



can Legend is Now History

finished, short-barreled pump shotgun, called the Stainless Marine. In the early 1980s, piracy was rampant in the Caribbean; private yachts were being hijacked, their owners and crews murdered and the boats being used for drug smuggling runs, then scuttled. Boat owners wanted heavy-duty protection, and the Stainless Marine was a natural. I wrote an ad headlined, "The New Winchester Stainless Marine...the Tough Response to Unfriendly Elements."

The illustration showed the product, covered with droplets of water, sitting on a chart of the Bahamas area, on a teak deck. The client loved it. Unfortunately, one large boating publication, in which the ad was to run, hated it. They claimed that the ad was too negative, and the chart too obviously depicted the Bahamas. Never mind that the danger did exist and that the Bahamas were probably the most dangerous area for an unwary yachtsman. I later discovered that the Bahamian government tourism board, a major advertiser in this publication, had been tipped off about the ad and raised hell. As a result, we had to reshoot the photograph with a chart showing some unrecognizable segment of George's Bank.

Occasionally, I actually got to throw in some ideas for new products. Shortly after the Winchester John Wayne Commemorative Model 94 was announced, I was walking through the plant and spotted a batch of large John Wayne loop levers sitting in a parts bin. I asked if I might have one for a Model 94 I had at home, an early and very worn .38-55 carbine. I brought the lever and my carbine to Fred Richardson, and he fitted the new loop lever and cut the barrel down to 16". It was a very cool-looking gun, I thought, and I told the client about it the next time we met. The initial reaction was, "Well, you just ruined a valuable collectors' item." Several months later, however, a group of us from the agency were having dinner

with the U.S. Repeating Arms people at Leon's Restaurant in New Haven. We got the word on a new product. It seems that they took a batch of 16"-barreled Trapper carbines, equipped them with John Wayne-style loop levers and some roll engraving, and were planning to market them as the "Wrangler."

I wrote Winchester's ads, both as an ad agency employee and as a freelancer, for a number of years. The contacts I made during that time helped me establish business relationships and friendships at a number of firearms firms, and eventually led to my writing articles and reviews for the firearms press. The folks in New Haven gave me my start, and I'm forever grateful.

The demise of made-in-America Winchester-branded long guns is a tragedy, and for all of us gun fanciers, it is a great loss. Looking at it objectively and dispassionately, however, Winchester lasted surprisingly long, considering that their product line had in recent years been primarily based on variations of an 1890s-vintage lever gun, a bolt-action rifle that was introduced in the 1930s, and a 1970s-era pump shotgun. They were operating in a 19th-century factory, with skilled American workers getting a well-deserved \$16 to \$26 per hour. Their competition was not only American – Marlin, Remington, Mossberg, Ruger, Browning *et al* – but also, and more important, a growing number of companies in Europe and Asia, with newer, more efficient plants and lower-paid but highly skilled labor. In addition, tariffs and export restrictions decreased Winchester's opportunity for overseas sales.

From the standpoint of a Harvard Business School case study, Winchester was a dinosaur, perhaps an object lesson for American gun manufacturers with a classic, but aging, product line. But for the rest of us, it is the loss of an old and valued friend. Hang on to that Model 94 or Model 70. It's a historical legacy. B