



THE

# CLASSIC ARMS REPORT

Thursday, January 19th, 2017

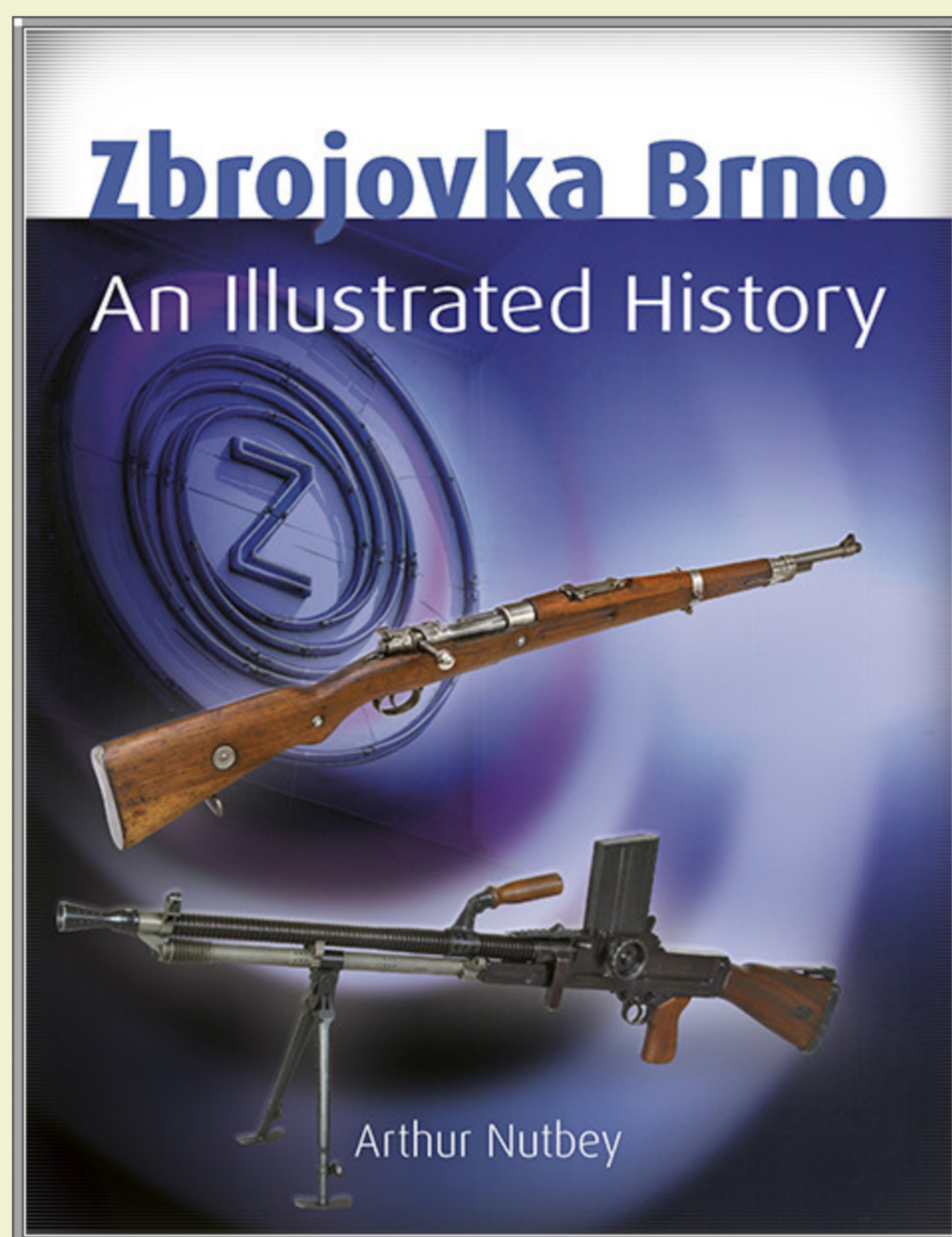
Welcome: Guest

*Welcome to the public section of the Classic Arms Journal website*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17TH, 2017  
BY HAMILTON BOWEN

*Book review of*

ZBROJOVKA BRNO:  
AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY  
BY ARTHUR NUTBEY



I've met a lot of gun nuts in my life and think I can say without fear of contradiction that all of them have been history nuts as well. Guns and history are subjects that are inextricably intertwined. Neither can be properly understood if divorced from the other. The problem is that while it's easy enough to take a gun in hand and examine it, history is an intangible that's much harder to corner. Original sources often prove inaccessible due to remoteness or perhaps due to death. Even secondary sources may be difficult to discover. That certainly was borne out in my recent search for information on the history and development of a pair of wonderful BRNO .22 bolt-action rifles that came into my care.

These two Czechoslovakian rifles are as nicely turned out and as sophisticated as any of the benchmark German .22 rifles produced by Walther and Mauser between the two World Wars. Workmanship of the Czech rifles is first-class, and their design – particularly that of the bolts – is so remarkably ingenious that it's bound to arouse the curiosity of any serious student of fine firearms. But try as I might, I couldn't come across readily available information on the origins of these great rifles. I had heard of the BRNO firm, of course, and knew it was in Czechoslovakia, but that was about the extent of my knowledge. However, with the aid of discussions with friends in the gun trade and with bits and snatches of information gleaned from old gun magazines and internet websites, I was eventually able to piece together a sort of rudimentary history of the guns. But I still didn't know much about the BRNO company itself.

Then I learned about a book that could fill that gap. When the BRNO firm went bankrupt, it was supplanted by new firm called CZ, which happens to now have a strong presence in the United States. It was a chap at CZ USA who made me aware of a book that tells the story of the BRNO firm. The book is titled *ZBROJOVKA BRNO: An Illustrated History*, and it will tell you everything you need to know and then some about the storied BRNO firm. The author, Arthur Nutbey, is a diligent researcher who traces the origins of the BRNO company from its humble beginnings as a hand-me-down workshop orphaned in the aftermath of World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Within just a couple of decades it rose to become to one of the great manufacturing conglomerates of the 20th century. BRNO was most famous for its firearms, but it also produced tractors, machine tools, motorcycles, aircraft engines and even typewriters. Nutbey has managed to amass some amazing archival photos and weave everything together in clear, concise language that tells the story of this great company and the people who made it.

It is not necessarily a cheery story line or one with a happy ending. BRNO prospered for a couple of decades between World Wars I and II, but on the eve of World War II Hitler's Germany took over Czechoslovakia, and after Germany's defeat, the Czechs feel under the yoke of Communists directed by Stalin and the Soviet Union. It was only toward the end of the 20th century that the BRNO firm regained a measure of independence, but it didn't survive the privatization and transition to a free-market economy that followed the overthrow of Communist rule. Fortunately, much of BRNO's tooling, designs and talent were secured by its successor, Ceska Zbrojovka, and once again the great BRNO guns are in production under the CZ label.

Nutbey's book doesn't cover the guns themselves in much detail but rather focuses on the origins of the BRNO firm, the people who drove its traditions of engineering excellence, made it great and made their place in history. That alone lets us understand the guns better.

The book is nicely bound with a handsome dust jacket. Its 80 pages are packed with black and white and color photos of the works and products along with several helpful charts and graphs concerning production numbers, dates, contracts and other information. Currently there's no domestic source for the books, but they can be readily mailed from the Netherlands to these shores. For more information or ordering, contact:

ARTHUR NUTBEY  
CONSUS MEDIA  
RIDDERBUURT 79  
2402 NH ALPHEN AAN DEN RIJN  
THE NETHERLANDS  
PHONE +31 (0)172 445 828  
MOBILE +31 (0)6 510 62 413  
E-MAIL: ARTHUR@NUTBEY.NET  
WWW.ARTHURNUTBEY.COM

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▼ 2017 (1)

▼ January (1)

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► 2016 (25)

► 2015 (10)