

# The History of MidwayUSA Part 2

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #83 —

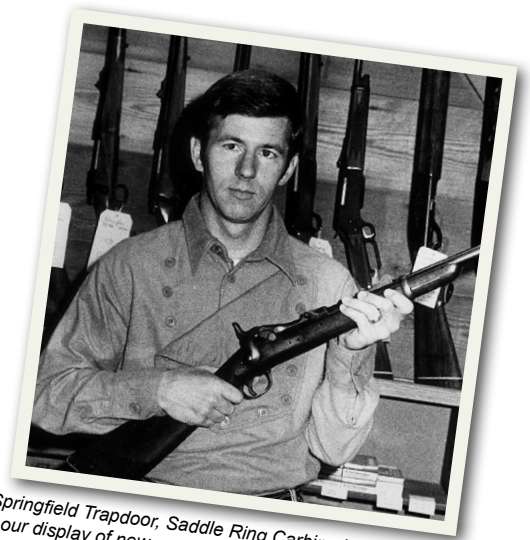
It was an amazing 7-1/2 years from the day my brother Jerry and I opened the gun shop, Ely Arms, Inc., in 1977 till Brenda and I closed it just after Christmas in 1984 – to become mail order only, with a new name – Midway Arms, Inc. The business was simple in the beginning; we specialized in the sale of new and used guns, ammunition, reloading supplies and equipment, and handgun accessories – there was only 960 square feet of display space. We sold all the desirable handguns we could get our hands on – Smith & Wesson, Colt and Ruger.

Right away it was obvious that our Customers wanted service – in addition to sales and soon we added a second mission – gunsmithing. Then came the opportunity to add a third mission – reloading 8mm Nambu pistol ammunition

-- and that created the fourth mission – mail order sales -- and more importantly – the link to our future. Brother Jerry was a partner in the beginning, but left in early 1980,

to move back to the farm. Shortly after advertising the Nambu ammunition, we received a letter from a law firm in New York, advising that our name Ely was in conflict with their client's trademarked brand Eley ammunition. Not a big problem, but **that letter** caused us to change the name from Ely to Midway.

The mail order business grew very rapidly, thanks to the addition of new, unprimed 357 Magnum brass in 1980, and other calibers thereafter. 1982 was our first building



*I'm holding a U.S. Springfield Trapdoor, Saddle Ring Carbine in 45/70; you can see some of our display of new guns in the background. (fall, 1982)*

expansion and we doubled our square footage and also began using a computer. We bought and sold over 2,000 of the discontinued Jonathan Browning Mountain Rifles in 1983. Also, our first simple catalog was published in 1983 – 5,000 copies.

The game changer came in July 1984, when Winchester decided to sell us unprimed cartridge

**"...we desperately needed more space..."**

cases. We immediately turned in a purchase order for over \$1,000,000 to be delivered in January of 1985. In September, we made the decision to close the retail store after Christmas and use the retail space for storage of the Winchester components. Closing the retail store may seem like a dramatic decision, but the mail order division accounted for 80% of our business and we desperately needed more space.

Part 2 of the History of MidwayUSA lasted 7-1/2 years – from 'opening day', to the closing of the retail store.

**MidwayUSA**  
Midway

Larry Potterfield

7450 Old High 40 West  
Columbia, MO  
December 31, 1984



*That's the original Ely/Midway building -7450 Old Highway 40 West -- where we started up in 1977 (32' x 48' [1536 square feet]). This picture was taken years later, after the chain link security fence was removed.*



*When the sign maker handed me this sign, he said "Larry, I hope this drives away all your business." (December 1984)*