

Russian Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich

Trip to the USA hunting grounds - 1872



Preparations for the hunt were extensive and had been carried out under the command of General Joel Palmer. Two companies of infantry in wagons, two companies of cavalry, the cavalry's regimental band, outriders, night herders, couriers, cooks had been mobilized for the event.

The Grand Duke in the company of General Philip Sheridan, General Edward Ord, and General George Armstrong Custer, the latter having been selected to be

Grand Marshall of the hunt, arrived at Fort McPherson on 13 January 1872, by a special train provided by the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. They were greeted by an enthusiastic crowd, headed by William Frederick Cody (know as Buffalo Bill). After speeches, the Duke's party set out for the hunting grounds.

The Duke and General Sheridan rode in an open carriage, drawn by four horses. William Frederick Cody escorted the party with five ambulances, a light wagon for luggage, three wagons of "champagne and royal spirits" and fifteen to twenty extra saddle horses. A relay of horses was set up at Medicine Creek, about half way to the camp, where the party stopped for lunch. The journey then continued to what they called "Camp Alexis" on the Red Willow Creek. The 2nd Cavalry band was in place and in tune; "Hail to the Chief" was played when the Grand Duke arrived. The entire trip covered about 50 miles and took approximately eight hours.

The camp consisted of two hospital tents (used as dining tent), ten wall tents and tents for servants and soldiers. Three wall tents were floored and the Grand Duke's was carpeted with oriental rugs. Box stoves and Sibley stoves were provided for the tents.

Cody had discussed the hunt with Spotted Tail, chief of the Brulé Lakota, who had agreed to meet the "great chief from

across the water who was coming there to visit him." About 600 warriors of different Sioux tribes, led by Spotted Tail, War Bonnet, Black Hat, Red Leaf, Whistler and Pawnee Killer, assembled to greet the grand duke at the hunting camp. They had been provided with ten thousand rations of flour, sugar, coffee, and 1,000 pounds of tobacco for their trouble - twenty-five wagon loads in all.

At the start of the party, Spotted Tail, dressed in a suit, which didn't fit him, with an army belt upside down and an extremely awkward look was introduced to the Grand Duke. Then the Indian chief extended his hand, and greeted the Grand Duke with the customary "How."

For the amusement of Alexei the Indians staged exercises of horsemanship, lance-throwing and bow-shooting. Then there was a sham fight, showing the Indian mode of warfare, closing up with a grand war dance. It was noticed that Grand Duke Alexei paid considerable attention to a good-looking Indian maiden. Concerned that his mother, Empress Maria Alexandrovna, might receive reports of his flirtations, he wrote her from St. Louis: "Regarding my success with American ladies about which so much is written in the newspapers, I can openly say, that this is complete nonsense. They looked on me from the beginning as they would look on a wild animal, as on a crocodile or other unusual beast."

However, a dispute broke out when general Custer, probably having drunk too much champagne, made crude overtures to Spotted Tail's pretty 16-year-old daughter. Alexei was able to calm down the fight with gifts of red and green blankets, ivory-handled hunting knives and a large bag of silver dollars. A formal council took place in Sheridan's tents and a peace pipe was passed around. Spotted Tail seized the chance to press his demand for the right to hunt freely south of the Platte River and for more than one store in which to trade. Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich killing a buffalo with a pistol shot on 15 January 1872.

The buffalo hunt

The big hunt took place on the Grand Duke's 22nd birthday, 14 January 1872. For the hunt the Duke wore a jacket and trousers of heavy gray cloth, trimmed with green, the buttons bearing the Imperial Russian coat-of-arms. He wore his boots outside his trousers in the European way, which was unusual for his American hosts. Alexei carried a Russian hunting knife, and an American revolver, bearing the coats-of-arms of the United States and Russia on the handle, which he had recently received as a present. The hunting party approached a buffalo herd several miles up the Red Willow Creek. The Grand Duke rode William Cody's celebrated buffalo horse "Buckskin Joe", which had been trained to ride at full gallop with a target so that the best shot could be

made. As soon as a herd of buffalo was seen, some two miles away, Alexei wanted to make a charge but was restrained by William Cody.

The party moved to the windward and gradually approached the herd. Within a hundred yards of the fleeing buffalo, the Grand Duke, not accustomed to shooting from a running horse, fired, but missed. Cody rode up close beside Alexei, handed him his own famed .48-caliber rifle, "Lucretia," the one with which he claimed to have killed 4,200 buffalo and advised him not to fire until he was on the flank of the buffalo. When Alexei tried again, he brought down his game. The hide of the dead buffalo was carefully removed and dressed; the Grand Duke took it home as a souvenir of his hunt on the western plains. Twenty to thirty animals were killed on the first day of the hunt. The party returned early to camp, where there was a liberal supply of champagne and other beverages provided, and the evening was spent in frontier style.

The next morning Spotted Tail requested him to hunt by the side of Two Lance, chief of the Nakota Sioux tribe, so that he could see a demonstration of the Indian way of hunting. Coming up to a heard of buffalo, Two Lance demonstrated his skill by killing a large animal with one arrow which passed entirely through the body of the running buffalo. The arrow was preserved and given to Alexei. The Grand Duke

killed two buffalo, one of them at 100 paces distance, with a pistol shot.

On the conclusion of the hunt, when returning to Fort McPherson, General Sheridan proposed that William Cody take the reins and show Alexei the old style of stage driving over the plains with the horses at full gallop. The heavy ambulance bounded over the rough prairie, while the occupants could hardly keep their seats. Grand Duke Alexei was pleased with his hunting trip. When he and Cody parted in Fort McPherson, he presented Cody with a fur coat and expensive cuff links.

It is claimed that, by the time they reached St. Louis, the party's supply of caviar and champagne had been exhausted.

General Custer became one of the Duke's best friends. He accompanied the Duke and his entourage through Kansas, to St. Louis, New Orleans, and finally to Florida. They continued to correspond with one another up until Custer's death.

In the United States, the hunt is remembered as "The Great Royal Buffalo Hunt". Starting from the year 2000, the Hayes Center, Nebraska organizes each year the "Grand Duke Alexis Rendezvous" featuring a reenactment of the buffalo hunt.

The Russian Smith & Wesson Revolver

Specifications

Parent case	.44 S&W American
Bullet diameter	.429 in (10.9 mm)
Neck diameter	.456 in (11.6 mm)
Base diameter	.457 in (11.6 mm)
Rim diameter	.515 in (13.1 mm)
Rim thickness	.060 in (1.5 mm)
Case length	0.970 in (24.6 mm)
Overall length	1.43 in (36 mm)
Primer type	Large pistol

Ballistic performance

Bullet weight/type: 246 gr (15.9 g) lead round nose

Velocity: 750 ft/s

Energy: 310 ft·lbs

The .44 Russian, also known as the .44 S&W Russian, is a blackpowder center fire metallic revolver cartridge developed by Smith & Wesson in 1870. The .44 Russian design marked the first use of an internally lubricated bullet in modern firearm ammunition.

Development history

In the early 1870s, General Alexander Gorloff, the military attaché assigned to the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C., approached Smith & Wesson about the possibility of negotiating a military sales contract for the purchase a large number of Smith & Wesson No. 3 revolvers for the Imperial Russian Army.

However, Gorloff had some reservations about the standard 44 S&W American chambering of the pistol which, similar to today's .22 long rifle, had an externally lubricated heeled bullet. Gorloff correctly recognized that such ammunition tends to pick up debris and contaminants which erode the bore when fired, so a qualification of the purchase contract was that Smith & Wesson develop an internally lubricated version of their .44 round.

Smith & Wesson did so by reducing the diameter of the .44 bullet to .429" and adding lubrication grooves to its base. This evolutionary improvement became an archetype, influencing future cartridge designs. With improved firearm metallurgy available, Smith and Wesson increased the bullet weight of the new cartridge to 246 grains while retaining a heavy 23 grain blackpowder propellant charge which almost equalled that of the .44 American and produced a muzzle velocity of roughly 750 ft/s. As a result of these changes, the

.44 Russian generated a much higher chamber pressure of 12,000 copper units of pressure (CUP) compared to the older .44 American round which generated only 6-8,000 CUP. To prevent the new high-pressure ammunition from being fired in .44 American revolvers with disastrous results, the overall cartridge case length was increased by .02" to 0.970". In addition, the cylinder design of the No. 3 revolver had to be changed from the straight bored .44 American configuration to a stepped arrangement which was .457" at the rear of the cylinder to accept the case, and narrower from the case shoulder forward to give a tight fit for the smaller bore .44 Russian bullet.

In 1872, while in the US, Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich visited the Smith & Wesson factory to review the progress of the Russian order. The American gun maker made him the gift of an engraved presentation Model No. 3 valued at more than \$400, a princely sum of money. The Duke was also feted with a US Government-paid buffalo hunting trip with Buffalo Bill Cody and US Generals Philip Sheridan and George Armstrong Custer, where he was impressed with Cody's adeptness with firearms.

Over 131,000 S&W Model No. 3 revolvers were eventually sold to the Russian Army. In addition to the S&W made revolvers, Belgian, Spanish and German made copies were adopted by several European countries and were used until the 1920s. The .44 Russian chambering became a hit in the

domestic market as well, gaining a reputation as the first American revolver cartridge offering inherent accuracy. In time it set many records, eventually becoming known as an established target round, enabling skilled shooters to achieve 3-inch (76 mm) groups at 50 yards (46 m); notable for the time and still imposing today.

Successor designs

The .44 Russian was the precursor for two very important later handgun cartridges which were based on its design, the .44 Special in 1907 and the .44 Magnum in 1956.

A number of ammunition companies still manufacture .44 Russian ammunition.

(Extracted from Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Duke_Alexei_Alexandrovich_of_Russia); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.44 Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.44_Russian))

It should be noted that, while all the production facilities of Smith & Wesson were engaged in the manufacture of the ‘Russian Smith’ revolver for the Russian government, Colt was supplying its single action revolvers to the American frontier with hardly any competition. It is for this reason that the Colt stands out as #1 in American history, and Smith & Wesson takes second place.

