

# Real Guns of

*Some of the most famous guns of both the big and little screen are on display now at the National Firearms Museum.*



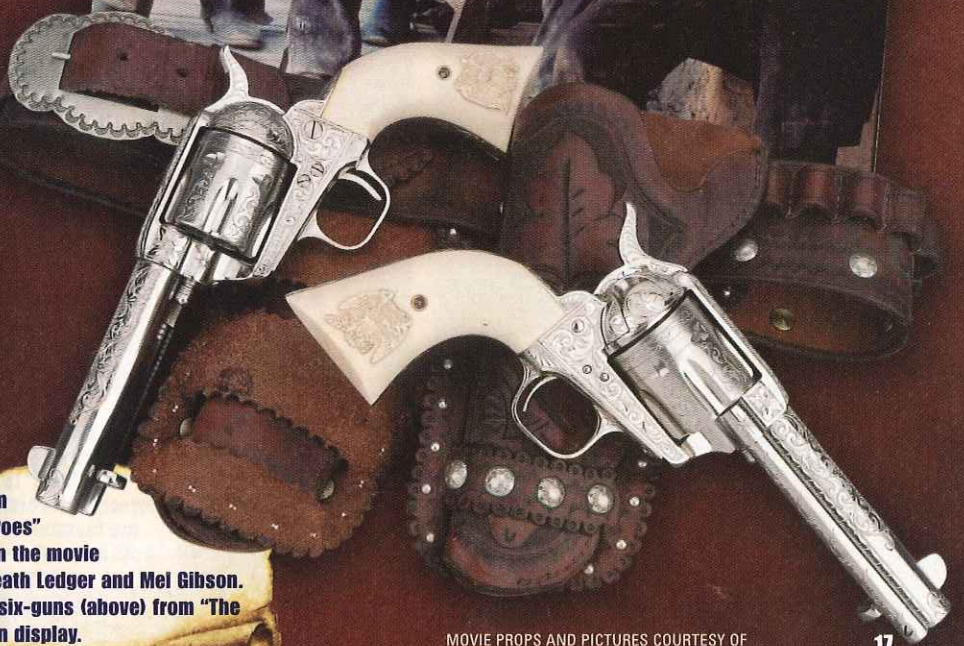
# Reel Heroes

By Philip Schreier  
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**T**he grizzled bandit, on his knees, covered in sweat and dirt, looked up at his nemesis, squinting with a hateful gaze. He had barely fixed his stare when the stranger with no name flung a shovel at him. It fell to the ground directly on top of the grave marked "unknown." He hesitated at first to reach for it, out of pure disdain, but when he saw the cocked Colt revolver leveled directly at his torso, he thought better. As he reached for the shovel, his off-side hand slowly slid toward his own holstered revolver. It was at that moment the stranger spoke. Shifting his tightly clenched cigar from the left to the right corner of his pursed lips, he said, "You see, there are two kinds of people in this world... those with loaded guns, and those who dig. You dig."

When I was all of 10 years old, the local TV station ran Sergio Leone's classic spaghetti western "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." For those three hours of Civil War battles and gunfights, I sat mesmerized by the cool deliberation that Clint Eastwood's character showed as he searched for hidden gold in the midst of a war. There was a lot of shooting and a lot of gun play that resulted in my rushing to find my neighborhood pals as soon as it was over and quickly establishing teams of good guys and bad guys for our own re-creation of a Dodge City showdown.

For me, TV and movie heroes were only real for the length of time that they appeared on screen. It wasn't until I visited an exhibit of movie props at the Smithsonian Institution that I came to realize that the things I saw used in the make-believe world of films actually existed.



The National Firearms Museum exhibit "Real Guns of Reel Heroes" includes the flintlocks used in the movie "The Patriot" (left) starring Heath Ledger and Mel Gibson. Leonardo DiCaprio's brace of six-guns (above) from "The Quick and the Dead" is also on display.

MOVIE PROPS AND PICTURES COURTESY OF  
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In that exhibit was a collection of Gary Cooper's guns and costume from the classic western "High Noon." When I first saw it, the sight of his Marshall's badge on his black vest displayed against the black-and-white photo backdrop of a deserted main street in a nameless cow town gave me chills. Now, some 25 years after seeing that Smithsonian exhibit, The National Firearms Museum in the NRA's Fairfax, VA, headquarters is hosting a blockbuster exhibit of some of the coolest firearms used in the greatest films of all time.

Displayed in the William B. Ruger Gallery of the museum, there are more than 80 guns used in almost as many films and by some of the most famous actors ever to work in Hollywood. The exhibit not only contains firearms but also costumes and accoutrements. The tomahawk that Mel Gibson used in "The Patriot" as well as some of John Wayne's shirts, hats, tunics and even his silver watch and belt buckle are on exhibit.

Separated into differing historical eras, the movie exhibit begins with a display of firearms from our Colonial past. Mel Gibson and Heath Ledger's rifles from last year's blockbuster hit "The Patriot" are on exhibit as well as Gibson's handcrafted bullet pouch. In 1955, NRA President Charlton Heston played the role of William Clark of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition in the film "Far Horizons." Little did he know at the time, but the long rifle he was using was possibly one of the most historic guns in all of Hollywood. It was made in Lancaster, PA, in 1816 by noted rifle maker Martin Smith. How the massive .70-caliber gun found its way to Hollywood is anyone's guess, but it showed up in an early John Wayne film called "Allegheny Uprising" in 1939. Subsequently, it also showed up in Gary Cooper's "Unconquered" (1947) and again in "The Alamo" (1960).

Do you like John Wayne? Born Marion Michael Morrison in Winterset, IA, Wayne became



**The Moison-Nagant M91/30 sniper rifle used by Jude Law in "Enemy at the Gates" (above) can be viewed at the National Firearms Museum. This movie, co-starring Joseph Fiennes, Ed Harris and Bob Hoskins, spurred renewed interest in these rifles and in the famous battle for Stalingrad.**

a valuable prop and stuntman on the sets of film director John Ford, who gave him ever-increasing roles in his 'B' grade westerns. By 1939, Ford was confident that his friend, whom everyone now just called "Duke," could handle carrying a film as its star and cast him as the "Ringo Kid" in the now-classic "Stagecoach."

In one scene, Ford has the youthful Wayne standing alongside the dirt trail that the stage travels, with a saddle slung over his shoulder and a Winchester carbine in his other hand. As Wayne hails the stagecoach for a ride, Ford wanted him to cock the rifle with one hand and move forward toward the stage. The small lever loop on the rifle cut mercilessly into Duke's hand. Fellow stuntman Yakima Canutt



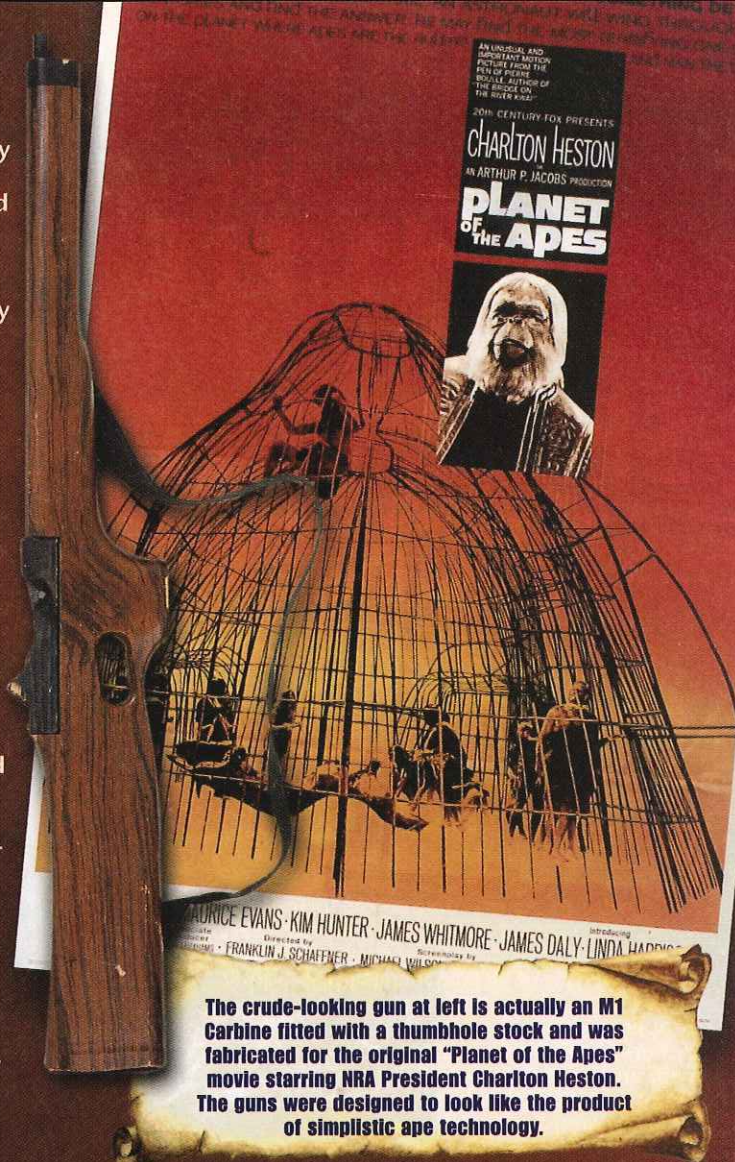
**May the force be with you! The light saber wielded by Sir Alec Guinness (as Obi-Wan Kenobi) in "Star Wars" is part of the exhibition. Displays are arranged according to eras and modern futuristic arms are featured as well as historical pieces. You'll see both Keanu Reeves' mini-gun from "The Matrix" as well as John Wayne's large-loop Winchester.**

and Wayne took the rifle over to the set's propmaster and blacksmith and soon fashioned a large angular lever that wouldn't punish the 6 foot 4 inch Wayne's hand any further. History was made that day when the 'D' ring Winchester showed up on screen, and that very gun is here on display. The Duke would have numerous rifles modified over the years and was hardly ever without one of his famous 92s with the large loop lever.

OK, so how many times have you heard someone say "Go ahead... make my day" or "Do you feel lucky punk?" Did you ever wonder who actually wrote the lines that Clint Eastwood as "Dirty Harry" spoke in those films? Well, I can't say that it actually kept me up at night, but I do know that meeting Academy Award nominee John Milius has been one of the more rewarding aspects of my job. John has written, co-written and or directed over 32 films including "Conan," "Red Dawn," "Apocalypse Now," "Dillinger," "Rough Riders" and one of the most hilarious and often overlooked war films, the side-splitting "1941."

John was asked to spark up the script in the 1973 film "Dirty Harry" and created a legend when Detective Callahan interrogated a bleeding bank robber lying on a street corner at the muzzle of his S&W .44 Magnum revolver. Warner Brothers and Clint Eastwood later gave John one of the original revolvers used in that now classic film and it, too, is part of the new exhibit, complete with its silver presentation plaque.

Did you ever cringe when you saw a cowboy or soldier in a film fall off a cliff with his six-gun or get blown up with his M1 Garand? I knew the actors were stuntmen and well-protected, but it made me almost want to cry to think of how much damage was done to guns that I saw in films. Well, fear not, Hollywood is one step ahead of you. Visitors to the exhibit will see all sorts of non-guns made especially to take the abuse of stunts and environmental hazards. A plastic and metal 1921 Thompson Machine gun is on exhibit from the Warren Oates film "Dillinger" (1973) as are the original two rubber Colt Walker revolvers used by Clint Eastwood in "The Outlaw Josey Wales" (1976). These fake guns keep production costs low as damage to rubber



The crude-looking gun at left is actually an M1 Carbine fitted with a thumbhole stock and was fabricated for the original "Planet of the Apes" movie starring NRA President Charlton Heston. The guns were designed to look like the product of simplistic ape technology.

guns is slight, and the guns are easy to replace if damaged or lost. Also on exhibit is a rubber M1 Garand from "Saving Private Ryan" as well as fake Henry Rifles and flintlock rifles from dozens of different films.

I hope that you have a chance to come by and see this once-in-a-lifetime peek into the magic that is Hollywood. The exhibit has dozens more interesting firearms from the Reel Heroes of the silver screen and they will be on exhibit until Dec. 31, 2002. The museum is located at the NRA headquarters, 11250 Waples Mill Road, Fairfax, VA 22030-9400, and it is open seven days a week 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call (703) 267-1602 for more information on tours and visits. ✓



The M1 Garands used by extras in the movie "Saving Private Ryan" appeared similar to the real one that Matt Damon used, but were actually made of rubber for durability and reduced cost.