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**THE CORUNNA FACTORY'S "NACIONAL",
AND OTHER POST SPANISH CIVIL WAR PISTOLS**



"NACIONAL" pistols, the largest one marked NACIONAL Cal. 9 mm - FABRICA DE ARMAS LA CORUÑA, SN A0050 and, the smaller one marked NACIONAL Cal. 9 mm corto - FABRICA DE ARMAS-LA CORUÑA, SN 0014.

I discovered the existence of the NACIONAL pistols while reading "Las Armas en España" by Jesus E. Casariego, published in 1984 by the "Empresa Nacional Santa Barbara de Industrias Militares S.A.", in commemoration of its 25th Anniversary; While describing the production of the Corunna Factory he states: "The project was started in 1941 and an experimental lot of 50 "NACIONAL", 9 mm caliber pistols was manufactured, but production in series was never developed"; Shortly thereafter I had the opportunity to see what had been done to most, if not all, of them, as can be appreciated from the above photographs; Many may applaud this but none, I trust, among my readers.

In the previous articles I discussed the War Industries of the Republic; The "Nacionales" (the pro-Franco, anti government rebels) also created their factories, one at Corunna (Galicia) in 1936 which they equipped with machinery from the Oviedo Factory which was at that time threatened by the Republican forces, and another one in Palencia in 1937 which they equipped with the Toledo Factory's machine tools; During the Civil War the 7mm M-1916 Mauser Musketoon (short rifle) was made in the Corunna Factory, and, in collaboration with the Oviedo Factory, also the model of 1937 "O-C" (Oviedo-Coruña) light machine gun; The Palencia Factory was limited to manufacturing ammunition.

At the end of the Civil War the Corunna Factory also produced the 9 mm Largo caliber "Coruña" SMG, based on the ERMA-VOLLMER, and, the Model of 1943 Mauser short rifle in 7.92 mm caliber, while the Palencia Factory continued to manufacture ammunition.

I am not aware of any specifically designed "war time" pistol production on the National side as the ASTRA (Unceta y C^a) and STAR (Bonifacio Echeverria) factories fell into their hands with the fall of the Northern front in April of 1937; The ASTRA factory had not

been damaged during the bombing of Guernica and was militarized in May, although one year later it was returned to its owners, Unceta y C^a; The STAR factory in Eibar had been evacuated prior to the city's fire and its machinery had been stored in Derio, Vizcaya, something that facilitated its rehabilitation.



ASTRA 300 pistol, 9 mm Corto, SN 574575 made in 1943 with German Army acceptance (WaffenAmt) markings: WaAD20. The barrel marked: 9 m/m KURZ. A total of 6.000 were delivered in 1941. (Photo H. J. Meruelo)

Leonardo M. Antaris in his work "ASTRA automatic pistols" (FIRAC, Sterling, Colorado, USA) describes the export, in 1941, of 6,000 ASTRA M 400, and 6,000 M 300, 9 mm Corto pistols to the German Army, which received a total of 84,990 M 300s from 1941-44, of which, 63,000 were in 9 mm Kurtz caliber and 21,990 in 7.65 mm; In 1943 "Unceta y Cia." started production of the 9 mm Parabellum M 600 which was adopted by the Germans as the "Pistole Modell 600/43"; A total of 10.500 were delivered, the first 50 test pieces, quickly followed during May-July 1944 by another 10,450; In addition, close to 30,000 units could not be delivered due to the Normandy invasion and remained in Spain where in the early 1950s they were sold to the Federal Republic of Germany. Production of the M 400 and M 600 ceased in 1945 but the M 300 in both 9 mm Corto and 7.65 mm continued to be made until 1947.



ASTRA 600 pistol, 9 mm Parabellum, SN 9643 made in 1943 with German Army acceptance (WaffenAmt) markings: WaAD251. The barrel marked: PIST.PATR.08 (9 mm Parabellum). A total of 10,500 were delivered (SNs 50-10,500). Photo H. J. Meruelo



ASTRA 600 pistol, 9 mm Parabellum, sold to the Federal Republic of Germany in the early 1950s with LBPN marking on the grip (Landesbereitschaftspolizei Niedersachsen). (Photo H. J. Meruelo)

STAR Bonifacio Echeverria also supplied STAR B 9 mm Parabellum pistols to Nazi Germany and Bulgaria; Quoting again Leonardo M. Antaris, this time in his work "STAR Firearms" (FIRAC, Davenport, Iowa, USA) where he details the export of 25,000 units to Germany in four different shipments: 4,000 in 1942 lacking any WaffenAmt marking, 8,000 in 1943 with WaAD20 WaffenAmt marking, 5,000 in May and 8,000 in June 1944 also bearing WaAD20 marking; A further 2,000 remained in Spain as the Allied Invasion made their delivery to the Germans impossible; They were part of those sold to West Germany in 1951-55 .

Antaris, in the same work, gives all the details that differentiate the pistols in each shipment, the most striking one being the Company name which was "STAR S.A. CONTINUADORA DE B. ECHEVERRIA" for the first three shipments but was simplified to "STAR B. ECHEVERRIA S.A." in the last two of May-June 1944.



9 mm Cal. STAR B pistol with the markings corresponding to the June 1944 shipment (Photos H. J. Meruelo)



A certain number (??) of STAR B pistols, separate from the LPN and LBPB marked guns, were purchased by the Hesse State Police and they bear this State's rampant lion emblem on their butts. (Photos H. J. Meruelo)

In 1946 trials were conducted in order to select a new regulation pistol for the Army; "Unceta y Cia" presented the ASTRA 700 with internal, and the ASTRA 800 with external, hammers, both in 9 mm Largo, but it was Bonifacio Echeverria's STAR A SUPER, also in 9 mm Largo, that was chosen by the Army on July, 24, 1946 and shortly thereafter on October, 25, 1946, by the Navy.



9 mm Largo ASTRA 700, SN 1 marked UNCETA Y COMPAÑÍA S.A. GUERNICA (Spain) y "ASTRA" Mod. 700 9m/m (38). (Photos P. Bello)



9 mm Parabellum commercial, ASTRA 800 CONDOR SN 827371 marked "ASTRA" Mod. 800 / "ASTRA" UNCETA y Cia. S.A. GUERNICA - Spain. (Photos H. J. Meruelo)



STAR model A SUPER, 9 mm Largo, adopted in 1946 as regulation sidearm for the Army and Navy; This Army specimen has the serial number preceded by the initials "E.T." (Ejército de Tierra = Land Army) (Photos H. J. Meruelo)



Air Force STAR A, 9 mm Largo, pistol bearing the emblem of the "Legions of the Air" (1939-1946). (Photos H. J. Meruelo)

The Air Force (Ejército del Aire) (Army of the Air), created by Law of October, 8, 1939 was initially conceived as having an important attached infantry element, which would include an "Aviation Arm" and an "Arm of Aviation Troops" which, organized in "Banderas", same as the Foreign Legion (Tercio de Extranjeros), would be called "Legions of the Air", and would be composed of airfield protection and airborne assault troops, plus paratroopers and antiaircraft artillery components; This project was abandoned before its Uniform Regulations were approved on November, 15, 1946; The STAR A pistol had been adopted by the Air Force and some specimens bear the emblem of those "Legions of the Air" which combines those of the Foreign Legion and of the Air Force.

On January, 15, 1940 it was decreed that the Corp of Carabineros (anti-smuggling border and coast guards) should be merged into the Guardia Civil and on September, 11 of the same year new Uniform Regulations were enacted including an emblem that united the traditional one of the Corp of Carabineros (crossed carbines under a crown) with that of the Guardia Civil (entwined GC also under crown); This new combined emblem was in use for a very short period (1940-43) and disappeared with the new Army Uniform Regulations of January, 27, 1943, which included the Guardia Civil, and described its new emblem as crossed Sword and Lictor, still in use today.



ABOVE: 9 mm. Largo Guardia Civil regulation STAR Model A (M1940) pistol (SN 49246) bearing the combined emblem of the Guardia Civil and Carabineros (BELOW CENTER) which was used briefly from 1940-1943 when it was substituted (1-27-1943) by the current Guardia Civil emblem (BELOW RIGHT); This combined emblem was , much later on, cancelled or over stamped by an inverted U (again, BELOW CENTER), and in a second specimen (SN 50391), by an inverted U containing an M (BELOW LEFT) which is the property marking of the Army of the Republic of South Africa (Union of South Africa Military) who adopted and acquired many of them in the 1970s-80s during their involvement in the Angolan war, after they were converted by STAR to 9 mm. Parabellum by changing the barrel and slide and were re-stamped as Model Bs. (Photos H. J. Meruelo)

Finally, we think it interesting to make some comments here regarding the STAR pistols that traveled to Russia as personal weapons of around three hundred Civil Guards that accompanied the Spanish Division of Volunteers (Blue Division, 250th Infantry Division of the Wehrmacht) as a Military Police unit when the Division was sent to fight in that front; There is anecdotal and photographic evidence that the Civil Guards left Spain already armed with their regulation STAR pistols (M1922-1931-1940) in 9 mm Largo (Bergmann-Bayard) caliber, using their then traditional usually black holsters and belts, and that they continued to use them in the Russian front even after they were re-equipped with German uniforms; Not so the division's officers who used German handguns (P-08 Luger/Parabellum and Walther P-38s) with German holsters, belts, etc; It would be interesting to speculate if perhaps they also may have used some STARs Model B in 9 mm Parabellum caliber, which were precisely at that time being produced in Spain for the German Army, Navy, and Police as a supplementary weapon, as its

ammunition, being regulation in the German forces, was of much easier procurement than the 9 mm Largo, but, we have no evidence whatsoever supporting this possibility; Any information or comments regarding this subject will be much appreciated.

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