

The BATTENFELD YEARS

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #190 —

Success comes in many different forms; and yes, it can be bittersweet. Such is the story of the Battenfeld company, which we spun out of MidwayUSA in 1999 and developed into a nice, small manufacturing business; then we sold it in 2012.

At startup, MidwayUSA was just a simple, little gun shop (1977); during the first year we added the beginning of a manufacturing mission with the 8mm Nambu ammunition project. In 1985, we became a distributor of Winchester brass and closed the gun shop — retaining

two missions, manufacturing and distribution.

By the late 1990s, this complicated two-mission business had grown into

something that was becoming difficult to manage and in my opinion not very sustainable. Spinning out the manufacturing mission into a new company seemed to be the best solution, and we did so in 1999.

The name Battenfeld was the surname of my family, when they immigrated to America from Germany in 1750 (it morphed into Potterfield a bit later - at Harpers Ferry). Our son, Russell and I sat down for lunch one day, over lemonade and barbeque, and picked the category brand names from a list of last names taken from the phone book, Caldwell (shooting), Wheeler (gunsmithing), Tipton (cleaning) and Frankford (reloading) were some of the final choices. We discontinued the MidwayUSA brand on everything; but MidwayUSA continued to buy the same products, bearing the new brands. In the beginning, MidwayUSA was the only Customer.



Dennis Cauley and Tim Morrow working on the Frankford Arsenal Vibra-Prime Automatic Primer Tube Filler.



The Battenfeld and MidwayUSA businesses were side by side on the campus.

The new Battenfeld company continued to develop innovative products and also began selling to other distributors in the industry, which was part of the plan. An issue developed after a while, that certain distributors (competitors to MidwayUSA) didn't like MidwayUSA's promotional business model and asked Battenfeld to prevent MidwayUSA from putting Battenfeld products on sale. This wasn't part of the plan.

"...two missions, manufacturing and distribution."

One large distributor discontinued their relationship and it took three years for Battenfeld to get them back. But the problem of the Potterfield family owning two businesses in the industry, one selling to consumers and the other selling to distributors, continued to get worse. The only answer was to sell Battenfeld; a conclusion we came to in the summer of 2011 and completed in 2012.

The bittersweet part — the people. Any way you look at it, many of them felt betrayed that the company had been sold, and the Family felt as if we had let them down.

MidwayUSA

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One of the many innovative products from Battenfeld, a Tipton Gun Vise.