ice cream in the lobby of the Tampa Hotel, the unofficial Army headquarters, Parker and Thompson debated the practical use of the Gatlings in battle.

It was well understood in military circles that the failure of the Mitrailleuse in the Franco-Prussian War was due to the fact that the French had not deployed them so as to make the greatest use of their effective firepower. Thompson and Parker discussed this at length, both finding out that the other had given a great deal of consideration to the subject and had arrived at the same conclusion—machine guns should be used in close



This photo of the 8th Ohio Volunteers verifies the fact that they were armed with single-shot Springfield Trapdoor rifles. Roosevelt felt that the smoke caused by the .45-70 black-powder cartridges

in 7x57mm, and at the conclusion of the attack on San Juan Hill, he found that his supply was down to an alarming level of only 4,000 rounds. Tiffany sought assistance from "Gatling" Parker, and the two discovered that the 10,000 rounds of captured enemy ammunition on hand were identical to those used by the potato-diggers—and were more than enough to hold off a few more attacks.

GUNS OF THE SPANISH MILITARY

The standard service longarm of the Spanish military during the war was the Mauser Model 1893 Rifle. Chambered in 7x57mm, this new design by Mauser incorporated a five-round staggered box magazine that was flush with the stock of the firearm, providing smoother lines and less maintenance than the earlier extended magazine rifles offered. This was one of the first rifles to employ the use of stripper clips in the loading process. More than 200,000 Model 1893 rifles were purchased by Spain from Ludwig Lowe & Co. of Berlin, contractors for Mauser Werke. The rifle's effectiveness took its toll on those who participated in the charge up San Juan and Kettle hills, and the Spanish defenders, numbering about 700, inflicted 1,400 casualties on their American attackers. A shortened carbine version of the '93 was also used.

Prior to the adoption of the 1893 Mauser, the Spanish used the Remington Rolling Block rifle of 1869 and the Mauser Model 1871 in 11mm (.43 Spanish). Thousands of these were captured, sold by the U.S. government at auction and then resold by Francis Bannerman of New York. Bannerman advertised "Captured Spanish War Trophies" for some 10 years after the Spanish surrendered. Bannerman's purchase of captured Spanish arms required him to lease additional warehouse space in New York City and forced him to eventually build a castle on an island that he purchased in the Hudson River just to house what he had acquired from the spoils of war.

Spanish military sidearms were copies of British and American revolvers, mostly



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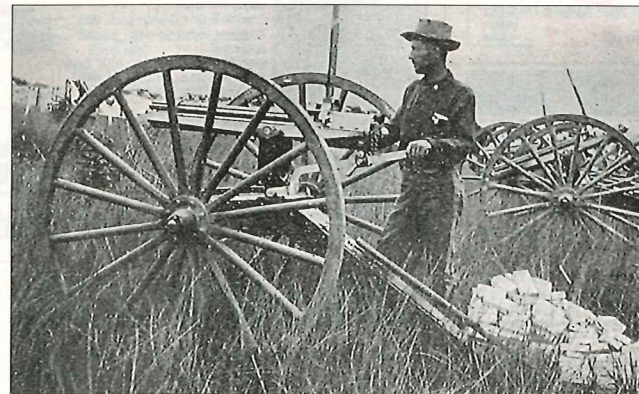
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The Guns of the Spanish-American War



The United States bought 18 Model 1895 Gatling Guns for service in Cuba, though only four of them actually saw action.

(continued from page 41)

1,500 German 1871 11mm Mauser rifles for sale. These guns, the catalog claims, were captured along with thousands of M-1893 Mausers at the conclusion of the war with Spain.

In John Milius's recent television production, *The Rough Riders*, a few scenes focus on a Spanish gun crew and a German adviser manning a German water-cooled Maxim gun—a curious inclusion that even most historians and military buffs whom I talked to chalked off to Hollywood's version of literary license. "The Spanish didn't have belt-feds on San Juan Hill" was a

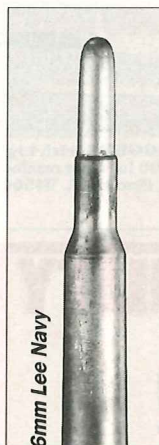
common comment that was shared by more than a few who were "in the know." Surely, if there had been any, there would have been some remark made and recorded in the history of the battle ... or was there?

Roosevelt wrote of one brief moment in his "crowded hour" when, during his advance on San Juan

sound. One or two of the men cried out, 'The Spanish machine guns!' ... " Roosevelt quickly determined that the noise was from Lt. Parker's Gatlings. Lt. Parker in his book *The Gatlings at Santiago* illustrates a map of the siege of Santiago with a "Spanish Machine Gun" emplacement. Dolf L. Goldsmith's *The Devil's Paintbrush* indicates that the Spanish government did indeed purchase six Maxim Model 1895 extra-

light, air-cooled machine guns and had them shipped to Cuba prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

Additional research might reveal that Milius wasn't far from being right in his depiction, though it is doubtful that they were used during the battle on July 1. Roosevelt's men seemed to know of their presence, and Parker knew exactly where they were during the three-week siege of Santiago, but no one wrote of their actual use in battle.



6mm Lee Navy