

MEMENTOS WITH HISTORY (83)

RUBYS, STARS, AND BUTTONS

Recently a friend, fellow collector, and author of the recent and excellent book “Unique Pistols”, Mr. Robert Adair, of Fort Worth, Texas, USA, contacted me, and through me, my good friend Juan. L. Calvó, well known author of multiple works on Spanish weapons, requesting any information that we could offer regarding a subject that he and his friend and colleague, and also co-author with Mr. Jean Huon, of the book “French Service Handguns 1858-2004”, are researching further:

It concerns some features found in many Ruby pistols, thousands of which were acquired by the French Army during World War I, when France found itself in need of vast amounts of handguns which its own factories, fully engaged in the manufacture of heavy weapons, could not satisfy. They then turned to their southern neighbor's arms industry by means of an Armaments Acquisition Commission which, initially contracted with the firm Gabilondos y Urresti, manufacturers of an Eibar type pistol which they marketed with their registered trademark “Ruby”.

The demand of up to 30.000 pistols per month quickly overwhelmed Gabilondos y Urresti's manufacturing capacity and this firm had to subcontract initially with two other reputable makers, Bonifacio Echeverria (STAR and IZARRA) and Esperanza y Unceta (ASTRA and VICTORIA), later on subcontracting with even more makers. But as the French demand continued to increase, the French Commission contracted in addition directly with other smaller and or less reputable workshops, which produced their “Rubys” with little interchangeability of parts and magazines, creating practical problems at the battle front.

Many, but not all, these pistols show the following, well known to collectors, features and markings:



Ruby type pistol trademark IZARRA (Bonifacio Echeverria), serial numbered on the slide and the frame but not on the magazine. I in a circle logo on the frame and the base of the magazine.

1)-Many bear a **serial number** on the slide, the frame, and the magazines; Others, only on the frame and slide plus the manufacturer's **logo** or **code** on the left side of the frame and the base of the magazine; This logo usually consists of one or two letters in a circle or oval, for example **EU** in an oval for Esperanza y Unceta , an **I** in a circle for IZARRA (Echeverria), **GU** for Gabilondos y Urresti, **AK** in a circle for ALKARTASUNA, etc. The reason for these initials or codes was, not only to identify the maker, but to match the pistol with its magazines and vice versa, as many of these different makers were not interchangeable. It is believed that these markings were all applied at the respective factories, prior to their export.



Ruby type pistol with serial number on base of magazine and stars on both sides of magazine release.



Ruby type pistol without stars or serial number on butt.

2)-Many others, but again, not all, also bear one, or usually two small **five pointed stars**, on the butt , at one or both sides of the magazine well, and it has been traditionally accepted that these stars represented a French Army property marking applied to them during WWI. However, there are now reasons to believe that they were probably applied to many of these pistols during a vast weapons refurbishing program during the 1,920s, and that they represent not so much a property marking, but indicate a foreign made weapon which has been inspected, found fit for service, and accepted, by French inspectors during the refurbishing program.



Ruby type pistol with steel button on the slide preventing contact between the safety lever and the holster's interior lining.

3)-Finally, a number of these pistols exhibit on the left side of the frame and above the safety lever, a steel **button** or hemisphere, which was grafted on to the pistol in order to separate it by a few mm from the inner surface of the holster, thus preventing an inadvertent release of the safety lever and an accidental discharge, something which apparently happened in a number of cases. Today there is also reason to believe that this button was applied during the 1920s refurbishing program and not during the Great War.

Further documentation is needed, however, supporting these conclusions, which although most probably correct, are anecdotal and empirical, and therefore require confirmation. We will very much appreciate any additional information that any of our readers may be able to contribute. My personal email is hjmeruelo@gmail.com .

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