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THE 1920'S PRODUCTION



Eight shot, Model 1926 STAR, cal. 7,65 mm, pistol; 95mm barrel, marked: BONIFACIO ECHEVERRIA EIBAR (ESPAÑA) and: STAR CAL 7,65 m/m & 32

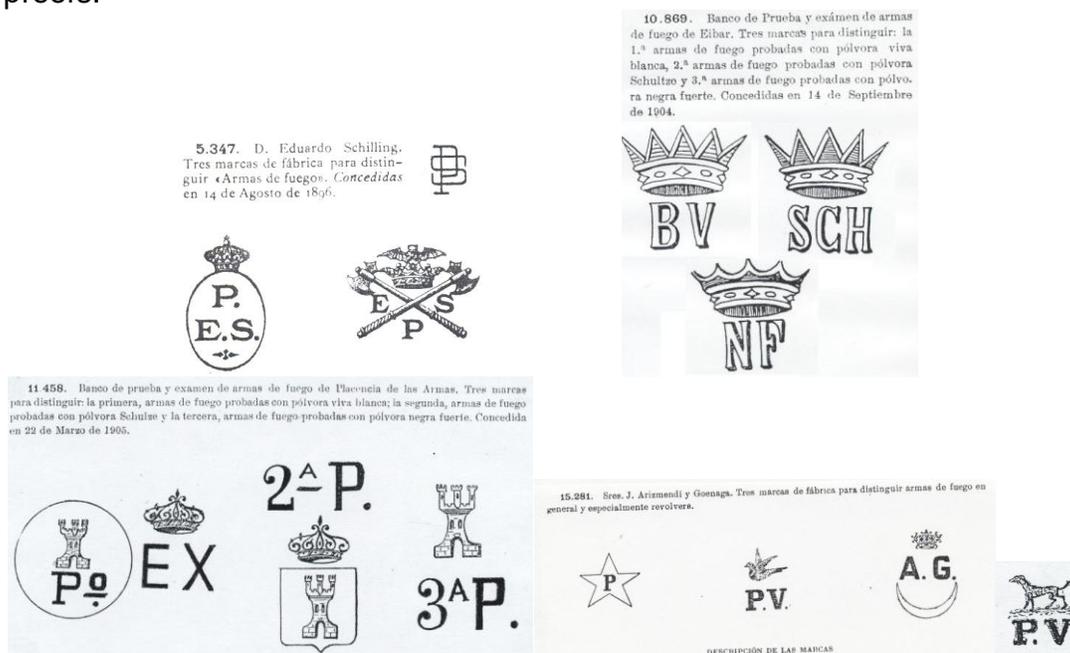


Seven shot, 6,35mm cal, “Eibar-type” pistol with grip safety and see-through holes to allow seeing the number of rounds left in the magazine; Specimen with ALKAR trademark and: AUTOMATIC PISTOL MODEL NEW ALKAR and CAL. 6,35 and NEW ALKAR on the grip panels; It was also marketed under the trademark MANUFACTURA DE ARMAS DE FUEGO- GUERNICA, which succeeded the ALKAR S.A after its destruction in a fire.

With the Great War the products of the Eibar arms industry improved somewhat their reputation in the international market, where, until this moment had been reputed to be, at best, “cheap copies”, which lacked the guarantees of having been tested in an “official” Proof House .

In Eibar, the idea of creating such an establishment went back to 1887, and, as far back as that date there existed there a firearms “Proof Bank” maintained by some of the manufacturers who used it on an optional basis, but, the only success in giving it a certain “official” character was the naming of a deputy of the Governor of the province of Guipuzcoa to run the facility, and three regulation proofs were determined for the proofed weapons; These proof marks were highly thought of by the customers, and during the 1890s there were many manufacturers who registered as “factory proof marks”, markings of an appearance similar to those used in various European proof

houses so as to give the impression that their products had successfully undergone such proofs.



Some of the markings seen in the Official Bulletin of Industrial Property (BOPI) after 1891; These were proof marks registered by the Eibar and Placencia proof houses, and, “factory proofs”, registered by individual arms makers

In January of 1915 it was decided to create official Proof Houses in Oviedo and Eibar but it was not until 1919 that the Eibar Proof House was designated an official establishment, with secondary sites in Placencia and Elgoibar and a delegation in the Barcelona Artillery “Maestranza”; In 1924 Spain signed the 1923 International Agreement of recognition of the proof marks of the different European countries and, from April, 16, 1924 the sale of any weapon not bearing these markings, even for export, was prohibited.

Due to the Great War, labor conflicts increased notably in Spain and the term “sindicalista” was applied to certain automatic pistols, underlining the “democratization” in the use of firearms; It should not surprise us then that the government started taking measures to restrict their sale and circulation creating the “guides of ownership”, decreed on September, 15, 1920, or that, the industrial arms makers protested and revived the so-called “arms maker’s suit” demanding to share with the Oviedo Factory the construction of the Army’s portable weapons; But the Administration did not favor this as they wanted to force these entrepreneurs to abandon the arms making industry and to go into other fields of endeavor; This Government control increased during Primo de Rivera’s Dictatorship and specially after the proclamation of the Republic.

The Basque arms industry was affected by the end of the Great War and, in 1919, the only arms makers still in business in Eibar were “Garate, Anitua y C^a”, “Trocaola, Aranzabal y C^a”, and Victor Sarasqueta; In Guernica, “Esperanza y Unceta” and perhaps “S.A Alkartasuna”, and, in Elgoibar, “Gabilondo, Urresti y C^a”, successor of

“Gabilondos, Urresti y C^a” and precursor of “Gabilondo y C^a”; The year 1920 was full of strife, with a strike in Eibar that caused the re-opening of the “popular kitchens” and the creation of workers cooperatives, such as “ALFA”, dedicated to the production of revolvers; In spite of this, the number of factories increased to seven in this year as Francisco Arizmendi, “Beistegui Hermanos”, Bonifacio Echeverria and a reborn “Orbea Hermanos” joined the previously mentioned ones.

Production improved noticeably both for domestically inspired, and foreign inspired, arms; Amongst the best known domestic creations were the ASTRA 400 and 300 and the STARs, the Sharp-Shooter and the JO.LO.AR, plus other less fortunate designs such as BERNEDO’s PISTOLA ORIGINAL; Amongst the foreign inspired types, in addition to the “Eibar-type” Brownings based on the Browning 1903 and 1906 models there were those based on the 1910 Browning, on the Colt 1911 and the Mauser C.96; As far as revolvers, the popularity of the swing-out cylinder Colt “Positive” and Smith & Wesson “Military & Police” models, surpassed that of the “Smith” top break types.

The North American firm of “J. L. Galef” was, in the 1920s one of the main customers of the Eibar arms makers and was naturally affected by the 1929 New York Stock Exchange’s “crack”; The civil war in China created then a demand that benefited some but, after the proclamation of the Republic, the gun control measures imposed made many of them aware of the need to diversify into other products of easier sale in the national market; “Garate, Anitua y C^a”, “Orbea” and “Beistegui Hermanos”, among others, opted to go into the bicycle field, the ALFA cooperative into sewing machines and utensils, and others into office products, industrial machinery, shaving razors, etc.



Seven shot, 6, 35 mm caliber, pistol patented in 1919 by Victor Bernedo and marked: “PISTOLET AUTOMATIQUE / BERNEDO / PATENT 69952”

To study the national pistols and revolvers during the 1920s, even briefly as I intend to, will require more than one article; I will limit myself here to Victor Bernedo, and will make some comments on Bonifacio Echeverria, being aware that, after the publishing of my friend Leonardo M. Antaris’s work “Star Firearms” (FIRAC publishers, Davenport, USA, 2001) the most respectful, and practical, thing is to recommend its study to my readers.

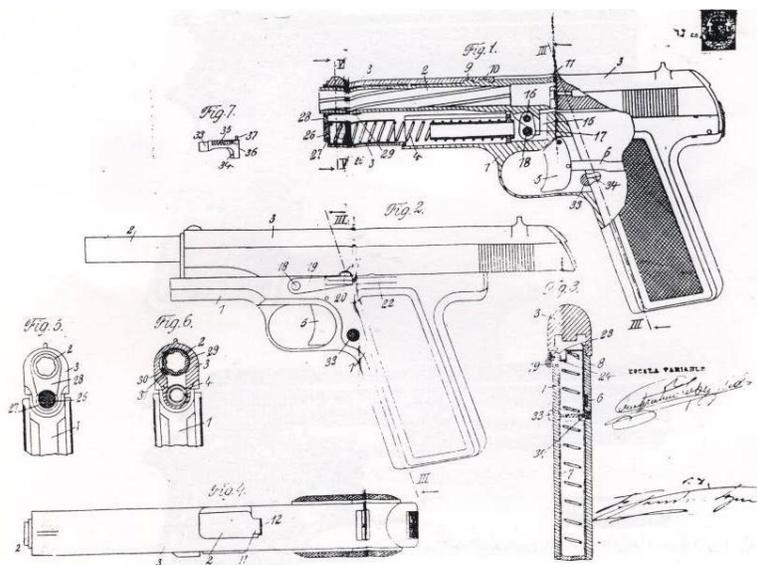
Victor Bernedo, born in Elgoibar, is listed in the Eibar Industrial Register of 1912 simply as “gunsmith”, but in 1913 he already appears as proprietor of a shop employing eight workers, increasing to 10-20 in 1914, and decreasing to 6 in 1915; In 1916 he appears

in the group with 20-30 employees, that of 30-40 in 1917, only 2 workers in 1919, recovering in 1920 to the 20-30 group again and, disappearing in 1921.

He initially worked in the mechanization of the WALMAN pistol frames forged by “Aristondo e Hijos” for “F. Arizmendi y Goenaga”, who was in charge of their assembly, finishing, and marketing; During the Great War he also worked for “Gabilondos y Urresti” in the production of the “Ruby” pistol and he also manufactured “Eibar-type” pistols in 6,35 and 7,65 mm calibers which he sold under the trademark **V.BERNEDO**.

In 1919 he obtained a patent for a pistol of original design, for which he registered in 1920 the trademark: **PISTOLA ORIGINAL / DE / BERNEDO / PATENTE**; However, in the few specimens that I am aware of, the marking actually reads: **PISTOLET / AUTOMATIQUE / BERNEDO / PATENT 69952**; In 1921 he sold his shop to Bonifacio Echeverria and settled in Beasain and went into tool making, specially wrenches and spanners; He died in 1944.

In 1919 Bonifacio Echeverria owned the most important shop in Eibar, employing 30-40 workers, followed by “Hijos de V. Aramberri” employing 20-30, by seven other firms in the 10-20 class, and by eighty (!) firms in the less than 10 grouping; In 1920 Echeverria started to be listed as a “factory”, although still at a level 25% lower than others, at least until 1923; I suppose he did not take long in reaching the other maker’s level.



Drawings included in the 1919 patent granted to Bonifacio Echeverria for “Improvements in automatic pistols”

In 1918, Bonifacio Echeverria applied for a patent for a 45 ACP pistol based on the Colt 1911 but with an internal hammer which, he hoped, would interest the French Army; However, the end of the Great War made him desist from manufacturing it although he maintained his interest in this type of weapon; In 1919 he obtained a patent of introduction for the Colt 1911 and then produced in succession his STAR Models of 1920, 1921, 1922 and 1931 which I will comment on, in the next article.

To the M1908 derived models of 1910, 1912/14, 1914 and 1919, followed the Model of 1926, which was the last one to use the date as the Model designation; The following ones used letter designations; In 1923 at the age of 65, Bonifacio Echeverria retired, and the name of the enterprise became "Fabrica de Armas STAR, continuadora de Bonifacio Echeverria" and later on, "STAR Bonifacio Echeverria S.A.", although all patents applied for after his retirement continued to be granted in his name; He died in 1951.