

## Gun Values – or The Value of a Gun

By: Paul Smeltzer

AGI Inner Circle Member and Pro Course Graduate

“What’s it worth?” is a question that is common to anyone with more than a casual interest in firearms. It is certainly a common question at the gunsmith shop for many reasons. Outside of the obvious need to understand what a gun’s monetary value might be, when it comes to repairing or restoring a gun the question takes on a more practical importance. “What’s it worth?”, translates into “Is it worth fixing?”.

One of those tough questions showed up the other day in the form of a Remington Model 11 12 gauge. A neat old gun, but not especially rare or overly valuable, you see them quite often at gun shows and auction sites in good shape for \$200.00-\$300.00, at least you do around north Louisiana.



This particular example had seen a hard life. The metal was not only well worn, but a bit rusted and pitted. The stock was pretty well beat up also, many good sized dents, checkering worn or scarred, and a set of initials cut into the right side of the foreman.



The owner didn't know if it worked or not, it had not been shot in years. It was his father's gun, and since the owner was in his mid 50's his father had to have been a bit older to match the gun I would guess. What he wanted me to do was to restore the gun as close to original as possible. Can do, but it ain't going to be cheap, and there's the rub. I was certain that you could get a Model 11 in considerably better shape than this one for a lot less than it would take to restore it. My wife saw one with an extra barrel at a garage sale for \$275.00 just a couple of weeks ago. It would cost more than that to restore his. That was assuming that there was not anything seriously wrong mechanically. I explained to the guy that it was very likely that at the very least the recoil buffer was bad or gone and a relief cut would be needed in the back of the receiver to make it safe, thus adding to the cost without even taking the gun apart.

After explaining all that, the owner said he did not care if it worked or not, it would never be shot again. He further explained that it was his father's, and believed that his grandfather had given it to his father sometime in the forties. Ok, I get the sentimental thing, but still? Does it really have that kind of value? It turns out that it does.

His father is Boatswains Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class James M. Vise and served in the navy between 1950 and 1954. For those of you who remember the "Forgotten War", that is the time period that our country was involved in one of those "police actions", which by the way has never officially ended. The Korean War started on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1950 and an armistice was eventually signed on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953. Boatswains Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Vise went to war in 1951 and did not come back until 1953. As his son Randy explained it to me, servicemen back then were permitted to take along personal firearms. Good thing, since the US was not very prepared to go to war in 1950, and the military could probably have used all the weapons they could get hold of. What I did not understand was what did a boatswains mate need with a shotgun? Well, it seems that a BAR gunner might have a use for a shotgun to be used as a trench gun. Makes sense, except for now what is a boatswains mate doing with a BAR and a Remington Model 11?

Well, according to Randy, it seems that there was a little known stop gap effort to beef up the military ASAP. There were serious shortages in men and material in the standing military. Pretty sad, and if you know the history of our armed forces in that time period,

military preparedness was not in the national lexicon. This particular program available to navy men was called the navy marines. Yes, I know the marines are part of the navy, but in this case the navy was acting like the marines. Volunteers from the navy were put through six weeks of marine training to teach the swabbies to fight on land. These men kept their navy designations and rank, and were sent to reinforce the ground forces. Thus Boatswains Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Vise became a BAR gunner, and for a little extra measure of personal defense, carried a Remington Model 11 strapped across his back.

The Korean War was a nasty little war in nasty weather, on nasty terrain, against a particularly nasty and determined enemy. The war deteriorated into a WW I kind of trench warfare by the close of it. Night attacks were common, fighting to gain the next rocky hill, retake the one you just lost, or defend the one you were on. If there were no trenches to occupy on the hill you were on, then dig one. You would need it, because the next swarm of Chinese infantry was not any further away than nighttime. Fighting could be unbelievably fierce once the artillery barrage lifted. Automatic fire from .50's, and BAR's, along with riflemen next to your armed with the venerable M1 Garand, M1 carbines and grenades was all there was to keep you alive and stem the tide. Sometimes the tide got to be a flood and combat got to be close quarters in those dark trenches. Colt 1911's, bayonets, and an assortment of close quarter weapons, such as a Model 11 with five rounds of military buckshot/slugs then came into play. Boatswains Mate 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Vise admits to shooting more than a few rounds of that military grade 12 gauge ammo. Gun values are one thing and have a certain definable market. However the value of gun is something else. The value of a Remington Model 11 on a cold winter night with a horde of screaming Chinese soldiers running at you, is, I assure you, considerably greater than market value. This particular Model 11 earned all of its nicks and dents, the worn out metal, the less than "good market value". Randy wanted the gun to be restored to present to his father on Father's Day. Randy served in the navy also, son to father, navy man to navy man recognition of probably a good many things. "It didn't need to work", Randy told me, he just wanted to look respectable. I took the gun in.



It took some effort, but the old soldier is in class A condition. Mechanically it was not in too bad a shape, the recoil buffer was gone as suspected. I could not bring myself to neuter this veteran by removing the firing pin to make it safe. I put it in the mill and cut the relief slot, no charge. I added the Korean service medal insetted into the buttstock in honor of a service recognized and appreciated, at least by some.

It is a nice looking piece at this point, I don't know what is worth, but I do know that its value is priceless. It stands proudly on display, but make no mistake, it is ready if needed.

Paul Smeltzer  
[Athensgunsmith@aol.com](mailto:Athensgunsmith@aol.com)  
AGI Graduate