

## The WWI "Spruce Guns"

[HOME](#)•[MEMBERSHIP](#)•[PUBLICATIONS](#)•[FEATURE](#)•[SHOWS](#)•[FAQs](#)•[STORE](#)•[ABOUT](#)•[CONTACT](#)•[LINKS](#)

### **Martially Marked Winchester Model 1894 Carbines**

By Rick Hill - #3517 L

Up until recent times, the U.S. Army Ordnance Department had a history of being unprepared for armed conflict. This was certainly the case when the United States declared war against Germany on April 6, 1917. With the need for rapid mobilization, the Ordnance Department hurriedly contracted with Remington Arms Co. and Winchester Repeating Arms Co. for commercial production of the Model 1917 Enfield rifle to supplement production of the Model 1903 Springfield rifle manufactured by the U.S. Armories at Springfield, MA and Rock Island, IL. All told, there would be 2,193,429 U.S. .30 caliber Enfields manufactured in 1917 and 1918.(1) While the military was focused on mass producing Springfield and Enfield rifles, Winchester had accumulated an abundance of the Model 1894s, and in a letter dated April 24, 1917, solicited their salesmen to offer these pieces to municipalities and state agencies for home defense purposes.(2)

As U.S. troops were busy being outfitted with arms and equipment to confront the Germans, a rather obscure and localized industry in the Pacific Northwest was identified as being essential to the war effort in Europe. This area grew straight grained Sitka Spruce trees essential for aircraft construction. Milled Sitka Spruce lumber was sold to France and England in addition to being supplied to the U.S. Aircraft Production Division. When the United States entered WW I, our Air Service was organized as the Aviation Section Signal Corps (ASSC)(3) of the Army. The ASSC was directed to operate and supervise "all military aircraft, including balloons and aeroplanes, all appliances pertaining to said craft, and signaling apparatus of any kind when installed on said craft." In line with the ASSC's mission, the Aircraft Production Board passed a resolution on October 11, 1917 outlining a plan to station military squadrons in the Portland, Oregon area to ensure that timber harvesting was rapidly expanded to meet aircraft production demands.



In early October of 1917, U.S Army Lt. Colonel Brice P. Disque, was dispatched to Portland, Oregon, to attend a conference of leading loggers and lumber mill operators and assess the feasibility of greatly increasing the production of quality kiln-dried Sitka Spruce. Disque learned that the entire lumber industry in the Pacific Northwest was in a chaotic condition beset with labor problems. The International Workers of the World (I.W.W.) or "Wobblies" had for six months been involved in an organizing effort to establish the 8 hour work day in the mills at \$3.00 per day minimum wage and a 9 hour work day in the lumber camps with a \$3.50 daily minimum wage. At that time, the going daily rate was \$2.50 for a work day that often lasted twelve to fourteen hours.(4) In the spring of 1917, workers throughout the lumber industry threatened to walk-off their jobs if their demands were not met.(5) Loggers and mill operators who defied the union frequently found trees spiked with large nails and chunks of iron which tore up equipment and often injured workers. After his return to Washington and upon presentation of his report, Disque was promoted to Colonel and given command of the Spruce Production Division of the U.S. Signal Corps headquartered at Vancouver Barracks, Washington. He was instructed ".....you're going to see that the aircraft factories are supplied with spruce to manufacture the planes we need to fight this war. You're to do anything you have to." Reminiscent of Caesar, who was credited with the famed statement "I came, I saw, I conquered" it is said of Disque's experience in the Pacific Northwest that "He came to see and stayed to saw!"

The Signal Corps senior staff anticipated the need for armed personnel to ensure a peaceful workforce. While the organization was gearing up to establish a military constituency, the Signal Corps turned to domestic sources for weapons to support their home defense mission since military arms production was entirely committed to supplying our troops overseas. On December 29, 1917, the Small Arms Division of the U.S. Army Ordnance Department placed purchase order number 291 with Winchester Repeating Arms Co. for 1,800 Winchester Model 1894 carbines "sighted for center fire smokeless powder cartridges cal. 30 with full patch bullets".(6) These arms were shipped, along with 50,000 cartridges(7),

one week later, on January 5, 1918 to the Commanding Officer, Signal Corps Troops, Vancouver Barracks, Vancouver, Washington. These Winchesters were stamped with a "US" and an ordnance bomb on the forward upper portion of the receiver. There are no periods after the "U" and "S" and individual stamps were used for each symbol. Model 1894 Carbines with these markings in the 835,xxx to 853,xxx serial number range have come to be known as "Spruce Guns".



Initially logging and milling operations were organized under the Spruce



Production Division of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. The Spruce Production Division was organized as a two-sided operation with a Military Department and a Civilian Logging and Milling Department. The Military Department was organized on February 6, 1918, with the formation of the First Provisional Regiment ASSC (Mill) headquartered at Vancouver Barracks, Vancouver, Washington. This organization consisted of six Aero Construction Squadrons (407th – 412 th Squadrons ASSC), each with a personnel authorization of five officers and 150 enlisted men. The Second Provisional Regiment ASSC (Guard) was also organized on the same day and consisted of the 401 st through 406 th Aero Construction Squadrons. These troops were issued the 1,800 Winchesters already delivered to Vancouver Barracks. The Civilian Logging and Milling Department was organized beginning the first part of December 1917 as the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen (L.L.L.L.) for which a patriotic pledge was prepared with each signer being furnished with a membership card and a badge of unique and attractive design.<sup>(8)</sup> At maximum strength, there were over 125,000 men inducted into the L.L.L.L.

On May 20, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson issued an executive order transferring aviation activities from the Signal Corps to two new entities, the Bureau of Aircraft Production (BAP) and the Division of Military Aeronautics, both under the direct command of the Adjutant General of the War Department. As part of this reorganization, the BAP took over all airplane construction including the Spruce Production Division, and the twelve ASSC Squadrons were renumbered and renamed. The 407 th to the 412 th became the 1 st to the 6 th and the 439 th to the 444 th became the 7 th to the 12 th Spruce Squadrons. The Army Appropriations Act of July 9, 1918, authorized the Director of Aircraft Production to form "one or more corporations for the purchase, production, manufacture and sale of aircraft, aircraft equipment or materials therefore, and to build, own and operate railroads in connection therewith."<sup>(9)</sup> Utilizing authority granted by this Act, the Spruce Production Division was transformed into the "United States Spruce Production Corporation." Articles of Incorporation for the "United States Spruce Production Corporation" were filed on August 20, 1918; however, the division did not become a Corporation until November 1, 1918.

Ultimately five military field districts were established within the Spruce Production Division. These districts were located at the following locations: Headquarters, Vancouver Barracks, Vancouver, Washington; Puget Sound; Grays Harbor and Willapa Bay; Clatsop; and Yaquina Bay. At maximum strength, there were 26,122 enlisted men and 1,027 officers assigned to 234 soldier camps along the Oregon and Washington coasts. Up to 6,000 troops were assigned to "riving" or splitting the large spruce logs in the field to facilitate their removal while 4,000 more troops were employed working around the clock in the Cut-Up Plant in Vancouver, Washington. These troops worked for civilian contractors and were paid civilian wages.

Although lumber operations started under the cloud of industrial disruption from militant labor unions, there were no significant confrontations with the I.W.W. and most of the Model 1894 Winchesters were confined to drill and guard duties. There are no indications that additional Model 1894 carbines were ordered over and above the initial 1,800 units.

World War I ended on November 11, 1918 and the 12 Spruce Squadrons began deactivation shortly after the armistice was signed. Demobilization was completed on February 4, 1919 giving the Spruce Production Division a life span of an even year minus two days<sup>(10)</sup>. Equipment belonging to the U.S. Spruce Production Corporation was subsequently cataloged and sold at public auction. As of this date, the disposition of the 1,800 "Spruce Guns" is unknown; however, the August 14, 1919 Monthly Property Report shows that there were 1,526 Winchester carbines & parts with an appraised value of \$18,964.37 remaining in inventory.

Information pertaining to these "Spruce Guns" has heightened the recent interest of both the military and Winchester collector alike resulting in escalating prices for original examples.

Following is list of currently identified "Spruce Guns". The serial numbers generally range from 835,xxx to 853,xxx. This range corresponds to manufacture dates (commonly accepted in the Madis publications) of 1918-1919. Since the guns under discussion were delivered on January 5, 1918, production would have taken place in 1917 or earlier and it would appear that the accepted dates of production may be in error by as much as two years. Examples of later guns with U.S. Ordnance marks exist. There is no current information regarding military purchases however many have turned up in Arizona and New Mexico and speculation is that they were purchased for use by National Guard (later U.S. Border Patrol) units.

Serial No.	Notes	Serial No.	Notes	Serial No.	Notes
621776	Maybe 821776 ???	841300*		847385	
<b>784029</b>		841625		<b>848335</b>	
<b>806525</b>	double stamped ???	<b>841820</b>		848363	
810460		<b>842117</b>		848396	author's gun
<b>810827</b>	rcvr. sight added	842333*		<b>848540</b>	
811598		842335*		<b>848564</b>	
812010*	also stamped "LC '17"	842337		<b>848586</b>	

812010	also stamped "J.C. '17"	842337	848673
<b>821776</b>		842348	848673
<b>826328</b>		842437	849006*
<b>831115</b>		842520*	<b>849369</b>
835889		842547	<b>849398</b>
836029*		842585*	<b>849426</b> high condition
<b>836432</b>		842843	849588*
<b>836508</b>	also stamped "J.C. '17"	842918	849681*
<b>836529</b>	also stamped "J.C. '17"	<b>842946</b> author's gun	849685
836772		<b>843089</b>	849803*
<b>836812</b>		<b>843556</b>	<b>849900</b>
836939		843569*	<b>849944</b>
836998*	also stamped "J.C. '17"	843744	849951*
<b>837207</b>	also stamped "J.C. '17"	<b>843791</b>	<b>849991</b>
837552*		<b>843826</b>	849998*
<b>837658</b>		843835*	850086
<b>837683</b>		843838	<b>850210</b>
838223*		843908	850229*
838233*		844671	<b>850255</b>
838374		844688	<b>850265</b> Madis - "Winchester Book"
<b>838422</b>	"MASS/10"	<b>844858</b>	850277
<b>838456</b>	also stamped "J.C. '17"	844860	<b>850491</b>
<b>838506</b>	also stamped "J.C. '17"	845085	<b>850524</b>
<b>838537</b>		845620	<b>850534</b>
<b>838719</b>		845780*	850547
<b>838727</b>	also stamped "DHO"	845784 reblued	<b>850549</b>
838795		845871	850718*
838898		<b>845909</b>	850932 also "U.S. Border Patrol"
<b>839152</b>		845925*	<b>850943</b>
839244		846016	<b>851393</b>
<b>839248</b>		846388	<b>851397</b> stamped on left side rcvr.
839288		846531	<b>851418</b>
839335		846586	851764* Madis - "Winchester Book"
839404*	also stamped "J.C. '17"	846653*	852119
839792		846665*	852123
840057*	also stamped "J.C. '17"	846715	852128
840110*		<b>846731</b>	<b>852130</b>
<b>840184</b>	also stamped "J.C. '17"	<b>846748</b>	852147 "U" on side
840321		846864*	852149*
840386		846878*	852170
<b>840524</b>		<b>846928</b>	852231
<b>840538</b>		847036	852242
840580		<b>847051</b>	852249
840751		<b>847143</b>	852273*
840757		<b>847148</b>	<b>852318</b>
840897*		847333	853569
841028*		847352*	<b>854493</b>
841208		847363	<b>855059</b>

**841267** Canada

**Data Sources:** Original list of serial numbers from Harold McCallum dated Jan. 1979. Numbers marked with an asterisk are updates provided to the McCallum list by Sam Maxwell about 1987. Numbers in **bold face type** provided by Rick Hill research March 2005 & italicized bold type after March 2005.

**Note:** The significance of the "J.C. '17" stamp on the bottom of the receiver beneath the serial number is unknown at this time. However, the initials "J.C." might stand for Captain James Van D. Crisp, who was assigned as Disbursing Officer, Representing the Finance Dept. of the Equipment Division of the Signal Corps at Vancouver Barracks on October 28, 1917.

**Author's note:** Acquisition of a Winchester Model 1894 martially marked carbine at the W.A.C.A. show in Cody in June of 2004 led to the research that ultimately produced this article. Special thanks go to WACA members Jim Curlovic, Carl Heinrich and Rob Kassab for providing information and photographs in support of this effort. Historian Hayes Otoupalik provided valuable assistance including the photograph of the 412 th Aero Squadron and the L.L.L.L. badge. Rod Crossley shared his extensive knowledge of the Spruce Production Division and corrected certain historical errors in the initial draft of the article. Finally, thanks go to all of the W.A.C.A. members who shared details of Winchesters and added to the list of identified "Spruce Guns".

- (1) Flayderman, Norm, "Flayderman's Guide to Antique American Firearms", 7 th Edition, pg. 489
- (2) Madis, George, "The Winchester Book", 1977 edition, pg. 442
- (3) United States Army, "History of Spruce Production Division", 1920, forward
- (4) Betts, William J, "Logging for Victory – The Spruce Production Division", True West Magazine, June 1989 pg. 31
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) Canfield, Bruce N., "The Winchester In The Service", pg. 89
- (7) Canfield, Bruce N., "19 th Century Military Winchesters", American Rifleman, March 2001, pg. 36
- (8) United States Army, "History of Spruce Production Division", 1920, pg. 19
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) United States Army, "History of the Spruce Production Division", 1920, pg. 68



**Winchester Arms Collectors Association**  
**915 S.W. Rimrock Way, #201-401 • Redmond, OR 97756**  
**Phone: (541) 526-5929 • Fax: (971) 285-9046**



Web Design by C.Michael Hager

**Last updated on February 20, 2012**