

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

The Long & the Short of the .45 Colt

By: Jim Taylor

The debate over whether there is a .45 "Long" Colt cartridge is an on-going one that has been active for probably 75 years. Elmer Keith alluded to the arguments many years ago when he wrote *"...Some newcomers to the game claim there is no such animal, but if they had shot the short variety that Remington turned out in such profusion before, during and after World War I they would see there was some basis in referring to the .45 Colt as the .45 Long..."* (Elmer Keith, Sixguns, page 285)



As far as I know there have never been any .45 Colt cartridges head-stamped "Long" and though I have reports of old cartridge boxes marked "45 Long" I have never personally seen any. Mr. Keith referred to them from time to time as "long" Colt's (with a small "L"). If you

have ever seen the short Colt .45's you can understand why.

The Winchester .45 Colt's that Paco and I have came from Shootist Keith Owlett who gave them to us a short time before he passed on. The cartridge box is deteriorated and I have it put away now - at least what's left of it. But it is plainly marked ".45 Colt Government".



The head-stamp on the cartridges is ".45 Colt" ... BUT these are SHORT .45 Colts! The head-stamp is the same as the longer .45 Colts, even down to the "W" on the primers.

These are not S&W or Schofield cartridges. The rim diameter is the same as the long .45 Colts, which is smaller than the Schofield rim diameter. These are true .45 Short Colts. The cartridge is listed in Cartridges of the World on page 306 as ".45 Colt - .45 Colt Government".

I can visualize someone walking into a hardware store around the turn of the last century and asking for a box of .45 Colt's. As the clerk pulls down a box

the customer says, "Not the short ones. I want the Long Colts!" and the name ".45 Long Colt" came down to us as a "user-applied" name, not a factory name.



While I can't prove it, I believe the usage was common since Colt had factory cartridges like the .32 Short Colt, .32 Long Colt, .38 Short Colt, .38 Long Colt, .41 Short Colt and the .41 Long Colt.

I pulled one of the .45 shorts apart and weighed and measured it. The case is 1.1" long. The powder charge was black powder, approximately 28 grains. The bullet weighed right at 230 gr. and was lubed with a white chalky-looking substance. I fired one from my Ruger 7 1/2" barreled .45 and it went through the chronograph at near 750 fps.

The following week I went out in the hills and called up a nice large coyote and shot him with the .45 short. He ran to within 10 feet of me, responding to the call. I pulled the gun up and shot, hitting him up through the right shoulder and spine, dropping him instantly. The little pointy bullet did not damage the pelt at all. I was able to tan the hide and make a nice looking wall hanging from it.

He was probably the last critter on earth ever killed with a short .45 Colt!

- Jim Taylor

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