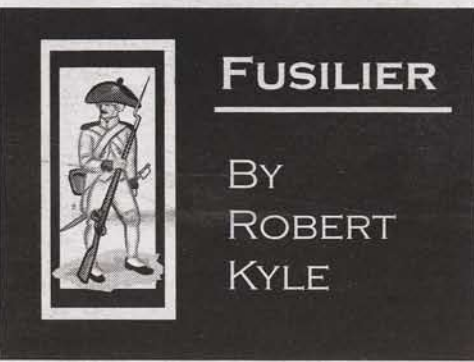


The Singer pistol: Not to be had for a song

You can buy a circa 1940 Singer sewing machine for around \$100. But a rare Singer pistol will cost you tens of thousands of dollars. Singer went into the military handgun business briefly in early World War II. The U.S. government used them as a test to see how well a manufacturing company that never made a gun could produce them to help the war effort.

In April 1940 Singer was given an "educational order" to make 500 Colt Model 1911A1 semi-automatic .45 caliber pistols. After fulfilling the order, however, either company management or the government decided Singer could best help the cause by making bomb sights and other weapon-related parts. The 500 handguns were distributed throughout the military. The equipment to make them was transferred to the Remington-Rand and Ithaca manufacturing plants.

The Colt Model 1911A1 was made by five companies during the war but those made by Singer have become the most coveted by collectors. Rarity and scarcity is behind it all. When they come up for sale at major gun auctions they go for a fortune. In September 2008 Rock Island Auctions in Moline, Ill., sold the second



example Singer made for \$74,750. As a comparison, the same Model 1911A1 made by Remington-Rand or Ithaca is valued at \$1,000 or so. It's all in the name. For Singer guns, however, there is no name. They are marked simply, "S. Mfg. Co., Elizabeth, N.J. U.S.A." on the side of the gun. All serial numbers fall into a designated range of S800001 to S800500.

Two more Singers were available at Rock Island's recent April 30-May 2 auction. Serial number S800499, the next to last one made, sold for \$28,750. An after-market beveled cut near the injection port hurt the value a bit. The other, S800326, went for \$34,500. If reading this has got you hankerin' to add a Singer to your collection, Rock Island will offer serial number S800221 in its auction Sept. 10-12.

Singer also made, as a subcontractor to Underwood, receivers for the M1 carbine. A Singer factory in Clydebank, Scotland, made bayonets for the British

Left: Rock Island Auctions in Moline, Ill., will offer this rare Model 1911A1 semi-automatic pistol made by the Singer Sewing Machine Co. in its Sept. 10-12 sale. It is number 221 out of only 500 made.

Lee-Enfield No. 4 Mk. I rifle.

Rock Island's spring auction took in \$7.6 million. Among the highlights: Volcanic pistol, \$74,750, sterling silver Colt deringer, \$69,000; Colt Model 1900 semi-auto pistol, \$43,125; Model 1878 Colt engraved sheriff model, \$46,000; Winchester Model 1873 with carved ivory stock, \$40,250; cased Nazi Luftwaffe survival drilling, \$20,700; and a gold inlaid O/U shotgun by Luciano Bosis, \$43,125.