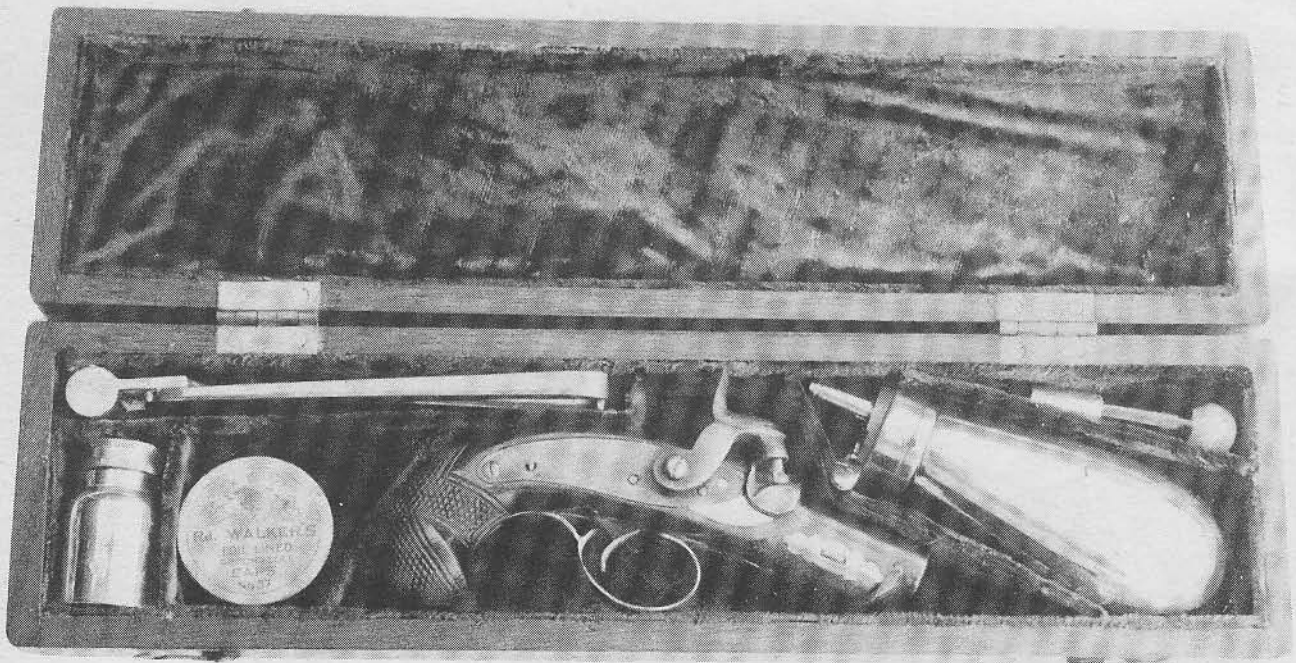


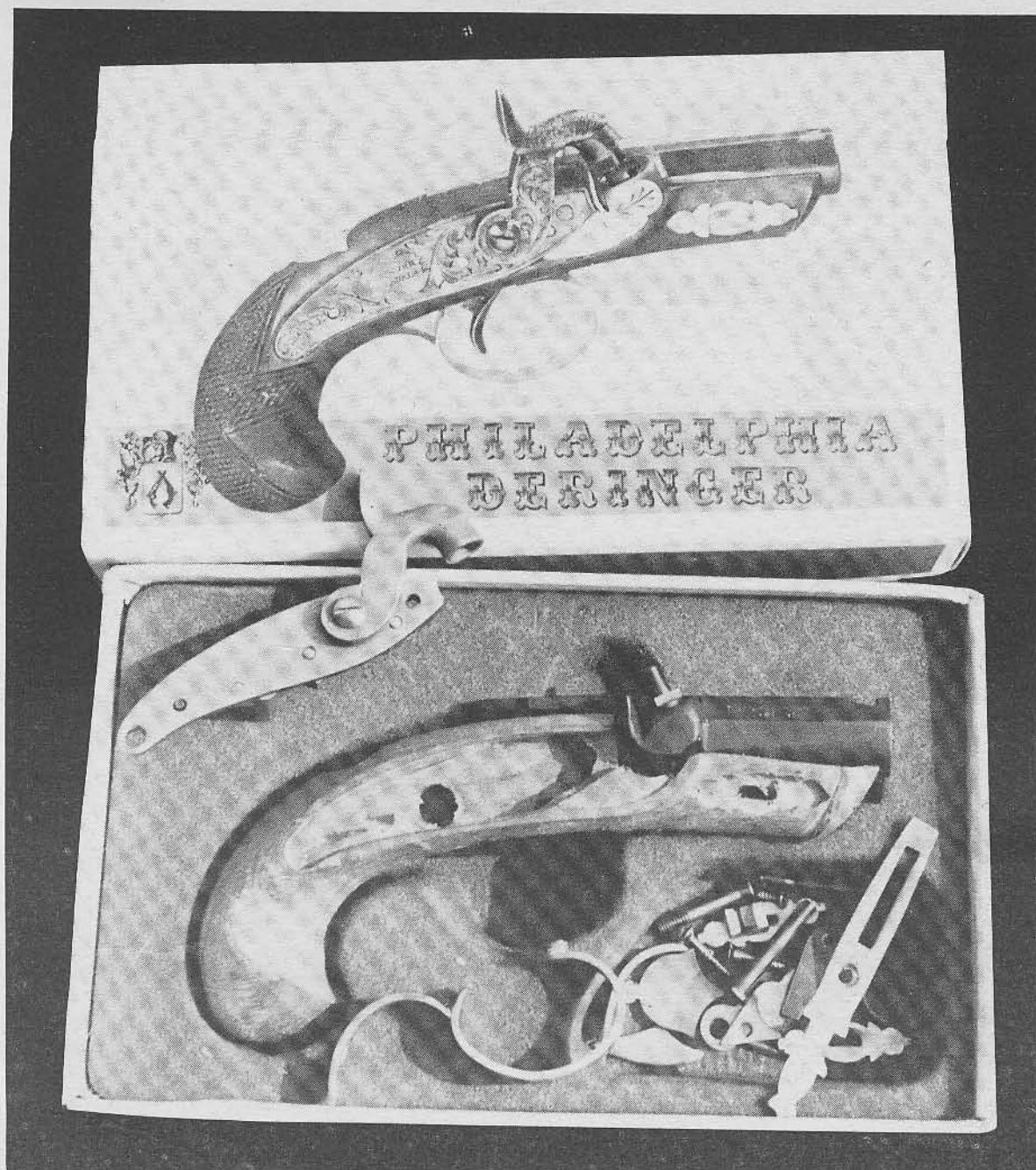
Chapter 11

BUILDING YOUR FIRST GUN

*A Kit Can Be Both Demanding
And Educational For The New Gunsmith*



When the replica Lincoln derringer was completed, the author built a special case to carry it, along with powder flask, a bullet mould, loading rod, percussion caps and an oil bottle fashioned from silver, adding to an authentic look.



As received, the Lincoln derringer kit from Dixie Gun Works contains everything that is needed for completion of the unit, making it an attractive piece with furnished inlays.

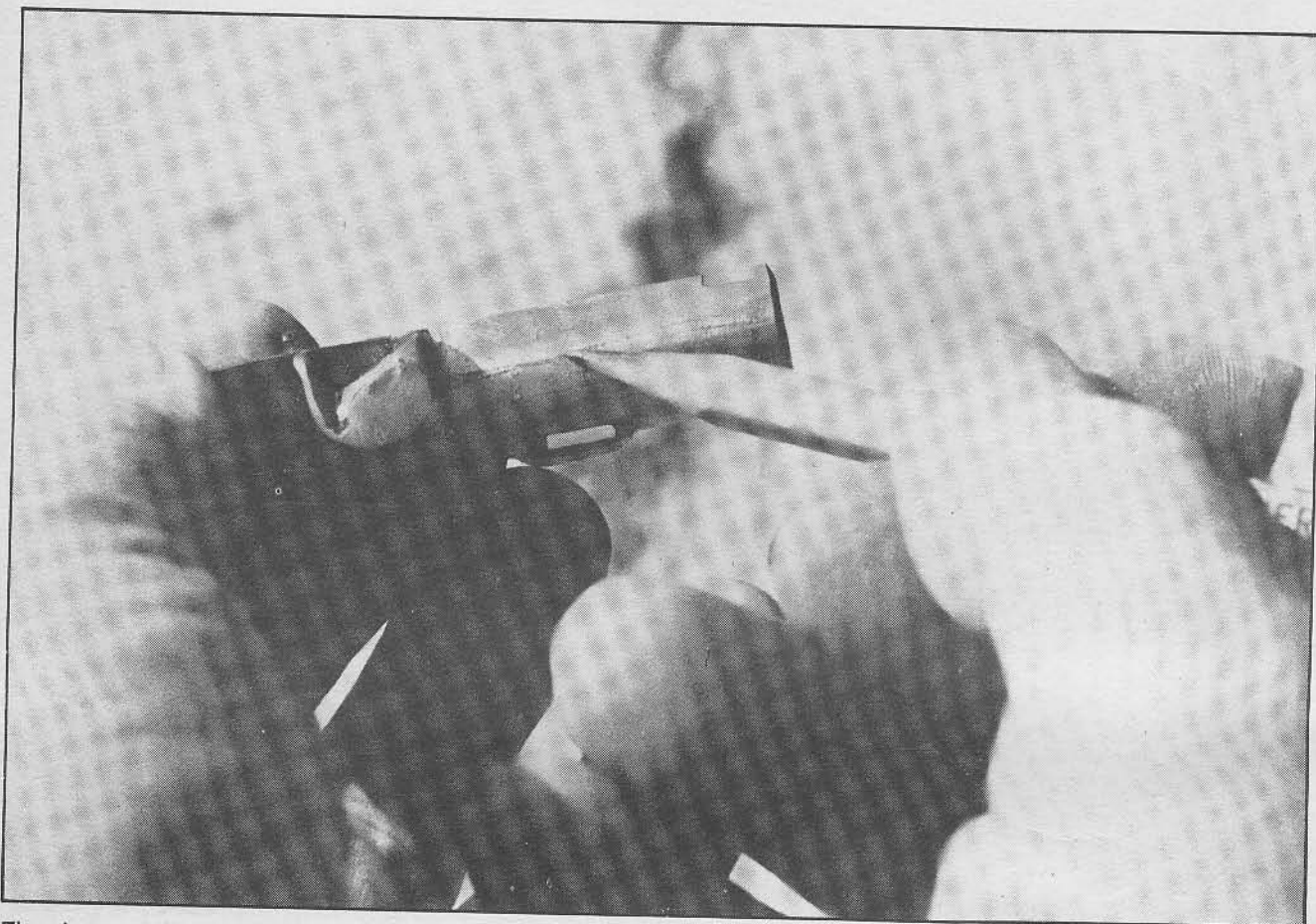
WHEN IS a derringer not a Deringer? This term has confused countless people for over 140 years. About 1845, Henry Deringer, Jr. made his first percussion pistol for the U.S. Navy. Prior to that, Deringer had made entirely by hand flintlock muskets and pistols for the Army. Sometime, during these early years, Deringer was to create and manufacture a firearm that would assure him notoriety and fame that has lasted to this day, although he died in 1868.

The firearm that has made the name of Henry Deringer familiar even today, became famous due to the infamous

event that occurred on April 14, 1865, at Ford's Opera House in Washington, D.C. It was there that John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln. The gun used was described as being small in size but of large bore.

In later years, the term, "derringer pistol," became synonymous with any small handgun of large bore, whether it be the percussion type or fired a metallic cartridge.

Because an arm such as this has great appeal to both collector and novice alike, Dixie Gun Works of Union City, Tennessee, offers a kit for building a vintage pistol like the one in the Ford's Opera House incident.

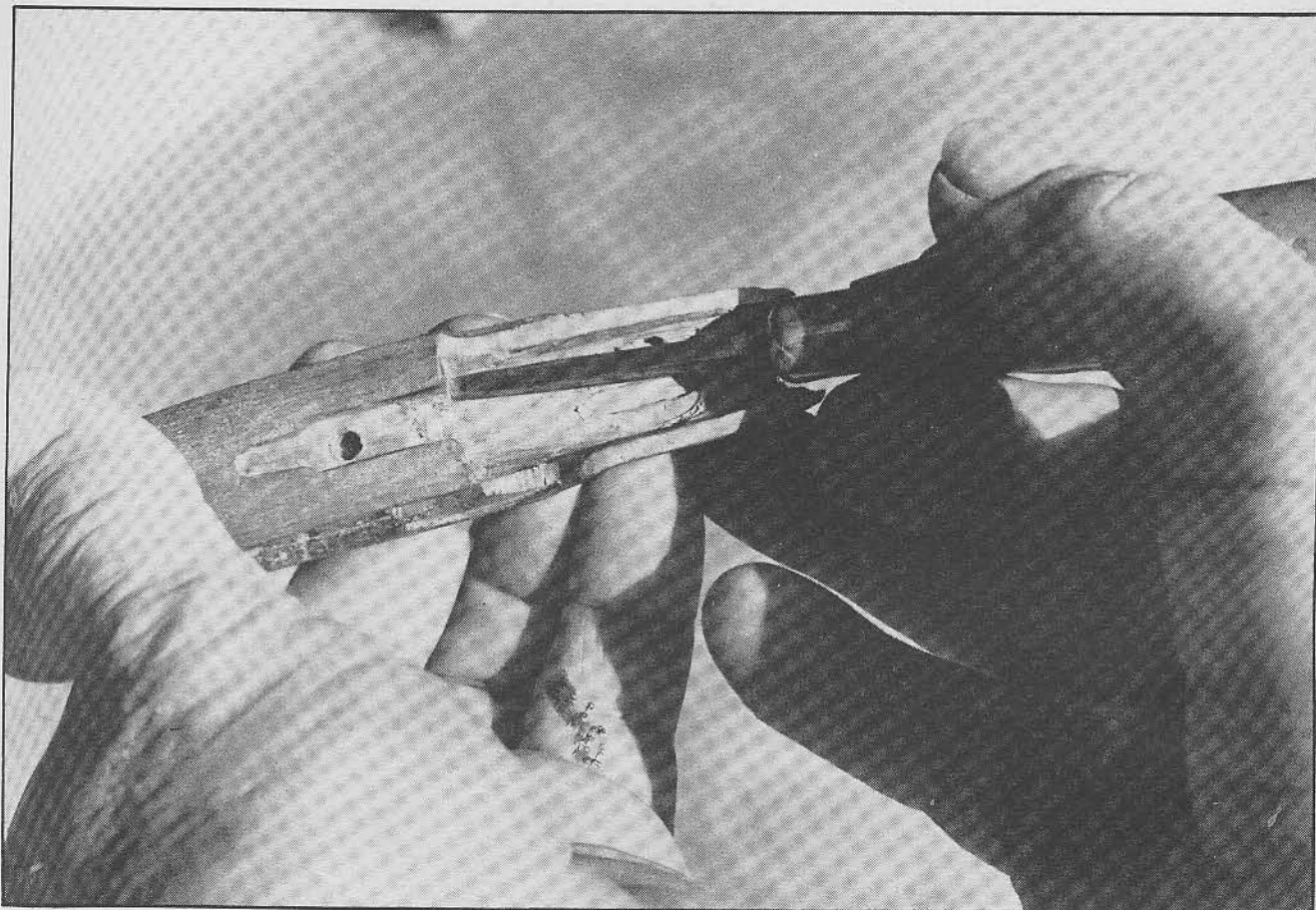


The sharp corners of the barrel should be rounded over slightly and visible tool marks and scratches removed.

Over the years, I have built about every worthwhile gun kit available, ranging from a blunderbuss to a flintlock Kentucky-type rifle. It is my contention that building these kits can provide challenge to professional and novice alike. In fact, I have seen far better jobs done on these kits by so-called amateurs than were done by some who claimed to be professional gunsmiths. Creating a finished firearm from one of these kits — and doing it right — requires painstaking work, providing a degree of experience that is an excellent teacher for any type of gunwork. Such kits, if properly finished, also will provide a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure for the astute gun buff. It also will tend to separate the true craftsmen from the hacksaw-and-hammer jockeys!

Dixie Gun Works has titled this unit the Lincoln Deringer Kit. It contains all necessary parts, such as inlays, screws, complete percussion lock, a .41 caliber barrel and a semi-finished wood stock. All the builder has to furnish is a few minor handtools, such as sandpaper, small chisels, files and a great deal of demanding workmanship. A real craftsman can end up with a worthwhile replica of the original arm that has considerable value. The hack artist can just as easily end up with an expensive piece of junk!

The first step in assembling this unique little handgun will be to examine the barrel closely. With such inspection, I found that the barrel requires considerable smoothing and some shaping to conform more closely to the original.



The rear portion of the replica stock's barrel channel must be chiseled out a bit in order to conform to the breech section of the barrel, thus providing a snug slide fit. The author advises that great care must be exercised.

On the kit I received, tool marks are apparent overall in the barrel's surfaces. These marks should be carefully removed, first using fine files, then various grades of emery cloth. The sharp edges along the sides of the barrel should be rounded and the muzzle tapered.

Once you have the barrel smoothed to suit you, the next step is to inlet it into the wood stock. One should be extremely careful during this operation, as this finely contoured wood stock is quite fragile and will not stand any great amount of rough treatment.

Lay the barrel atop the stock, noting the areas of the wood that must be removed to allow the barrel to seat fully within the stock.

Due to the original machining, the corners of the mortise that accept the breech section of the barrel are rounded instead of being square. Carefully chisel out these corners only enough to square them up; remove as little wood as possible.

The next step is to fit the barrel channel in the stock to the contour of the now semi-polished barrel. It is essential to remove no more wood than is necessary to allow the barrel to slide fully into the stock. During this fitting, the rear tang must be taken into consideration. This tang must be fully seated in its groove, too. It might be necessary, as it was in my kit, to slightly bend the rear tang to conform to the contour of the wood stock.



The barrel and lock of the gun must be fitted precisely to the wooden stock, with no gaps, cracks between metal, wood.

To this point, only minute amounts of wood have been removed from the stock; this is as it should be. Once the barrel is seated to your satisfaction, turn your attention to the lock.

The lock will require some careful fitting into its mortise to prevent cracking the stock, so be especially careful during this operation. It is possible that the lock components will bottom out before the lock plate is fully seated. Using Prussian blue, or any other marking dye to determine where the lock parts might be bottoming out before the lock is fully seated, chisel away only minor layers of wood from the mortise bottom to allow the lock and its component parts to seat fully in the mortise. At this point the lock plate should sit flush with the wood of the stock, not below or above it.

Inletting the barrel and lock into the wood of the stock should have required several hours of painstaking workmanship. From now on, the little derringer will begin to take shape.

Assemble all of the nickel-silver inlays before you. There should be eight of them, including the trigger plate. The teardrop inlay goes into the butt section where a mortise is precut to accept it. It is possible that minor filing will be necessary to allow this inlay to seat properly. Too, this inlay may require slight bending so that it will conform properly to the contour of the stock. Due to the extra thickness of these inlays, it will be necessary to bury only about half their thickness into the mortise. Later, the inlays can be filed or disc-sanded to the surface of the wood.

Inlay each of the eight pieces in their respective mor-



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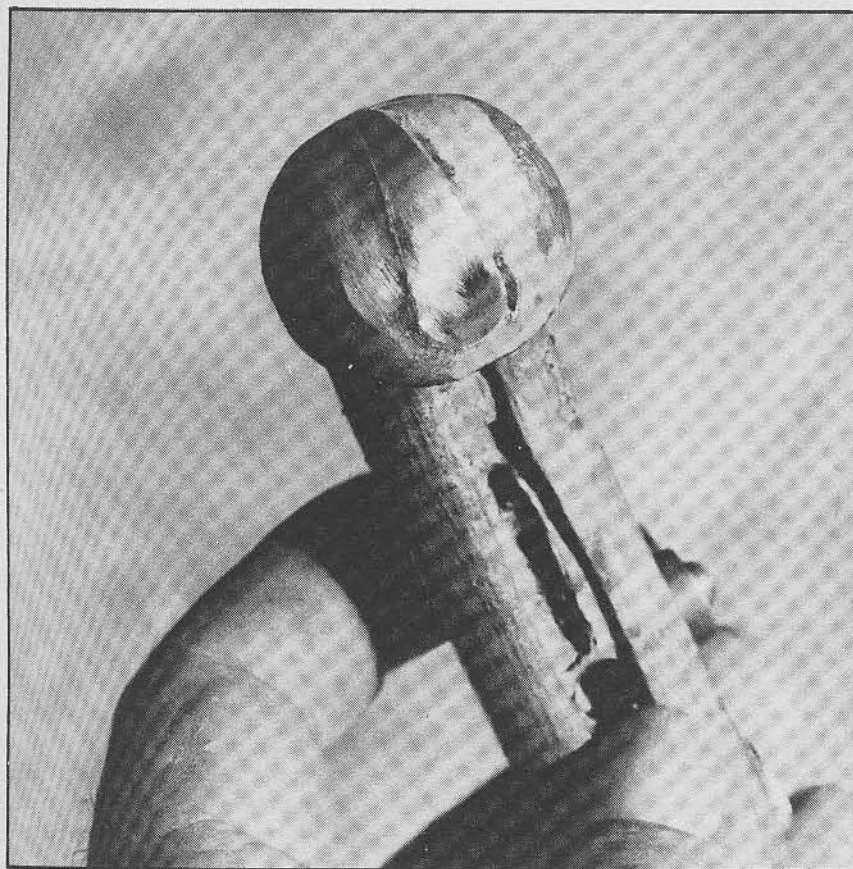
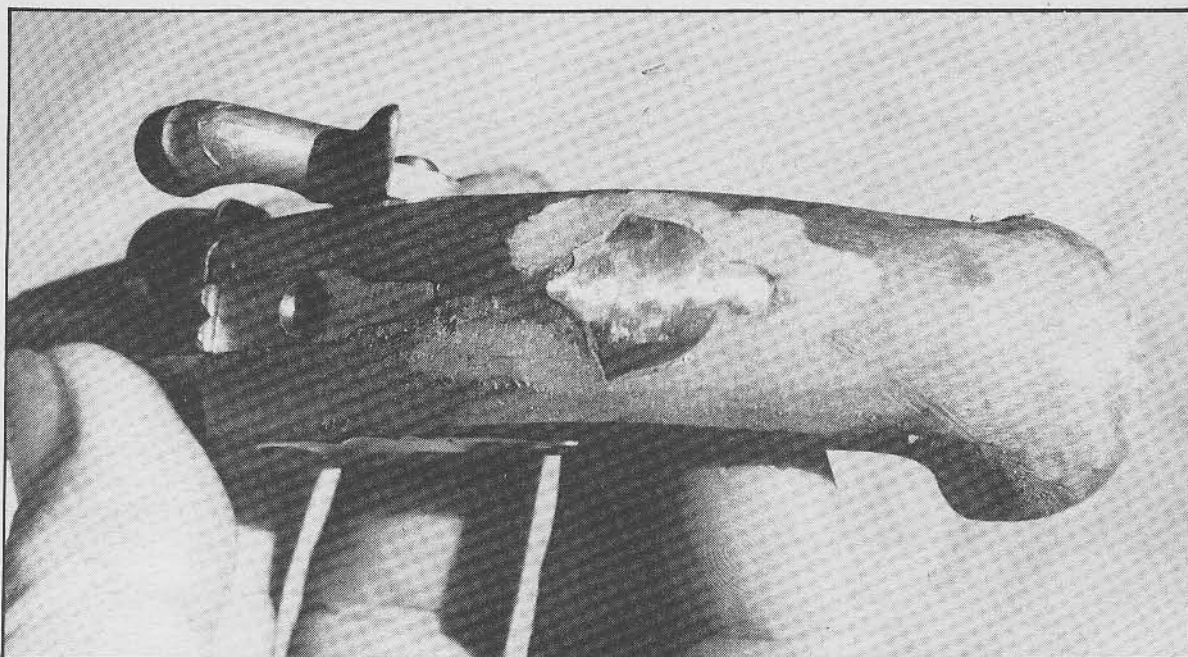
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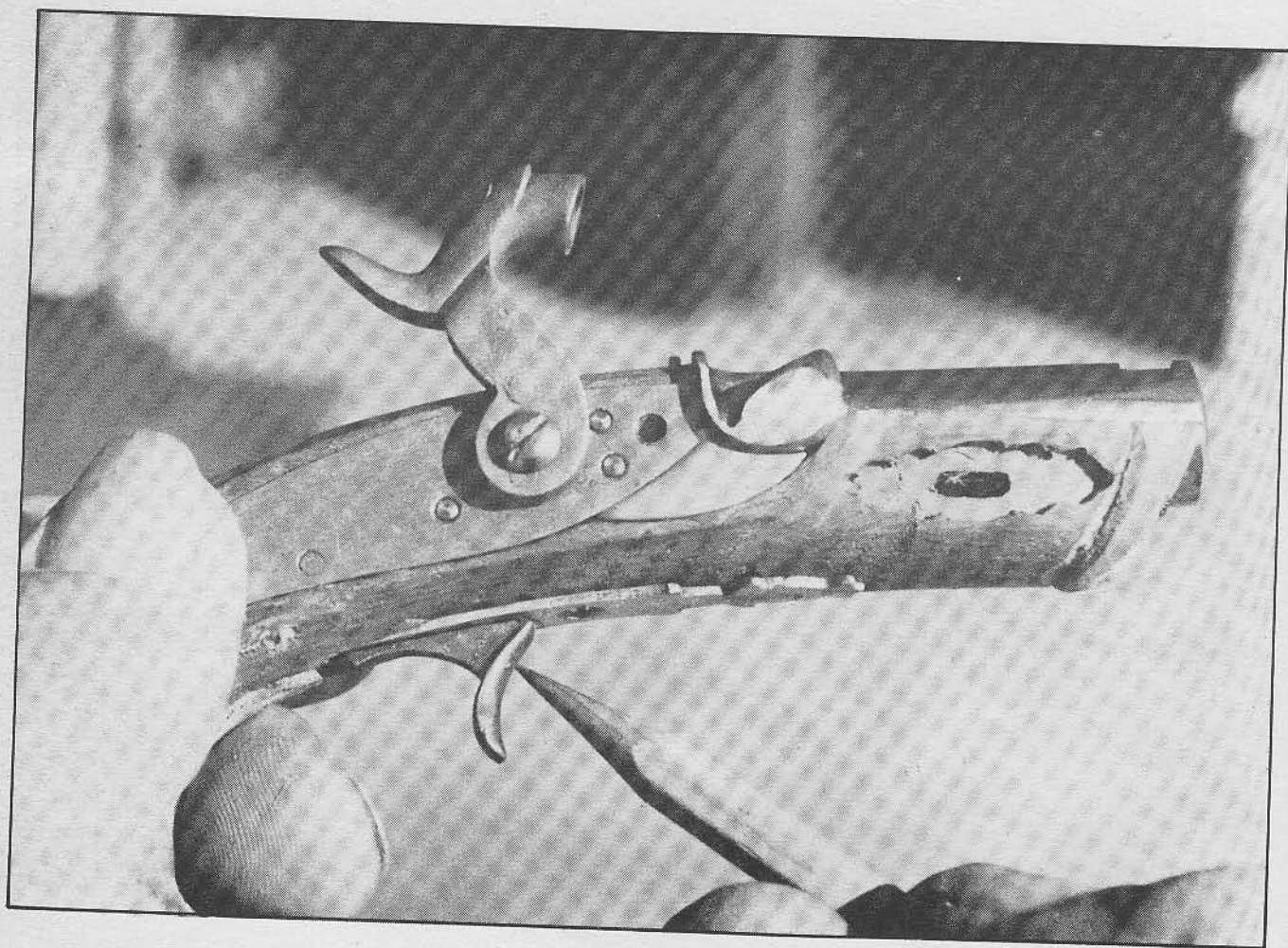
Above: With the barrel and lock in place, the inlays may be installed, then cemented in place with an epoxy. (Left) Slight bending may be needed with the butt inlay to ensure perfect fit to the contour of the stock wood. Note that wood is in unfinished state.

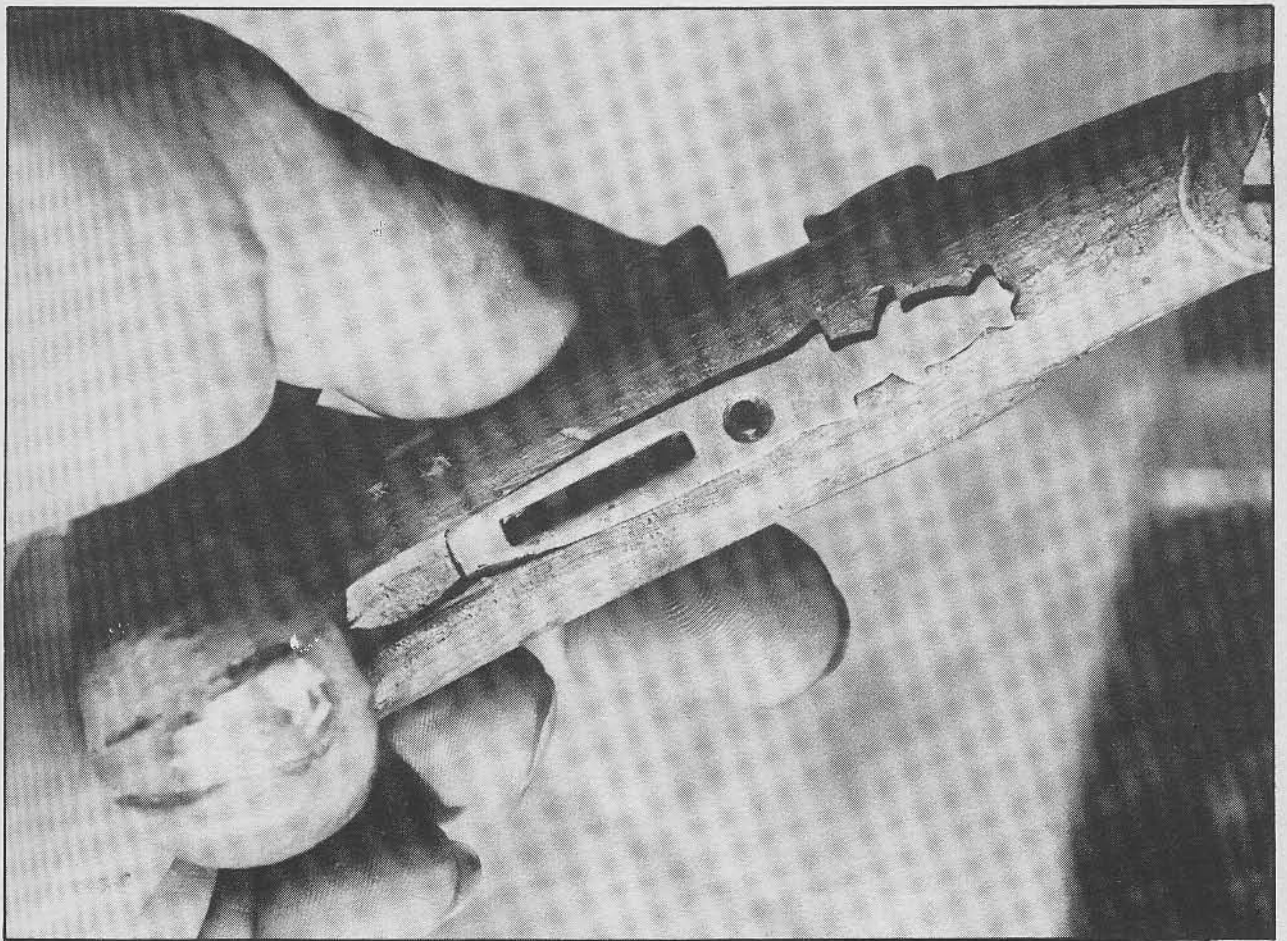
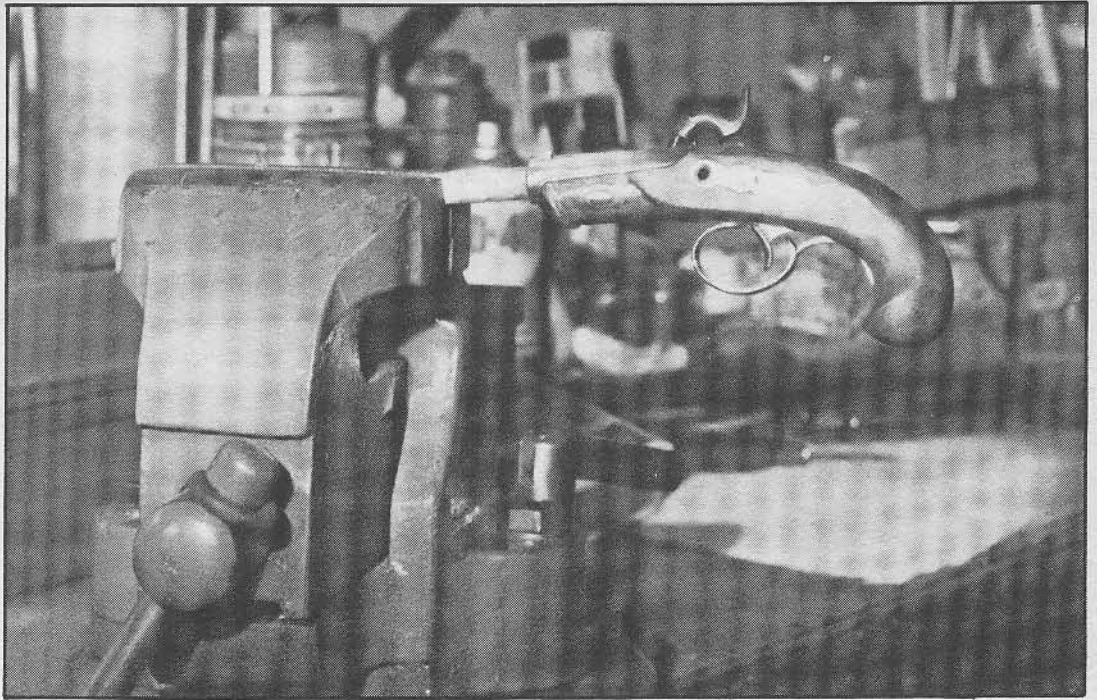
small accessories are ideal for polishing the inner surfaces of the trigger guard and around the drum and nipple on the barrel.

A good method for holding the derringer during the finishing operation is to insert a snug-fitting length of wooden dowel into the bore, the barrel in place on the stock. This dowel can be approximately four inches in length. The section of wood extending from the bore can be clamped in the bench vise. This allows the derringer to be turned to any angle at will, affording access to any parts that require finishing.

In the finishing operation, such iron parts as the lock, hammer and barrel may be either blued or given an aged brown patina look. Birchwood-Casey Liquid Gun Blue or

Below: With lock and barrel in place, positioning of the trigger is determined. It must contact the sear of the lock tightly when the hammer is at full cock. Trigger pin then is installed by drilling a 1/16-inch hole in the lock mortise to accept the pin. (Right) A good method of affording access to all portions of this little replica for sanding and finishing is to install a snug-fitting wood dowel in the bore. The other end of the dowel then is clamped into a bench vise. (Lower right) The trigger plate is not epoxied in place. It is held, instead, by the screw just forward of trigger slot.







With all inlays dressed to the surface of the stock, all nicks and scratches removed, the entire stock then can be sanded lightly with fine garnet paper before it is given a coating of wood filler in the finishing process.

the same firm's Plum Brown may be used. Finishing of these parts as to color — blue or age brown — is at the discretion of the individual builder. Incidentally, installation of the front sight, a simple chore, should be done prior to finishing the metal of the barrel.

Once the entire stock has taken on a glass-smooth surface, with all pits and scratches removed from the inlays, the wood stock is ready for first a sealer, then the final finish of Tru-Oil. Follow the directions on each bottle for a perfect finish. A couple drops of Tru-Oil should be sufficient for the complete job. Spread the Tru-Oil sparingly and evenly over the entire surface. Extremely thin coats of



At this point, the derringer is ready for its final finish with Tru-Oil stock finish. However, for the best results, the finish should be used only sparingly, with craftsman sanding the wood lightly between application of the coats.

finish are far better than one or two thick coats in that they will produce a finer finish.

After a couple of days have been allowed for drying, the entire gun may be waxed and the lock and barrel lightly oiled. Prior to final waxing, however, the Tru-Oil stock finish should be removed from all inlays with the careful use of 0000 steel wool. Take pains during this phase not to disturb the oil finish on the wood proper.

To add to this historic replica's attractiveness, I built a suitable case of walnut with compartments for a bullet

mould, powder flask, percussion caps and even a small loading rod. This box has a hinged lid and has been as highly finished as the gun itself.

Despite the fact that this replica was built from a kit, if properly assembled and finished, its value can easily increase to \$200 or so. After all, the originals of these tiny handguns are selling daily for \$2000 and up! The original Lincoln Deringer is priceless and cannot be bought for any amount of money. Hence, this replica is well worth owning as a show piece.