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Our Old Bookcase, Oct. 12, 2017. Military Exhibit – 1917 French Chauchat Machine Gun, on Oct. 22.

Photo caption: Uncommon WW I French Chauchat Machine Gun will be on exhibit at the October 22, 2017 Military Exhibit at the Mercer County Historical Museum, Celina.

OUR OLD BOOK CASE

By Joyce L. Alig, President, Mercer County Historical Society

The 100th Anniversary of the United States entrance into the Great War in 1917 is being recognized at the 17th Annual Military and Antique Gun Exhibit, at the Mercer County Historical Museum, 130 East Market Street, Celina, Ohio, by the Museum of the Soldier and the Local Gun Collectors, on Sunday afternoon, 1:00 – 4:00, October 22.

On April 6, 1917, the United States Joint Congressional Resolution declaring a State of War was signed by President Wilson. That winter, on December 7, war against Austria-Hungary was declared. The conclusion to this War arrived on November 11, 1918, known as “Armistice Day.”

In respect for the Military who served in World War I, the Administrators of the Museum of the Soldier, Jim Waechter and Brian Williamson, are focusing on the World War I era Firearms for this Centennial

Exhibit, on Sunday October 22. They have acquired an “uncommon” gun to exhibit this year, the World War I French Chauchat Machine Gun.

Colonel Louis Chauchat was instrumental in designing this machine gun, and the French assigned Chauchat’s name to this gun. Chauchat’s improvement over previous machine guns was that the Chauchat machine rifle not only was the first light-weight automatic rifle caliber weapon designed to be carried and fired by one operator and an assistant, but also the machine rifle did not need a heavy tripod or extra gunners for its operation. In addition to those features, the machine rifle combined a pistol grip, an in-line stock, a detachable magazine, weighing about twenty pounds, and during a march, could be fired from the hip.

The French Army used this as their standard machine rifle during World War I, (1914-1918). The gun was placed into regular service with the French Infantry in June 1916. The troops called the gun the “FM Chauchat,” as the gun’s military name was "Fusil Mitrailleur Modele 1915 CSRG." The American Expeditionary Forces (A.E.F.) used the Chauchat machine rifle in 1917-1918. Other Nations saw the advantage of the use of this gun, and used Chauchat during World War I. During the action in the field, problems surfaced with the Chauchat. Shortly after World War I, the French army replaced the Chauchat with the new gas-operated Mle 1924 light machine gun.

Other firearms and accoutrements from World War I will be on exhibit on Sunday, October 22. Local Gun Collectors will also have Military Guns on Exhibit at the Mercer County Historical Museum.

The Museum of the Soldier has one of the finest exhibits of local service men and women’s Military Service this area. When we visit the Museum of the Soldier, we recognize their families from this area. This makes the importance of the history of our United States Military very real and understandable as we see the dedication of our local families to protecting the Freedom of United States of America Citizens.

The October 22 Sunday afternoon Military Exhibit and the November 12 Sunday afternoon Post Card & Post Mark Exhibit, will be the last two Open Houses at the Mercer County Historical Museum in 2017. I hope to see you when you visit these History Exhibits at the Museum before the Winter Holidays.

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