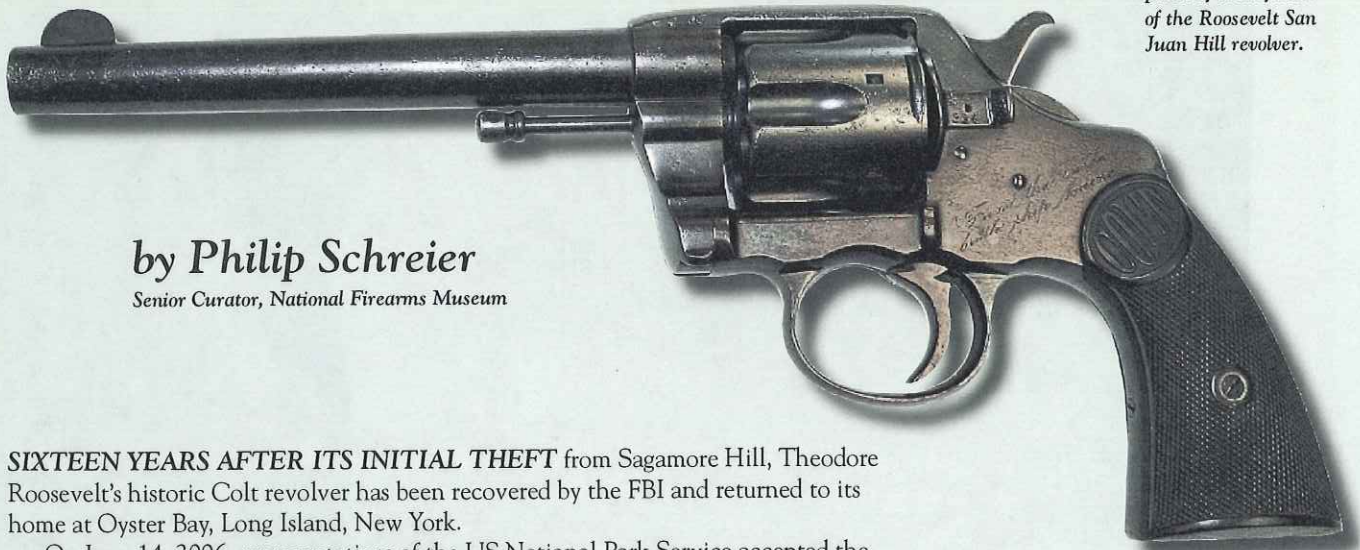


# Roosevelt Revolver Recovered!

First ever published photo of the left side of the Roosevelt San Juan Hill revolver.



by Philip Schreier

Senior Curator, National Firearms Museum

**SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER ITS INITIAL THEFT** from Sagamore Hill, Theodore Roosevelt's historic Colt revolver has been recovered by the FBI and returned to its home at Oyster Bay, Long Island, New York.

On June 14, 2006, representatives of the US National Park Service accepted the revolver from FBI agents who recovered the revolver in Florida last fall. As of this writing, no arrests have been made in connection with the revolver's theft.

Made in Hartford, Connecticut in March of 1895, Colt double-action revolver #16,334 has experienced a most interesting life. It was received by the U.S. Government and entered the arms inventory of the USS *Maine* when she was commissioned in September of 1895. At approximately 9:38 p.m., on February 15, 1898, while resting at anchor in Havana, Cuba, the USS *Maine* was suddenly blown up and destroyed with a loss of 266 officers, sailors and Marines.

News of the ship's loss reached Fleet Headquarters in Key West, Florida whereupon the officer in charge of the U.S. Naval Station, Commander William S. Cowles, was dispatched on the USS *Fern* to render aid and assistance to the stricken ship and crew. As the first American naval vessel to arrive in Havana, Cowles sent divers aboard the *Maine* to recover the dead and to make initial inspections of the ship in order to determine the cause of the explosion. Navy divers recovered Colt double action revolver #16,334 while searching the quarters of the ship's Captain, Charles D. Sigsbee, in an effort to locate the keys to the ship's magazine bunkers.

Commander Cowles presented the revolver to his brother-in-law, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy and NRA Life Member, Theodore Roosevelt.

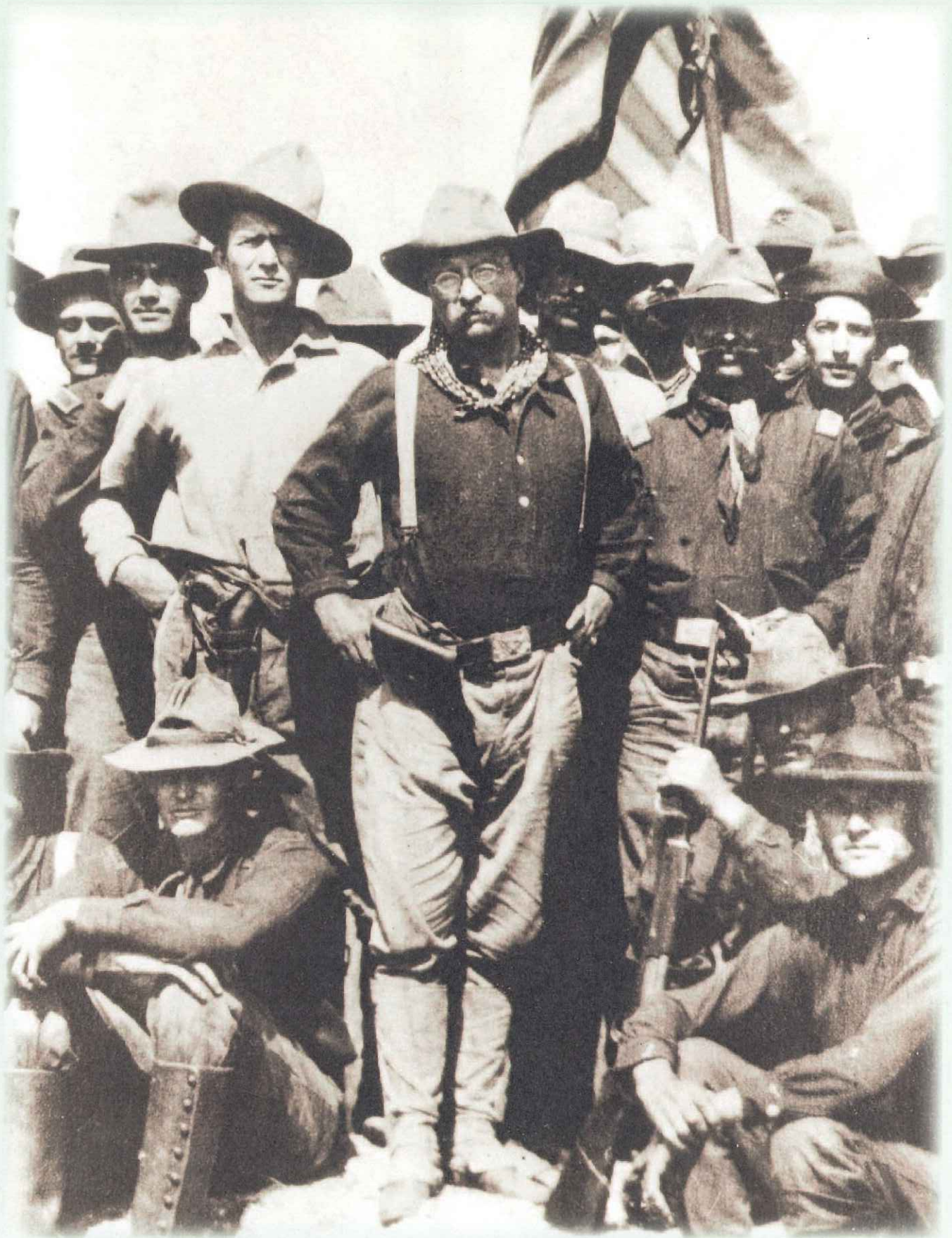
Shortly after the United States declared war on Spain in April of 1898, Roosevelt resigned his Navy position and organized a regiment of cavalry known as the 1st U.S. Volunteer Cavalry — more popularly known as "Roosevelt's Rough Riders." Though he was presented with at least one high-grade revolver (a Smith & Wesson) and had numerous others in his personal collection, Roosevelt chose the Model 1895 Navy from the *Maine* as his side arm during the military campaign in Cuba.

On July 1st, 1898, Roosevelt's Rough Riders charged up Kettle and then San Juan Hills in the campaign for Santiago, Cuba. Of the gun's performance he wrote: "Two Spaniards leaped from the trenches and fired at us, not ten yards away. I closed in and fired twice, missing the first and killing the second...He doubled up as neatly as a jack rabbit."

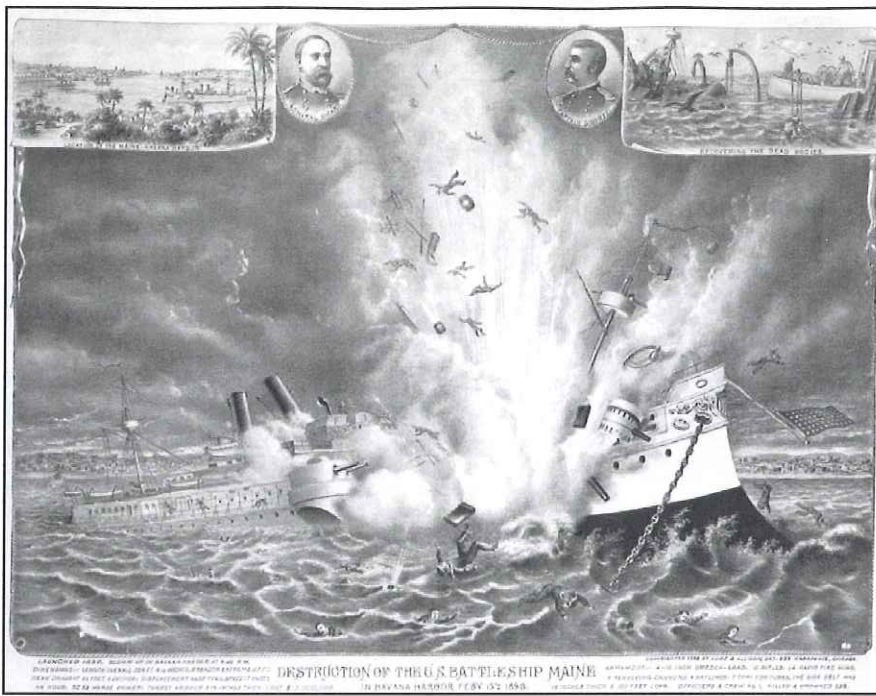
In what would become one of the most iconic images associated with the entrance of the United States on the world stage at the dawn of the 20th century,

*Sixteen Years After  
its Theft, a Firearms  
Treasure Has Been  
Returned to the  
National Park Service  
and is on Public  
Display Again!*

*At Last...  
The Mystery  
is Solved!*



*Roosevelt was photographed wearing the revolver on the top of San Juan Hill at the culmination of his "crowded hour."  
Roosevelt's actions that day earned him the Medal of Honor, our country's highest award for valor in combat.*



Roosevelt was photographed wearing the revolver on the top of San Juan Hill at the culmination of his "crowded hour." The charge and the subsequent capture of both of the hills, effectively ended the two-and-one-half-month war with Spain. Roosevelt's actions that day earned him the Medal of Honor, our country's highest award for valor in combat.

The revolver stayed in Roosevelt's beloved Sagamore Hill home for many decades following his death in 1919. The gun was subsequently moved to "Old Orchard," the home of his son, Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr., also a Medal of Honor recipient, which is located in a corner of the Sagamore Hill estate.

In 1963, the gun was stolen for the first time; the thief abandoned the revolver in the woods where it lay rusting for some months before it was recovered.

Then, in April 1990, the National Park Service reported the gun as stolen in a robbery that occurred between April 5-7. No one is quite sure of the exact date. A thief managed to lift a corner of the display case in which the revolver was resting, and by using the weight of the case against itself, popped the internal door lock, opened the door and removed the revolver.

At one point in the mid-1990s the gun was rumored to have been recovered and subsequently destroyed in a gun buy-back program run in Pennsylvania. Evidently, a recovered revolver bearing the same serial number was acquired and then destroyed in the program. A closer check of recorded information from the destroyed gun proved it to be a different model of the same caliber and serial number.

For 16 years the FBI, the National Park Service, interested collectors and historians have looked diligently for the missing artifact with no luck on results or even whispers about its whereabouts.

That all changed last summer when Andy Anderson of DeLand, Florida was shown a revolver by his girlfriend. He had expressed an interest in historic items to her and she soon produced the missing Roosevelt revolver, which she had retrieved from her husband's closet where he had kept it hidden for the last decade or so. Anderson, not knowing that the gun had been stolen or was even associated with Sagamore Hill, called the Roosevelt homestead in September of 2005 and spoke to Curator and Chief of Cultural Resources, Amy Verone of the National Park Service. "I

think I've seen Teddy's gun!" he told her. This set in action a chain of events that had the FBI on his door step within the next 24 hours.

The following day, FBI agents from the Art Crime Team based in Philadelphia, made contact with Anderson. His girlfriend again retrieved the gun from her husband's closet and gave it to Andy, who then turned it over to FBI agents without incident.

On June 14, 2006, at 11:00 a.m., FBI agent Robert Wittman arrived at Sagamore Hill in a government sedan with former Federal Prosecutor and member of the Art Crime Team, Robert Goldman, with the recovered revolver under his arm in a suede case.

Placing the revolver on a mat in the office of NPS Curator Amy Verone, Wittman, at the invitation of the park service, asked the National Firearms Museum's Senior Curator Philip Schreier to inspect the revolver and make a judgement as to its authenticity. Looking over the serial numbers, proof marks and comparing the gun to some of the rare photographs taken of the gun prior to its theft, Schreier consulted with Springfield Armory Park Ranger and Historian, John McCabe, and pronounced that "There is no question in my mind, this is the President's original revolver. A true piece of American history and a national treasure."

At 1 p.m. that same afternoon, Park Superintendent Greg Marshall welcomed the revolver home with a ceremony on the front porch of Roosevelt's cherished home, Sagamore Hill. Above and behind the Superintendent, just over the door frame, is a Latin inscription carved into

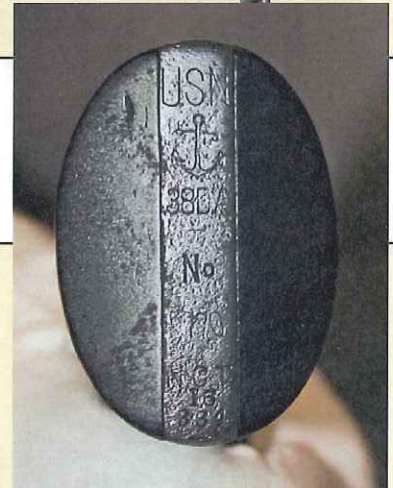


L to R - NPS Curator Amy Verone, Springfield Armory Historian John McCabe, Philip Schreier and former Federal Prosecutor Attorney Robert Goldman inspect the Colt Model 1895 at Sagamore Hill. (photo by Karin Johnston)

Right panel reads - July 1st 1898 / San Juan / Carried and used by / Col. Theodore Roosevelt.



the hearth: *Qui plantavit curabit*. This translates to "He who has planted will preserve." Now the revolver is home once again, planted firmly in the consciousness of the national psyche by its use in the opening act of the 20th Century and now preserved for the ages with the possessions and trappings of an icon of American history. □



Butt markings on the Roosevelt revolver.



Left panel reads, "From the sunken / battle ship Maine".