

THE CLEVELAND THAT ONCE WAS AND NOW IS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF GUNS - BY WILLIAM C. BLYNN



William C. Blynn at age 17, with Mossberg .22 cal. Target rifle in Brecksville, Ohio (a suburb of Cleveland)

With regards to the ongoing controversy of private ownership of firearms, permit me to tell you the way it once was in Cleveland, Ohio. Some of this author's personal experiences with that issue as a youth are likely endemic to other cities.

At age 14, I acquired my first firearm at Sears Roebuck and Co., on Carnegie Avenue. I purchased a sporting arm by myself, a 16 gauge J.C. Higgins bolt action shotgun at their sporting goods counter, with Christmas gift money. Also, I purchased shotshells with it.

A year later, at age 15, I acquired my second firearm. It was brought home by my downstairs neighbors' son on Crawford Road in his US Navy duffle bag from the far east theater of war. He generously gave me the firearm – a Japanese World War II military carbine in mint condition. A scarce gun today, in that condition.

I carried the carbine, minus its wooden stock, on a Cleveland streetcar downtown to Hart Arms at 201 Huron Road. Just imagine! A real gun shop in Cleveland. I needed cartridges (bullets) for it. A few of the persons on the streetcar smiled, but otherwise, no one, including the conductor and motorman objected. Hart Arms said that they had no ammo for it. Crossing Public Square, gun in hand, I successfully purchased ammunition for it at the May Co. sporting goods counter on Euclid Ave. It was no hassle for this teenager.

Now, consider this. When I was a student at Addison Jr. High School, located at East 79th St and Hough Avenue, the school principal had planned to have a gun display

in the school display case and asked the students to bring guns from home. If I remember right, that was in 1946. Many students did bring interesting firearms to school, making a very nice display. However, someone broke into the school overnight, via the front door entrance, and stole all the guns! None were ever recovered if the reports were correct.

One may ask here: "Did your parents own guns?" Frankly, no. They had no interest in firearms but didn't object.

This may be interesting also. When my two sons, one now a pharmacist, and the other one a government criminal investigator, were ages 12 and 10, my wife and I gave them Christmas gifts. Each boy received an Italian military Carcano carbine. You know, of course, the very same type of rifle that Oswald used to assassinate President Kennedy. So they say.

I purchased them with my sons at Whitey's Army and Navy store on Prospect Avenue. We took the guns out of an empty fifty-five gallon Oil drum with a sign on it that said "\$7.00 each." The drum held about twenty rifles in it. I later removed the firing pins to be sure they would not fire.

As a Cleveland firefighter, and a war veteran residing temporarily in Medina County for awhile, one of my daughters, a student at Highland Junior High School, was asked to bring, from home to school, something unusual for "show and tell." I permitted her, my oldest daughter, to take my army US M1 Carbine to school on the school bus. She said it was "a hit" on the bus and in the class.

I remember well, as do many of you Clevelanders, the basement exhibit in the Western Reserve Historical Society Museum in Cleveland. In the basement of the Mansion House, there used to be a glass-sealed room, full of semi-modern firearms, including machine guns, which came home as souvenirs of earlier wars brought here by Society Museum officers and members that went to war. Children loved that exhibit.

So, what part has firearms, in my youth, played in this native Clevelanders' adult life? I guess it could be said it prepared me for the inevitable. At age 20, I entered the US Army. My combat infantry unit, in the Korean War, issued me three guns at one time. Among other things, my duties included dispatch rider/company runner.

I was issued an M1 Garand Rifle, an M2 carbine, and a Colt .45acp semi-automatic pistol, plus I slept with a light weight Colt Commander .45acp automatic pistol I obtained from a UN Belgium soldier for \$20.00, who needed it for brothel money.

It was an exact match to my Colt Commander at home with my wife on Division Avenue.

My work consisted of trench warfare, aggressive patrol action and mountain assaults. Small arms, including the bayonet, was our stock in trade. I fear more for my life now on Cleveland streets than I did in the war. Today, a potential murderer, who desires to blow your head off, and they are legion, can assume you probably are not armed in Cleveland. In an earlier time, the opposite was the case.



The author with .45 cal. Colt automatic pistol in holster on webb belt and M2 Carbine on front lines in 1952 Kumwha North Korea at age 20.

Clevelanders enjoyed a time at the turn of the twentieth century when a great deterrent to murder was gathering together hundreds of people to watch a hanging on Public Square of a convicted murderer. You take a life - you forfeit yours.

My, how times have changed. Guns are now still popular, especially in Cleveland, with many school students taking guns to schools, churches, etc. as a status symbol for a "show and tell" of their own.

I have saved to the last this nostalgic tidbit that may warm your heart. In point of fact, one could actually visit an amusement park in the Cleveland area in those days, such as Puritus Springs Park on Cleveland's west side near Rocky River valley, and potentially, win a genuine little .25 caliber automatic pistol! As one walked down the

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COSSECK PISTOLS

We want to thank Neil and Julia Gutterman for their great display of Cosseck Pistols at the September meeting. Following is an excerpt from their display.



Georgia is a region in the south-central Caucasus with a long history of weapons production. Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, had an arms-production center composed of craftsmen from Georgia as well as Armenia, Dagestan and Ossetia. Attributions of a particular Caucasian weapon to Georgia or any other region, can be made if there is a Tiflis, or other regional silver-guild hallmark, on the weapon or any of its associated accessories. The Georgian people, because of their similar Christian religion, were more receptive to the series

of Russian victories in the Caucasus during the 19th century, whereas the people of Dagestan and Circassia resisted Russian occupation and substantial numbers emigrated.

Circassia is the northwestern region of



the Caucasus but unlike Georgia it had no major weapons-production center. Rather, weapons production was undertaken by village craftsmen and firearms production usually involved imported Turkish barrels. Accordingly, the presence of Arab script is more likely on Circassian arms than on arms from Georgia. Due to the exodus resulting from the Russian victories of the

mid-19th century. Circassian arms dated after 1861 are extremely rare. Most Circassian arms to be found today are from the 18th century or the first half of the 19th century. There is very little difference in the appearance in technology of arms throughout that period, as there was little change during that 50 year period. The North Caucas regions, including Circassia and Chechova were subject to severe repression under both the Imperial Russian government and the Soviets. Arms possession was strictly prohibited, and routine searches and confiscation of even heirloom weapons was widespread.



Neil and Julia Gutterman

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boardwalk, there was a toss game where one would purchase balls to throw at fuzzy dolls, standing in a row. Your reward could be pleasing if the doggone dollies would just cooperate.

Upon relating how I could have possibly won a real .25 caliber German pocket automatic pistol at Puritus Springs Park as a teenager, reminds me of another .25 caliber German automatic pistol of three decades later in my life. I was approached by the owner of another identical German pistol to see if I might arrange a donation of his gun to the West Point Academy Museum. His pistol was well-known to me and it would be an honor to handle the matter. It took one telephone call to the curator to hear a resounding yes! The pistol was on its way to a new permanent home on the Hudson. The pistol was a Menz Lilliput (remember the Lilliputians of Gulliver's Travels?) It was gold-plated and totally engraved, and documented to have been Adolf Hitler's own. What a match to the West Point Museum's own Smith & Wesson military and police model revolver, once owned by Reichsmartial Hermann Goering. Doubtless, both guns can be seen there today.

Oh, and I must not forget what environment had on the gun issue. I resided in what is now known as the Hough and

Glenville area, near Crawford Rd and Hough. A few of the original commercial buildings still stand where once there was a bustling shopping center. The shells of the bank building and the Hough Library are still there and they pleasure my memory. The Hough theater and the Market Basket grocery are gone. Much to the credit of the Western Reserve Historical Society, they do have several original store-fronts, such as the Crawford Saloon on the basement level.

The reason I mention all that is it had much to do with my liking of guns. There was a hardware store on Hough near Hough school. Some of us schoolboys, on occasion, stopped in and nurtured our fascination with the rack of rifles, which included Winchester, Remington, Marlin, Lever, and bolt-action rifles. Who could forget the looks of those wood finishes and blueing? The hardware store also sold beautiful Bowie style Case sheath hunting knives. In a Depression, these were the things dreams were made of. All the western movies were so common in those years—remember Stagecoach? The best I could manage to acquire in those days was a cap pistol. Gene Autry was on the plastic grips of my capgun.

If you do not already know it, the controversial 2nd Amendment to the Constitution was inserted, not just so one could hunt rabbits or defend again criminals or invaders, but it was absolutely felt by most

founding Fathers that we should be able to defend ourselves against our future government, if necessary.

Adios, amigo. Keep your powder dry and watch your back in Cleveland and in all the other big cities.



William Blynn has been a member for over 45 years and a past display show participant. Above, enjoying the great outdoors with his pal Jojo.