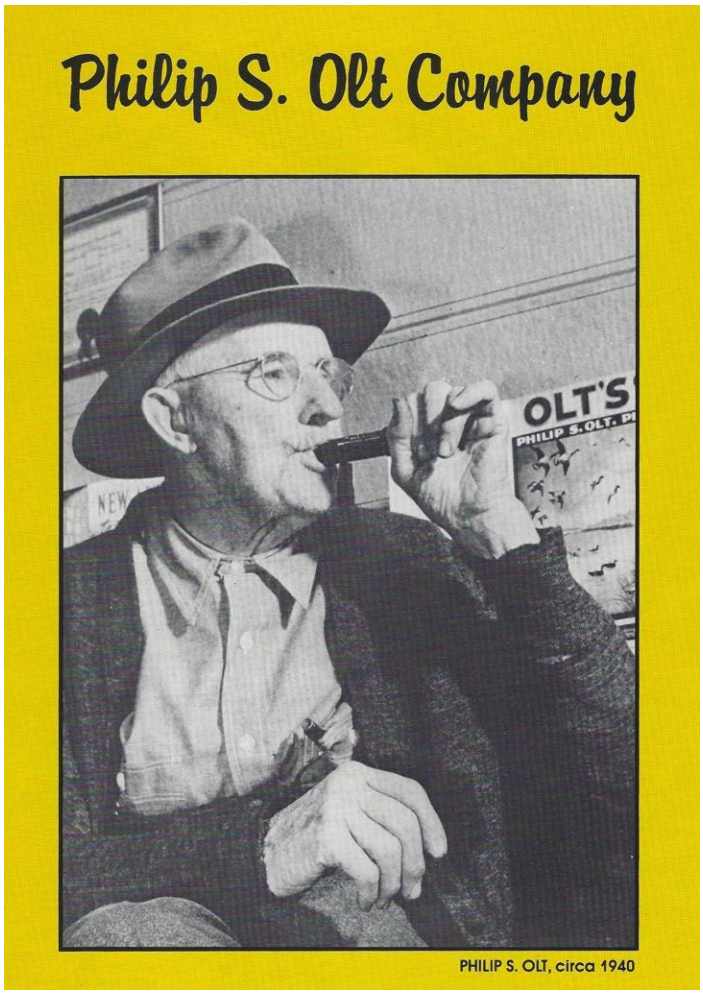
PS OLT BIO



Philip S. Olt, the founder of the game and bird call manufacturing company that bears his name was born in 1870 in Illinois. Of German decent, his early years were spent farming in the Illinois River Valley near Pekin, Illinois. Neon lights and turbocharged automobiles hadn't been invented during Philip Olt's younger years, and like most young men of his times in the rural Midwest, he spent his spare hours hunting and fishing. And the waterfowl hunting was something to behold in the late 1800's. The Illinois River was a whole ecosystem of river, flood plain lakes, prairie marshes and ponds and backwater sloughs. It stretched from near Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River at Grafton in southern Illinois. The whole of it was in the heart of the great Mississippi River flyway.

Philip Olt was well-known locally as a wingshot of considerable skill. His old Lefever Damascus double barrel with the pistol grip wrapped with copper wire still hangs in the Olt factory. But what Philip Olt really was a thoughtful, inventive young man. He first started making duck calls in the late 1800's. Most of the duck calls used in those days were rough copies of the Glodo design made by the mysterious Frenchman, Vit Glodo, in southern Illinois around around 1860. The Glodo-style calls utilized a straight reed base (the grooved part the reed vibrates against) with a brass reed bent upwards on the tip. They were made of wood. Philip Olt didn't think much of the early Glodo style duck calls available. First of all, the brass reed material available varied all over the place as to temper and hardness. A reed bent even slightly more than is should be was useless. And due to the lack of good finishes available, wooden calls quickly became soaked with moisture from condensed breath and saliva.

In the late 1800's, Phil Olt came up with the idea of a duck call with a straight reed and curved reed base just the opposite of the Glodo design. His reasoning was that once the contour was ground into the reed base it would be easy to keep the call in tune with a straight reed. Furthermore, reeds could be replaced quickly and easily in the field if necessary. The first model he produced for sale was the D-2 regular. The year was 1904. Olt's first patent was for an adjustable version of the D-2 duck call called the B-4 adjustable. The Olt straight reed-curved reed base has been copied by every other major and minor call maker today.

Whether Philip Olt was the first to come up with the idea of the contoured reed base and straight reed design for a duck call (and the basis for sound producing for most other types of call), we cannot say with absolute certainty. We believe he was the first and, if not the inventor of the modern duck call, at least the perfector. But to be sure, there were other craftsman-hunters making calls in the Illinois River Valley in those days, and much parallel inventing took place due to lack of communication via a sporting press. A good example of this would be the invention of the choke shotgun bore by Fred Kimble and the Englishman Pape at about the same time, but in different countries. However, much of the foundation for modern waterfowling was invented in Illinois. The names of Olt, Allen, and Perdew are legendary.

When Philip Olt went into production of his D-2 duck call, he took another direction away from the traditional. In order to eliminate the moisture-absorbing problems of wood, he used an entirely different material for the barrel and tonal plug of this call. He chose hard rubber. Hard rubber was and still is an amazing material. It was the cycolac of its day. It possesses amazing dimensional stability in cold weather and an extreme lack of moisture absorption. For example, hard rubber completely immersed in water for one year will asorb less than 1% moisture. What that means is Olt hard rubber

calls have a reputation for working and lasting for years. There are many recorded incidents where Olt duck and goose calls have been recovered from lakes and swamps after being underwater foe 25 years. After a cleaning the mud and other junk out, they were still in good working condition!

The D-2 Regular Duck Call was Philip Olt's first model in 1904. The tonal plug was compression molded in hard rubber, but the barrel of the call was made of hard rubber tubing with a brass ring. He sold 600 the first year. And if we may modestly say so, a legend began. Millions of Olt D-2 duck calls have and are being sold to this day. They are widely used by duck callers ranging in skill from rank beginners to seasoned professional guides. As we hear so often from good callers and guides, "the D-2 has that duck sound." The Olt D-2 has been to duck calling what the magnificent Model 12 Winchester has been to repeating shotguns. They work and last, they're easy to use and reliable, and they didn't cost a fortune to buy.

The D-2 call also developed a little history of its own over the years. Accidentally or on purpose, we created a call that while excellent as produced, it is also very easy to modify. Hard Rubber is easy to file and smooth up, so a little or a lot of material can be taken off in strategic places to change the tone to fit user needs. There are Louisiana modifications where the tip of the tonal plug is cut off and the reed extends over the end for a harder-blowing and loud duck call. There are Arkansas modifications where a second reed is put over the first to make a double reed D-2. And many other D-2's have been filed on a little bit by their owners to get their idea of the perfect raspy hen mallard sound. Quincy Illinois duck hunters also modified their own D-2 duck calls, by milling the groove in the tonal plug about 1/8 of an inch longer and putting a 0.20 reed in for a hard loud sound. It was said if you got more than 5 note out of the call it was too easy to blow!

Originally, the D-2 tonal plug had a round hole in the end. In 1939 this was changed to the current "keyhole shape." Legend or rumor has it the keyhole was used as a spit trough to get rid of the moisture. Not so. Actually, the reason the keyhole shape was incorporated was to make it easy to withdraw the core pin during the compression molding production cycle. Round hole D-2's are still in great demand by expert callers and collectors. The original reed material used in the D-2 and other early Olt calls was spring sheet hard rubber. It produced great duck tones. It usually was about .012" thick and not quite as stiff as the vinyl and mylar plastics used today. Hence the reputation of early Olt calls as being easier to blow than later models.

But the P.S. Olt Company just didn't make duck calls. By the late 1930's they produced a complete line of game calls. The E-1 Crow Call was developed and introduced in 1921. The A-5 Perfect Goose Call in 1930. The C-3 perfect Mallard Call came out in 1929. The F-6 Turkey Call was first sold in 1931. The G-7 Hawk Call completed the early line in 1935. Of all these calls, only the F-6 Turkey Call was made of wood, all other models were made of hard rubber.

1935 was a year of considerable impact for the P.S. Olt Company, and for everyone else who was involved in hunting ducks and geese. A farsighted group of sportsmen concerned with the future and even survival of waterfowl in North America due to extreme drought conditions formed Ducks Unlimited. And 1935 was also the year the federal government called a halt to, among other things, baiting ducks and geese and the use of live decoys for calling. Were it not for those two things happening at the height of the great depression and dust bowl, waterfowl hunting as we know it would be nothing but a dim memories passed down from grandfather.

Outlawing the use of live caking ducks had a big impact on the use of duck calls, to say the least. In 1935 Philip Olt sold about 10,000 D-2 duck calls. By 1941 sales had jumped to about 50,000 D-2's a year. Any every D-2 produced by the Olt Company was hand-filed, hand-tuned and tested before shipment.

Philip Olt had been helped in his game call business by his three sons, Philip, Richard and Arthur (in order of age), and many other employees including Albert Sonderman. In 1950, at the age of 80 Philip Olt was killed in an automobile accident. His three sons and other original employees are also deceased. The company is still owned by the Olt family though, and run by third generation Jim Olt, and Brad Olt. The Olt Company went out of business on April 5, 2002 and ended a great era of waterfowl tradition.