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SUPER-RARE RUGERS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RUGER'S HARD-TO-FIND FACTORY-ENGRAVED REVOLVERS

BY T. LOGAN METESH



The timeline for factory-engraved Ruger single-action revolvers is short—just four years. When Bill Ruger initiated the plan for engraved revolvers, he sent the first batch of guns to Spain, where they were embellished and then returned to the United States. A total of 22 revolvers were sent to Europe in December of 1954, and the majority returned by September of 1955.

Ultimately, the decision to have the engraving done right here in the U.S. won out over the imported work. Between 1954 and 1958, a total of 238 Single-Sixes and eight Blackhawks left the Ruger factory as engraved guns. Most of them were engraved by Charles Jerred, who worked closely with Bill Ruger to develop and perfect the patterns used on the guns.

One of the first things that had to be sorted out at the beginning of the business relationship between Bill Ruger and Charles Jerred was compensation. On March 17, 1954, Jerred quoted a cost of \$50 per engraved revolver. He based this on the design requiring 12 hours to complete per gun, with his standard workday being eight to 10 hours.

Three months later, Ruger told Jerred that his quote was “not unreasonable,” but he felt they would be “on much surer ground” if Jerred could do the work for \$25. He clarified to Jerred, “I do not want to suggest that you put price ahead of quality” and recommended that they agree on a simpler design to meet that price point. To be clear, Ruger wasn't trying to get more for less. He

was simply looking at things from a business standpoint. His goal was to offer the guns at a retail price of \$95 to \$100. He acknowledged that “the mark-ups which have to be allowed for the trade” would make a gun that cost more than that “price prohibitive to the customer.”

In a letter dated December 28, 1954, Ruger told Jerred that the extra cost would be passed on to the consumer and would “greatly restrict the market” in terms of potential buyers.

By late January of 1955, Ruger sent the first batch of 10 guns to be engraved and sold as consecutively numbered pairs. On July 27, 1955, Ruger wrote to Jerred about the plan for the next batch of five Single-Sixes to be engraved. His suggestion was to “make less of an effort to secure coverage and rather to concentrate on slightly smaller areas

to do the work with greater depth and detail, and with plenty of emphasis on lines of varying width.”

To test this idea, Jerred was sent two guns—serial numbers 24382 and 24383—on August 27, 1955. They were to be engraved as instructed and then returned to Ruger for approval before proceeding on a larger scale.

Jerred worked quickly. The two guns were completed by September 10 and in Bill Ruger's hands on September 15. Ruger approved of the engraving's quality, design and coverage and determined that those two guns would be the “pattern guns” for the next shipment of 10 to be engraved.

When the first engraved guns were offered for sale in September of 1956, the MSRP was \$150.50 compared to the standard model's MSRP of just \$63.25. Moreover, Ruger had missed the retail price he set for himself by 33 percent. As such, consumer demand for the engraved guns was never as high as Ruger had hoped. Ultimately, the factory agreement for engraving between Jerred and Ruger ended on May 19, 1958.

While the official offering of factory-engraved guns ended in 1958, special exceptions were made over the years, and additional engraved guns were commissioned for high-profile individuals. By 1991, the total had reached 279 guns. Several were made either for the factory collec-



◀ Charles Jerred (left) was mentored by famed master engraver Albert Kraus (right).



LEFT: An engraved Blackhawk from 1960.

BELOW: Tyler Gun Works is now offering commemorative engraved revolvers.

BOTTOM: Charles Jerred engraved this gun back in 1956.



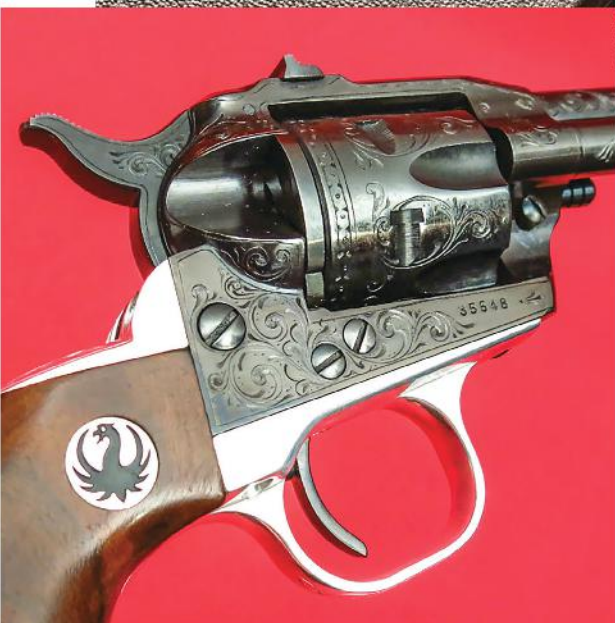
beautifully engraved and inlaid Blackhawks created in commemoration of the gun's 50th anniversary.

At the helm was master engraver Paul Lantauch, an immigrant from Lithuania. In addition to his work on Rugers, his engraving has graced some of the finest firearms from Galazan and Westley Richards, to name a few.

While the Ruger Studio is now closed, contemporary engraved Rugers are still available from Baron Technology, an engraving company that works with a variety of brands.

This year also marks the 65th anniversary of the first factory-engraved Single-Six. To commemorate the occasion, Bobby Tyler of Tyler Gun Works has teamed up with engraver Rocky Sharp to bring to life a modern-day replica of those original guns. Limited to just 100 units, each revolver comes in its own leatherette-covered wooden case lined with green velvet, just like the originals. Each of these guns costs \$2,500.

Today, the original engraved Rugers are highly prized by collectors for both their beauty and their scarcity. While the high cost of the guns in the 1950s led to their demise, those who purchased them had made a wise investment. You can now expect to spend around \$10,000 on one of the Jerred-engraved examples. If you want one of the 22 done in Spain, it will set you back an untold amount, as they come up for sale so infrequently. ☐



tion or as special presentation guns to people like Herb Glass, Elmer Keith, Skeeter Skelton, Hugh O'Brian and President Richard Nixon.

MODERN MODELS

In 2004, the Ruger Studio of Art and Decoration opened its doors and reintroduced the idea of factory-engraved guns. The goal was to create "a custom gun engraving facility specifically dedicated to the creation of individualized firearms artistry." Some of the works of art to come out of the shop were