

by Richard MacLean

The first part of this three-part series described the early events in his life that shaped the man and his legendary personality characteristics. In this, the second of the series, we provide his business strategy that parlayed his original collection into a collection worth millions and a revenue stream that put millions in the bank. We also include a summary of his breathtaking inventory of NFA weapons.

The 1960s were turbulent times of job changes and dissolved marriages. His third marriage only lasted a few years. His fourth and final marriage lasted literally a few days. The most consistent thread in this tumultuous period was his uninterrupted dedication to gun collecting, flying and his visits to his children in Logan, Utah.

The end, in 1968, to the “marriage that did not count since it was so short,” as he would joke, also brought an end to the

overlapping part-time jobs: in 1968 he was in the gun business full-time. The precise reasons that he became a full-time Class 3 dealer are not known. It was probably a blend of numerous factors. No doubt, being under the direction and control of corporations did not suit his style; déjà vu working for his father on the farm.

Another likely factor was the fact that from childhood he had developed the skills of an astute dealer and trader. He would shrewdly buy two guns, keep one and sell


one then buy two more with the profits, repeating the process over and over for decades. A 1981 newspaper article stated that he “started out in the military arms business while still a kid. He supported his wildlife-management education at USU variously from farm work, gunsmithing, hawking war surplus sporting goods, and even aerial shooting (for bounty and furs) from an old Cessna 140 airplane.”

Yet another factor may have been a twist of fate. He told friends that a wealthy in-

Lead photo, above: Curtis owned several Lewis guns including one used by Charles Nungesser, WWI French flying ace responsible for 38 German kills, and three bought by Pancho Villa and confiscated by authorities at the border. This one that he is shooting in 1963 is believed to have been one of the Pancho Villa guns. (Gary Christopher)

Right: Small ads in gun magazines such as this one appearing in the February 1975 edition of *Guns* helped build his gun business. By the 1970s, he had built an unsurpassed inventory of NFA weapons. (Chuck Olsen)

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1975 EDITION

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 Thompsons, Schmeisers, Stens, M-16s, B.A.R.s, Lewis Guns, Spandaus, MG-34s & 42s, Maxims, Brownings, Colts, Winchester, and many others. All federally registered and transferable.—Send \$2.00 for large 1975 illustrated, informative brochure listing guns, prices, and facts of interest.

J. CURTIS EARL
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Right: The ads may have been small, but his catalogue was enormous, typically 32 pages. Between 1965 and 1983 he had distributed over 65,000. By 1983 his income from catalog sales alone was nearly \$34,000 in 2009 dollars. (Chuck Olsen)

dividual in the air cargo freight business was interested in collecting and investing in machine guns but could not legally own them. He helped Curtis apply for his Class 3 FFL in 1964. (Author's note: 1965 is often cited as the start of his business; 1964 is the date given in the 1983 business prospectus and may represent the date he submitted the paperwork.) Curtis would later claim that there were only two other such dealers in the country, one in Wisconsin and one in Illinois.

The wealthy businessman would provide the money but Curtis would own and store the guns; the businessman could shoot them when he was with Curtis in Phoenix. Recognize that this was long before the straw buyer concept was even imagined, and, of course, Curtis kept possession of the guns. He was given the opportunity to fly around the country and began making key contacts in police departments that later proved invaluable. It was another one of those win-win situations that Curtis loved.

Curtis claimed that the businessman caught his wife cheating and this led to a tragic murder-suicide. All the guns, papered to Curtis, became his. This story is "real" as told firsthand to others, but again, the truth may lie elsewhere. He also told friends that he had received a large settlement from the judgment on a car accident, severe enough to require a fusion of vertebrae in his neck. Monthly income from the storage units given him by his father paid the day-to-day expenses. Additional money may also have come from the continued support from his father back in Utah. It is unlikely that he would ever admit this.

One thing was certain: he was reaching critical mass whereby the revenue from the part-time gun business was exceeding the income from his more traditional corporate jobs. In addition, he was living frugally and plowing the profits from gun sales into the purchase of more guns.

Regardless of what propelled him to graduate from collector to dealer, the net result was that on December 29, 1965,

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Curtis formally opened for business as a part-time Class 3 dealer until he went full-time in 1968. His first entry in his "bound book" was a Sten gun. (As an aside, throughout his life he used standard Ideal System Company eight-column ledger pages bound side-by-side and set up according to ATF record-keeping requirements.) The last entry was an MG-42 on July 14, 1999. The ledger tracked as follows:

•1960s	528
•1970s	1,556
•1980s	454
•1990s	27
Total	2,565

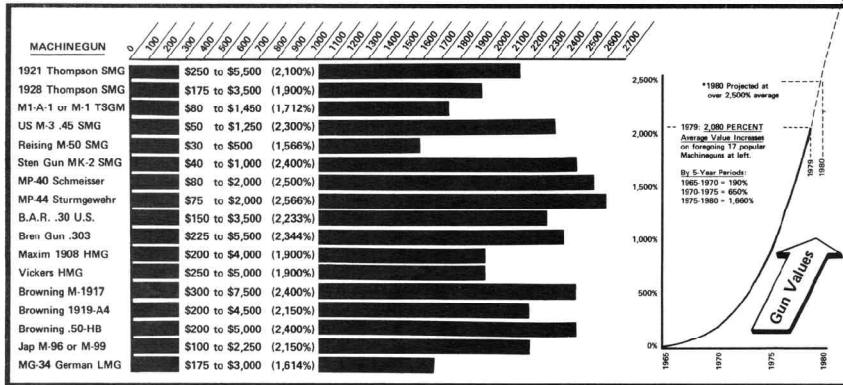
With a Title II inventory such as this and since he included his address in his ads, security was a constant issue. He built a separate structure on the property with

overall dimensions of 12 by 27 feet, which included a vault with a time lock door imported from Spain and originally installed in the First National Bank in Florence, Arizona. Both his house and the external storage areas had what he described in the prospectus as "sophisticated security systems." In reality, it was rudimentary according to close friends.

He always had a watchdog, usually a German shepherd, plus an assortment of hidden, loaded guns around the house and in his car. He built a special bracket to hold a 12-gauge shotgun under a coffee table, kept a .38 under a hat on top of the refrigerator and used as his primary defense weapon a WWII vintage .45 marked United States Property, SN 965435. He had it at the ready in a cut-off leather military shoulder holster stapled to the headboard of his bed. This gun would later be confiscated by the police in one of the

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Average Increased Value, in Percent, per YEARLY Average is: **149 Percent**

Note: Above data compiled from sales and advertising materials available reflecting like condition guns in both 1965 and 1979. This graph was designed to show increasing values, and should not be used to evaluate any particular single item.

Note of Interest: According to PICK'S WORLD CURRENCY REPORT, the "12-month increase in value of collector's items auctioned in 1972" showed An Increase In Value Of Collectable Firearms Of Over 175 Percent. Buying guns could be the best investment you ever made.

NOTE: At last report firearms are leading all other collectables on investment value increases!!

NOTE TO PURCHASERS:

Due to the fluctuating market and limited availability of firearms and accessories listed herein — basically a matter of supply and demand — prices and inventory are subject to change without notice.

Make all replies and inquiries to:

J. CURTIS EARL

5512 North Sixth Street Phoenix, Arizona 85012

... or phone station to station (602) 264-3166

— Thanks For Your Interest —

Left: Curtis would pack his catalog with useful information on how to buy NFA weapons and would correctly describe their investment potential such as it appears on this back cover from a 1988 catalog. (Chuck Olsen)

\$15,000 annually from catalog sales alone (nearly \$34,000 in 2009 dollars). Curtis also was quick to adapt new photo technology, owning several Polaroid cameras and getting into home video back when cameras required a suitcase-size recorder. For those interested in getting a closer look at a particular gun, he offered to take and send a custom photo, "\$1 submachine gun photo, \$2 light, and \$3 crew served or heavy guns." He even made and sold tapes of guns to potential buyers with a narration of the gun's statistics and qualities.

Curtis did three things in his catalog that greatly benefitted the collecting public. First, he educated them that they could own machine guns and explained the process to legally acquire them. For example, wording from the 1976 catalog states, "Machine guns are legal. They always have been! However, old wives' tales to the contrary are bolstered by our American new media (sic), the reverse of this has been very effectively drilled into the public's brains."

Second, he pointed out the rarity of the classic original guns and the impact on supply and demand: "It is now simply a matter of supply and demand... with the demand far greater than the supply!" and its impact on price: "Any machine gun worth having will demand premiums unheard of today; they will fall in the same category as the Colt Patersons or Walkers, or any of the other highly sought and very costly collectables." He was correct, of course, but in those early days he never anticipated the astronomical rise after the 1986 ban on the manufacture of transferable machine guns.

Part of his logic on the inevitability of price escalation was based on the impact of the transfer tax. "On each transaction of a live gun, the value of that gun is increased by \$200.00." As he detailed, the owner of the gun in each succeeding transfer would want to recoup his original cost, plus expenses, plus a profit. As he explained, after several transactions, "The \$59.50 Thompson (Author's note: Interarmco was selling these at this price

darkest periods of his life just before he died.

The Business Strategy

Clearly, the 1970s were the peak of his business, but it would be the very early days that proved critical since they laid the foundation of his business development strategy. As the 1983 business prospective detailed, "This business was built up over the years by primarily buying everything in the Title II gun line that he could afford. As the annual increase in the value of all of these items is far in excess of any other commodity, he continually poured his profits into more inventory and antique guns, he exercised the 'new pots for old' approach and acquired many collections and large lots from states, governments, and law enforcement agencies. He spe-

cializes in good, clean guns... he has become the largest dealer in the U.S. with an inventory most probably in excess of all of his competitors put together!"

By the 1970s he not only was the largest Class 3 dealer, he was also one of the most influential. As mentioned in part one of this series, his father and three of his uncles were in the retail and sales business; maybe he picked up some of the skills from them and understood the power of advertising. He was one of the first to run national ads in widely read magazines such as *Gun World*, *Guns* and *Guns & Ammo*.

The ads may have been small, but they caught the eye of thousands who bought his catalog that was nothing short of breathtaking for NFA collectors with its dozens of illustrations. Between 1968 and 1983 he had distributed over 65,000 brochures. By 1983 he was receiving nearly

in 1967) is now listing at \$500.00. The new buyer pays the \$200.00 federal tax, making his total cost for the gun \$700.00... and ad infinitum."

Third, he provided a summary of the classes of machine guns, key dos and don'ts, the possible problems with remanufactured guns or "re-wats," the regulations and the legal traps, sometimes in brutally frank terms. For example in his 1988 catalog, after the dust had settled on the historic ATF raid, "(Un-registered) guns brought home by an earlier collector as a war memento, or something from prohibition days... will show up... now and then... but contraband they are, and contraband they will most likely always be... good for spare parts only. The BATF Gestapo loves to find the 'innocent' owner of such items... You may as well get caught with a kilo of 'H'."

Curtis had eight business advantages that, in sum, no one else had. First, he had a lifetime of collecting, bargaining knowledge and contacts. He knew guns and where you could get them. Second, he had a tremendous inventory from day one of the business. Third, the market timing was in his favor. He went into business during the golden period, long before the astronomical rise in machine gun prices and the field was packed with competition. Fourth, he had the capital to buy large lots of weapons from collectors, police departments, movie studios and prisons. Fifth, he had a knack for self-promotion and advertising. Sixth, he had something that few had - an airplane and a pilot's license which allowed him to traverse the country looking for deals. Seventh, he could work out of his home, thus eliminating the cost for a storefront. Zoning was not an issue. Eighth, he had fortuitous luck as explained next.

The Thoresen Gun Runs

Mentioned earlier was his chance encounter with a wealthy air cargo freight business owner that may have helped jump start his dealer career. Again, this may or

Right: Curtis bought the entire MGM Automatic Arms Collection in 1970. There were so many significant items from this single purchase that he prepared a special catalog listing the guns and accessories. (Chuck Olsen)

may not have occurred, at least to the extent Curtis would tell the story to several friends. But there was no question about another chance occurrence, one that eventually was described in the 1974 book, *It Gave Everybody Something To Do*, by Louise Thoresen.

Born Louise Banich into a blue-collar family of meager means, at the age of twenty-one she met and married William Thoresen, a Chicago trust fund millionaire. He may have had wealth, but he was also an unstable manipulator and petty criminal who had visions of grandeur, including dreams of establishing a military arms museum in San Francisco.

Louise wrote, "So once again I was caught up in his schemes and agreed to embark with him on this new adventure - into the upper echelons and lower depths of the gun dealing world." Curtis' ads had

caught his eye and he made arrangements to meet him at his home in "Santa Fe, New Mexico." In the book the characters' actual identities and locations were not revealed. Curtis was "Orval Lee."

Jumping directly to the end from Curtis' standpoint, this wealthy individual paid for Curtis to fly around the country, build key contacts and support William Thoresen's efforts in assembling an arsenal reported by federal agents to weigh as much as 70 tons. Fast-forwarding to the end of this story from Louise's standpoint, the marriage disintegrated, he abused her and in a famous California trial, she was acquitted of the murder of William by reason of self-defense.

A careful read of the book reveals more than just Curtis' fortuitous encounter with Thoresen to expand his network on someone else's dime - another one of the win-



win deals he loved. It also revealed the near paranoia and suspicions that influenced a few of the buyers and sellers from that period. On page 192 Louise wrote, "Within two hours, two FBI agents came to our motel and arrested William on the fugitive warrant from Tucson." (Author's note: ATTU was the Alcohol, Tobacco Tax Unit of IRS, as it was called back then before independence from the IRS in 1970 or so) "We later learned that Orval Lee had begun making immediate inquiries about William and the ATTU and the FBI... He knew from the FBI that William had been arrested, but he was still chary that it was all part of an entrapment plot to nail *him*." ("Him" is emphasized in the original.)

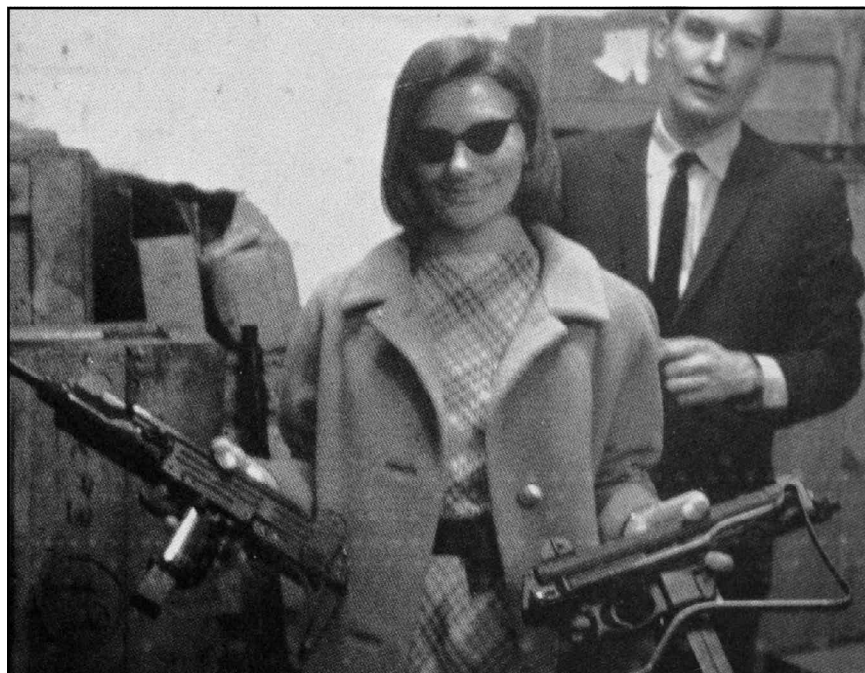
On page 202 Louise continues, "'I do not want to go there,' Orval said. 'You take care of it. You take me to Newark Airport now'... No amount of persuasion would change his mind. We did not understand what all the panic was about, but we drove him to Newark Airport anyway... It should have occurred to us that Orval Lee's sudden departure from the gun run was much more than an omen, but neither of us was very good at looking into the future."

Hours later Louise Thoresen was arrested for "storing explosives at an airport and attempted interstate shipment of explosives and contraband firearms." Years later Curtis would tell friends that he thought the Thoresens were trying to set him up in an ATF sting operation.

Double Dealing and Contraband

On page 194 Louise implies that Curtis was ready to facilitate contraband deals, "Look, let me tell you something, Lee said expansively. 'The ATTU told me not to do business with you at all. But I think you're a nice guy... your wife is nice... He looked at me with much more than casual interest. 'I'll work with you on it... I'll take a deposit on the papered weapons you want, crate them and store them in a bonded warehouse till we can transfer them to your name. And in the meantime,' he grinned expectantly, 'maybe I know about a few things you can buy right now from friends of mine. Unpapered. Machine guns you wanted, wasn't it?'"

Thoresen's comment about the lustful look-over was absolute pure Curtis. No doubt that happened. But I have been unable to uncover so much as a shred of in-



Above: Curtis accompanied Louise and William Thoresen on a series of "gun runs" in 1966. The couple would later be arrested on weapons charges, and Louise was acquitted of the murder of her husband. As documented in Senate testimony, Curtis was cooperating with the ATF on their gun-dealing activities. (Source: *It Gave Everybody Something To Do*)

formation that he ever knowingly dealt in contraband. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the world of machine guns was different than it is today and as documented in earlier interviews in *Small Arms Review* of leading historic figures in the industry. The draconian controls today did not exist in days past.

Maybe there were some less than perfect deals, but it is highly unlikely that Curtis, a financially well-off dealer, would have put his collection, which was his pride and joy, and his growing business, which was a major source of income, in jeopardy, all to earn a few extra bucks. He was definitely always looking to abscond with a few extra dollars or score some trinket he had his eye on, but felonious activities were unlikely.

He did run into an issue in 1976 that eventually resulted in the confiscation of 13 machine guns and one silencer. In his bound book he listed their removal as "ATF Commandeered." He bought from the Kearny, Arizona police department one Ruger AC-556 machine gun, three M60 machine guns and one M-11 submachine gun. The ATF alleged that the transfer was arranged to take advantage of the police and military discount on the price of these

new guns - in effect, a straw purchase through Donald Lane, the Police Chief. In addition, some manufacturers would only sell directly to the military and law enforcement. ATF allegedly used this as justification for the subsequent search warrant and raid in June 1977. Curtis claimed that all these transfers were done with full approval of the ATF.

Curtis was extremely cautious, to the point of paranoia. For example, he frequently would tape record telephone conversations and some of these tapes still exist. Even the ATF was aware that he would record conversations. These recordings stand as vivid testimony to Curtis' skill as a crafty tactician and brutal negotiator. Several involved talks with Louise Thoresen after she was acquitted of murder and re-acquired all the properly papered guns that were part of the estate. She told Curtis that she was offered \$5,000 by the ATF to set up dealers.

In her book, Thoresen also raised the possibility of Curtis being an agent for the government, essentially a snitch. On this, the record is clear. He was. Curtis helped from time to time when he wanted to court favors or defensively position himself.

His July 1979 Senate testimony was ex-

plicit, even mentioning some of the Thoresen dealings and tape recordings:

Senator DeConcini: *In what manner did you cooperate with the agencies?*

Mr. Earl: *Primarily acting as an informant to the FBI and ATF people in turning in people who I know were bad guys.*

Senator DeConcini: *You had acted as an informant for ATF?*

Mr. Earl: *Many, many, many times.*

Senator DeConcini: *At their request?*

Mr. Earl: *No sir; because I felt it was the duty as a citizen to do so.*

His daughter Pat was aware of her father's cooperation with ATF, "In 1983 I was working for TransWest Air Service in Salt Lake City at the front counter renting airplanes. Two ATF agents flew in and waited at one of the nearby tables until they got their orders to pursue a suspect. They flew off and returned in less than an hour. In the meantime, the office had called and asked for them and inadvertently mentioned that they were from ATF. I assumed that they lost their suspect and mentioned something to effect, 'Looks like somebody got away from the ATF.'

"One of the agents was surprised and asked, 'How do you even know what ATF is?' In typical Earl fashion, I told him bluntly, 'You guys have been pretty nasty to my father, J Curtis Earl.' One agent immediately said, 'One of my first ATF assignments was to check his books for several illegal weapons we were trying to locate. I spent all day and found nothing. When I was leaving, your father asked what prompted the inspection and I told him exactly what we were looking for. He responded, 'I do not deal in illegal guns. You should have asked me in the first place.' Then he proceeded to tell me exactly the information I needed and the whereabouts of the guns. I have a lot of respect for that man."

Getting back to the original point,

Right: His guns, usually the Thompsons, landed on the cover of gun magazines and received feature story treatment such as the "Midas Touch" Thompson in 1973. (Chuck Olsen)

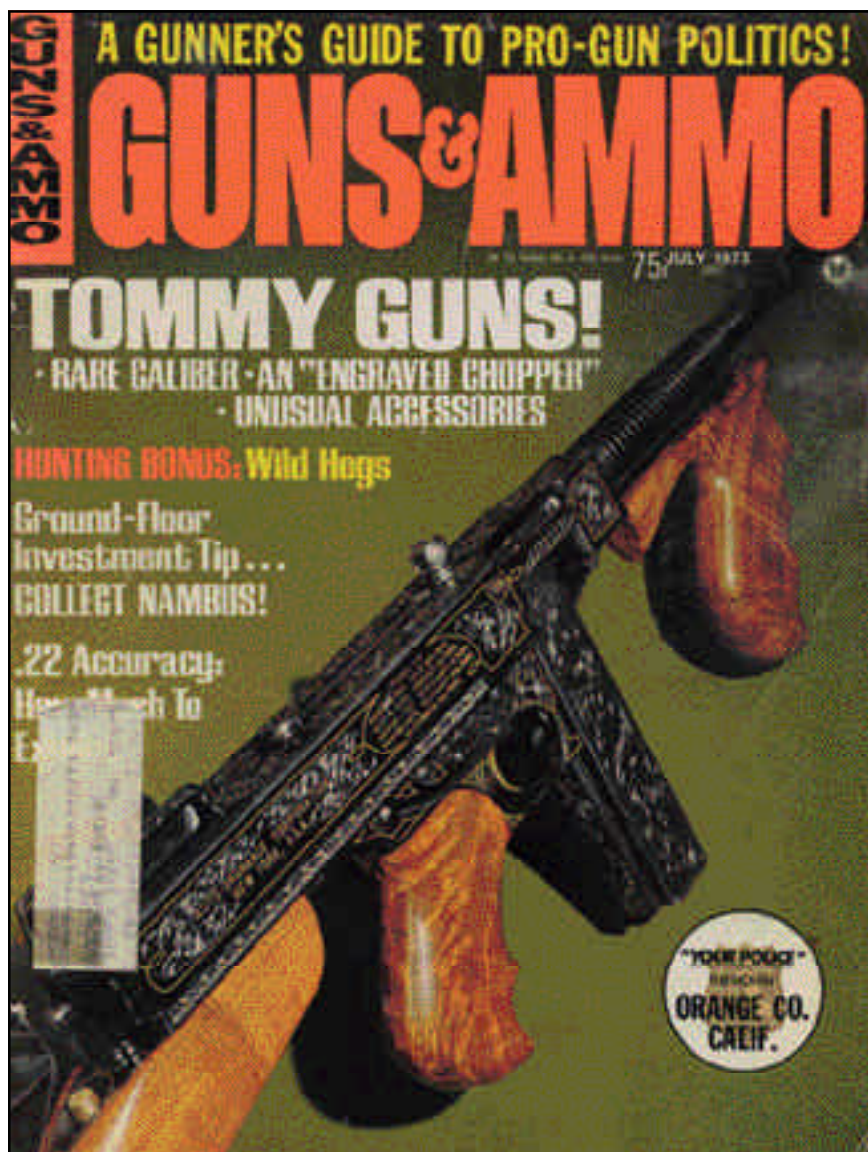
namely, Thoresen's version of what went on. Just how truthful was she in all this? Autobiographies are inevitably spun to favor the author. She killed her husband and she was, to some extent, rationalizing her actions. In the book she made numerous references to deals in transferable, properly papered guns across the country in which Curtis allegedly was involved. Cross-referencing his bound book from that period reveals no connection to these possible deals. The book may be accurate in broad terms, but in terms of any specific illegal operations which may have involved Curtis, the evidence is weak.

A Collection of Dreams

By 1983 Curtis had amassed an inventory of approximately 800 NFA firearms. There were complete "sub-collections" of

machine guns which he divided into the categories of (1) assault rifles; (2) light and heavy machine guns; (3) submachine guns; and (4) silencers and silent weapons. These were further broken down by country of origin. He had complete or nearly complete collections of English, Japanese, French, German and American guns plus others, from the first machine gun invented up to, at the time, the latest U.S. M60. He also had a nearly complete collection of aircraft machine guns. There were military, commercial and even prototypes. He also became the primary distributor of the E. H. de la Garrigue half-scale miniature Thompsons.

The center of the collection and what he was most noted for, aside from some specific guns mentioned later, was what he claimed to be the only complete Thompson submachine gun collection in the



world. So extensive was his collection that Gordon Herigstad, author of *Colt Thompson Serial Numbers*, sought out and was given access to his bound book records in 1995. Later, after Curtis died, he produced a separate listing for all Thompsons Curtis had from 1965 through 2000. On Curtis' bound book at one time or another were the following:

- 199 Colt Model 1921, 1927 and 1928 Navy
- 109 Savage Model 1928-A1 and 1940-41 Auto-Ordnance
- 81 Savage Model M1 & M1A1 and 1942 Auto-Ordnance
- 67 1952 Numrich Arms Corporation Thompson Model 1921 & 28
- 35 West Hurley Model 1928 & 27-A1 Semi-Auto

He had five consecutively serial numbered sets (i.e., 10 Thompsons total). Some were movie guns from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) Studios or television guns such as those used in the TV series, *The Untouchables*. Many were from police departments around the country or from notorious prisons such as Attica, Sing Sing, Folsom and San Quentin. One incredibly engraved and ornate 1921 Thompson was dubbed the "Midas Touch" and it made the cover of the July 1973 issue of *Guns & Ammo*. This was another form of advertising that at-



Above: Curtis helped on the Mexico set of the 1970 movie *Catch-22*, maintaining B-25 Mitchell bombers and sitting in the co-pilot's seat dressed in uniform during filming. Curtis was in heaven; he could not be a real WWII hero like his famous childhood friend, Gail Halvorsen, but he got to play a bomber hero in the movies. (Michelle Earl Cruson)

tracted new, high-end customers.

His inventory also included approximately 200 Title I firearms, some standard, but mostly rare collectable rifles, pistols and shotguns, especially Lugers, Mausers and Winchesters. There were also seven cannons ranging from 20 to 75mm. He had tons of ammunition and accessories;

some rare accessories were more valuable than the guns that they were designed for. A lot of the inventory was impressive just because of the sheer volume of particular models. Aside from the Thompsons, he had 66 MAC M-10s and M-11s and 44 Reising's. He also had a mind-boggling collection of German MG 34s and 42s - 33 in all.

The 1983 business prospective totaled the value as follows:

Firearms (Title I and II)	\$1,450,000
Destructive Devices	60,000
Accessories and spare parts	150,000
Ammunition	15,000
Total	(1983 dollars)
	\$1,675,000
Total	(2009 inflation adjusted dollars)
	\$3,600,000

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July 2010
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flation, a fact pointed out by Curtis himself. If one were to make a guess of the average value of the guns at \$10,000 each, one can see that this inventory, if it existed today, could approach \$10 million. This is all just idle speculation since some of these guns would sell today for somewhere between a few hundred dollars to a hundred thousand dollars or more each. Examples of a few of the more exotic guns in this later category included the following:

- Charles Nungesser, WWI French flying ace's Lewis aircraft machine gun responsible for 38 German kills
- Pancho Villa's Lewis machine guns confiscated by Arizona authorities in their original shipping containers
- Thompson experimental 9mm model serial number S1
- Thompson Model M1A1 presentation commemorative made for President Eisenhower
- FN-FAL select fire Serial number 1
- Gewehr 43, semiautomatic Mauser code ac44, presented by the Walther people to Alfred Jodl, WWII German military commander

The MGM Automatic Arms Collection that he acquired at public auction in 1970 was so extensive that he prepared a special catalog detailing the items. They represented all of the machine guns used by MGM in their movie and television productions over a 40-year period. This included World War I and II movies, Pancho Villa and the Spanish American War movies and "general shootouts of all descriptions, including the Tarzan flicks where three of the Vickers were used."

Television series included *Combat* and *Rat Patrol*. These were guns used by Wallace Berry, Clark Gable, Humphrey Bogart, Edward G. Robinson, John Wayne, James Cagney and others. Twenty guns were transferable and those that were not, such as several of the .50



Curtis' inventory was nothing short of breathtaking. Some of the more valuable pieces were kept in the vault that was secured by a door imported from Spain. In addition, he had a display area in his home. These pictures are images taken of the original 20x25 inch poster board photographs that he used in his 1979 \$8.4 million dollar lawsuit against several agencies for "malicious prosecution." (Chuck Olsen)



caliber Brownings, were parted out and the receivers destroyed by the ATF. This MGM lot also included spare parts and accessories, some in mint condition.

According to a letter dated January 8, 1992, 188 guns in his collection were sold to Windward Aviation, Inc. (Champlin Fighter Museum). Indeed, there were so many transferred in that one sale that he prepared a special rubber stamp to make each entry in the ledger. Even after this single lot sale in 1987 and other individual sales, he still had approximately 520 Title II weapons in 1992 because of new additions. These figures did not include his personal guns and all of the specialty items such as ancient weapons and armaments. Many of these went to the J Curtis Earl Memorial Exhibit in Boise, Idaho.

Business with the Rich and Famous

Needless to say, Curtis and his collection were attracting international attention, including interest from very wealthy and connected individuals. From time to time Curtis would relate stories to friends who

took these in, but sometimes wondered if he exaggerated. After his death, however, a number of photographs and other records verified these stories.

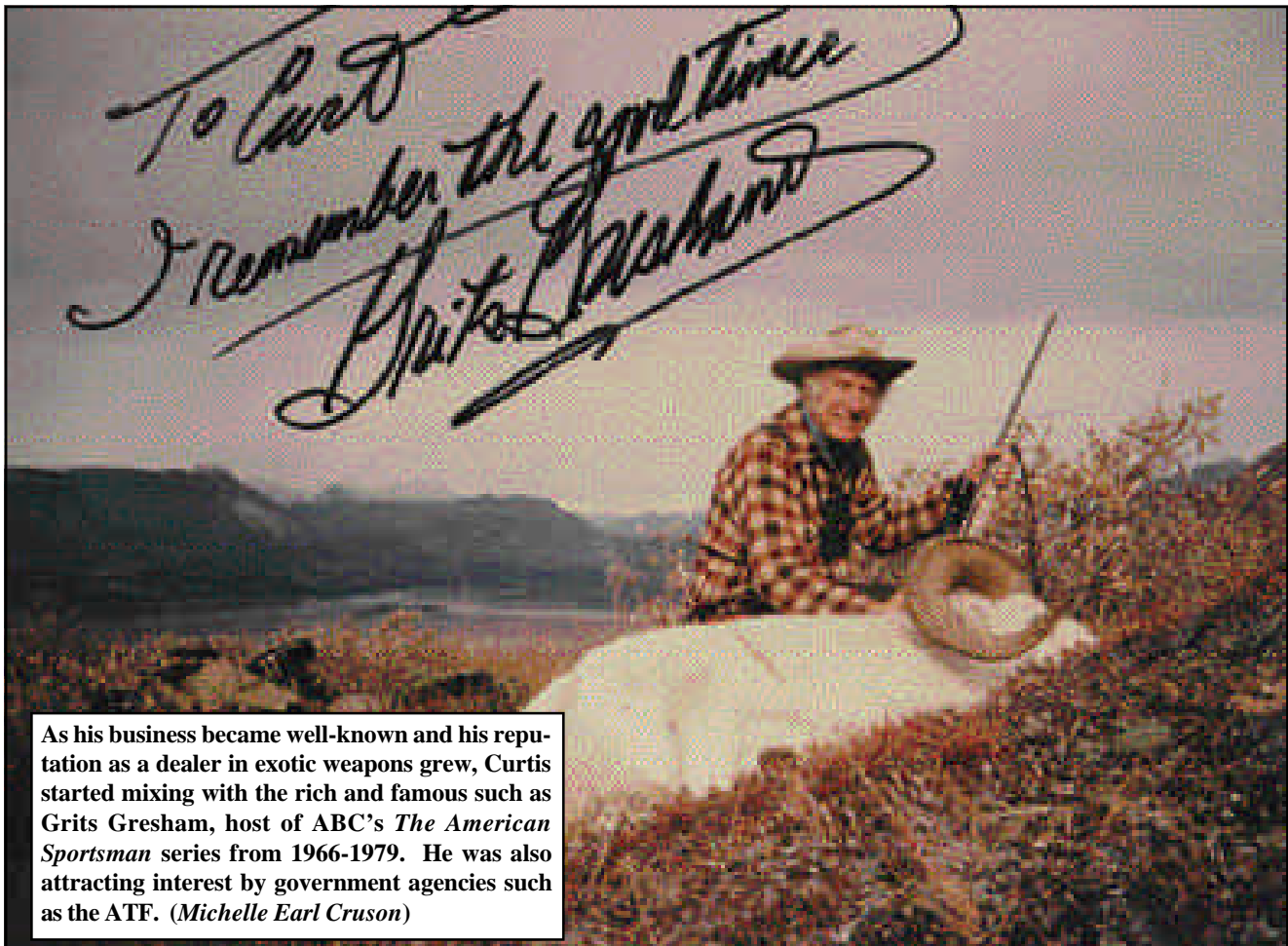
Some of these prominent connections were not related exclusively to guns. For example, he claimed that he would scuba dive with Jacques Cousteau in Mexico. He also was a friend of Frank Tallman, a stunt pilot, who worked in Hollywood in the 1960s and 1970s. Tallman was the president of Tallmantz Aviation which supplied a fleet of operating B-25 Mitchell bombers to recreate a Mediterranean wartime base as depicted in the 1970 movie *Catch-22*. The flying was done in Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico and Curtis dressed in a uniform and sat in the co-pilot's seat. The production required three months to shoot and the bombers flew a total of about 1,500 hours. Curtis was in heaven: he could not be in WWII for real like his friend, Halvorsen, but he got to play a bomber hero in the movies.

He had pictures of himself with actors such as Mr. T (born Laurence Tureaud) who starred in the television series *The A-*

Team and autographed photos from celebrities such as Grits Gresham, host of ABC's *The American Sportsman* series from 1966-1979. There were copies of records of export licenses for guns sold to Middle Eastern sheiks. Curtis would marvel to others at how these otherwise complicated export deals would proceed through the bureaucracy at lightning speed for the diplomats. One friend relates the story of arriving at his house to find a shiny new Ferrari in the driveway, "Curtis and the owner had been fighting over the price of a case of ammo - like their very existence depended on the last few dollars of price difference. The case of ammo wouldn't fit in the trunk, so it rode in the passenger seat."

He entertained his friends with these stories, but the events were also a harbinger of something else... a growing interest by federal agencies.

(Part three describes the growing friction with government agencies and the NFA gun community, his quest for a lasting legacy and the tumultuous final days of his life.)



As his business became well-known and his reputation as a dealer in exotic weapons grew, Curtis started mixing with the rich and famous such as Grits Gresham, host of ABC's *The American Sportsman* series from 1966-1979. He was also attracting interest by government agencies such as the ATF. (Michelle Earl Cruson)