

A DEPRESSION-ERA WINNER: ZIPPO

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Zippo is almost synonymous with the lighter. But how did it get that way? The entire story of this successful lighter company is almost too amazing to be true.

George Blaisdell founded the company in the 1930s as the Depression had gripped America. But cigarette smoking had become popular since packs were included in soldier's rations in World War I and lighters were everywhere. Blaisdell offered a lifetime guarantee on his lighters — "it works or we fix it for free" — that still holds true today and coupled with his promotional genius, Zippo's sales soared. Lucas noted that "One interesting early marketing device for Zippo was the use of the punchboard. For five cents, store patrons could punch a paper slip out of one of the holes in the board and, with a little luck, win a Zippo, which sold for \$1.95 at the time. These came off the counter-tops of bars and stores in 1940 when the device was ruled illegal as a "game of chance";.

Then Zippo's other great marketing break came when World War II broke out and the military ordered so many lighters that consumer production was ended. Wartime ads for the company told the public at home, "We've been drafted by Uncle Sam. So be kind to your Zippo. You won't be able to get another for the duration."

By war's end, millions of lighters had been distributed or purchased by the troops and the massive distribution throughout the service ranks ensured its future popularity. Lucas points out that every U.S. Navy ship "has its own custom-designed Zippo."

Among the thousands of stories about Zippo reliability: a lighter was once removed from the stomach of a fish and still worked, as did another which resided — for a time — in the stomach of a bear!

That's enough to get anyone fired up about Zippo.