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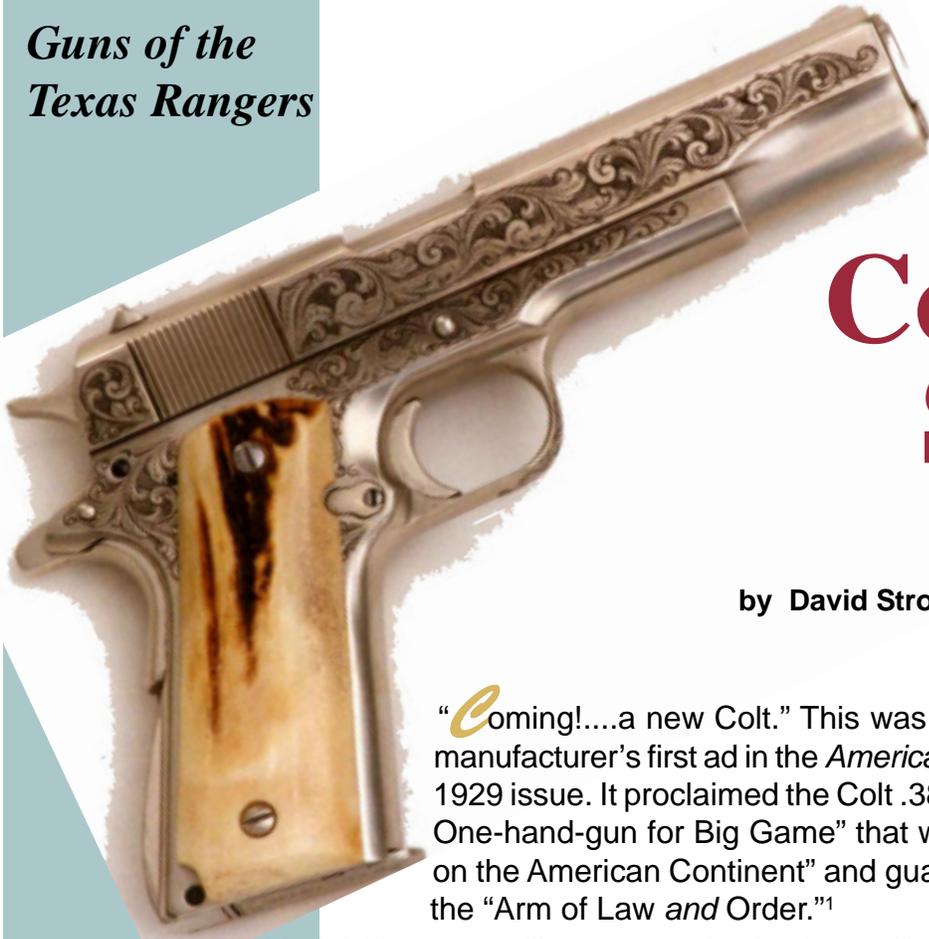
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## *Guns of the Texas Rangers*



# The Colt .38 Super

by David Stroud and Robert Nieman

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“Coming!....a new Colt.” This was the introduction in the manufacturer’s first ad in the *American Rifleman*, December 1929 issue. It proclaimed the Colt .38 Super to be the “ideal One-hand-gun for Big Game” that would “stop any animal on the American Continent” and guaranteed the interest of the “Arm of Law and Order.”<sup>1</sup>

After the Model 1902 .38-caliber automatic pistol was discontinued in 1928, Colt began producing that popular caliber with a load that increased velocity and power so much it was named the Super .38 Auto Pistol Cartridge.<sup>2</sup> The Government Model .45 1911 Automatic frame was utilized, the barrel was bored and chambered for the new cartridge, and the pistol was designated as the Super .38 Automatic Pistol.<sup>3</sup> Because Colt considered the Super .38 a distinctive model, its serial numbers began with 1.<sup>4</sup> The weapon’s popularity was proven when 34,450 were sold by 1940, and then the 1940 production was limited. The model was discontinued with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and production resumed again in 1947.<sup>5</sup>

After reissue in 1947, Colt began numbering the Super .38. The series began with

- 1 Douglas G. Sheldon, *Colt's Super .38: the Production History from 1929-1971* (Willenle, MN: Quick Vend Inc., 1999), 3, 13.
- 2 Charles T. Haven, & Frank A. Belden, *A History of The Colt Revolver from 1836-1940* (NY: Bonanza Books, 1940), 213.
- 3 Haven, 213.
- 4 Sheldon, 5.
- 5 R.L. Wilson, *Dates of Manufacture: 1837-1978* (David Madis, 1985).

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number 40001 and reached 202188 by December 1969. In 1970, Colt preceded the serial number with CS as one of two ways to maintain accordance with the Gun Control Act of 1968; the second was placing the weapon's manufacturer's name on the right side of the receiver. Therefore, Serial Number CS001001 became the first so marked Super .38, and CS00202.388 the last in December, 1970.<sup>6</sup> Although Colt produced the Super .38 after 1971 within the 70 Series Model O line, 1971 was the last year it was listed as an independent model.<sup>7</sup>

The left side of the slide markings of the Super .38 are:

COLT'S PT.F.A.MFG.CO.HARTFORD, CT.USA  
PAT'D APR.20,1897,SEPT.9,1902,DEC.19,1905.FEB.14,1911.AUG.19,1913

The right side has the firm's trademarked rampant Colt holding an arrow in its mouth.<sup>8</sup> To the right of the trademark is printed:

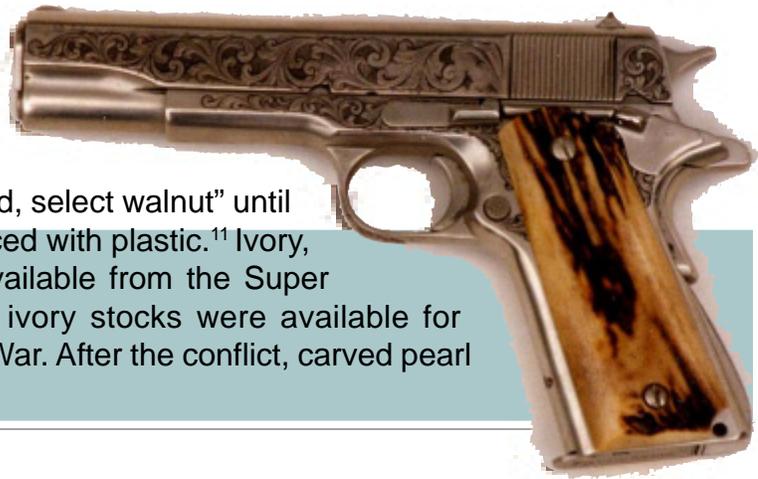
COLT SUPPER SUPER .38  
AUTOMATIC (below SUPER)

When the company began production again in June 1947, the patent dates were eliminated. A few months later, the firm's name changed. The right side of the .38 Super remained the same, but the left side was roll died with the inscription:

COLT'S PT.F.A.MFG.CO.HARTFORD, CT.USA.<sup>9</sup>

The Super .38's standard finish was blue. The pre-World War II blue was "mirror-like," but after the war, the steel was "tank blued." Nickel plating was available from 1929 through 1941, but amounted to no more than 2% of the line. This may be the reason that this finish was not offered once the war ended.<sup>10</sup>

The standard stock for the Super .38 was "machine checkered, select walnut" until phased out before 1943 and replaced with plastic.<sup>11</sup> Ivory, pearl or stag-horn stocks were available from the Super .38's introduction. However, only ivory stocks were available for carving prior to the Second World War. After the conflict, carved pearl stocks were offered.<sup>12</sup>



- 6 Shelton, 9
- 7 Sheldon, 13-15.
- 8 Sheldon, 13-15.
- 9 Sheldon, 24
- 10 Sheldon, 21
- 11 Sheldon, 59
- 12 Sheldon, 61



### **Ranger Glenn Elliott's Colt .38 Super**

Curley Smith presented a Colt .38 Super to Texas Ranger Glenn Elliott in 1956. The gun's history is unique, to say the least.

For many years, Curley Smith owned and operated a restaurant on West Marshall Avenue (Highway 80) in Longview. Many of Curley's patrons believed he served not only the finest food in East Texas, but also in the entire state. Most of his clientele were the elite of East Texas. Entering the restaurant, there was a coat and hatcheck stand, certainly not something common in most places in Texas. He always had a first-class band, and his dance floor was second to none, including Longview's legendary Reo Palm Isle. The food his chefs served was unsurpassed anywhere.

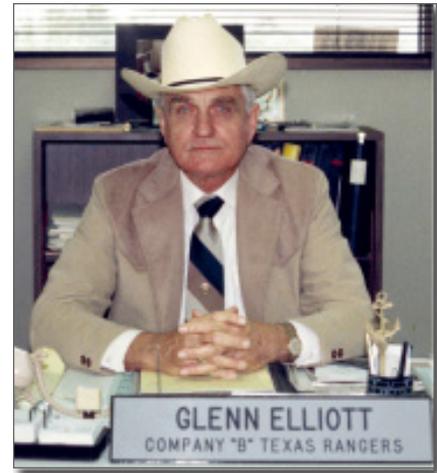
In the early 1950s, a man named Black was released from prison. He was Curley's brother-in-law, married to Smith's wife's sister. The day Black got out, he arrived at the restaurant before opening time and almost immediately got into a heated argument with his wife, who worked at the restaurant. Black was mean, and it was not surprising when he started beating her.

Curley was in his office and heard the commotion in the kitchen. Seizing his Colt .38, he rushed to stop the beating his sister-in-law was taking. Perhaps fearing a shot would strike his sister-in-law, he started hitting Black and continued until Black collapsed and died shortly thereafter.

Curley was charged and tried for murder in Gregg County. His attorney, Fred Erisman, had a simple defense. His client was only trying to stop the beating his sister-in-law was suffering; if he had meant to kill his brother-in-law, he would have shot him. The jury bought it—they found Curley not guilty. The pistol was returned to Smith, and for many

years, he kept it beside his cash register with a towel over it. This Colt .38 Super had been shipped from the factory on January 31, 1950, to Ogilvie Hardware Company Inc., 217 Jones Street, Shreveport 82, Louisiana. It was the only gun in the shipment, and it had a blue-finish 5" barrel and factory plastic grips.<sup>13</sup>

At the time of the murder and subsequent trial, Glenn Elliott was a Highway Patrolman stationed in Longview. For many years, he and his partner Lloyd Webb stopped by Curley's, drank coffee, and ate an occasional meal. As time went by, Glenn and Curley became friends. Glenn long admired Curley's .38, and Curley was aware of this. One day in 1956, he pushed the Colt to Glenn and said it was his. A year later, while serving as a Special Ranger, Glenn carried the .38 Super during the wildcat Lone Star Steel strike. When he became a Ranger in 1961, Glenn carried the pistol many times on a regular basis.



Eventually, Glenn decided to enhance the gun and took it to Lister Custom Gun Engraving in Boerne, Texas, owned and operated by the famous W.E. "Bill" Lister and his son Weldon.<sup>14</sup> Weldon removed the blue finish and decorated it with scroll. On the smooth mainspring housing, he engraved:

GLENN ELLIOTT  
TEXAS RANGER

Weldon then nickel-plated the beautiful Colt .38 Super and shipped it to Glenn in Longview, Texas, on October 7, 1986.<sup>15</sup>

As for Curley Smith, he had a problem. Every time he got a little money, he headed for the nearest gambling hall (they were all illegal then), and the inevitable happened. Finally, Curley had to close the finest restaurant in Longview, and he kicked around East Texas for several years before passing away.

Glenn Elliott retired as a Texas Ranger in 2007. As of this writing, he is eighty-one years old and still going strong.

As for the Colt .38 Super . . . today it is in the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum in Waco.

If you want to know more about Glenn Elliott, he has written two books: *A Ranger's Ranger* and *Still A Ranger's Ranger*. Both can be purchased through the Texas Ranger Museum Gift Shop.

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13 Kathleen J. Hoyt, historian, to Colt Company, July 26, 1993. Did not list what type of grips, but were probably plastic.

14 Business card of W.E. (Bill) Lister & Weldon E. Lister Jr.; *Buckles by Lister* magazine ad.

15 Invoice of Weldon, E. Lister, October 7, 1986.