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2022

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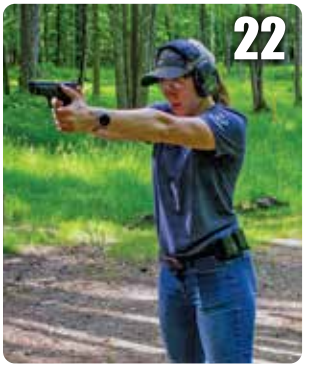
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TOM McHALE

WIN HANDGUN OF THE MONTH **66**



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OWN IT?

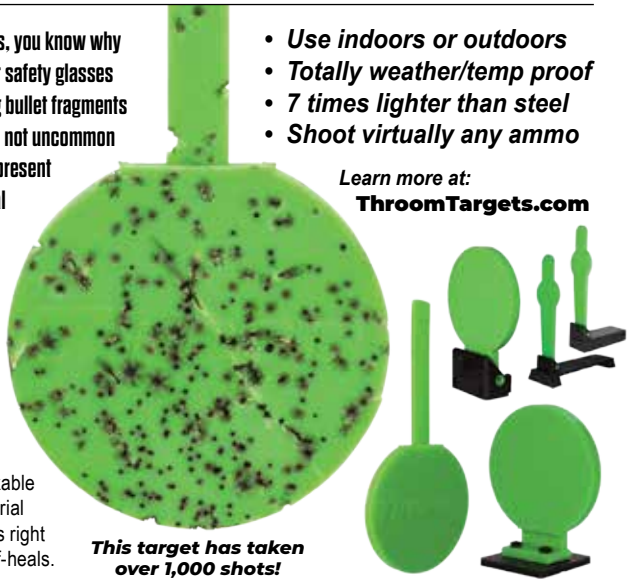


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WHO NEEDS FIRE INSURANCE?

Beware of the man who only owns one gun, one box of bullets and no holster. He may be a "gunfighter." My late Dad owned an old-fashioned S&W .32/20. He would often just wink his eye and say, "Son, I've got it right where I want it." The reason? He would tuck his piece under his left armpit. I would often fuss at him saying, "One of these days Pop you are going to drop that damn thing on the concrete and shoot your self or break it." You see, gunfighters have this thing they refer to as "The Edge." My Pop always had "The Edge." Years after his passing, my much older half-brother informed me he had gunned down five gangsters during the Al Capone days. They wanted to sell him fire insurance so his place of business would not burn down.

Robert Dean Jr.

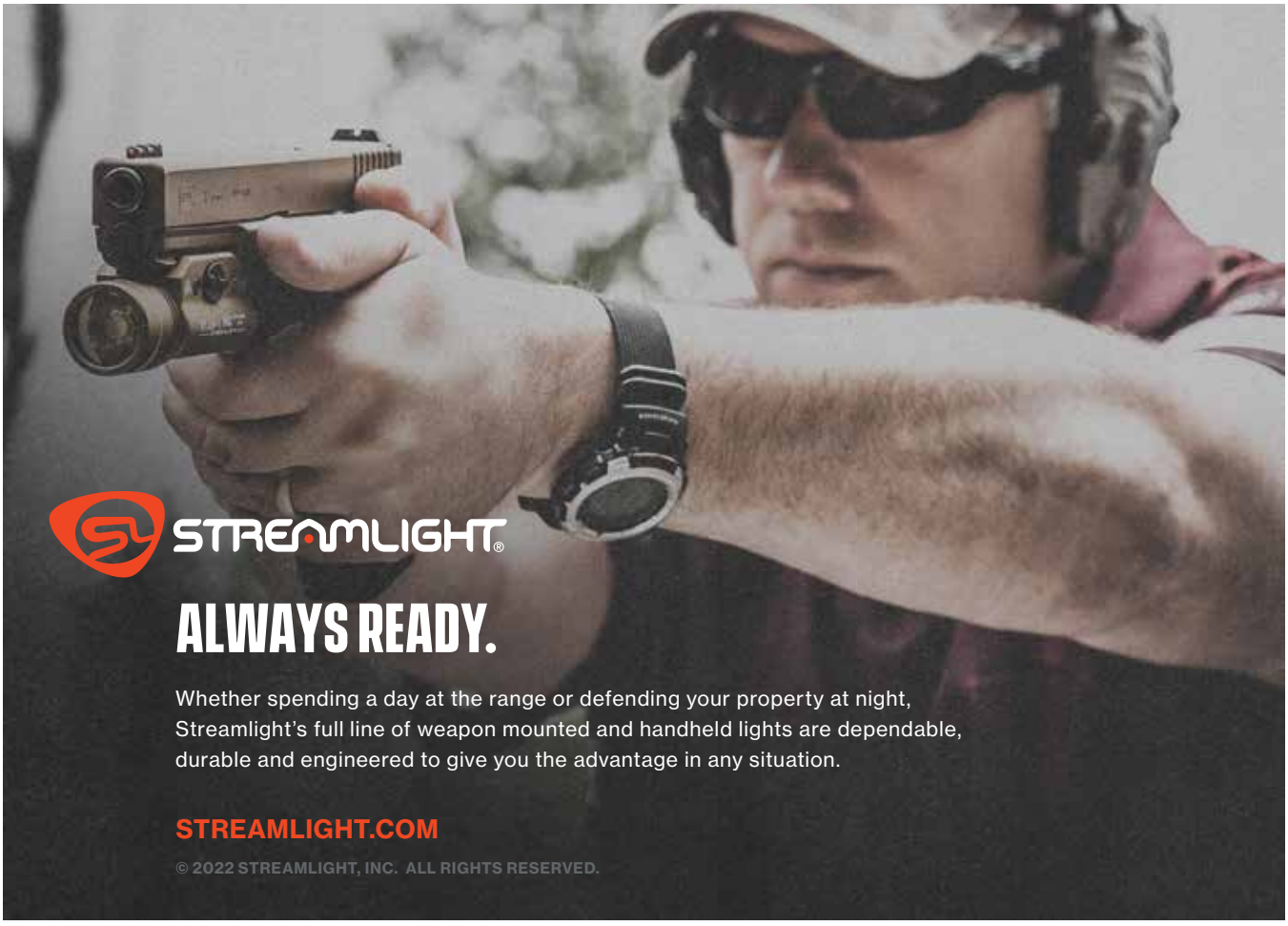
Department Store 'Smiths

Regarding Roy Huntington's recent *Insider* column, I noticed he missed a few "Print vs. Electronic" favorites of mine. I spent many pleasant hours combing offerings from Herter's, Reinhart-Fajen, Century Arms and Montgomery Ward. Furthermore, I miss cruising the Sporting Goods Department of the department stores. In Cleveland in the '60s, we had the May Co. with a gunsmith in Sporting Goods. I was able to get a deal on a 1903 Springfield, which had been converted to .300 Win. Mag. with a Bishop premium Mannlicher checkered stock, Douglas barrel and Timney trigger. I escaped to Sporting Goods whenever forced to accompany my mother/sister/wife on a shopping trip. It's harder now to avoid being captured in front of the screen while they ask your opinion of their selections (and then argue about it). Electronic is usually more efficient, but not as satisfying!

John Miller

Old, Old Gun Designer

In the recent S&W CSX article, Mr. Ayoob states the lead engineer was "also



responsible for the original M&P." Since that person should be over 140 years of age, how about an article on him? :-)

Bob Connell

He has to wear bifocals now for the up-close work, and he takes a nap every afternoon, but other than that, we hear he's still going strong. —TM

Favorite Revolver

I enjoyed Roy Huntington's piece on his rebored Heavy Duty, especially as the result is close to my favorite revolver, the S&W 22-4, which is visually a ringer for the customized .38-44 and sharing the same bore dimension.

I'll have to advocate for the .45 ACP chambering of the 22-4, if for no reason other than the ability to utilize moon clips. Regardless, the appeal of the slender, 4" barrel, "half nickel" front sight and polished blue finish should be universal.

Rick Breneman



Nice Grips

I just picked up the July/August issue of *American Handgunner*. Tank Hoover's write-up about the Tyler Gun Works 1911 got my attention. Not long ago I put a set of Tyler Gun Works rams horn grips on my Ruger SR1911. They do good work.

Dustin Warren

The Turkey Beagle

Dr. Dabbs: I really enjoyed your stories about "Dog." Years ago, I was turkey hunting in southern Iowa at a friend's farm. While I was curled up in a nest of fallen trees by Squaw Creek trying to call a turkey, I spotted two dogs crossing an open field far off. One was a big dog, the other a little puppy, big ears flopping as it tried to keep up with his big buddy.

I stopped gobbling for a bit to watch them pass. Soon the two dogs passed by again but closer this time and the little puppy, less than a year old, turned to me. As it got closer, I could see it was a beagle mix of a sort, so I stopped gobbling again and sat motionless and just watched as the beagle, nose to the ground, worked his way closer to me. Finally, he made it. I was sitting on the ground with an old army wool











SPEAK OUT

blanket pulled across my legs to ward off the morning chill. The beagle puppy crawled up between my legs, turned three times and curled up in my lap, content to be warm for a bit.

As the day progressed, I got up and moved to two other locations hoping to bag a turkey. When eating my packed lunch, I fed the dog pieces of my sandwich, which he gulped down.

As the sun was getting low, it was time to head back to my truck. Following a cow path, the puppy stayed ahead of me, occasionally looking over his shoulder to see if I was still there. When we arrived at my truck, I had a decision to make. I did by opening the door, picking up the puppy, and placing him on my seat. It was not unusual for people to dump off pets they no longer wanted out there in his section of the farm.

As I started the hour trip home, the puppy asleep on the seat next to me, I called my wife on the cell phone. "Hey babe, you know how we always talked about getting a dog?" Then I went on to explain what happened. "I'm at the grocery store right now. I will get some dog food," she replied.

The dog lived with us for three years before getting sick and passing. My father-in-law always referred to the dog as the turkey beagle. Later, when he succumbed to Alzheimer's, he didn't remember a lot, but when he would see me, he would always ask about that turkey beagle.

Rus Eaton

Less Blood, More Files

I presume I have, like most 1911 and other pistol shooters, accidentally put a thumb in the line of "backfire"! Well, in my case it was the knuckle of the left thumb that sustained a nice gash from the sharp outer underside edge of the recoiling slide. But it never happened again. Why? Because when I got home from the range, I pulled out every pistol I owned, pulled each slide until it locked back, took a Swiss file and neatly broke both of the sharp outer edges resulting from milling the underside of the slide. Guys, get out those files!

Frank DeFelice

Compliments

Sincere compliments to Roy Huntington for his excellent article, "Forgetting to Remember" and to Jeremy D. Clough for his article "Standard Mfg.'s Damascus 1911" in the July/August issue. Both articles were very informative and well-written, with Roy's being thought-provoking on a subject we should all be concerned about, and

Jeremy's providing a thorough assessment of an impressive pistol. Also, as a general comment, *American Handgunner* continues to set the standard for excellence in gun magazines: Compliments to all concerned.

Clyde Ware

The Whinery



A few months back I received a letter in the mail for what I mistakenly thought was a subscription renewal notice for a magazine I subscribe to and enjoy — *Handloader!* I knew my subscription was due soon, and the offered annual price was good, so I sent in my payment.

A couple of months later, I received a letter from *Handloader* informing me my subscription had expired! I was confused! So, I reviewed my paperwork. I keep meticulous records.

Come to find out I had "renewed" a nonexistent subscription to *Handgunner,* not *Handloader!* I have never subscribed to *Handgunner!*

Further investigation showed the *Handloader* and *Handgunner* logos are deceptively similar! I had been suckered! I don't know exactly by who, but there's no doubt I had been duped.

As far as I can tell there is no connection between the publishers of the two magazines, so how my name and address was obtained by *Handgunner* is not obvious.

As it turns out, I have received a couple of copies of *Handgunner* magazine now. I find it interesting, and I will continue to read them when they arrive, but I will not renew the subscription!

I am writing to say this — if you or your organization were responsible for this trickery — shame on you Sir! If on the other hand, someone outside of your control is responsible for this, I thought you should be aware.

I can assure you; I won't fall for this again. I will NOT renew this subscription!

Kevin Were

Communists

In the July/August 2022 issue, *The Ayoob Files* discussion of the Inez Garcia case is well-researched and well-written, as always. Massad's analysis of the defense strategy in Garcia's first trial makes sense. But I wonder if defense attorney Charles Garry's "avowed Communist" ideology was the reason he did not claim self-defense







SPEAK OUT

for his client? On the off-chance there is an isolated *Handgunner* reader who has not heard, I'll just say it. Communism does not acknowledge an individual's right to anything. There. I said it. Is it possible Charles Garry's core communist values are what denied his client her best defense? Could he have genuinely believed Inez Garcia had no inherent right to self-defense? A good attorney does not have to agree with his client's cause to provide competent representation. That attorney will also recognize when his values prevent him from doing his best job and will step aside. Fortunately for Inez, she won the legal lottery, thanks to a new lawyer.

Doug Wolfe

New Tricks

Greetings — thank you for adding Serena Juchnowski to the staff. Her article on the placement of the little finger was excellent. Amusing to learn from someone so much younger as I who have been shooting for 67+ years. *Wopila tanka* (biggest thank you)! Peace.

Hal

I read Serena Juchnowski's article that included her conversion to red dot sights. I am an (old) old school shooter, primarily pistol, now. Last year, after years of scoffing at red dots, scopes on pistols and such more modern accessories, I brought a Kimber Aegis 9mm with a red dot. Initially, I wasn't sure I'd love it, but a trip to the steel range really sold me. It should be darn near illegal! I'm too old to be converting all my pistols to red dots, but I really love the steel range with that sight! I enjoyed the article!

Paul

Hi-Power Triggers

Attn: Jeremy Clough. I enjoyed your piece on EAA's new Girsan Hi-Power in the July-August issue of *Handgunner*. You clearly understand the Hi-Power's trigger function better than other commentators, so you may appreciate the redesign of the Hi-Power trigger for the GP-Competition Model, a redesign that went far to address the Hi-Power trigger pull. The GP-Competition Model was a short-lived late-'80s version easily identified by its 6" barrel with muzzle weight and adjustable sights. It has two modifications that improve the trigger. First, it has a redesigned magazine safety that does not involve the trigger directly reducing trigger pull weight by about half a pound. Second, the designers moved the fulcrum on the sear lever. This changed its leverage ratio from a "one-to-one" to a "two-to-one" advantage. This reduced trigger pull weight by half without changing any other parts in the design and without compromising reliability and safety in any way. It is a shame these changes were not incorporated into the more recent Hi-Powers. Both you and *American Handgunner* have my permission to use this information in any way that may suit an editorial need, including promptly hitting delete.

Marshall Williams

Haunted Guns

Will Dabbs' article about haunted guns likely struck a chord with those of us who have had many old guns enter our lives, and I've wondered what stories they held about past owners and uses. When I was a boy during World War II, we had an old neighbor who was in his 70s and had been a seaman since his boyhood in Norway. He was among the last survivors of the "square-rigger" sailors and had many stories and mementos of his years at sea. One day he gave my dad a small revolver commenting it had "saved his bacon" on a couple of occasions in the Orient. Almost 80 years later it resides in my safe and shows the expected wear years in a saltwater environment incur. Nevertheless, it still locks up tight as a drum and the trigger is heavy but smooth. It's a five-shot .32 ACP, marked "Iver Johnson's Arms & Cycle Works, Fitchburg, Mass., June '96." All these years later, I still have to wonder about the details of those "bacon saving" incidents. His only enlightenment on the subject was that considering the attitude of the natives toward Westerners in some ports, no prudent sailor went ashore without an "equalizer" of some kind.

Lee Fowble

Where's The Kimber Solo?

I would like to see an article about the Kimber Solo. Why didn't it stay on the market very long? I have one; it IS hard to rack the slide. The trigger chewed up my finger between the guard and the tip of the trigger, so I installed an aftermarket straight trigger. Now it is a nice carry gun!

Unknown

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VRF14

SKU	CALIBER	CAPACITY	BARREL
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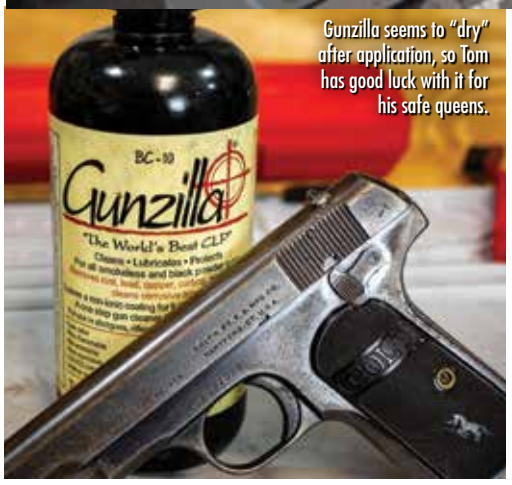


TOM MCHALE

1,2,3,4 I DECLARE A LUBE WAR



The Slip 2000 and Militec products do a fine job for Tom in his hot and humid environment.



Gunzilla seems to "dry" after application, so Tom has good luck with it for his safe queens.

Like all those "Housewives of Toad Suck, Arkansas" reality TV shows, capitalism is subject to the immutable and universal laws of unintended consequences.

Take the gun lube market, for instance. We all need it, and presumably, there's always room for a better ~~mouse~~ grease trap. So, in theory, I have no real problem with the onslaught of miracle gun lube products.

Entrepreneurs everywhere have figured out you can package stuff auto repair shops purchase by pallet-loads of 55-gallon drums into teeny, tiny, plastic bottles with eyedropper attachments and charge a per-ounce price equivalent to platinum, and, these days, gasoline. It is not unusual for a container small enough to legally carry on an airplane to cost $15, $25 or even $40. If a container won't cause anxiety and suffering among TSA agents, it's small indeed.

Edible Oils?

Naturally, if you're going to enter the crowded gun lube market, you need to differentiate your product. Some companies have accepted this challenge with a plethora of assorted colors. Others appear to be chasing the kindergarten arts supplies market by hawking various smells and flavors. Orange-flavored gun lube? Sure. Cotton Candy? Mango Tart with essence of Passion Fruit? Lime green bubble gum? We've seen it all. Some companies actually brag about the human-digestible attributes of their firearm ointments.

I don't know about you, but I don't much care for edible gun oil or lilac fragrance on my 1911s. There are better ways to sate my sugar cravings and make the house smell less like dogs.

The Evaluation Challenge

Here's my theory on why some of this nonsense continues and thrives.

It's logistically near impossible to evaluate gun lubes properly.

To know if a gun lube lives up to its marketing hype, you've got to use it for a long time under a wide variety of abusive but controlled conditions. You'll want to slather it on a safe queen, let it sit for a year, then see if it gooped up on you. You'll want to lube a pistol on day one of a Gunsite 250 class, run that sucker all week in 120-degree dry and sandy conditions, and make sure your gun works flawlessly for the Friday afternoon shoot-off. You'll want to carry it in a holster all day in a 15-below ice storm, then try to shoot it before you pack it in for the evening. Oh, don't forget to check rust preventative and preservative qualities. Leave a gun in your garage all summer to see what happens.

To know if a lube is worth its slick reputation, you've got to invest much energy and time. Most people slap some on their gun, head to the range a couple of times, and call it good should things run satisfactorily.

Fabio's Recommendation

Let's get real. Many of us could successfully use I Can't Believe It's Not Butter as a gun lube. If you're one of those who cleans and re-lubes after every range visit, Fabio might serve you reliably forever. Heck, you'll even get the side benefit of making your range smell like fresh-toasted English muffins.

I ran a pistol on I Can't Believe It's Not Butter, and it worked just fine, although everyone on the firing line asked for popcorn. Just in case it needs saying, this is not recommended.

Home Ec Solutions

We've heard all the buddy recommendations. "I've used 3-in-One forever, and



I'll bet you a sammich I could secretly swap out most people's gun lube with I Can't Believe It's Not Butter and they wouldn't know the difference. This Springfield Ronin EMP runs just fine with it. To be clear, this is not recommended.

it works just fine!" Or perhaps, "I'm not gonna spend my hard-earned money on expensive gun oils. I use Mobil 1."

Then there's the great canola oil controversy. Because the players involved went all lawsuit happy, we're not mentioning any names. Still, a certain person or persons tested a certain gun lube in a lab and speculated it was made entirely or at least primarily from canola oil. Was (is) it? I have no idea; my expertise is limited to fake margarine products.

If you go the home ec route, just consider a couple of things. Non-gun oils like 3-in-One and WD-40 aren't designed for the abusive, hot and fiery environment inside a gun. Check the flash and fire points of your creative solutions. A gun can easily reach 200 to 400 degrees inside and that's not counting full-auto happy switch mode. If your home lube is burning up quickly, it's creating fouling and not being very slippery.

Motor oil makes a great "keep those parts moving" lube solution, especially the newer synthetics. It also works pretty dandily in hot environments. What it doesn't do so well is protect against rust and corrosion. Your gun might work just peachy until it rusts together.

My Go-Tos ...

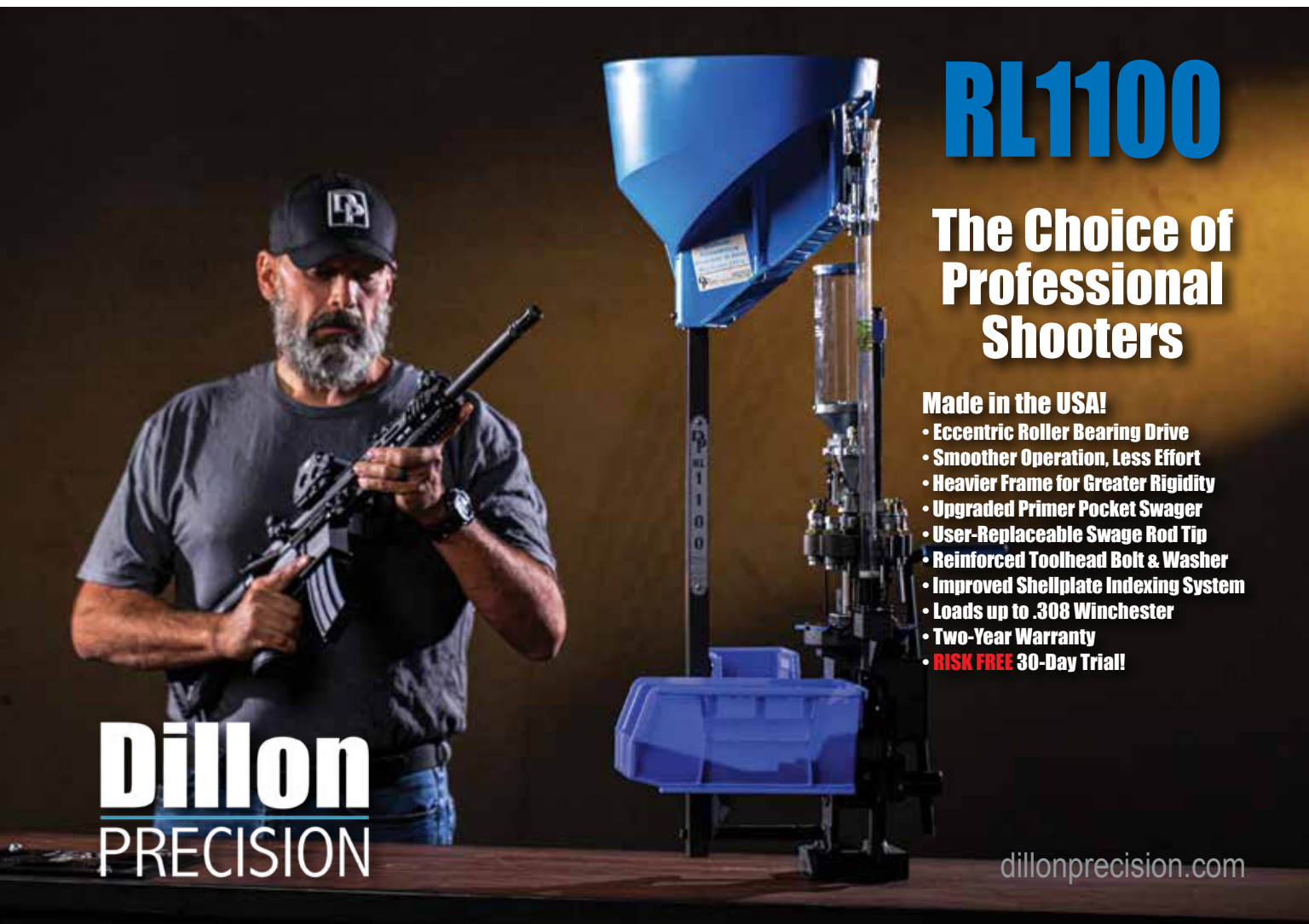
I use a variety of slippery stuff. For safe queens likely to sit for extended periods, I tend to grab the Gunzilla. It "dries" after application but retains protectant and lubricant qualities, so there is no goop after extended sitting.

For daily carry, when I'm gonna be cleaning and re-lubing on a somewhat regular basis, I often use either Militec (slipperier than Chuck Schumer) or the Slip 2000 EWL products. Both work wonderfully in my hot and humid conditions.

Always in my range bag is a container of Hoppes Gun Medic. This stuff is designed for "emergency use" when a gun stops working mid-outing due to filth. Just squirt it in the action and function resumes 'til you get home for a thorough cleaning.

There's nothing wrong with loving your lube of choice and plenty of good ones are out there. Just remember, a frequently re-lubed gun will run on most anything — even margarine.

For more info: Slip2000.com, Militec-1.com, Hoppes.com, Superzilla.us



PISTOLSMITHING CAN BE A GRIND


A 1911 frame set in the surface grinder to remove welded material from the top of the frame rails. Note the micro-welding material on the sides of the rails.

With the reintroduction of classic guns like the Colt Python and the Model P35 (Hi-Power) by Springfield Armory and FN, there is a growing need for custom parts for pistolsmiths to fill the needs of clients who want custom improvements.

John Harris of Harris Design has produced a line of sights for the new Colt "Snake" series of revolvers with adjustable sights. Harrison's front and rear sights are larger for faster acquisition and alignment. They are taller too and will be offered in serrated steel, fiber optic, gold bead and tritium. The rear sights are larger and stronger, with a slightly wider notch to allow more light on each side of the front sight. Edges are rounded for a snag-free draw. The sight utilizes the factory sight housing, replacing the blade in the Colt base.

For the Hi-Power, I always turn to Cylinder and Slide. The Laughridge family has been making P35 parts for decades. Wide thumb safeties, no-bite hammers, beavertail and magwell blanks, along with lots of other parts. I like their thumb safeties available in ambidextrous or single side.

The long spur hammer on the P35 has been a pain (no joke) for many shooters who get hammer bit in the web of their hand; C&S offers eight different hammers. For sights, look at the Heinie and Novak offerings. Both make sights that are easy to see. The Hi-Power can be customized in many areas allowing shooters to tune the pistol to their needs. I'm sure the variety of custom parts will only increase with the renewed popularity of the Browning Hi-Power. Gunsmithing is required for most of the items I have mentioned. It's usually best to find a pistolsmith with a good understanding of the pistol type needing work. A good source is the American Pistolsmith Guild website.

But what secrets do these pros use to perform their top-notch work? Let's consider a couple of advanced techniques.


Before: A 1911 slide that had been altered to fit a Millett Dual Crimp front sight.


The 1911 frame, after surface grinding the frame for a match grade fit with a 0.001" tolerance.

SURFACE GRINDING

When you're a custom pistolsmith, there is a lot of metal cutting — milling, filing, sanding and drilling. One of the best methods of metalworking is grinding. Not with a Dremel or bench grinder but with a surface grinder. A surface grinder removes precise amounts of steel, usually to within 0.0001". That is one ten-thousandth of an inch. The grinder uses a spinning circular stone fixed to an arbor that moves vertically with great precision. The work moves under the spilling wheel on a sliding magnetic table. The stone or wheel can be moved up or down using an indexed wheel.

Surface grinding offers precision cuts and the resulting surface is glass smooth. I use the surface grinder to fit oversized 1911 slides and frames after material has been added via welding. The resulting fit is smooth and allows for less friction than traditional milling. Surface grinding is also used to flatten surfaces on steel parts. I have often used it to remove rollmarks on a semi-auto pistol slide before shipping them for engraving. With the right fixture, it can be used to shape sears and hammers. Anything that needs to be cut to a finished surface can be cut on a grinder. I'm not a master by any stretch, but I find it indispensable in my shop.


After: The 1911 slide after micro-welding by Jim French of JMF Micro Welding.

FILLING THE VOIDS

Micro welding is an art. Most of the fine-scale welding today is done with precision equipment like lasers. These are not cheap — costing tens of thousands of dollars. The skill is also very specialized. For these reasons, most pistolsmiths rely on specialists. One such specialist is Jim French in Georgia, who has been welding for years and recently acquired his FFL to work on firearms. I use Jim for all sorts of projects. Just recently, he welded cracks on an aluminum Colt 1911 frame. The cracks at the point where the dust cover meets the frame are not uncommon and usually fatal to the gun. Aluminum welding is difficult and even tougher on a small scale. Jim has also welded a few slides with Millett Dual Crimp sight holes. The holes are filled with weld and then I recut the slide for a new dovetail sight. This is on top of adding material to frames and slides to allow for a tighter fit after milling and grinding. Jim does a much neater job than I could with my large-scale welder.

Depending on the job, it can be well worth the money to pay a top pistolsmith. They've got the right tools and, more importantly, the right know-how.

For more info: JMFMicroweld.com, Cylinder-Slide.com, Heinie.com, NovakSights.com, AmericanPistolsmithsGuild.com, HarrisonCustom.com



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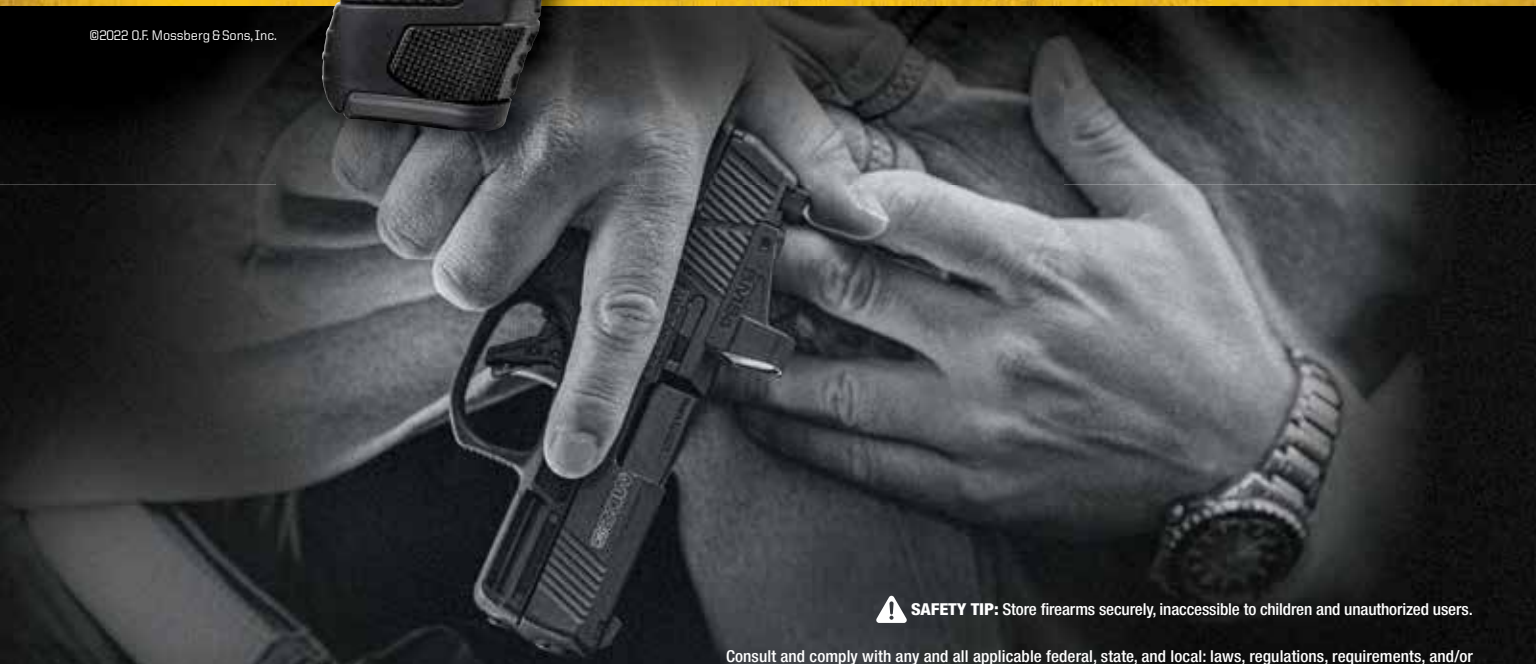
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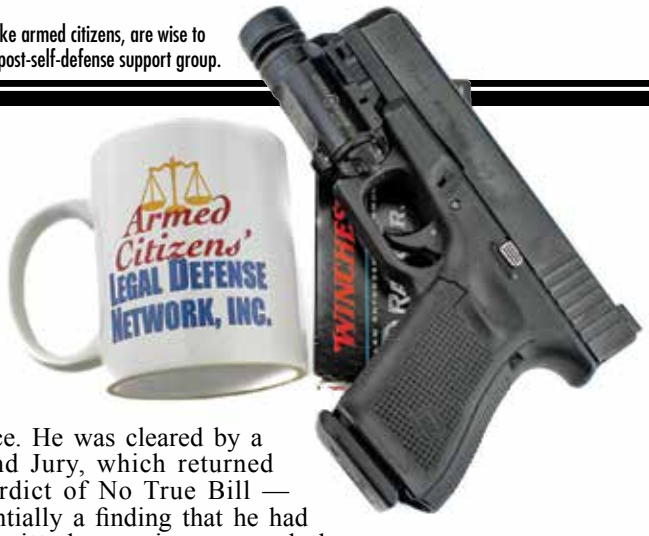
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SAFETY TIP: Store firearms securely, inaccessible to children and unauthorized users.

Consult and comply with any and all applicable federal, state, and local: laws, regulations, requirements, and/or restrictions, including but not limited to those regarding the purchase, ownership, use, transport, and carrying of a firearm.



Retired cops, like armed citizens, are wise to subscribe to a post-self-defense support group.

PROTECTION AFTER THE SHOOTING

You've won the gunfight. Now come the court fights … in criminal court, in civil court and in the court of public opinion. Current cop, retired cop, or private citizen, you need to be ready.

I'm writing this eight days after the Not Guilty verdict for a lawman I spoke for in Federal court in Tampa, Fla. His case is a classic example of why I laugh when I read that shibboleth on the gun-related internet, "A good shoot is a good shoot."

His shooting took place in October of 2016. He was completely exonerated by the internal affairs investigation conducted by the Sheriff's Department he had served for many years. He was likewise cleared by the investigators from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which does not by any means cover for bad cops. His shooting was determined justifiable by the prosecuting authority, the State's Attorney's Office. He was cleared by a Grand Jury, which returned a verdict of No True Bill — essentially a finding that he had committed no crime — and the foreperson of that Grand Jury even took the unusual step of generating a memo explaining their verdict.

That didn't matter to an attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, who ramrodded an indictment on him in 2019.

His trial did not begin until April 4, 2022. It ended five days later with his final exoneration.

I can't tell you exactly how much his legal defense cost him. I can tell you it wasn't cheap.


Mas, foreground, with involved officers at the fatal OIS scene. The county, when sued, paid to defend the deputies as well as itself.

That's not always the case when officers are criminally charged. Yes, the lawmen won the lawsuit.

HOW THINGS WORK

Legal defenses are expensive. Unless they're sympathetic to your case and cut you an awfully good deal, you're looking at somewhere around $500 an hour for a whole lot of hours.

Some of the most famous defense lawyers get more. According to the newspapers, one thousand dollars per hour is the current fee of Mark O'Mara, who led the successful defense of George Zimmerman when he was tried for murder after killing Trayvon Martin a decade ago. It's also the same hourly fee of Wayne LaPierre's primary attorney. The longest police shooting trial I've done was that of Miami officer Luis Alvarez back in 1984: between eight and nine weeks. The pre-trial preparation was even more exhaustive. Legal fees in that case would have run over a million bucks in today's money. A month to the day before that Tampa trial, I had spoken for an armed citizen charged with First Degree Murder in South Dakota, arising from a shooting 26 months before the trial. His legal fees were about $300,000.

WHO PAYS?

Does the police department pay to defend the officer? Bwa-ha-ha! There is no law enforcement agency in the nation with a line-item budget for defending personnel accused of felonies! In a civil suit, the officer will be sued jointly and severally with the department, because the agency has the deep pockets of the community's tax base. If the department pays for the individual cop's civil court defense, it's only out of mutual interest.

An indicted cop has only his union or fraternal organization to pay his or her legal costs if they are indicted, and it's why for decades, I've told cops to join that association! The Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) paid for the defense of Alvarez in that Miami case. The Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA) paid for the criminal defense of the four cops charged with murder in the death of Amadou Diallo in NYC twenty-some years ago. Unfortunately, the cop I mentioned who was tried in Federal court hadn't joined such an association because he naively believed the criminal justice system would never prosecute a cop for doing the right thing. He had to pay for his defense out of his life savings.

A retired cop may or may not be on his own. There is a retired federal agents' association offering such coverage for its members, and a friend who's a retired California deputy tells me he pays for such coverage through PORAC, the Peace Officers Research Association of California. Without something like that, the retired cop is essentially a private citizen whose only recourse is a legal support group like USCCA, CCWSafe, or the organization I serve as an advisory board member, the Armed Citizens Legal Defense Network (ACLDN.) Knowing there is an organization that will pay your legal fees takes one more worry out of the equation, and when you're under life-or-death stress with a gun in your hand, leaves your mind free to focus on the critical decision: Shoot or don't shoot.

To the attorneys who've been hiring me as an expert witness for 43 years, no one pays me to say how I think things should be. They pay me to explain how things are.

And this, God help us all, is How Things Are.

For more info: USConcealedCarry.com, CCWSafe.com, ArmedCitizensNetwork.org

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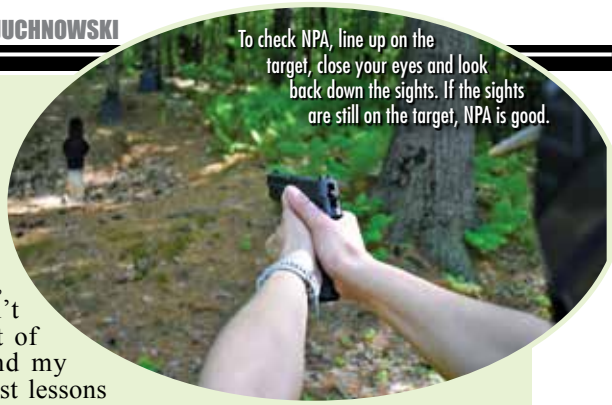
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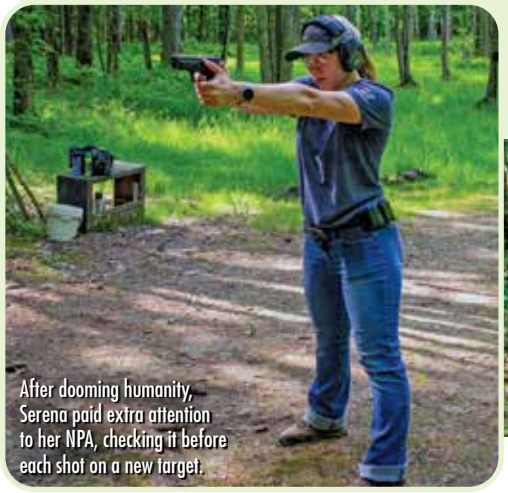
SERENA JUCHNOWSKI

NATURAL POINT OF AIM: IT MATTERS



To check NPA, line up on the target, close your eyes and look back down the sights. If the sights are still on the target, NPA is good.

I never realized, and probably still don't, how many shooters don't understand natural point of aim (NPA). How to find my NPA was one of the very first lessons I learned when I started shooting rifles competitively. While largely understood in the competitive shooting world, it is of great value to any shooter looking to place hits on target.



After dooming humanity, Serena paid extra attention to her NPA, checking it before each shot on a new target.



Every one of these targets requires a slightly different NPA. Not checking is a mistake.

WHAT IS NATURAL POINT OF AIM?

The easiest way to think of NPA is as where your muzzle wants to go when you are holding the gun with as little muscle tension as possible.

Have you ever continually missed a target right off the left or right? Repeating this phenomenon indicates an incorrect zero or a natural point of aim problem. For simplicity, let's assume the gun's zeroed. If you're missing consistently, check your NPA.

FIND YOUR NPA

The first thing you need to do is acquire your shooting position. It's essential to be relaxed with as little lateral muscle movement as possible. From a supported position, you have bone support to rely on. Shooting freehand with a handgun is much harder. You need to use enough muscle to hold the gun, but not so much you're uncomfortable.

Line your sights on the target as if to shoot. Close your eyes. Open them. Where are your sights? If they are no longer in the center of the target, your natural point of aim is incorrect. If your sights are to the right of your target, your shots will go right. If to the left, the same applies.

Moving your feet will fix this. Turn your trailing (back) foot an inch or so. Moving your foot to the left will move your NPA to the left; moving your foot to the right will move your NPA to the right. You can use either foot though using the trailing foot is more common. The amount required to move may vary but can be as small as moving a toe or heel. Keep in mind, if you are way off target, you may need to move both feet to be comfortable. You don't want to shoot all twisted up just because the sights are on the target in that position. It isn't sustainable.

CHECK IT

Every time I pick up my service rifle, the first thing I do is check my NPA. After seven years, I'm conditioned and not doing so feels wrong. Full disclosure: I often dismiss it when I'm shooting handguns. Usually, I'm shooting 15 yards and under — how much could it matter? A lot, actually.

I visited SIG Academy's George Harris, and we spent several days working to improve my handgun shooting. His backyard range included a trio of small plates. I hit some and missed some. George set the stage with one round left in the SIG SAUER 226 magazine. The fate of all of humanity rested on the last shot. I laughed, partly because of the premise and partly because this paired nicely with an unusually addictive series of sci-fi books I was reading. I missed, dooming the world to … I don't know what. In the book, it was extinction.

I made up for it the next day, choosing the same troublesome targets to shoot. After hitting one and barely missing another, George reminded me to check my NPA. I did. The sights settled on the first plate I had knocked down. The second plate, the one I just missed, sat off to the left. Oops.

Sheepishly I corrected and sent the second plate flying. I knew better, but I got a bit lazy, assuming muscling the gun was okay (it's not when shooting for precision) and the three plates were close enough to one another, it wouldn't matter.

NPA CHANGES

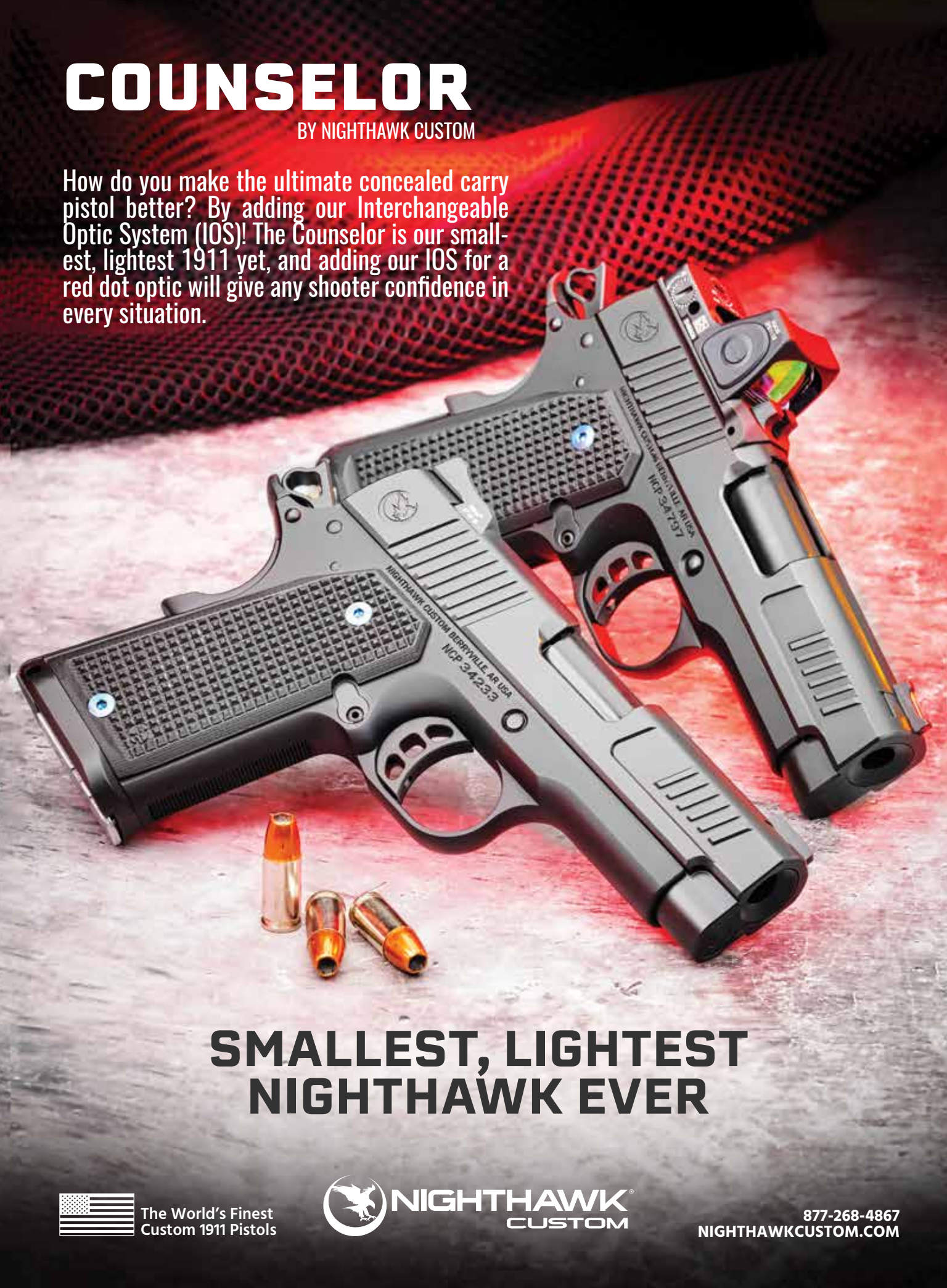
NPA changes as you shoot. You should stop and verify every few rounds. The best example I can give is from my rifle experience. I typically shoot 20-shot strings offhand. After about five or six shots, I'd notice everything seemed a bit wilder and my scores would fall. I'd always be outside the 10 ring off to the left or right. As I shot, my body settled, and the position of my bones and muscles changed. Now I had a different NPA even though the target didn't move.

Many people erroneously compensate for poor NPA by moving their sights (usually hard to do precisely/quickly on a pistol) or by muscling the gun. Give this a try the next time you head out to shoot.

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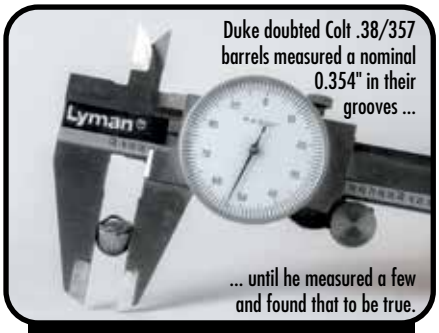


A problem commonly encountered with .45 Colt revolver cylinders is that chamber mouths are too large and often vary in size.

REVOLVER DIMENSIONS

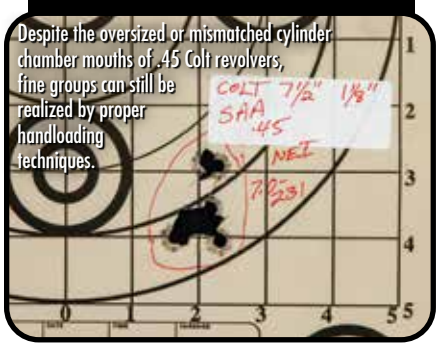
Not long into my shooting career, I realized not all revolvers were equal in terms of closely putting bullets near one another on paper targets. Many years passed before experience began to reveal why that was. It is because almost all problems in revolver accuracy could be laid on mismatching dimensions. That's not a blanket statement because poor barrel quality can contribute, as can damaged crowns at barrels' muzzles or weak firing pin strikes.

Think about it this way; a revolver is a precision instrument. The cylinder must rotate precisely, so chambers are perfectly aligned with the barrel forcing cone. That forcing cone must be minutely funnel-shaped so bullets don't just slam into its sharp edges. If they do, the shooter will certainly notice it by small particles of lead or bullet jackets along with unburned powder stinging hands and face. The common name for that is "spitting lead." There is actually an implement sold named the "range rod." Its purpose is to slide down a revolver's barrel and into cylinder chambers. If it hangs up even a tad, then cylinders are not aligning properly.



Duke doubted Colt .38/357 barrels measured a nominal 0.354" in their grooves ...

... until he measured a few and found that to be true.



Despite the oversized or mismatched cylinder chamber mouths of .45 Colt revolvers, fine groups can still be realized by proper handloading techniques.

MATCHY MATCHY

Next is the notion that cylinder chamber mouths and barrel bore diameters should match, at least to an acceptable degree. If chamber mouths are tighter than a barrel's grooves, bullets are swaged down upon firing. Then they will be smaller than the barrel's grooves. As a rule, this does nothing for revolver precision. However, I've occasionally experienced an exception to that rule. It may be if the revolver's cartridge generates enough pressure and bullets are soft enough, they will expand in the barrel's forcing cone to still grip rifling suitably.

Here's an example. My first .32-20 Colt SAA had a 0.314" barrel groove diameter but 0.310" chamber mouths. Mild loads would not group better than about 4" at 25 yards. However, heavy charges of 2400, as given in old reloading manuals, would deliver groups down around 2".

The flip side of that coin is if chamber mouths are significantly larger than barrel groove diameter. Bullets can then enter the barrel, forcing cones slightly tilted off-center. Colt SAA .45 revolvers are especially bad offenders in this respect. I've used plug gauges to check many SAA chamber mouths. They have almost all ranged from 0.455" to 0.457". However, since early in this century, Colt specs called for all .45 barrels nominally 0.451"/0.452". (Source: factory spec sheet dated 1922.) That's why Colt SAA .45s have no great reputation for precision shooting.

CASTING SOLUTION

My solution to this problem was to size .45 Colt cast bullets to 0.45" — close to the chamber mouth dimensions — and to use relatively soft cast bullets. They will swell to fill chamber mouths but also swage down easily in forcing cones. For example, regardless of the powder used, my .45 Colt bullets are cast from soft 1-20 tin to lead alloy. And I have no complaints about how well my Colt SAAs shoot.

In my early years, I always took gun'riters' advice and shot hard cast bullets in my Colt .45s, sized no larger than 0.452". With decades of experience behind me, the idea finally dawned on me that softer bullets would obturate (yes, that is the proper word!) to fill chamber mouths. Regardless of the exact powder charge, bullets fired through my dozen .45 Colt SAAs cluster into acceptable sizes. This method also works with the fairly common problem of Colt SAA cylinders not being the same in all six chamber mouths.

I've often been asked, "Isn't it harmful to shoot 0.454" bullets down 0.451" barrels?" No. Soft bullets will harm nothing. Again, referring back to my beginning years, manuals advised sizing .38 Special cast bullets to 0.358" or 0.001" over my S&W K38's nominal 0.357" barrel groove diameter. Upon buying Colt SAA .38 Special and .357 Magnum revolvers, nothing changed in my reloading habits. Many years later, I discovered Colt SA and DA barrels were all nominally 0.354" in their grooves. I didn't believe it until I slugged those barrels myself. They indeed were 0.354"! Did I change my load recipes? Nope, I kept shooting the same handloads as prepared for S&W .38s and .357s and have suffered nary a problem.

For over 50 years, I've strived to understand all the ins and outs of revolver accuracy. Much has been learned, but there is a ways to go yet.

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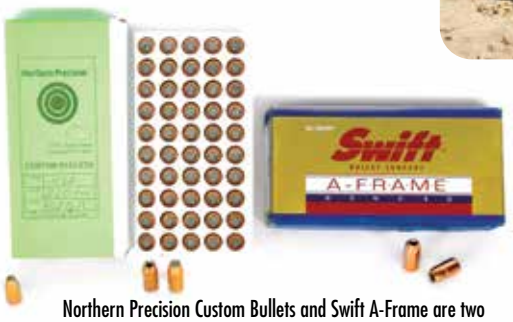
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BIG BULLETS FOR BIG CRITTERS


This cape buffalo was taken in Zimbabwe with a .500 S&W Mag. using a 440-grain hard cast bullet. Mark has taken multiple buffalo in his career, and this bull fell with one shot.

In the past, we've discussed bullets and what's necessary for tackling hogs and deer — an army of handgun hunters pursue those more than most other game. However, there are those adventurous souls who enjoy the challenge of confronting really big, perhaps dangerous, game with a handgun. One must carefully choose a bullet for taking game such as cape buffalo, water buffalo, huge brown bear and similar animals.

I've observed some heated arguments over this topic — social media is a stomping ground for many self-proclaimed authorities. I've seen several cases where individuals were postulating about the best bullet for buffalo or other giant beasts, and yet they have never seen a cape buffalo or a giant brown bear, much less taken one! Make no mistake; I'm not an expert on anything — my wife would testify to this fact on a stack of bibles. But I have taken a multitude of really big animals from all over this planet, and I have experienced a thing or two.



Northern Precision Custom Bullets and Swift A-Frame are two prime examples of premium bullets designed for large critters.

PRECURSORS

There are a couple of factors to address before we face the charging rhino. First, precise shot placement reigns supreme regardless of what firearm you're shooting. No bullet, regardless of size, will compensate for a misplaced shot. Knowing the anatomy of the game is beneficial. You must know where the vitals are located before squeezing the trigger.

Since we're explicitly discussing giant critters, penetration is imperative. Some of these animals — cape buffalo, for example — have tough, thick hide, massive muscle tissue and heavy bone structure. It takes a well-constructed bullet to punch through all of this before reaching the vitals.

The physical properties of every bullet differ according to the intended application; preferences may and will vary. Depending on composition and construction, bullets of the same weight and diameter with identical velocity may exhibit totally different results on game. As a general rule, bullets that expand more will penetrate less. Likewise, a bullet that expands less will penetrate more. FMJ or non-expanding bullets are often used on elephant and rhino — even hippo and buffalo in some cases.

Premium bullets designed for hunting large or dangerous game are not cheap. If you're looking to cut corners on cost, look somewhere else. Some of these hunts for giant critters are downright expensive and skimping on bullet selection is not logical.

A FEW EXAMPLES

Swift A-Frame bullets have a proven track record on big critters. Swift bonds the lead core to the jacket. In most cases, this process allows the bullet to expand slightly, leaving a mushroom effect while retaining weight. These bullets have been a favorite for many handgun hunters and are available in various calibers, including their 300- and 325-grain bullets for the 454 Casull.

Northern Precision manufactures custom bullets in different weights and styles. Their bonded core bullet is another example of a projectile that, under most circumstances, expands slightly while maintaining nearly 100% of its original weight. The company also provides a heavy tapered jacket for big game where penetration is necessary. Northern Precision is now offering spitzer bullets designed for the 454 Casull in 300- to 375-grains with custom options that include bonded cores and a heavy copper jacket. The bullets are also available in a flat tip, truncated conical shape with a pure lead core and heavy jacket.



Left to right: Buffalo Bore .44 Mag. 305-grain L.B.T.-L.F.N., DoubleTap .500 S&W Mag. 400-grain WFNGC and HSM Bear Load, .460 S&W Mag. 325-grain hard cast are examples of heavyweight bullets designed for big animals.

Buffalo Bore loads a Mono-Metal bullet made of copper or brass in their "Dangerous Game" lineup. They are advertised to be cleaner burning than hardcast bullets. Buffalo Bore states these Mono-Metal bullets penetrate deeper than typical hard cast. The company is well-known in the handgun hunting arena, and I've shot their ammo for years. I've yet to use their Mono-Metal bullets but am anxious to give them a shot. These Dangerous Game loads are available in a 265-grain 44 Mag., 300-grain .454 Casull and .460 S&W Mag.

Several ammo companies offer heavy hardcast bullets such as HSM, Buffalo Bore and DoubleTap. The composition of the alloy in cast bullets determines performance. My friend and experienced caster, Dick Thompson, can modify cast bullets to his liking by mixing the right percentage of antimony, pure lead, and linotype, along with water quenching and powder coating. He took a cape buffalo last year with his hard cast bullets, which performed flawlessly. In Zimbabwe, I took a dandy bull with a .500 S&W Mag. using a 440-grain hardcast — the only cape buffalo I've taken with only one shot.

Regardless of bullet choice, proper shot placement is paramount and the slug must be capable of serious penetration. Choose wisely.



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Will could, and probably has, lived exclusively off of Count Chocula cereal.

FOOD OF THE GODS

Ambrosia is the technical term. In Greek legend, ambrosia sustained the gods. For a mere mortal to taste of such was an indulgence beyond compare.

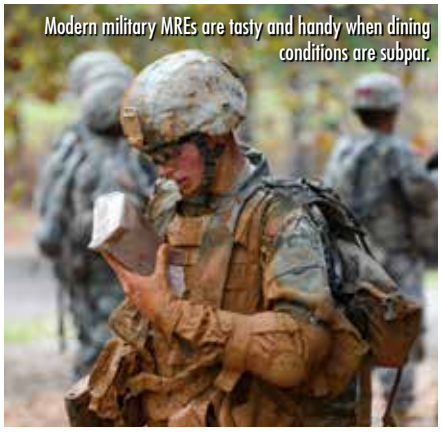
I'm a 55-year-old man who should know better. A significant fraction of my professional day is spent trying to stave off the inevitable results of poor life choices. I know this sounds ghoulish but were it not for cigarettes, unhealthy foods and booze, my family might starve.

Pharmageddon

When I finished med school in 2002, one in every 12 adult Americans had diabetes. Today that number is one in 10. By 2050 it will be one in three. Half of all African-American children born after the year 2000 will have diabetes. We fret over North Korea, a nuclear Iran and rampaging anarchists. None of that matters. The thermonuclear bomb that is about to go off in America is diabetes.

In the timeless words of the Apostle Paul, I am chief among sinners. My diet is simply ghastly, but I am living proof a guy can stay sufficiently active to eat garbage and remain thin.

I don't much care for stuff like squash or okra. I can murder me some mashed potatoes, but that's just fluffy sugar. My real kryptonite is breakfast cereal. In fact, there is one particular sort that stands out among all the rest. *I am and always have been hopelessly addicted to Count Chocula.*


Modern military MREs are tasty and handy when dining conditions are subpar.

A 6th Food Group?

The Monster Cereals from Quaker Oats: Booberry, Frankenberry and Count Chocula made up the vanguard. I never held much affection for the first two, but I could subsist solely upon the third. To name a breakfast cereal after a blood-sucking ghoul was a bold move. I am, however, living proof that it resonated.

Count Chocula has evolved considerably through the decades. Like most things, the old sort was better. Early on, the crunchy bits were quite porous and friable. They floated like little pieces of grey Styrofoam and were nigh heavenly. The modern versions are shiny and seem vaguely shellacked. I can live with that. The real tragedy was the marshmallows.

Those earliest Count Chocula marshmallows looked like grey pencil erasers and personified breakfast perfection. They had the perfect consistency and the ideal ratio of crunchy bits to marshmallows. The new ones look like bats and just aren't the same. I will forever be vexed at the pervasive drive among humans to change things just for the heck of it. Had Michelangelo been similarly afflicted, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel might ultimately have morphed into an advertisement for 16th-century Italian timeshare condos.

Practical Tactical

Modern T-rations and MREs are actually quite good. A guy could gain weight in the field feeding from American field kitchens. The most extraordinary component of field food to me back in the day was nuclear milk.

At least that's what we called it. My understanding is they took regular milk, subjected it to intense doses of gamma radiation and shipped it off to us in the suck. It didn't have to be refrigerated. I could leave cartons of the stuff out overnight underneath a Humvee in the desert or secure it in a sack in a mountain creek and have it seem right chilly. I hope you can see where this is going.

We used to call MREs "Meals Refused by Ethiopians." However, nowadays they are actually quite good. Image: Ashley Pomeroy



Bruce Banner got some gamma radiation on him and turned into the Hulk. I hoped the Army researchers at Natick Labs had thought of that. However, it never really seemed the Army's primary mission was to create healthy, productive, cancer-free retirees.

Mail call was a holy thing back in the days before Facetime and Skype. Those letters and parcels from home were like cool water for a guy dying of thirst. I had been in the desert for some weeks already and got a package from my mom. I retreated to a quiet spot to skin the thing and dream of home. With fingers trembling in anticipation, I used my GI-issue Camillus switchblade to disassemble the box. I was greeted by the bucktoothed grinning visage of my favorite blood-sucking vampire. Those two family-sized boxes of Count Chocula might as well have been pure gold bullion.

I chilled a little nuclear milk and ate my ambrosia out of my canteen cup using one of those long brown plastic MRE spoons. If I closed my eyes and ignored the accumulated gratuitous filth, I could be transported back to a better place where there were hot showers, clean sheets and love aplenty. Moms. Wow.

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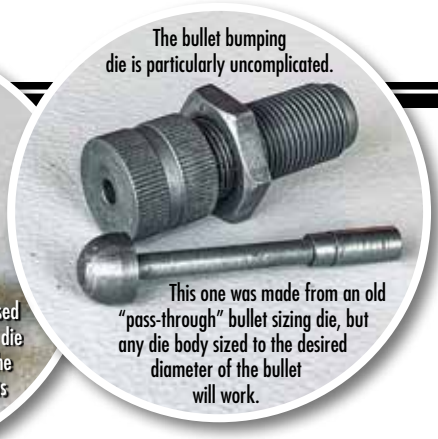
LINDSEY BERTOMEN



BULLET BUMPING



Lindsey used the bump die to flatten the meplat of the 158-grain cast bullets. They worked rather well.



The bullet bumping die is particularly uncomplicated. This one was made from an old "pass-through" bullet sizing die, but any die body sized to the desired diameter of the bullet will work.

When I told my range buddies I was writing an article about bullet bumping, I got several wisecracks like "hammerin' bullets" and "sledge-o-matic." As a side note, I don't recommend doing any internet searches with the term "bumping." Bullet bumping is a real thing — and you should try it.

It's a swaging process using pressure and a sizing die to form a new custom bullet. It takes a solid press to bump bullets, but since it is not full-length bullet making, it can be done on any good single-stage.

Reloaders bump bullets to either expand their diameter or reshape a bullet's profile. The advantage to using bullet bumping is we're reshaping a bullet whose weight is already known, so we have a good starting point for load recipes.

LEARNING THE BUMP

A few years back, I was shooting a cast bullet competition. A couple of shooters shot both .303 British and 7.62x39, depending on the match. Their molds threw a .308, and they used a bump die to get the diameter to 0.311". I asked one of them about bullet bumping, and he gave me some parts, telling me to make my first bump die for a .357-sized cartridge.

The bump die was made from a sizing die body with an inside diameter of 0.358". A threaded cap served as a guide for the internal rod, which moves freely inside the die. It has a .358 plug on the end of the rod. Using the bullet punch from a Lee Bullet Lube and Sizing Die Kit, one pushes the bullet into the die. Controlling the amount of pressure determines the amount of "bumping."

The rod with the plug is used to eject the bullet from the die. Mine has a wide-domed top that doesn't deform when I hit it with a hammer.

I started with a flat-surfaced plug on my bump die, which compresses the overall length of the bullet, and flattens the meplat. In my first experiment, I made 158-grain bullets that look like a wadcutter with a little nose.



The bump die can be used on a standard single-stage press. Tap the dome with a hammer to eject the bumped bullet.

THE RIGHT LEAD ... AND LUBE

It is best to use lead on the softer side, but you should know I've used linotype too — it just takes steadier pressure.

I don't have sophisticated tools for measuring lead hardness. I sand a 2B lead pencil down to a chisel shape and see if I can create a gouge in the lead ingot. If it does, the hardness is around 12 BHN. An HB lead scratch is 14–15 BHN. A 3B is BHN 10. This test is pretty accurate. Some budding artists buying those Staedtler Mars Lumograph Art Drawing Pencils at Hobby Lobby probably aren't artists at all — they're lead testers.

Wheel weight lead runs from 12–15 BHN, depending on how it is treated after molding. If it is air-cooled, it stays soft, usually around 12. Water quenched, a process I do not use, it can go 18 BHN. If it is cured in an oven, they are much harder.

For rifle bullets, I use a lanolin-based lube and a punch approximating the desired shape of the nose. For pistol bullets, there is less surface area to adhere to the sides of the die and a deliberate tap on the punch will eject the newly formed bullet.

BIG FLAT NOSES

If you look through the Buffalo Bore catalog, you'll see they are well known for cast handgun cartridges designed for defense against dangerous game. What do some of these cartridges have in common? They use bullets that can handle higher-than-normal velocities whose noses are big and flat. They are not designed to mushroom. They penetrate, creating tissue damage with a larger meplat.

I tried it with a relatively mild loading of 4.3 grains of Unique and my bumped 158-grain bullet. My Lyman 357446 mold throws a consistent 158-grain, Keith-type bullet. I decided to bump bullets incrementally to see if there was a performance improvement.

The larger I made the meplat, the greater the permanent wound channel in ballistic gelatin. I never did get the bullets to stop within 20" of gel, but the goal is penetration, not expansion and energy transfer.

I sincerely doubt I could design a better cartridge than Buffalo Bore because I don't have their engineering experience. I can, however, articulate why their cartridges work and why I would buy them. In the meantime, I'm bumping bullets.

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TIGER McKEE

MOVE!

The fundamentals of responding to a threat are Move, Communicate, Use Cover, Shoot — if necessary — and Think. "Move" is first for multiple reasons. The best way to win the fight is avoidance and escape. Moving forces the threat to react to you. Moving reduces your chance of injury, especially creating distance and moving to cover for protection. Engaging the threat may require moving to ensure safety for bystanders. There are lots of important reasons to move.



Movement flows from your fighting stance. Feet shoulder-width apart, strong side foot to the rear and a little more than half your weight on the support side foot.



Movement to the rear begins by taking a full step with the rearward (strong-side) foot.



Then, shift the weight to the rear leg, resetting the support side foot by taking a half step. You should end up in your fighting stance after each step.



The goal is never to let the threat get back to the "Act" phase of their loop. Movement is one of the best ways to accomplish this.

Move First, Orient Later

Fighting is problem-solving at high speed. Winning is about cycling through Boyd's O.O.D.A. Loop — Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. Your first response to "Observing" danger should be to move. Even if the situation doesn't immediately affect you, waiting until you're involved may be too late. One problem with moving immediately is the desire to gather details about what's occurring, spending too long in the "Orient" phase of the loop. There's no time to stand around being curious, and there's still the "Decision" process to cycle through. How will you respond to the information gathered?

Cycling through Boyd's loop isn't a straight, linear, sequential action. The original diagram has over 30 different lines of flow, bouncing back and forth between stages. Through practice, you've already incorporated movement into your threat response. You "Observe" (danger) and jump straight to "Act" (move). Now, the threat is reacting in the "Observe" part of their loop. Moving creates time to cycle through your loop again, gather a few more details, decide and initiate your next action.

Moving Reduces Risk

It doesn't matter whether the threat is trying to hit, slice or shoot you; it's best to be a moving target. Move off the "X," the attack line of the threat. Do not stand still or ball up on the floor, allowing the threat to have their way. Sometimes, running fast is the best defense. Distance, moving away from the danger, dramatically diminishes your risk of injury — ditto for moving to cover and its protection. Once you're protected behind cover, search for better cover. At the first opportunity, you're moving again. If concealment is the only option, use it; they can't attack what they don't see.

An instinctual problem with moving is that once we decide to "fight," there's a strong urge to root to the ground. The beauty of firearms is that you can be moving while drawing the weapon or shooting accurately. Of course, this requires plenty of practice. The draw-stroke is rehearsed until it's as smooth while moving as when stationary. Shooting while in motion is practiced slowly and only after exposure to the proper techniques.

Move Now, Shoot Later

Moving is usually more important than drawing or shooting. Move first, create distance, get behind protection, then think about the pistol work. Plus, it may not even be safe to draw or engage the threat until moving to a location where you won't muzzle bystanders and have a backstop positioned to trap errant rounds.

Movement must be stable, balanced and controlled unless you're "haulin' ass" to escape. Falling to the ground makes it more difficult to win the fight. The technique for movement is simple but requires plenty of repetition for it to be automatic. One step always means moving both feet. After taking one step, you end up in a fighting stance, similar to a boxing stance. (There's a world of difference between a "shooting" stance and a "fighting" stance.) Moving left begins by taking a full step with the left foot, lowering your center of gravity slightly so the toes can "feel," ensuring there's solid ground before committing your weight. Then, shift the weight over as you take a half step with the right foot to re-establish the stance, maintaining shoulder-width distance between the feet. To move forward, step with the forward foot first — in a fighting stance, this will be the support side. Moving back from this stance begins with the strong-side foot. This shuffle-type movement is stable, allows you to stop at any time in a fighting stance and provides the platform needed to shoot while moving.

It's always better to react when you smell smoke, as opposed to waiting until you see the flames or feel the heat. This is especially true when moving in response to danger. The sooner you're moving, the better. Remember, communication is required to coordinate these actions with family or friends; another reason to practice in advance. Understanding the necessity and advantages of movement should provide motivation to incorporate it into your threat response.

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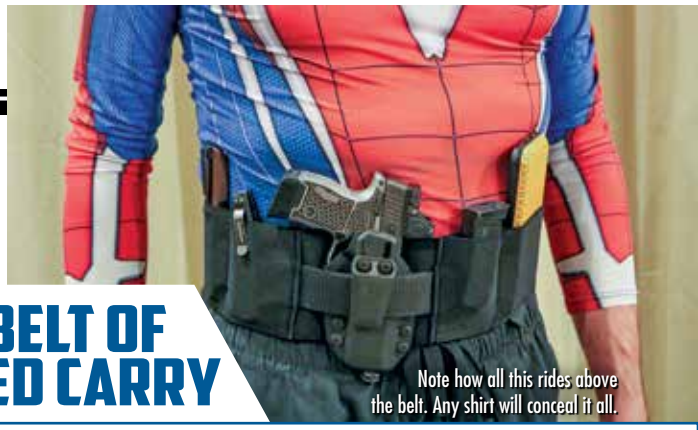
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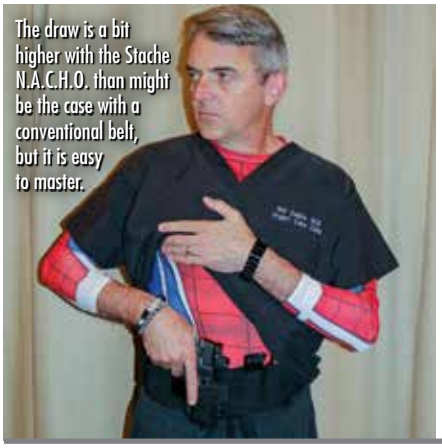
Note how all this rides above the belt. Any shirt will conceal it all.

If you found yourself in the suck, what sort of defensive weapon would you like to have handy? I'm thinking maybe an HK 416 or perhaps an M249 Para SAW with a truckload of ammo. While we're dreaming, let's make it a platoon of M1A2 SEP Abrams tanks and Close Air Support stacked up to the International Space Station. However, none of that stuff is terribly practical. It's tough to conceal an M1 tank underneath a pair of shorts and a T-shirt while out with your best girl on a date.

Reality is that the best defensive firearm is the one you actually have on you. I'd much sooner have a Ruger 22/45 in my hand than that HK416 locked up in a gun box someplace. That's why figuring out how you're going to carry your gun is at least as important as the details of the gun itself.

I work in a busy medical clinic, so my daily uniform is basically pajamas. While that's not *THE* reason I do what I do, that is indeed *A* reason I do what I do. Surgical scrubs are the next best thing to being naked, but they're not necessarily the most efficient foundation for concealed carry.

I've tried quite literally everything. Pocket carry, ankle holsters, appendix carry and IWB rigs on a good stiff belt — all have their strengths and weaknesses. The rub is if something is uncomfortable or inefficient, you just won't use it. The road to Hades is paved with fancy holsters that looked good on the website but rode like a wad of barbed wire stuffed down your Speedos. The Blackhawk Stache N.A.C.H.O. is legitimately different.



The draw is a bit higher with the Stache N.A.C.H.O. than might be the case with a conventional belt, but it is easy to master.

TACTICAL DETAILS

The Stache N.A.C.H.O. is like the Bat Belt. Everything you might reasonably need while out and about rides comfortably in its generous pockets.



N.A.C.H.O. stands for Non-Conventional Adaptive Carry Holster Option. That acronym seems a wee bit contrived, but the rig it describes is indisputably elegant. The Stache N.A.C.H.O. is a belly band. It comes in five different sizes to suit most any particular body habitus.

The N.A.C.H.O. is formed from wide, heavy-duty, double-ply 4" elastic. A generous 3D mesh backer cushions the load and helps the rig breathe in hot climes. The edges are intentionally rounded to prevent chafing. Two integral 3" pockets accommodate spare magazines or a flashlight. Another pair of 3.5" pockets will carry your wallet and cell phone. No kidding, it's like the Bat Belt. Just slap this rascal on, and you're carrying all the sundry gear you might need to stay connected, supported, and safe while you're out where the Wild Things roam.

The Stache N.A.C.H.O. includes a length of rigid 1.5" double-layer scuba webbing to accept your favorite IWB holster. The system is really designed for weapons like the GLOCK 19 or smaller. The adaptive bit means the rig can be configured for appendix, hip, behind-the-hip, or mid-torso carry. I used mine with my SIG SAUER P365XL micro-carry gun.

PRACTICAL TACTICAL

In case you hadn't noticed, people these days don't dress quite like they did back when we were kids. The Stache N.A.C.H.O. is perfect for those times you're not wearing jeans, 5.11s, or anything that doesn't lend itself to a proper belt. Sweat pants, yoga pants, shorts and a T-shirt, skirts, dresses, kilts, or most any other sort of truly comfortable attire nicely complement the Stache N.A.C.H.O. This thing is just perfect underneath a pair of untucked surgical scrubs.

For starters, the Stache N.A.C.H.O. really is comfortable. The wide 4" elastic spreads the weight of your gear out so it doesn't eat into your anatomy. Pressure always equals force divided by surface area. That's not just a good idea; that's the law.

Your weapon is as positively retained as the holster you choose. You can customize your rig to your particular proclivities and circumstances. The Blackhawk Stache IWB base holster is a seamless fit. Even tricked out with my P365XL, smartphone, flashlight, knife and spare magazine, the whole rig still feels more comfortable than my old belt packing just the gun.

My draw was just as fast as with my previous conventional rig. I tried the orientation behind-the-hip, which is my custom, and in the front, both over my appendix as well as covering my belly button. If you can imagine it, the Stache N.A.C.H.O. will put your gun there. I found it fit best riding a bit higher than a typical belt. This changes the draw somewhat, but that's the reason we train.

So, if you feel less is better when it comes to clothing and the only thing standing between you and that killer loincloth are those antiquated indecent exposure laws, then this is your minimalist concealed carry solution.

For more info: Blackhawk.com

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Rimfire pistols and revolvers are among the most useful tools handgunners can own. They are outstanding for training new shooters and maintaining shooting skills. Ammunition is (or was) relatively cheap compared to centerfire ammunition and with virtually no recoil. They are excellent for pest control and informal small game hunting around a farm or ranch, or to pack while camping, fishing, or hunting big game. But most of all, .22s are fun to shoot.



Dave remembers when the original Browning Challenger was introduced. It remains, in his view, the best all-around .22 pistol ever made.

BUT WHAT ABOUT CARRY?

What about .22s as carry guns? I'm not talking about them as backup or last-ditch firearms but as primary personal defense weapons. The short answer is don't do it. No. End of story.

Except there has to be a story. Yes, any gun is better than no gun. In the vast majority of instances in which a firearm is used defensively, no shots are fired. The person being threatened displays a firearm and the assailant either flees or surrenders. No sensible person wants to be shot. *Most foolish people don't want to be shot either*.

The .22LR is no toy. There's hardly a species on earth that hasn't at one time or another been killed with a precisely placed .22 bullet. I've killed quite a few animals ranging from 300 to 1,200 lbs. with .22 rifles. For years on the farm, we butchered at least two steers and two hogs annually, meat for ourselves and a close relative or two. Dad didn't mind shooting vermin from around the barn but found it hard to shoot animals he'd raised. On butchering day, he'd always go to the house for a forgotten knife or sharpening stone, and it was understood the animal would be dead by the time he got back. One shot with the muzzle of the .22 rifle a couple of feet from its head and even a 1,200-lb. steer dropped instantly.



In all its forms, the Ruger .22 pistol provides excellent value and performance for its cost.



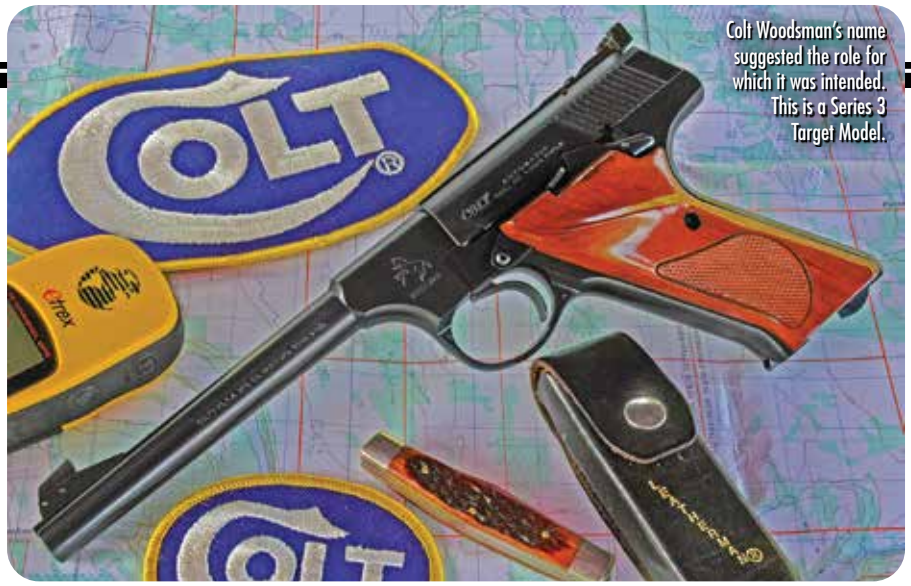
One of the best revolvers for the outdoor person today is the Ruger SP-101 in .22LR. With stainless steel construction, it is nearly impervious to the elements and is an accurate, dependable outdoor companion.

FEEDING

Don't think I don't have respect for the .22LR cartridge. But I cannot recommend a .22 handgun as a primary defensive arm. There are two fundamental reasons: reliability and power. In a semiautomatic action, the .22LR has two strikes against it. It is a rimmed case, *not well adapted to being stacked in box magazines*. And it is long for its diameter, making reliable feeding more problematic.

I have many .22 rifles, which have been completely reliable. Almost always, they are models with tubular or rotary magazines. Semiauto .22 rifles I've used with complete success include the Winchester 63 and 74, Browning takedown model, Remington Nylon 66 and 550, Marlin 60 and Ruger 10/22, among others. Box magazine semiautos have been less reliable. The standard Remington Nylon 66 is legendary for its reliability, while the Nylon 77 with a detachable box magazine I once owned was nothing but trouble. Among detachable magazines, the only ones I can recommend unreservedly are the Ruger and Browning rotary designs.

AMMO RELIABILITY

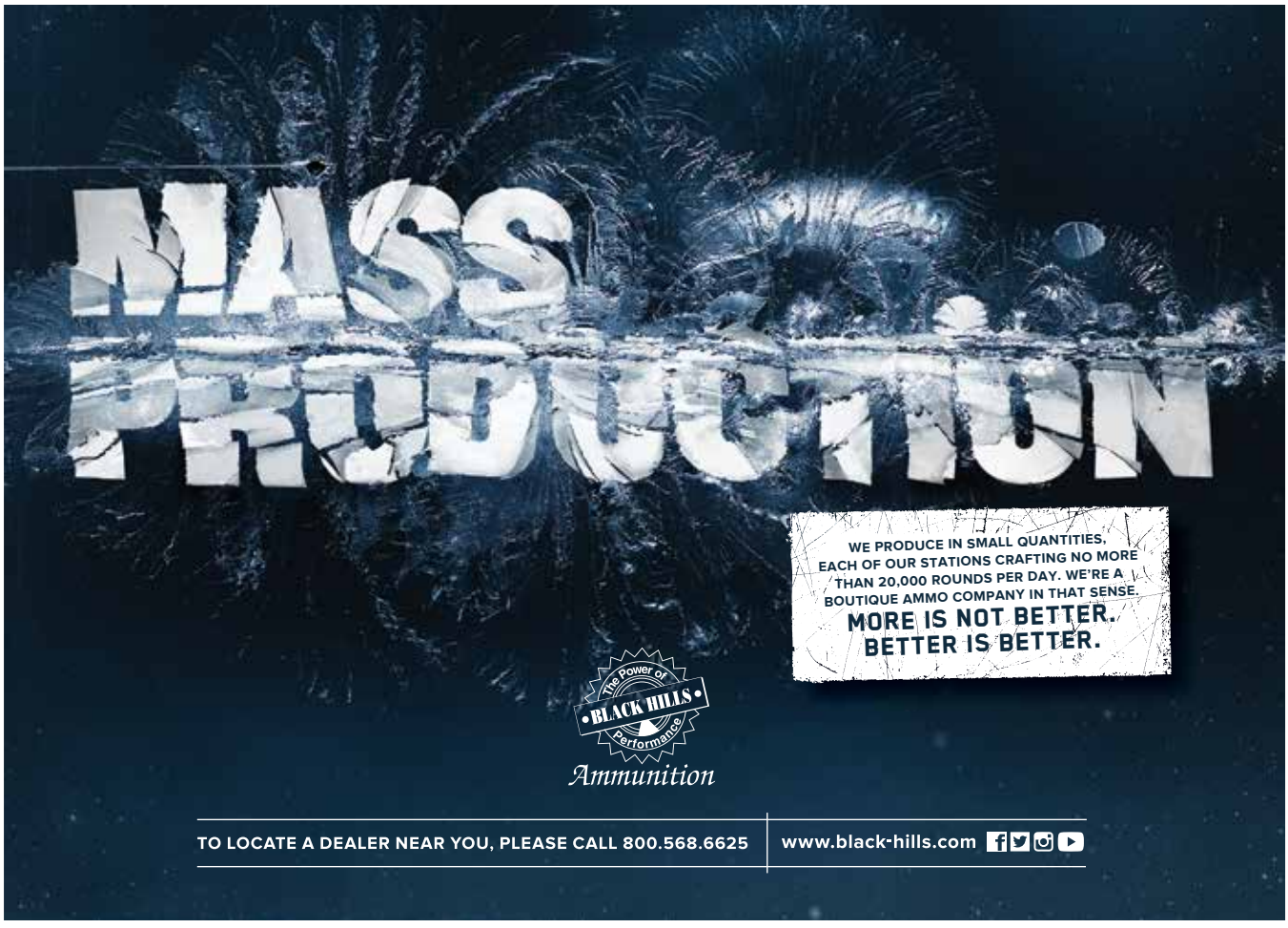


Colt Woodsman's name suggested the role for which it was intended. This is a Series 3 Target Model.

I believe rimfire ignition is less reliable than centerfire ignition. I've had far more misfires with rimfire cartridges. Often, they will fire on a second strike, especially if you rotate the cartridge, so the firing pin strikes a different location. I've fired hundreds of thousands of centerfire rounds and can recall only two or three misfires.

There's very little to go wrong with a centerfire primer other than a missing pellet of priming compound or missing anvil. Quality control is rigorous and the chances of a bad primer are remote. One reason I use Black Hills ammunition whenever possible is they visually inspect every primer before it goes to the loading machines, reducing the chances of a misfire to near zero. The handloader can do likewise by inspecting primers before loading. And do keep your oily fingers from touching the primer. There's a good chap.

There are reliable .22s, most revolvers, for example. Some semi-auto .22 pistols are as reliable as the best centerfires, including, in my experience, the Beretta 70 series, the Ruger .22 model, the S&W, 41 and the Browning Buckmark. I'm sure there are others. But that doesn't solve the lack of power issue. I've conceded the effectiveness of the .22LR with precise shot placement. Can you achieve such precision on what will likely be a moving target? Can you hit a rolling baseball — make that a golf ball — every time, on-demand, at speed and under great stress? Surviving a gunfight will take all the skill, courage and coolness you can muster, the most effective weapon you can manage and probably a good dose of luck. Unless you have no other choice, don't handicap yourself with a .22.



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MIKE CUMPSTON

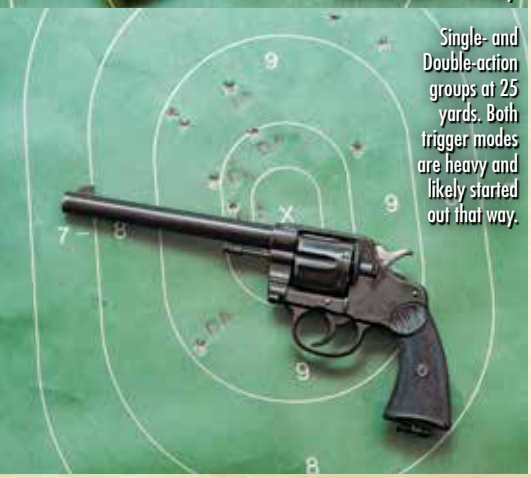


The New Service revolver took the Western World by storm. Adopted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the U.S. Border patrol and other police and military organizations foreign and domestic, it was chambered for the Black Powder era .45 Colt, the .38 and .44 WCF rounds and various British large bore revolvers.

ROUGH HISTORY... REBORN



Mike shot this 25-yard group one-handed, single-action like they used to do back in the day.



Single- and Double-action groups at 25 yards. Both trigger modes are heavy and likely started out that way.

The New Service was introduced in 1898, 10 years after Colt's first swing-out cylinder Army and Navy models. It was basically a large frame version of the earlier revolvers and shared the same lock work, including the small breakage-prone leaf springs that remained standard until replaced by coil springs a decade later. Even in its earliest form, the revolver won acceptance across the western world. Even early on, it was chambered for virtually every large-caliber revolver cartridge in America and Great Britain, later including the .38 Special and .357 magnum before being discontinued in 1942.

In 1962, I sent $22.50 to a Dallas mail-order house for a New Service model 1917 from The Great War. Chambered in .45 ACP, this model uses moon clips. A postal employee delivered it to the front door — happy with a 15-year-old's signature.

It had the positive safety bar developed in 1907 and the device was so efficient it blocked the hammer even when the trigger was pulled. I removed it and tossed it away. The trigger pull was prodigious in weight with a long reach that must have challenged the average-sized shooter of the period. This was back in the day of the $2.50 per box 1942 steel-cased surplus ball that stuck fast to the chamber walls and had to be pounded out.

It was also the time of the "Poor Man's Magnum" — a favorite subject in the pulp zines of the day that involved ladling in quantities of Unique or 2400 (!) behind cast bullets of 200–250 grains until the characteristic "BOOM" became a supersonic "CRACK" of nascent magnum-hood. Versions of these loads even made it into loading manuals. I shot the steel-cased ball and the Poor Man's Magnum handloads and never blew the gun up. I can't recall ever actually hitting anything with it and 57 years passed before I heard another New Service calling my name.

A Piece Of History

It occasionally appeared on a friend's table at local swap meets and gun shows. It was an early .44-40 with an un-tapered 7½" barrel. It was made in 1906 when Theodore Roosevelt was President and the Panama Canal was under construction. If this revolver could talk … it would probably relate to a near-century abandoned on the floor of a barn be-pizzled and be-shat by cows and such.



Left: The original gutta-percha grips with a former owner's initials and "1915." Gutta-percha is a pre-petroleum plastic made from tree sap. It is extremely fragile.



The Colt Double Actions became more refined as the 20th century progressed. Coil Springs replaced many of the flat-leaf springs, and these Police Positive revolvers came along in 1907, providing a "Positive" blocking element that made the fully loaded colts "drop safe."

That is just how ugly the surface patina really was.

Flat springs do not wear well, and the action was "whocky" as anticipated. Still, held at a downward angle, it seemed to carry up to a tight lock-up, double or single action … some of the time. The positive safety block was not yet invented and the revolver might or might not go off if dropped on the hammer fully loaded.

The bore and chambers had survived corrosive primers and likely black powder cartridges and were free of pits. The underside of the gutta-percha grips bore three initials and the date 1915. The right-side panel had the near-universal missing piece above the bottom locating pin. Faintly visible was the revolver's serial number scratched in a different hand. Despite the truly ugly patina, the address line, serial numbers, model designation and ".44 Caliber" were legible.

A Lick And A Promise

I ordered replica grips from GunGrips.com, then lightly corded the surface grimness with steel wool and followed up with multiple treatments of Birchwood-Casey Plum Brown and Super Blue until an even, dark finish emerged. The treatment doesn't wear particularly well in a holster but is easily restored.

My friend Johnny Bates has won the respect of local collectors by restoring historic arms to working condition. He volunteered to fit the grips and held onto the revolver until they arrived. He quickly determined that while the flat handspring was present, it was not impinging on the hand. It looked like he might be able to cobble up a replacement from a percussion revolver part. His better idea led him to modernize the system via a ballpoint pen spring and J&B Weld. "The gun is working just fine," he reported, "and I think it will last quite a while."

Sure enough, the timing was perfect, the action was smooth and the cylinder locked up tight. It didn't even require the extra shove from the advancing hand when the trigger is pulled — a characteristic so common with even slightly worn DA Colts and a major selling point in old Colt advertisements. The trigger pull reminds me of my old 1917 and weighs in at 8 lbs., 6 oz. on the scale. The double-action is long and heavy at 13 lbs., 6 oz. per scale and barbell plate.



Shooting the New Service. Two hands? Nah.

Shooting

I got to the range with a box of MagTech 200-grain lead flat point rounds which, right in accord with suggested handloads, clocked 880 fps and seemed suitably mild for shooting in a century-old artifact. My first go was at a paper plate with a double-action shot from seven yards to establish zero. I followed that up with nine more, including a single miss from 15 yards. I was perfectly willing to stick with 15 yards with this relic, but by the time of my next visit, the range was under two feet of water. The 25-yard range was operational and the shooting results very instructive. I fired five single-action shots into a 6" cluster, then another five double-action. The DA group was actually the better of the two. All were inside the nine-ring of the B27 target, with four well centered at about 4". All shots were single-handed as shooters of the era generally considered using both hands to be excessively "precious." Overall, the result of the project and the shooting results provide a gratifying excursion into the material culture of a bygone era.

The practical value of this venture into kitchen-table gunsmithing is severely circumscribed by the nature of the beast itself. The Colt double actions of 1889 and forward were a major component of 20th Century handgun development. Still, the utility of the delicate and complicated lock mechanism depended on highly skilled artisans now departed and a skill set completely at odds with economic realities and the evolution of production modalities. The New Service is best appreciated in the context of its historical milieu.



Who wouldn't want a personalized coffee mug reflecting a piece of history?


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CREAM OF THE CROP



WILSON COMBAT SFT9 9MM

TOM MCHALE
PHOTOS: ROB JONES
THE IMAGESMITH, LLC

Nothing floats cream to the top quite like accountability. There's a reason why all those Delta Ninja SEAL teams implement harsh after-action review sessions. By painstakingly reviewing what went right and what could be done better in the future, each team member is called to account to continuously raise the bar of their individual performance. The result is a finely tuned team machine, with all cylinders operating just a bit smoother with each passing iteration.

There's also nothing quite like standing up and publicly stating one's approval for their work to keep peak performance. Back in 1982, engineers at Apple applied their signatures to the inside of each Macintosh 128k, 512k and Mac Plus case. Do ya think they were proud of their work?

Custom Build Process

When I opened the soft carry case containing the new Wilson Combat SFT9 pistol, I risked forfeiting my man card by pulling out the instruction packet. Yeah, I know, we don't need no stinkin' directions, but hey, this is an expensive pistol, so I figured I would take a look in the interest of providing a full and complete report. Anyway, two 8.5 by 11 stray sheets caught my attention. The first was a Wilson Quality Control Checklist. The second was the test target report.

The target report illustrated the requisite shots on paper, listing specific load and such (5.2 grains of Power Pistol driving a 125-grain Hornady HAP bullet), but that's not unusual. Lots of


WILSON COMBAT
SFT9
9MM
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WILSON COMBAT


AMERICAN
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companies stick a spent cartridge case in the box, and some drop a target inside. This one went somewhat beyond with a listing of each pistolsmith who worked on this specific gun. Six craftsmen had their hands on the sample shown here, and I know their names. No home phone numbers, but I won't nitpick.

The quality control checklist provided a detailed listing of 44 distinct inspections divided into custom build process, final assembly, test-firing and final inspection categories. Each step was initialed by the individual doing the inspection and covered everything from checking actual zero with live ammo to extractor movement and position. My favorite items on each subdivision of the list were simply labeled, "Overall job meets my approval." You don't want to be signing that statement unless you mean it.

The next time someone tells you a pistol in the four-figure price range is no different from one in the three-figure realm because they'll both "do the job," consider factors such as these. An Aston Martin Vanquish and AMC Gremlin are both capable of going forward, but few would draw an equivalent comparison.

SFT9 Heritage

The proven EDC9 begat the SFX9, which begets the new SFT9.

As a double-stack, sorta 1911-ish carry pistol, the EDC 9 featured design elements like a bushing-less bull barrel, double-stack 9mm capacity of 15 (and up depending on the variant) and a beautifully carved aluminum frame using removable side panels. The 9mm chambering allowed a double-stack









configuration still managing to "weigh-in" with a lower overall circumference than a traditional 1911 grip. The length of pull to the trigger in the pistol's medium configuration is right at that of a standard 1911.

The SFX9 pistol added a few design twists. The most visible differences are a solid frame design with Wilson's distinctive "X" patterning cut into the frontstrap, backstrap, grip sides and the slide itself on fore and aft cocking positions. The SFX9 also added a bushing fit to the bull barrel and uses an external extractor design. The SFX9 also added a two-slot frame rail for accessories.

What's An SFT9?

One can describe the SFT9 as having a frame similar to the SFX9 but with a rail-less configuration and Wilson's TRACK pattern on the front and backstraps. The slide is essentially a 4.25" 1911 Commander model. Unlike the flat tri-top slide cuts of the EDC and SFX models, the SFT features a rounded slide configuration with fine longitudinal grooves cut along most of the uppermost surface to provide a matte appearance, reducing glare. The classic 1911-like profile is all about smooth and comfortable concealed carry.

You'll also note a traditional internal extractor in the SFT9. The SFT also loses the "X" pattern on the fore and aft cocking serrations, going instead with a more traditional aggressive vertical groove texture. The slide's rear surface is covered with fine horizontal serrations to eliminate glare. The rear of the extractor is perfectly mated to the slide surface, and the grooves on the extractor and slide match perfectly. The slide settles in a perfectly flush position with the rear frame rails.

Like the SFX pistols, the SFT uses tightly fit bushing to align the 9mm bull barrel. While we're talking about the barrel, note the heavily recessed crown. It'll help protect the all-critical bore transition, and I have to say, it looks great. Aft of the locking lugs, you'll see four fluted grooves on both sides. The integral feed ramp is polished mirror-smooth. While distorted from the curvature, you can quite literally see your reflection.

Sights

The sighting system shows the same attention to fine detail as everything else. The steel front sight housing contains a 1/2"-long fiber-optic tube. The remaining rear surface of the front sight is textured with horizontal grooves to reduce glare. That's not something you'll see on most off-the-line pistols.

The rear sight is ramped with a "U" notch. To reduce glare, most of the rear surface is finely grooved, but you'll note a scooped-out smooth area surrounding the notch itself. From what I can see, this serves to draw the eye to the correct position more quickly.

Controls

As a "modified" 1911 design, there's no grip safety. You carry this one cocked and locked, relying on the left side safety and trigger discipline to keep things locked up until you're ready to fire. The safety lever is grooved for a bit of texture and clicks solidly into engaged and disengaged positions. I liked the feel.

I generally don't use the slide lock to release the slide on magazine changes. The primary reason is by nature of the job, I'm using different pistols all the time. Slide lock levers are all different shapes and reside in different positions, so I've trained to perform the same action using a quick slide rack motion, which works the same with any pistol. There's also the fail-safe element and benefit of using less-precision-required big muscles to do the job. However, if I were to carry the SFT9 daily, I'd consider kicking the rack habit. The pad on the slide lock lever is generously sized



and positioned a tad closer to the grip. I can actually reach it with my firing hand thumb without wrecking my grip.

The magazine release button is also generously sized in the "vertical" direction. The button is more or less the same diameter as any other, but it's "taller," sticking out of the grip frame. The height, combined with a generous firing hand thumb cutout in the grip panel area, makes it easy to activate the magazine release without alteration of your grip.

Bottom line on the controls: They're optimized for fighting if you're right-handed. Lefties will want to make a couple of modifications.

Trigger

As the SFT9 has 1911 genes, the trigger action is a straight-back affair — no hinge motion. I measured about 1/16" of pre-travel before pressure and another 1/16" before a crisp break. Testing for reset by holding the trigger depressed after a dry-fire "shot," I racked the slide and slowly released the trigger. The reset was crisp, easy to feel and audible.

I measured pull weight on this one right at 4 lbs., press after press.

Field Stripping

Like a standard 1911, you can perform most field-stripping chores sans tools, although you'll want a 1/8" punch to open the backstrap. More on that in a minute.

You can remove the guts by rotating the bushing by hand, but the fit is tight, so the included plastic bushing wrench will save some wear and tear on the fingers. A quarter-turn clockwise will release the recoil spring and plug. An eighth of a turn from home position counter-clockwise will





unlock the bushing from the slide and allow removal of the bushing as well as the barrel.

To access the guts, including the mainspring housing, main spring, sear spring, etc., you'll raise the hinged backstrap. Using the handy pin with a disc base, I pressed the grip downward on my bench, applying pressure through the flat disc and pin to the mainspring. This relieves tension and allows you to lift on the beavertail until the base of the backstrap can pull out of its locked position, lifting up and out of the way. Be patient. Things are tight, hence the successful approach of using the bench surface for increased leverage.

When you get things taken apart, have a look around. Think about the design and manufacturing challenges in creating this pistol from solid metal blocks. It's impressive. You won't find leftover cutting or machining marks scattered willy-nilly.

Handling

Before we get into the range performance stuff, I have to mention the subjective "handling" of this pistol. If we ignore the grip texture and someone placed this pistol in my hand while I was blindfolded, I'd say it feels an awful lot like a Hi-Power. I know "feel" is subjective, and your opinion may vary, but there's just something about a Hi-Power grip…. The proportion of thickness to longitude and the height of the grip overall just works. The 15-round capacities cause the grip to end flush with the bottom side of my pinkie, so we've got a perfect balance of capacity and compact size.

Not surprisingly, when I pull out a Hi-Power and look at it and the SF9 side by side, there's a lot of similarity in the grip geometry. I think the Wilson folks pay a lot of attention to grip sculpture as I've also become a big fan of their custom grips for P320 series pistols — I've outfitted all of mine with Wilson grips too.

Shootin'

I elected to test this fine pistol with four different types of ammo, with a twist. All four are Wilson Combat loads.

For practice and general shooting, the remanufactured line is the way to go. It'll save you a few bucks, and you give up nothing in the accuracy and reliability departments. The hollow-base, flat-nose projectile is a specially designed (by Bill Wilson) Berry's extra-heavy plated 135-grain projectile. It'll meet IDPA and USPSA power factors at just 926 fps. I chronographed this with a Competition Electronics ProChrono DLX placed 15 feet down range and recorded an average velocity of 923.4 fps. As for accuracy, I broke out the Ransom Multi-caliber Rest (think sandbags on steroids, not the vise solution) and set up at 25 yards for five-shot groups. Even with my decrepit eyes over iron sights, this ammo averaged 1.38". No doubt an optic or Ransom Rest would improve those numbers.

The first of the three defensive loads tested was the TAC-XP +P. This load uses the outstanding Barnes solid-copper 115-grain projectile. It's accurate and expands like few others. Over the chrony, this one averaged 1,122.5 fps. As for accuracy, again, from 25 over irons, I averaged 1.4".

I finished up with two different loadings using the Hornady XTP bullet. The 124-grain +P load averaged 1,151.8 fps and produced 1.35" groups. The subsonic XTP offering, at 147 grains, clocked in with an average of 982.8 fps. This load also won the accuracy competition with 0.89" for five shots.

Parting Shots

There are guns, and there are "sweet" guns. You know the difference. I'd happily sell off a couple of "guns" to make room in the safe for a "sweet" SFT9. Everything about this pistol is slick. Handling, feel, performance and the all-important fit and finish one expects in a premium pistol. The MSRP on the SFT9 is a cool $3,095. All those gunsmiths who signed their names to this one can rest easy.

For more info: WilsonCombat.com



This gun asked for a DoubleTap diet. It's like Paleo, just louder.

A HOLSTER FULL OF BOOM

TOM McHALE

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY XD-M 10MM

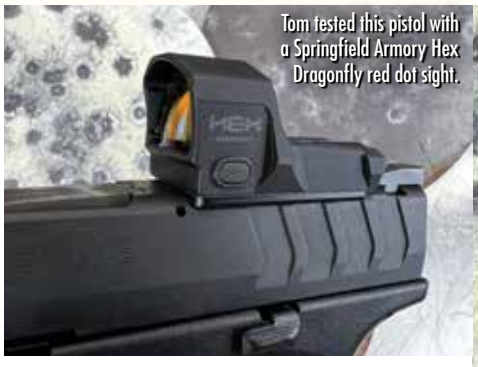


That's 16 rounds, and it doesn't count an extra one in the chamber if you carry full-up.

Reports of the demise of the 10mm cartridge have been greatly exaggerated. If new gun launches are any indicator of consumer demand (they are), then the 10mm is alive and kicking; thank you very much.

While we're on this topic, here's a trivia tidbit for you. That quote attributed to Mark Twain? The one about reports of his demise being greatly exaggerated? Well, that quote has itself been exaggerated. He actually said, "The report of my death was an exaggeration." I have to admit I prefer the inaccurate and embellished version, so let's stick with that.

Anyway, the 10mm has been coming on strong this past year. Considered mor-


Tom tested this pistol with a Springfield Armory Hex Dragonfly red dot sight.


The 10mm 4.5" Elite XD-M is optics-ready out of the box and fits an array of red dots using adapter plates.

tally wounded after law enforcement everywhere moved to the .40 S&W and assumed to be dead and recycled into Shake Weights when law enforcement everywhere moved to the 9mm, it seems to be still kicking. Apparently, it's the Michael Myers of calibers.

You may recall we looked at a nifty 1911 chambered in 10mm — the Springfield Armory Ronin in the May/June 2021 issue of *Handgunner*. And there have been plenty of others from various manufacturers. The only explanation for the resurrection I can come up with is … America! We like big guns and we cannot lie.

The newest caretaker of the 10mm is the XD-M Elite 4.5" handgun from Springfield Armory.

Just The Specs

You're likely familiar with the XD-M family of pistols. They've been plenty successful in the market for quite some time now. This one shares the family genes you've come to know and love. Hammer-forged steel barrel with a 1:16" twist and Melonite-finish. Forged steel slide, also with Melonite treatment and a black polymer frame with aggressive grip texture molded in. As an Elite model, you'll note a magazine well extension generously flared for fumble-free reloads. If you want a slimmer profile, it's easily removable.

Even with the physically larger 10mm cartridges it eats, you'll fit 16 rounds in each of the two supplied magazines. If you top off, that's 17 rounds of 10mm punch at the ready.

As for size, you're looking at an overall length of 7.6", grip width of 1.2", height of 5.75" and unloaded weight of 31 oz.

As for holsters, you should be good to go with most any holster sized and shaped for a .45 ACP XD-M pistol of similar size.

Sights on the XD-M Elite 10mm consist of a red fiber-optic tube up front — you can easily swap this for any color you like — and what Springfield calls a Tactical Rack U-Dot in the rear. It's a mashup between a ramped low-profile sight and one with a vertical leading edge for racking on belts, slow-moving zombies and other nearby objects. The U-Notch has a — you guessed it — U-shaped white line to guide the eye. The shape provides a bit more speed in sight acquisition with minimal, if any, loss of precision.

Controls

The XD-M Elite 10mm is an ambidextrous extravaganza. Magazine release buttons aren't reversible; they're already present and accounted for on both sides. The same goes with the slide lock levers; low-profile versions are located on the frame's left and right sides. The only control not ambidextrous is the takedown lever. Being a purely administrative tool, that's irrelevant. This pistol is designed to use with either hand out of the box.

The trigger is the newer Match Enhanced Trigger Assembly (META) system. The face is flat rather than curved like the original XD-Ms, with a subtle hook on the bottom. This one breaks at 5 lbs. To me, the travel before the break after you clear the take-up stage feels a bit shorter than the originals. The reset also seems to be a bit shorter. For a polymer gun service trigger, it's nice. There's no detectable grit, and the pull is constant before a clean break. A molded overtravel stop prevents unnecessary movement after the shot.

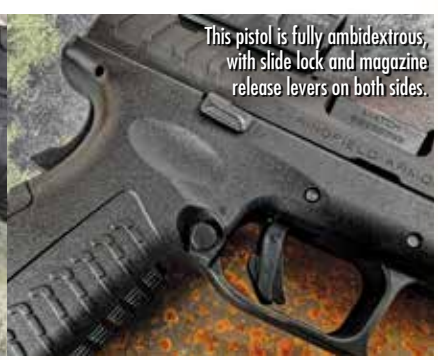
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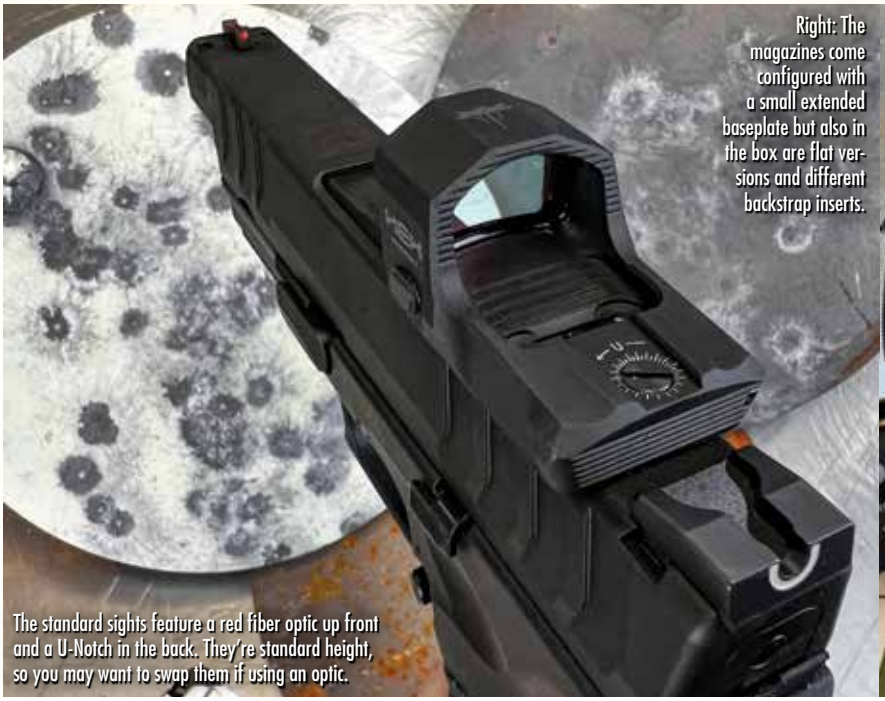
You'd expect the 10mm version of the XD-M Elite to be larger than the 9mm versions, and you'd be right. With an overall cartridge length of 1.260" compared to the 9mm's 1.169", the magazine well (translation: grip) will require a larger longitudinal measurement. The case diameter is also somewhat larger at 0.425" compared to 0.391" for the 9mm, so depending on how you want to stack cartridges in the magazine, you may need more magazine well (grip) width also.

I just happened to have a 9mm XD-M Elite sitting here, so I compared a few measurements. The 9mm maximum slide width is 1.03" while the 10mm measures 1.072". As for the grip, the nine measures 1.083" while the 10mm comes in at 1.282". As you'd expect, all of this translates to a difference in grip circumference. Measuring in the middle, with the medium grip insert installed in both pistols, I figured about 5⅜" for the 10mm and 5⅛" for the wonder nine — a one-quarter-inch difference.

Bottom line? The 10mm is nominally and noticeably larger in hand. Here's what all those numbers mean in practical terms. I have size Large hands. With the 9mm pistol, again using medium grip inserts, my trigger finger rests on the pad with plenty of airspace between my finger and the frame. I can barely use a first joint trigger placement with minimal finger dragging on the frame. With the 10mm model, I can again get a proper finger placement using the "pad on the trigger face" placement with enough


Note the straight trigger of the Elite series.

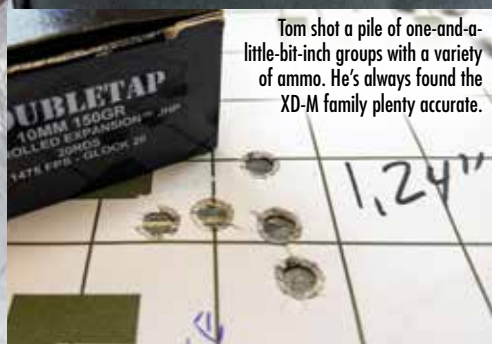

This pistol is fully ambidextrous, with slide lock and magazine release levers on both sides.



The standard sights feature a red fiber optic up front and a U-Notch in the back. They're standard height, so you may want to swap them if using an optic.



Right: The magazines come configured with a small extended baseplate but also in the box are flat versions and different backstrap inserts.



Tom shot a pile of one-and-a-little-bit-inch groups with a variety of ammo. He's always found the XD-M family plenty accurate.

airspace between finger and frame. While I can get my first joint on the trigger, there's too much frame contact for my preference. If I were a joint trigger puller, I'd use the small grip insert to make that work.

Optics Ready

The XD-M Elite 10mm is optics-ready out of the box. While the sights are standard height, the pistol comes with the slide pre-cut for optics installation. Just remove the included cover plate, install the correct optics adapter plate, and add the red dot of your choice. Do be aware you won't have co-witnessing with the iron sights until you install taller irons.

This pistol arrived with a Springfield Armory Hex Dragonfly red dot sight pre-installed, so being of blurry-front sight disposition, I left it right where it was and did all shooting with the red dot. I've grown quite accustomed to the pistol red dots and am at the point where I shoot far better with than without them.

The Hex Dragonfly beams a 3.5 MOA red dot into your field of view. A single activation button on the left both powers the unit on or off and, with repeated presses, changes to one of eight different brightness levels. If you forget and leave it on, it'll power off after 16 hours, so the battery is rated to last 100,000 hours. Change it every year or two, and don't worry about it. As for mounting, the Dragonfly shares the same footprint as the Vortex Venom and Burris Fastfire. You can mount most any optic to the XD-M Elite 10mm with different plates.

Range

Before heading out to shoot, this pistol spoke to me and requested the DoubleTap diet. I get it because DoubleTap Ammunition cut their chops on beefy and boomy 10mm loads back in the day. That plan worked for me, so I rounded up an assortment of hardcast, light-for-caliber, lead-free FMJ and jacketed hollowpoint ammo, all in the black and blue boxes.

Before I broke into the premium, I tested out a practice handload I whipped up. I made this one to be a pussycat practice load, even somewhat light by .40 S&W standards. I used 6.0 grains of Vihtavuouri N320 to drive a 155-grain plated bullet. I chrony-ed this one at just 1,060 fps — a true pleasure to shoot, but the only thing 10mm about it was the cartridge case. When I shot for accuracy at 25 yards, it pleasantly surprised me, turning in a 1.14" five-shot group. Considering I didn't even try for precision with this batch, consider me lucky. I took this as a sign of things to come with the real stuff, so I broke out the boomier ammo.

The DoubleTap FMJ weighs in at 200 grains and zipped along from the 4.5" barrel at an average of 1,058.3 fps. A 25-yard grouping measured 1.95".

Next up, I went with an interesting carry load. The DT 155-grain lead-free is an all-copper bullet, and its lighter weight allowed me to break the 1,240-fps barrier by a couple of feet per second. Accuracy: 2.02".

The Godfather of Boom at DoubleTap also makes a 200-grain hardcast load for occasions when deep penetration matters. This one clocked in at 1,149.7 fps and produced a 2.53" group.

Last, I checked out two different controlled expansion JHP loads. The 150-grain moved at 1,357.5 fps and grouped into 1.24". The 200-grain offering clocked 1,107 fps and produced a 1.29" group.

I have to say I wasn't surprised by the frequency of one-inch-plus groups. I'd reviewed a 9mm XD-M Elite model some time back and found it shot exceptionally well too.

Want a little more beef for home defense, carry, or those trips into the wild? Consider a super-sized XD-M Elite.



One can field strip the XD-M by rotating the takedown lever upward — no trigger press required.

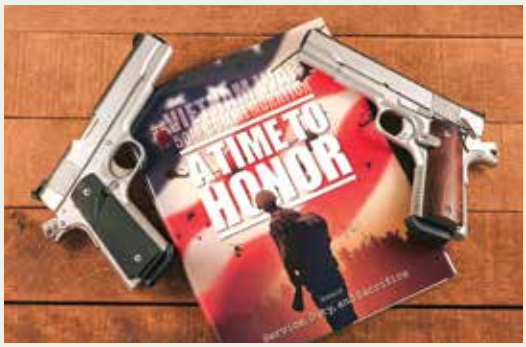


The Elite model has a removable flared magazine well.

The mag extensions give you something to grab if you need to rip one out.

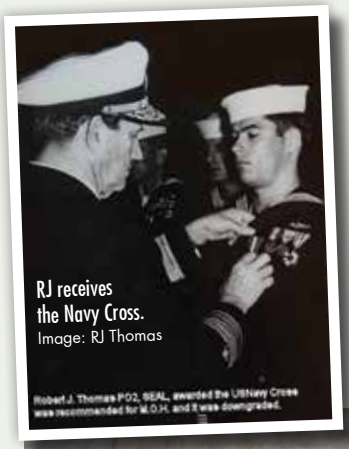

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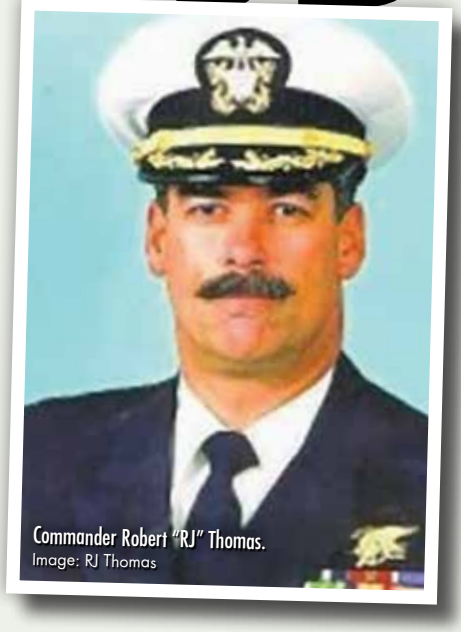
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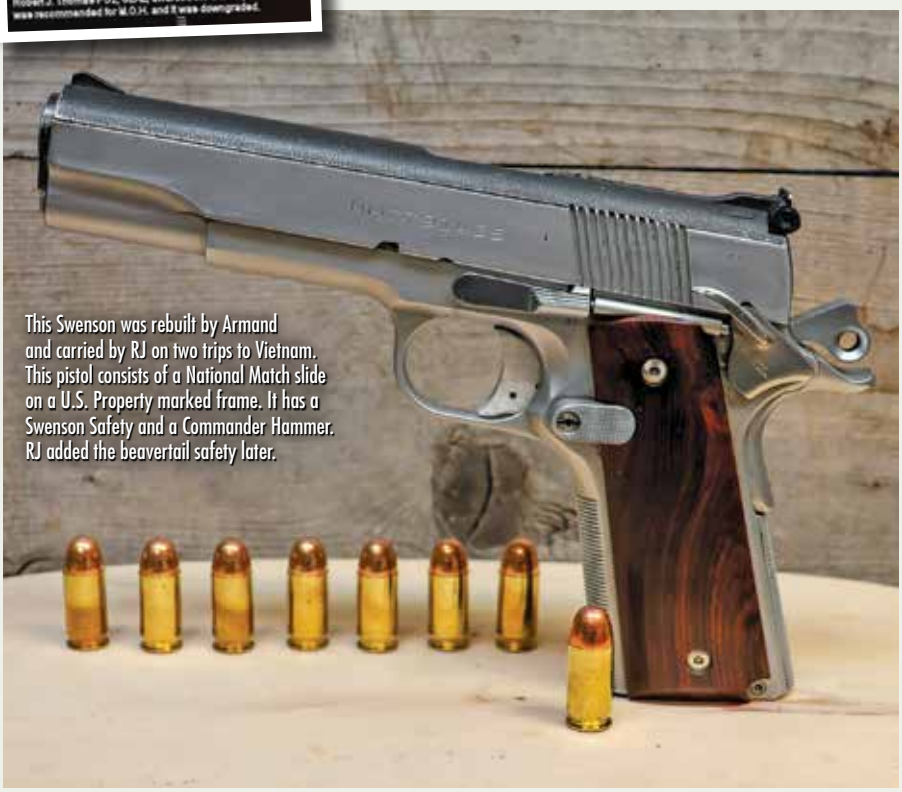


A REAL AMERICAN GUNFIGHTER AND HIS GUNS

JOHN TAFFIN


RJ receives the Navy Cross.
Image: RJ Thomas

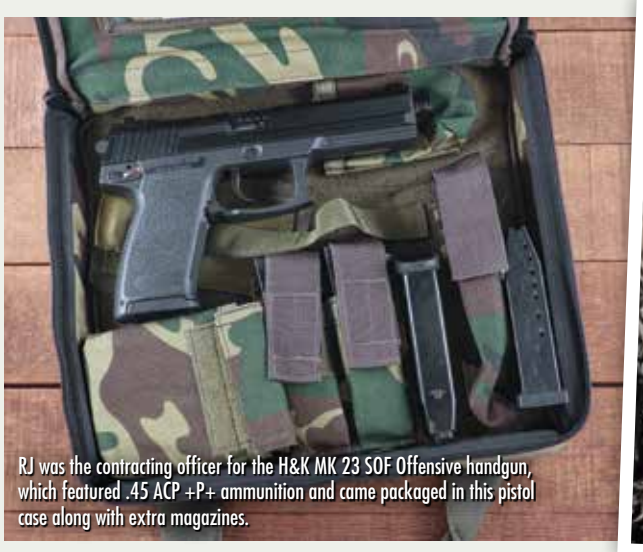

Commander Robert "RJ" Thomas.
Image: RJ Thomas


This Swenson was rebuilt by Armand and carried by RJ on two trips to Vietnam. This pistol consists of a National Match slide on a U.S. Property marked frame. It has a Swenson Safety and a Commander Hammer. RJ added the beavertail safety later.

When those who grew up in my era hear the words "gunfight" or "gunfighter," we immediately get a vision of something that never existed. Spending many of my Saturdays in the late 1940s at the West Theater to watch western movies with the likes of Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, Hopalong Cassidy and others embedded visions in our minds of what a gunfight is.

A perfect example of a gunfighter was Marshall Matt Dillon of Dodge City. The gunfight took place on Front Street as the good and bad guys faced each other. Or there were gunfighters like the Lone Ranger who always shot the gun out of the bad guy's hand.

Finding a documented historical reference to a gunfight with two gunfighters facing each other is harder to come up with than winning the lottery



RJ was the contracting officer for the H&K MK 23 SOF Offensive handgun, which featured .45 ACP +P+ ammunition and came packaged in this pistol case along with extra magazines.



Hunter Grimes, RJ Thomas, Dick Moran getting ready to search a bunker that turned out to be a field hospital exposed after a B-52 Arc Light strike. Image: RJ Thomas

without a ticket. The closest example might be Wild Bill Hickok shooting at Dave Tutt at 75 yards while bullets were whizzing. Hickok took his time, aimed carefully and put a .36 caliber ball in Tutt's heart. There was no fast draw involved. And consider the pure hokum involved in shooting a gun from someone's hand with a maximum speed draw from leather.

Gunfighters

I have met several movie and TV western stars such as James Arness, who portrayed Matt Dillon, Clint Walker, who was Cheyenne, James Drury, The Virginian and Buck Taylor, who was Newly O'Brien. All seem to be especially nice fellows who filled a role.

I have also met and, in a couple of cases, got to know several real gunfighters quite well. These include Col. Charles Askins, Walter Walsh (an FBI agent responsible for capturing a gang in the 1930s), Bill Jordan (Border Patrol Chief Inspector) and Col. Rex Applegate (a member of the original OSS and held the rank of colonel in both the United States and Mexico militaries).

I also was privileged to know Col. John Dean Cooper, whom all of us know as Jeff. He entered World War II with a mismatched pair of .45s, a 5½" Colt Single Action .45 Colt and a .45 ACP Model 1911. He used the SA to good effect the first time. However, he felt it was too slow to load, especially in the dark. So, he switched to the Model 1911 and used it at least twice with the same results. He went on to spend many years advocating the 1911 and teaching *The Proper Technique of the Pistol*. We will never know how many lives his instruction saved. All of these men are now history and we will never see their like again.

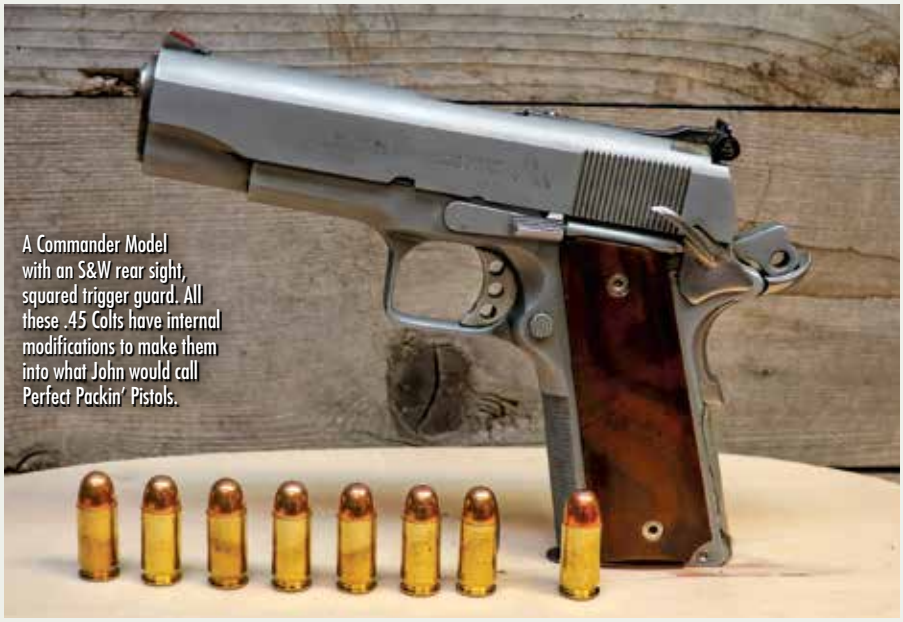
True American Gunfighter

It has been my great privilege recently to meet a true gunfighter. Robert "RJ" Thomas is one of the original Navy SEALs. He found himself in a gunfight at Hà Tiên, Republic of Vietnam in March 1969. At the time, Navy SEALs were classified as elite extensions of the Navy Underwater Demolition Teams: ST-1 in Coronado, Calif. and ST-2 in Little Creek, Va. Despite attempts at keeping the mission of the SEAL Teams classified, the NVA placed a $10,000 bounty for killing or capturing one of the "Men with Green Faces."

Two Navy Seawolf (HAL 3) gunships were on a rocket strike mission near the Cambodian border. Troop activity was spotted around the caves from which the Viet Cong/NVA were shelling the nearby village of Hà Tiên with mortars. RJ recounts, "The Seawolf crew spotted activity around Da Dung mountain caves during their first rocket run. As they reloaded for a second rocket run, they yelled for me to board the Seawolf. Grabbing my binos, my Stoner 63A and my issue S&W 39 on my H-harness, I jumped on board. I was looking for the cave with rails, where the VC were rolling the mortar out, to set up a sniper op. After a couple of rocket passes, the Seawolf was hit with heavy machine-gun fire and crashed at the foot of the mountain. Pilot Lt. Richard Barr's collective control stick slammed into his helmet visor above his orbit bone, crushing his eye socket and forcing his eye out on his cheek."

RJ was thrown out the side door more than 30 feet from the copter onto the dry, hard, concrete-like rice paddy, suffering multiple injuries, including cutting his nose loose on the right side of his face and multiple bullet fragment injuries to his chest and shoulder. Between 10 and 20 NVA troops soon descended the mountain advancing on the crash site to kill or capture crash survivors.

Thomas was stunned by the crash and his Stoner 63A was destroyed in the crash. Reaching for the standard-issue SEAL Team 9mm S&W Model 39 in his H-harness, he found it had been



A Commander Model with an S&W rear sight, squared trigger guard. All these .45 Colts have internal modifications to make them into what John would call Perfect Packin' Pistols.



On patrol — 7th platoon 1969 in Rung SAT with Chuck Fellers (back). RJ lost this long-barreled Stoner when shot down.
Image: RJ Thomas



Notice the Swenson Rear Sight and the special radiused Commander hammer.

ripped off, leaving the pilot's 1911 A1 as the only weapon left to the SEAL. RJ was able to release the seatbelts on the unconscious pilot and drag him a safe distance from the burning helo. Meanwhile, the second helicopter dropped off PO2 Dan Riordan to help RJ recover PO1 Abbott, .50 gunner, and move the unconscious man farther from the crash, now raging in flames. The co-pilot and second gunner were consumed in the flames. As Thomas dragged the unconscious pilot farther from the burning wreck, incoming fire kicked up dust around the crash.

Thomas laid across the unconscious pilot and pulled the .45 from the pilot's shoulder holster. Fortunately for what was about to happen, the pilot's shoulder rig also had two extra magazines and extra ammunition for his .45 in cartridge loops for a total of about 50 rounds. The enemy was closing, and RJ, now prone across the pilot and using the pilot's helmet as a rest for his wrists, engaged the approaching NVA with the 1911 A1 at over 100 yards. The NVA took cover behind a rice paddy berm and returned un-aimed fire at the wounded men from behind the dike. The NVA would peer over the dike to see if they had taken out the SEAL, and he would shoot back with the old 1911. More than occasionally, a thud sounded, and the head would disappear. Barr came to and asked how he could help. Thomas told him, "Load magazines." An NVA jumped the dike and charged. He made it about 50 yards before RJ centered him and stoned him at 30 yards.

After 40 minutes on the ground battling the NVA, an Army Slick (transport Huey) attempted to extract the wounded Navy helo crew and SEAL. As the Slick flared to land, the NVA poured point-blank fire into the cockpit of the Huey, hitting pilot Capt. Mike Willsey in the jaw and upper leg, stunning him and knocking his legs off the controls, causing the helo to spin out of control. Co-pilot Lt. Kent Graham regained control of the helo and flew it back to the crash site several yards from the wounded Navy crew and the SEAL. As Thomas loaded the wounded pilot into the rescue helo, he fell to the ground. The NVA again charged and attempted to take out the helo. Capt. Willsey, despite multiple wounds, continued to return fire out of the helo with an M-3 grease gun. A lone NVA charged the front of the helo. Thomas rolled over on the ground and shot the last of the NVA from between the helo landing skids at 10 yards off the nose of the rescue helo. As the Slick extracted from the crash, Thomas manned the single M-60 MG door gun and engaged the remaining NVA behind the berm. Thomas recalled, "It was like sluicing quail on the ground."

How many NVA did Thomas take down? We will probably never know but consider this. He was an excellent shot, and he had very few rounds left. The "Gunfight at Hà Tiên" may be the last military gunfight in which the wonderful 1911 was employed to dominate the battlefield in the hands of a "gunfighter."



This Swenson also has a Vietnam heritage, used by a pilot and spending 10 years in an aircraft carrier armory before being acquired by RJ. It is also a Series '70, which RJ turned over to Armand for the Reliability Package and has the first Swenson HiViz non-adjustable rear sight attached with two set screws.

Citation

Army rescue pilot Lt. Kent Graham submitted Thomas for the Congressional Medal of Honor for saving him and his crew from the charging NVA. Thomas was ultimately awarded the Navy Cross with the citation reading as follows:

"The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Radarman Second Class Robert J Thomas (NSN: 688-7315), United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism on 23 March 1969 while serving with Sea-Air-Land Team TWO (SEAL-Two), Detachment ALFA, Seventh Platoon, during combat operations against communist aggressor forces in the Republic of Vietnam. Embarked in a Seawolf helicopter on a visual reconnaissance and strike mission on Da Dung Mountain near the Cambodian border, the aircraft was struck by enemy ground fire and crashed in an exposed rice paddy. Petty Officer Thomas was thrown from the wreckage, sustaining multiple injuries.

Fighting off the stunning effects of shock, he immediately moved to the aid of the helicopter crewmen still in the burning aircraft. Despite the intense flames and the heavy gunfire from both the mountain and a nearby tree line, Petty Officer Thomas managed to remove one of the crewmen to safety and, with the aid of another man who had been dropped onto the site by an accompanying helicopter, succeeded in freeing the trapped pilot from the flaming cockpit. Petty Officer Thomas then made a gallant attempt to rescue the two remaining men trapped beneath the twisted metal, discontinuing his efforts only when driven back by the exploding bullets and rockets of the burning helicopter. After moving the two previously rescued men to a greater distance from the crash site, Petty Officer Thomas realized that Viet Cong troops were steadily advancing on his position. He selflessly threw himself upon the body of one of the wounded men and began returning the enemy fire. His deadly accuracy accounted for at least one enemy dead and held the aggressors at bay until an Army rescue helicopter landed. By his valiant efforts and selfless devotion to duty while under hostile fire, Petty Officer Thomas upheld the highest traditions of The United States Naval Service."

For a more in-depth recounting of what took place, I recommend Paul Kirchner's book *More Of The Deadliest Men Who Ever Lived*, which also includes a chapter on Col. Cooper.

A Quieter Life

RJ retired in 1995 and five years ago moved into my area. He was the contracting officer for the H&K MK 23 SOF Offensive handgun and several other weapons projects from the SAWS to the .50 McMillan sniper rifles. He was in charge of all Navy SEAL shooting schools, from Close Quarter Battle to sniper schools, as well as a shooting member and Officer In Charge Of the Navy Rifle and Pistol Team for several years. He is a Double Distinguished Military Shooter and an A-Class International IPSC shooter. As stated, it has now been my great privilege to meet him. As a bonus, he gave me the privilege of seeing and handling a Gunfighter's Guns. One indication of RJ's influence was that he had Armand Swenson rebuild his 1911A1 in the 1970s, and then for the next 25 years, Swenson built Swenson Combat Pistols for the Navy SEALs.



RJ is not only highly partial to the .45 Model 1911, but he also shows his highly refined taste in pistols by choosing those which have been customized by Armand Swenson, who was one of the premier innovative pistolsmiths a half-century ago. He shared a quartet of Swenson .45s as we gathered several times to talk handguns, share Mexican food at Jalapenos and just visit.

Today in our jaded world, entertainers and sports figures are called heroes. It has been an extreme pleasure for me to actually meet and get to know a real hero.



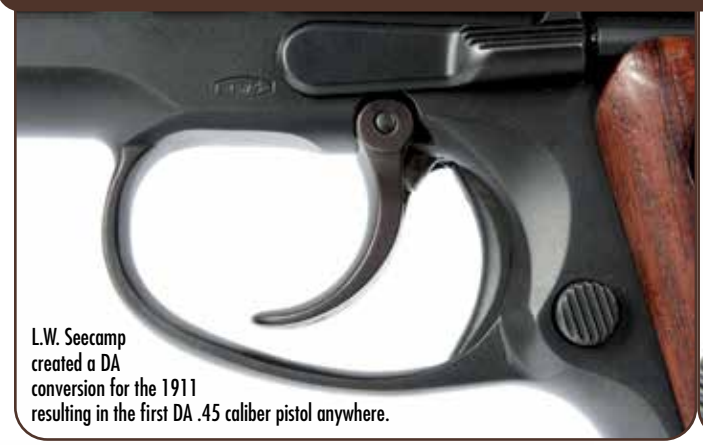


This impeccably crafted 1911 was cut down to compact dimensions and converted to double action by L.W. Seecamp of .32 auto fame. It fires 9mm, .38 Super and .45 ACP.

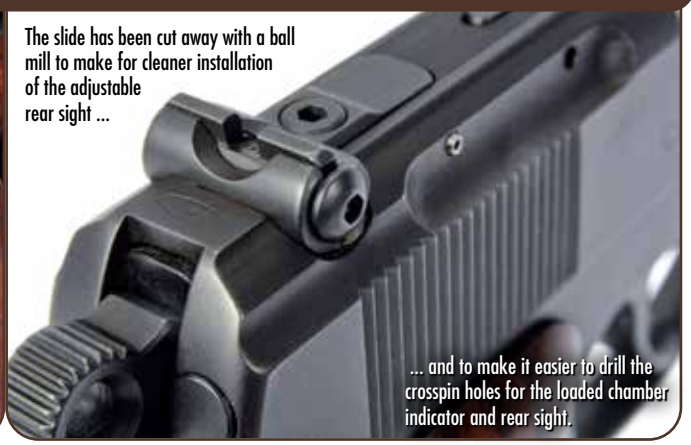
JEREMY D. CLOUGH

A MASTER GUNSMITH'S ONE-OF-A-KIND

THE SEECAMP COMPACT 1911 ... DOUBLE-ACTION



L.W. Seecamp created a DA conversion for the 1911 resulting in the first DA .45 caliber pistol anywhere.



The slide has been cut away with a ball mill to make for cleaner installation of the adjustable rear sight ...

... and to make it easier to drill the crosspin holes for the loaded chamber indicator and rear sight.



The initials on the bottom of the backstrap provide clues: The gun was built for Bob Angell.

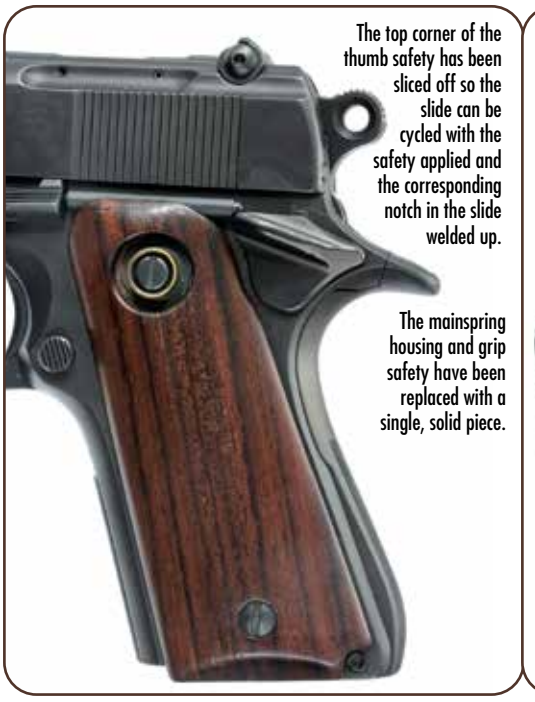
When Wayne Novak tells you something is the best work he's ever seen, you better listen. In this case, the gun he showed me was a compact M1911 with two slides and three barrels, capable of firing .45 ACP, .38 Super and 9mm.

The pistol started life as a full-size Colt Government Model, only to find itself cut down to compact dimensions. We're all a bit spoiled now, but in those days before the Officer's ACP, the only way to get a short Colt was to cut one into pieces and weld it back smaller. For those like me who nerd heavily on such things, George Nonte published a detailed description of how to do it in 1973 and it is fearsome.

Nonetheless, that's precisely what was done to this gun, only so cleanly you can't tell.

Elegant File Work

The frame was likely welded when shortened, as was the slide, but not



The top corner of the thumb safety has been sliced off so the slide can be cycled with the safety applied and the corresponding notch in the slide welded up.

The mainspring housing and grip safety have been replaced with a single, solid piece.



Note the flat cover on the receiver.



The serrated ramp front sight is wide and low. Think less "high visibility" and more "snag-free."

The muzzle shows off Seecamp's skill: Note the flawless beveling of the bushing, barrel, slide and recoil spring plug.

where you might expect: The top corner of the thumb safety has been sliced off so the slide can be cycled with the safety applied. The corresponding notch in the slide was welded up. The alert reader will remember Charley Kelsey of Devel fame had a Hi-Power modified in that way and Devel 1911s often had matching bevels cut on the slide and thumb safety to accomplish the same thing.

The two slide tops were machined to create a low, flat rib lined with attractive serrations — bordered, no less — with a neat adjustable rear sight matched to a strikingly low front. All sharp edges have been flawlessly removed, and anyone who's ever beveled a pistol can tell you how difficult it is to do this cleanly. Just aft of the ejection port, a pivoted loaded chamber indicator is installed — something Nonte also mentioned — and which he attributed to the French M1935-S pistol.



The gun was turned into a multi-caliber by adding a second slide with a pair of Bar-Sto barrels in 9mm and .38 Super.

Lockup Modifications

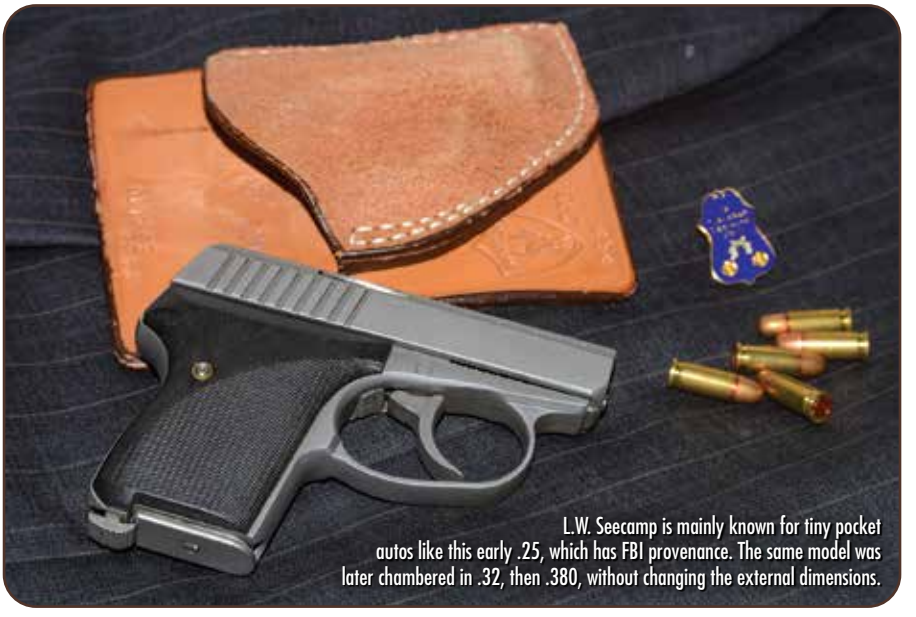
Almost all centerfire pistols 9mm and above fire from a locked breech, and modern ones use the square chamber area to lock into the slide's ejection port. The 1911, however, uses locking grooves machined into the barrel forward of the chamber and which mate with similar lugs inside the slide. When you start shortening slides, those raised lugs limit how far back the slide can go, which is one of the reasons many compact M1911s use a flared muzzle; it allows clearance for the lugs to move past where the barrel bushing would usually stop them. On this pistol, the forward lug has been neatly removed from its



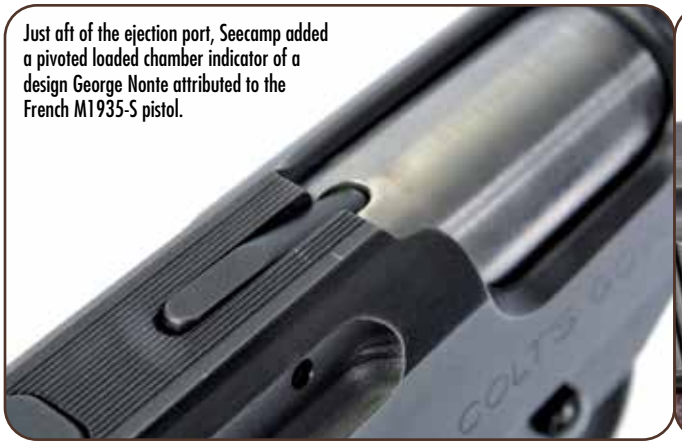
The frontstrap was serrated, and then material around the serrations removed, so they rise above the otherwise-smooth surface.



Perhaps the most distinctive part of the build is the snap built into the upper left grip panel.



L.W. Seecamp is mainly known for tiny pocket autos like this early .25, which has FBI provenance. The same model was later chambered in .32, then .380, without changing the external dimensions.



Just aft of the ejection port, Seecamp added a pivoted loaded chamber indicator of a design George Nonte attributed to the French M1935-S pistol.



Opening up the ejection port is a classic 1911 modification intended to improve ejection and eliminate dents in the casemouth for easier reloading. Seecamp scooped out the entire lower surface.

Bar-Sto barrels, a solution that also appeared on the über-rare M15 General Officer's Pistol manufactured at Rock Island Arsenal in the 1970s. The 1911 being as over-engineered as it is, this approach presents no safety problem and allows the critical amount of slide travel for the gun to function.

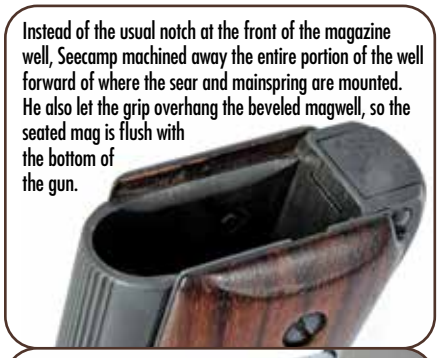
Double-Action?

And oh, it's double action, which, for the cognoscenti, gives away the maker. Ludwig Wilhelm ("L.W.") Seecamp is currently best known for his tiny stainless steel .32 pistol, the first hammer-fired double action only pistol made in the U.S. and the first stainless DAO pistol in the world. Leaving it at that breezes over too much, especially for a man whose work lives on in some of today's most popular carry pistols.

The Seecamp Story

L.W. Seecamp was trained as a master gunsmith in pre-WWII Germany, a grueling process that could involve having to make your own gun — barrel and all — from raw steel with a file. John Lachuk's description of the decade or so it took Augustus Pachmayr to become a master gunsmith is enlightening, especially in our current world where melting divots in a plastic gun is considered "gunsmithing." Seecamp immigrated to America in the late '50s and worked as a gun designer at Mossberg for a dozen years before retiring in 1971 and turning his attention to carry pistols.

There were few such guns from which to choose: the Browning Hi-Power was an option, as were the S&W M39 and Walther P38, all of which were 9mm (and the last two double-action), but the 1911 still loomed large. While he liked the 1911, Seecamp had fought — how to put this delicately — on the P38 side of WWII, and his combat experience had convinced him of the value of double-action pistols. He started converting 1911s to double-action by machining away part of the right side of the receiver, generally having to move the serial number, and adding a drawbar and pivoting trigger so the pistol functioned as a traditional double-action, but with the usual thumb safety and no decocker. In effect, it was the first double-action .45 anywhere, and Seecamp converted just under 2,000 pistols in the course of a decade until other competitive pistols appeared in the marketplace.



Instead of the usual notch at the front of the magazine well, Seecamp machined away the entire portion of the well forward of where the sear and mainspring are mounted. He also let the grip overhang the beveled magwell, so the seated mag is flush with the bottom of the gun.



The Seecamp conversion requires machining away part of the side of the receiver to make room for the drawbar that cocks the hammer when the trigger is pulled. Photo: Roy Huntington

Pocket Pistol Diversion

He then pivoted to pocket pistols, the market for which had been dramatically limited by the Gun Control Act of 1968, which restricted the importation of most small handguns, such as the beloved PPK. Seecamp's finely crafted .25 led the way in 1981, followed about four years later by a .32 and a .380 version in 2003, all of which are the same size externally. The second of those is the famous one: Basically, a .25 that just happened to be chambered for .32 ACP Silvertip hollowpoints; there was nothing like it on the market. The wait for one was in the years, and when you saw one for sale (generally, you didn't), they could be several times the MSRP of $300 or so. This unicorn-like status held steady until competing .32 (and then .380) pistols appeared from NAA, Kel Tec, Ruger and others.



Seecamp removed the front locking lugs on the Bar-Sto barrels to make extra room for the slide to come back.

In the process of making little guns, especially ones that shot large-for-platform calibers, Seecamp learned a thing or two about recoil. This he distilled into a telescoping recoil system for which he received a patent in 1980. A substantial improvement on early dual-spring systems such as that used by short gun trailblazer Detonics, Seecamp's telescoping recoil system was used in compact pistols by GLOCK, Colt, Kahr, Kimber and others.

Grip Safety ... Irrelevant?

Back to this little gun. In addition to the double-action mechanism, the mainspring housing and grip safety have been replaced by a single piece (much like the fully machined Novak Answer backstrap), the top of which is shaped into a wide, downward-swept beavertail. I understand eliminating any safety is a controversial issue. Modern shooting technique, however, creates a bit of a hollow in the shooting hand where it should contact the safety (hence the addition of all those bumps at the bottom) and causes the hand to put pressure on the underside of the beavertail, levering it back out to the "safe" position. At one time or another, most of us will miss it, and the safety won't let the gun fire. It happened to me in a match, where I lost a little time. It's a much greater risk on a carry gun, and eliminating it entirely is a solution few people (even those who have done it) are willing to write about, but that goes back as far as the



The Seecamp pistol came with an ingenious shoulder holster, the thumb break of which snapped directly onto the gun.



Texas Rangers. On a double-action gun, it makes even more sense.

Bob Angell's Gun

The most unusual part of this gun isn't technically the gun at all: It's the holster and the letters "R A" engraved on the bottom of the gun may give us a clue about why this is. This pistol was made for Robert "Bob" Angell, who surfaces in both the gun and custom knife worlds in the '70s and '80s. Angell worked with pioneering concealment holster makers Chic Gaylord and Paris Theodore of Seventrees (and ASP pistol) fame and was reportedly involved early on in using Kydex for knife scabbards and holsters. It's hard to find much detailed information on Angell: He's mentioned in Knives '83 as the designer of a fixed blade and matching shoulder harness, but other than that, even the internet doesn't have much to say about him. If you do, please email me care of this magazine, as I'd like to know more.

While I have no definitive information on it, it seems likely to me it was Angell's idea to replace the top left grip screw of the Seecamp auto with a snap so the matching shoulder holster's thumb break, rather than wrapping around the gun, snaps directly to it. Very clever, and the gun even came with a spare grip panel and snap insert.

After a century-plus, the idea of what a custom 1911 should look like is fairly crystallized. In the earlier days, though, imagination and craftsmanship created some very interesting pistols many of us have never seen, and this one is a prime example.

Special thanks to Wayne F. Novak and Anthony Lombardo.

TACTICAL
RED DOTS





MDPR1 ● 3 MOA MICRO DOT
RMR FOOTPRINT



MDPR2 ● 4 MOA MICRO DOT
DELTA PRO FOOTPRINT

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110 Hunter Sport

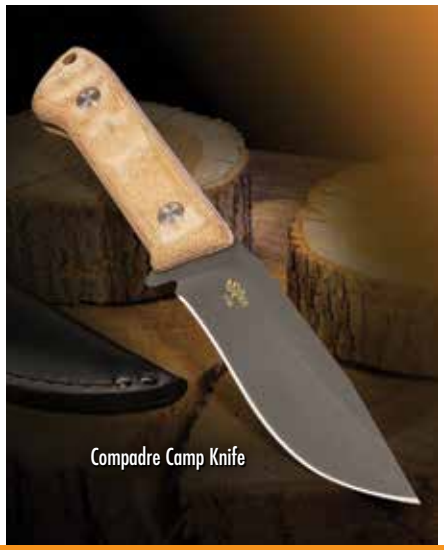
BUCK KNIVES MAKES YOUR OUTDOORS COME ALIVE


Pursuit Pro Large Folder

112 Slim Pro TRX Small

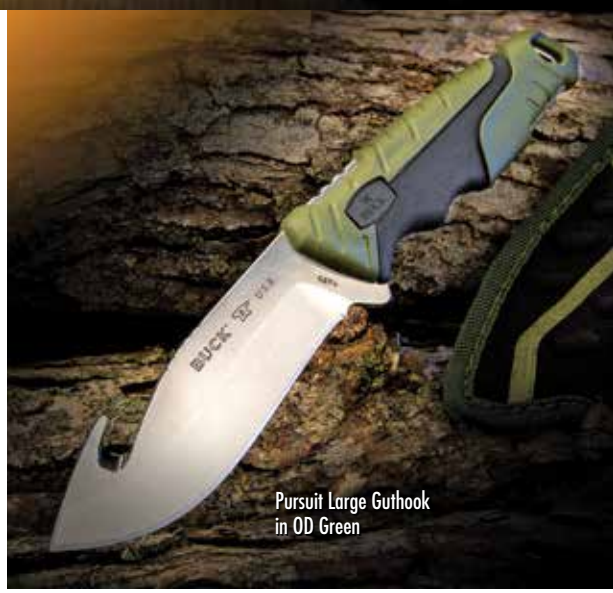
PAT COVERT
PHOTOS: ROB JONES THE IMAGESMITH, LLC

Buck Knives has brought to bear some iconic outdoor knives over the years. The Buck 110 is the hottest selling folding knife ever, for one. On the fixed-blade side, the 119 and big brother 120 Hunters come to mind. That said, modern-day Bucks have their advantages, including new designs, materials and technologies noteworthy in their own right. In addition, Buck continues to offer its customers more modern, up-to-date versions of their old standbys, such as the legendary 110 and its siblings. We'll look at the new gonzo Bucks and the company's updated variants here.


Compadre Camp Knife

Technology Galore

The Buck Knives name was built on a firm foundation of fixed-blade knives for use in the great outdoors. Although Buck still offers their early stacked handled fixers for devotees, their new modern fare resides in a whole 'nother world. The Buck Pursuit series of fixed-blades and folders are real eye-openers, combining new technology with function and flash for any outdoor foray you choose.


Pursuit Large Guthook in OD Green

The Buck 657 Pursuit Large Guthook is 9.50" overall with 4.25" of the total in a Drop Point blade with a deep gut hook notched into its forward spine. The blade steel is 420HC stainless steel with an option of top-shelf S35VN stainless on the 657 Pro model. The full tang Pursuit 657 Guthook's handle is supple two-tone Versaflex rubber with optional green/black or orange/black scales, and there's





a section of the rear handle with exposed steel jimping serving as a sure-footed thumb rest. An alternate 657 model without the guthook is also available and a polyester sheath locking flap is included with both.

Buck 110s have skinned an ocean-load of game and the 659 Pursuit Pro Large Folder is hell-bent on doing the same. Pictured here is the Pro model with premium S35VN stainless steel — but you can also opt for the less expensive 420HC stainless. The blade is a 3.65" Clip Point with a flesh-grabbing re-curved cutting edge, a bevel grind for enhanced penetration and jimping on the spine for choking up while cutting. The handle echoes its fixed blade siblings with color optional two-tone Versaflex scales and at mid-spine is a lock-back mechanism (just like the 110). You'll appreciate the 659 Pursuit Pro's light weight — 3.8 oz. as opposed to the 7.2 oz. of its famed Buck 110 ancestor. A Polyester belt pouch is included for the toting chores.

The 685 BuckLite Max II Large and 684 BuckLite Max II Small are part of a series of Bucks with affordable price tags. The BuckLite Max II Large is 8.875" overall, sporting a 3.50" Drop Point blade with both plain and guthook versions available. Blade steel is workhorse 420HC stainless with a hollow grind and stonewash finish. The Max II's 4.0" full-tang handle has textured Dynaflex rubber scales designed with a deep finger choil for a sure grip. True to its "BuckLite" moniker, this fixer checks in at an easy-to-manage 4.3 oz. and is delivered with a black polyester sheath. The 685 BuckLite Max II is a field knife large enough to handle a variety of tough chores.

The Max II Small has all the attributes of its big brother in a more compact package better suited for skinning game. If you process a lot of game, this 7.50" overall with a 3.25" blade weighs in at a paltry 2.80 oz. and is the perfect companion to the guthook version of the Max II Large. You'll be a deer dressing machine with this combo.

Buck's 104 Compadre Camp Knife looks a little old-fashioned compared to their modern fare, but it's very much up-to-date with current Bushcraft knives. Working with wood, slicing rope or cord, batoning firewood and preparing vittles are this 9.50" workhorse's strengths. The Compadre's 4.50" hollow-ground 5160 high-carbon steel Drop Point blade has a tough, black Cerakote finish from stem to stern for keeping the cooties at bay — and the blade's spine is squared to throw firestarter sparks. The Compadre's 5.0" handle has durable tan Micarta scales and its flared base and lanyard hole with the lanyard of your choice attached will make for a secure grip. A black leather sheath is provided for belt carry.

Modern Throwbacks

Buck has spent a lot of focus the last decade producing variants of the Buck 110 and its siblings much lighter in weight. The new 110 Hunter Sport and 112 Slim Pro TRX featured here accomplish the job in spades. Sporting a black anodized 4.8" frame with green Micarta scales, these lighter materials allowed Buck to knock the 110 Hunter Sport down to 4.6 oz. as opposed to the hefty 7.2 oz. of the original. An upgrade in blade steel to S30V stainless, the addition of ambidextrous thumb studs, and a reversible black Cerakote'd pocket clip bring the iconic lock-back folder up to modern standards while giving 110 fans a more enjoyable and functional alternative. The 110 Hunter Sport is now not only a contemporary alternative for field use but can easily serve as an urban EDC.

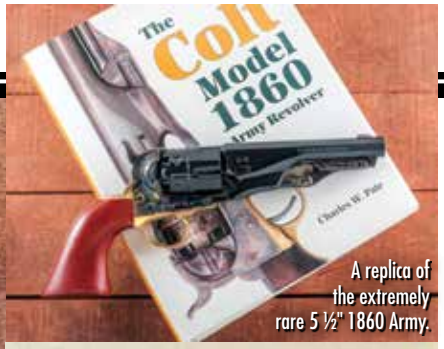
The smaller 112 Slim Pro TRX, 4.375" closed and weighing in at 2.70 oz., lightens its former load with a synthetic G10 frame — available in Orange, Olive Drab and Black. Buck ditched the nail nick for an ambidextrous thumb stud and added a reversible, black-coated pocket clip as well. Torx screw construction allows both the 110 Hunter Sport and 112 Slim Pro TRX the ability to make quick pocket clip changes and adds yet another advanced element to these modern-day Buck folders.

As you can see, Buck Knives refuses to sit on its laurels. From fresh, state-of-the-art folders and fixed-blades to rejuvenated legendary classics, the company has positioned itself to appeal to every segment of the outdoor market and — in the case of the modernized Buck 110s and 112s — to the EDC consumer base. That's innovative marketing but not surprising considering Buck's history of legendary blades.

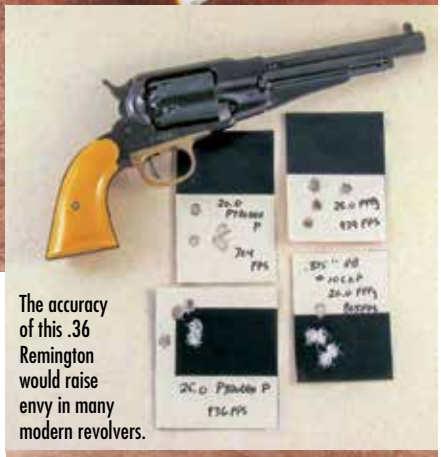
For more info: BuckKnives.com


The 5½" Sheriff's Model 1861 Navy .36 compared to the full-size 1861 Navy.

PERFECT PACKIN' PERCUSSION PISTOLS

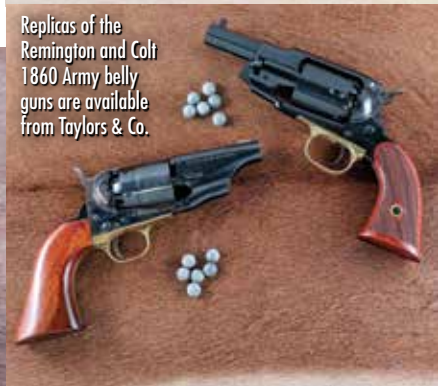


A replica of the extremely rare 5 ½" 1860 Army.


The accuracy of this .36 Remington would raise envy in many modern revolvers.


With black powder shooting, charges are measured by volume.


These 5 ½" .44 Remington and 1860 Army Colt are much easier to pack than the original long-barreled version.


Replicas of the Remington and Colt 1860 Army belly guns are available from Taylors & Co.

When I was a kid, I read an article in a gun magazine about foraging with a percussion pistol. At the end of the Civil War, many soldiers had to walk home, feeding themselves along the way with what they could take with their cap & ball sixgun. The author of this particular piece decided to follow in their footsteps and spent several days walking across a wilderness area with nothing but his percussion pistol. He was well-fed when he came out the other side. That impressed me, and I have been a fan of percussion revolvers ever since. I soon purchased an original Colt 1860 Army, and then if my memory is correct, my first replica black powder pistol was an 1858 Remington made in Belgium.


Ruger's 5 ½" Old Army percussion pistols are unarguably the best ever offered.

Four Extra Shots

In 1836 Sam Colt came up with the first truly practical and workable revolver, the Colt Paterson. This revolver was a five-shot affair with a revolving cylinder in .28, .31, .34, or .40 caliber. As with all subsequent percussion revolvers, it was loaded from the front with powder and ball and then primed at the back of the cylinder with a percussion cap. However, unlike Colt revolvers that followed, the Paterson did not have a trigger guard — a folding trigger came down as the hammer was cocked. It was also quite fragile. However, it was still a tremendous improvement over single-shot pistols. Now a Texas Ranger carrying two pistols had 10 shots instead of two.

Their effectiveness was shown when a small band of Texas Rangers, probably 15 in number, led by Major John Coffee "Jack" Hays, encountered a large band of Comanches west of San Antonio in the Nueces Canyon. One of those Rangers was Samuel Walker. The Comanches expected each Ranger to empty his single-shot rifle and pistol and then be at their mercy. The Paterson made all the difference. As effective as the Paterson revolvers were, for whatever reason, Colt went bankrupt, and the Paterson factory was closed. The Texas Rangers were later drafted into United States service, with two of those Rangers being Jack Hays and Samuel Walker. In 1846 General Taylor sent then Captain Walker back to recruit volunteers from Maryland and acquire more Colt revolvers. The problem was there were no more Colt revolvers.

Two Sams

The two Sams, Colt and Walker, designed a new sixgun together. In

late 1846, Sam Walker ordered 1,000 "heavy" revolvers, complete with several improvements. By heavy, Sam Walker meant larger in caliber than the Paterson and definitely stronger. These were true sixguns, six-shot, 9" barrels and in .44 caliber. Colt contacted Eli Whitney Jr., who did have a factory, and the agreement was made for Whitney to produce the Colt revolver, which became known as the Model of 1847 Army Pistol, or more commonly, the Walker.

The Walker dwarfed the sleek little Paterson. It weighed 4½ lbs., with a much larger grip, square-backed brass trigger guard, and a loading lever mounted under the barrel. Colt delivered such a large number of sixguns simply because Eli Whitney Jr. understood interchangeable parts. Any part from any Walker could be easily placed in any other Walker.



These Ruger Old Armys are exceptionally accurate with round balls and black powder loads.

New And Improved

It did not take long for the Walker to be improved. In 1848 the Transitional Whitneyville Walker Hartford Dragoon appeared. The grip frame, the mainframe and working parts remained the same; however, the cylinder was shortened slightly, and the barrel was cut back to 7½". The First, Second and Third Model Dragoons followed over the next two years, with each one being a slight improvement over the preceding example.

The much lighter Colt 1851 Navy was a six-shot, .36 caliber revolver. James Butler Hickok carried a pair of ivory gripped Navies, and even with the coming of cartridge revolvers, he was still wearing them when he was shot from behind in 1876. The smaller-caliber .36 Navy was slightly enlarged to become the first .44 sixgun to be easily carried. This was the 1860 Army that many consider the most beautiful of all the percussion pistols.

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The 1860 Army is available in these three versions, full-sized, easy-packin' and belly gun.



Taylor's & Co. have added the 3" Ace to the 5½" and 8" versions of the 1858 Remington.

In 1861 Colt combined the streamlined profile of the 1860 Army with the 1851 Navy, and the result was the last full-sized Colt cap & ball sixgun, the 1861 Navy.

All of these pistols had long barrel lengths from 9" in the case of the Walker, 8" for the 1860, and 7½" for all the others. What about Perfect Packin' Percussion Pistols? We know some cut the barrels to a much shorter length, especially on the 1860 Army, with one well-known example being an Avenging Angel. Today, shorter barrels, usually 5½", are available in Colt and Remington replica percussion pistols and the Ruger Old Army. Can these fill the same role as the original defined Perfect Packin' Pistols? Could they be used for self-defense today?

Percussion Defense?

As I was thinking positively about this last question, I received confirmation of a sort. I correspond regularly with a reader in Arizona who is almost as old as I am. In his last letter, he shared what his go-to-town guns were. He says he will remain a dinosaur as his primary pistol, which he calls his Daily Carry Gun, is a replica 1849 Colt Pocket Pistol. The 1849 Colt was an extremely popular everyday carry gun, with nearly 1/3 of a million being produced. The quickest reload is still a second gun, especially with a single-action sixgun and impera-tive with a percussion pistol. His 1849 Colt is backed up by a replica 1862 Colt Police Pistol in his boot.

He does not feel the least bit under-gunned and a check through history will show just how potent these pistols have been in the past. I have heard from two other readers who carry .44 Remington cap and ball revolvers daily. One is a long-distance truck driver traveling through many states, while the other drives daily in a city known for its anti-Second Amendment sentiment. The feeling of both of these men is if they do have to use or if they get stopped for some reason, they are carrying six-guns, which are not federally regulated as firearms.

Ruger Old Armys

In the early 1970s, Ruger reached back into history, looked at the cap-and-ball sixguns from the middle of the 19th century and decided those designs could be easily modernized. The result was the Ruger Old Army. Ruger used the same coil spring-operated action in the Old Army as found in their extensive line of single-action sixguns. They also offered it in the much easier-to-clean stainless steel, made the loading lever stronger and easier to remove and replace, and provided easily adjustable sights. The gun is rugged, simple and extremely accurate. Ruger stopped production of the Old Army more than 10 years ago, and I doubt we will ever see it again. Over the years, I have added more Old Armies, both blue and stainless, with adjustable sights, as well as three with traditional fixed sights. One was an 8" version, while the other two were a pair of 5½" easy-handling sixguns.

These 5½" Old Armies perform well with Speer's 0.457" round ball, Thompson's Lubed Wad and CCI's #11 percussion cap. My commonly used three powders are used in both 35.0 and 40.0 (by volume) charges. Those powders are Goex FFFg black powder, Hodgdon's Triple-7 FFFg and Pyrodex P. Charges are measured with a Thompson/Center powder measure. With 35.0 grains of Triple-7 FFFg, muzzle velocity is 925 fps with six shots in 1⅜" at 20 yards. Moving up to 40.0 grains of Triple-7 FFFg yields 1,130 fps and a group of 1¾". These velocities are right at, or even exceed, those of the longer-barreled Old Army.

There is no doubt the Ruger Old Army is the finest percussion pistol ever offered. Liking the 5½" Old Armies mentioned above, I decided to take a step further to give me more versa-tility starting with a pair of adjustable sighted, longer-barreled original Old Armies. Both of these, one stainless steel and the other blued were fitted with Super Blackhawk grip frames, giving them an 1840s Colt Dragoon



Before it was discontinued, the Ruger Old Army was offered in three versions.



The Colt Pocket Police .36 and 1849 Wells Fargo .31 compared to a standard-sized 1861 Navy .36.



Hodgdon provides black powder, Pyrodex and Triple Seven for percussion revolvers.

look; they are one of the few sixguns I can handle with these grip frames without getting my knuckles rapped every time I fire. They were then turned over to Milt Morrison to have the barrels cut back to easier handling and packing 5½" barrel lengths.

Black Powder Power

Just how potent are black powder loads? The standard .45 ACP Hardball load of a 230-grain bullet at 820 fps has long been regarded, and rightly so, as a highly dependable fight-stopping load. This can be duplicated in a Ruger Old Army Percussion Pistol with a 220-grain conical bullet over 35 grains of Pyrodex. The standard 140-grain round ball at 1,000 fps is an easy handling and powerful load.

Production Models

During the original days of the cap and ball revolvers from about 1836 until the arrival of cartridge firing sixguns in the late 1860s, Perfect Packin' Percussion Pistols were not easy to find. Certainly, individual owners cut the barrels of their pistols to make them easier to carry, but what about short-barreled production cap and ball sixguns? It is easy to say there were none. However, this is another example of "Never Say Never." In his excellent book, *Colt Model 1860 Army Revolver*, which is a must-have for anyone interested in these wonderful Percussion Pistols, author Charles Pate states there were at least one each 1860 Army revolvers made with 4½", 5½" and 6½", and also interestingly enough, one with a 10" barrel.

Today, Taylors & Co. offers 5½" 1860 Army and 1851 Navy easy packing pistols. A most interesting version has just been introduced. The Ace is a 3" 1858 Remington without a loading lever. It fits very nicely into a pocket. Taylor's & Co. and Cimarron Firearms offer blue and stainless steel 5½" 1858 Remingtons, and I found a 5½" 1861 Navy .36 at Dixie Gunworks.

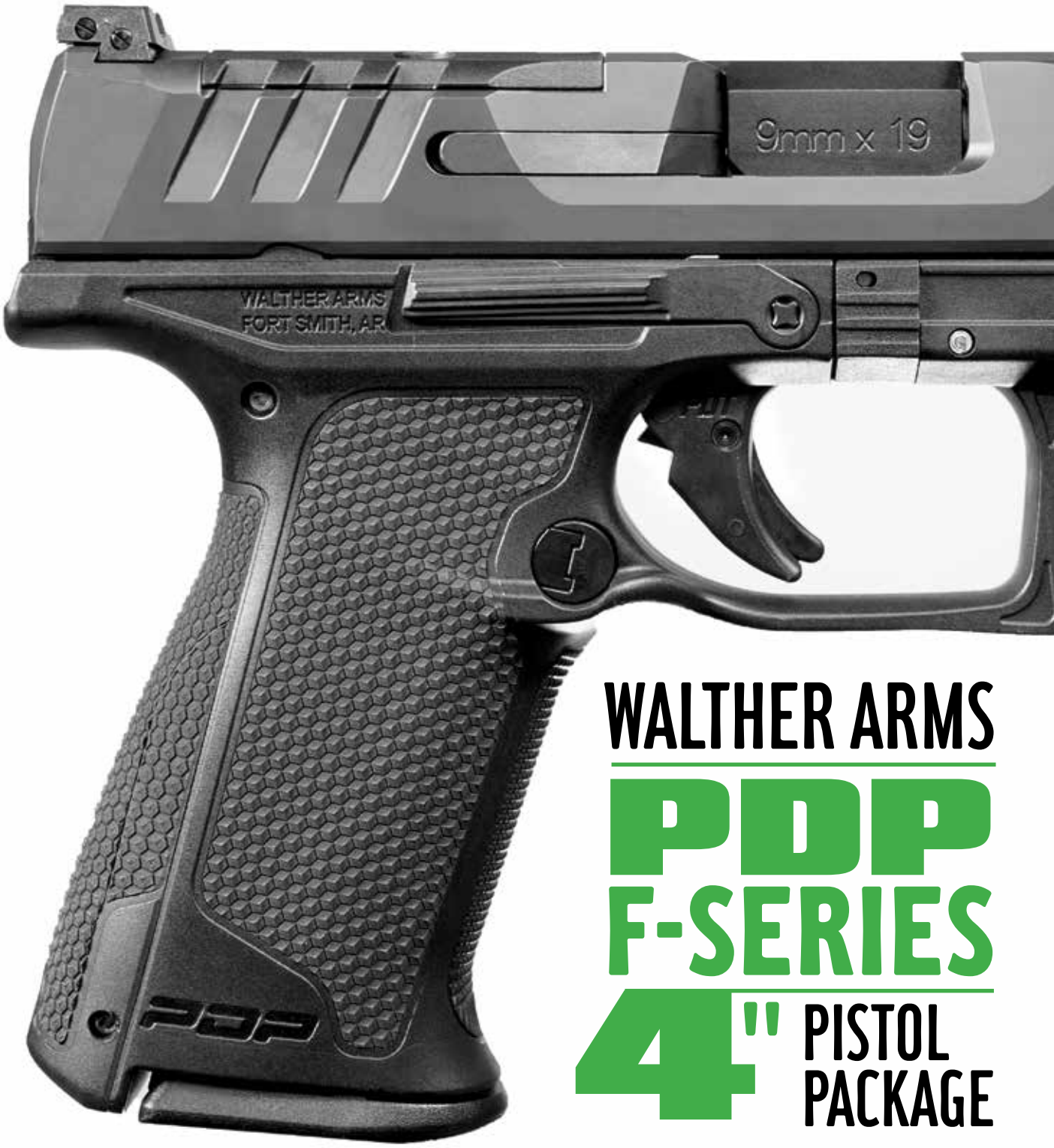
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SCAN TO ENTER



According to Walther Arms, their duty is "to build the best performing firearm." Your duty is to be ready. We hope you are ready because you may just win Walther Arms' *PDP F-Series 4"*, the gun of the month for this issue of *American Handgunner.* It is versatile, dependable and effective in both concealed carry and conventional service/duty situations. An ergonomical design, a reduced trigger reach, reduced grip circumference, reduced slide force, SuperTerrain Slide Serrations and a high-quality striker-fired trigger make the F-Series in 9mm your best choice for staying ready. Its features make this gun a perfect tool for those with smaller hands. While the PDP F-Series is ideal for female shooters, I think this wouldn't stop our male readers from entering this giveaway. Join the contest for a chance to win a precious gift for a wife, daughter, granddaughter, sister or mother.

Sharpen your aim with the THROOM 6" KNOCKDOWN Plate Rack Kit. It includes six 6" targets, six base mounts and one set of Alpha Stand Brackets, all requiring little assembly. Just add standard 2x4s to build a lightweight plate rack for the indoor or outside range.

The folding *Venandi* knife with a slip joint has a Latin name that translates to "hunter." The 3.14" blade is made of 8Cr13MoV, a high-carbon stainless steel with a bead-blast finish. The grip is G10. With an OAL of 7.22", the Venandi is just big enough to handle most jobs. At 1.80 oz, it is lightweight and easy to carry.

Walther Arms' PDP F-Series 4", Throom Targets' plate rack kit and CRKT's Venandi knife are prizes you'd want to own or give to a loved one. Here's your chance to win! Enter the giveaway at AmericanHandgunner.com/giveaways/ or mail a post card! —*Jazz Jimenez*

PLUS



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TOM McHALE

EDITOR PICKS

GUNNYSACK

AXEON MDPR1 RED DOT SIGHT



Need an affordable pistol optic? Check out the Axeon MDPR1. Distributed by Umarex USA, you'll find this one available for a little over a hundred bucks with an MSRP of $129.99.

The unit mounts using the standard Trijicon RMR footprint, so compatibility won't be a problem. Once you get it zeroed, it'll stay that way as the battery compartment is accessible on the side — no need to remove the sight to swap batteries. With 11 different power settings, you'll see a 3-MOA red dot in varying low and bright light conditions. The company claims a 30,000-hour battery life if kept on the lower settings.

This is a great option to equip plinkers, competition, and range guns without breaking the bank. I'm searching for a suitable .22LR pistol to host it, although this sight is built for centerfire use too. *AxeonOptics.com*

UM TACTICAL UM3 SIGHT MOUNT



I've been using a vintage UM Tactical Sight Mount for 75% of forever. I picked one up at a SHOT Show many years back and have used it ever since. Recently upgrading my antique to a new UM3 model, I figured it was time to share the joys of this simple piece of gear.

The UM3 Sight Mount gives you an over-the-slide standard rail mount for red dots or handgun scopes on virtually any pistol equipped with an under-barrel rail. A couple of pistols require the UM3(X) model, so check the website.

Simply slide the unit over the front rail, allowing the detent lever to lock into a rail slot. Then mount your optic, drawing the two upper rail halves together. This "locks" the unit into place. It'll even maintain zero through removal and remounting.

I use it most frequently with a Bushnell handgun scope. You'll be amazed what most handguns can do when optical sighting precision is perfect. An optional holster is available too. *UMTactical.com*



LYMAN AMMO CHECKER: HANDGUN



I don't know about y'all, but I've noticed a higher failure rate in bulk packs of ammo. Perhaps it's a result of production lines running at full tilt through the great ammo panic. One handy thing to have in the shooting gear pile, whether you reload or not, is an ammo checker.

Think of the Lyman Ammo Checker as a block containing perfectly-formed chambers of various calibers. Just drop a round (or empty case if you're reloading) to see if your ammo is up to spec. It's a fast and handy way to help avoid misfeeds and failures-to-whatever before you shoot.

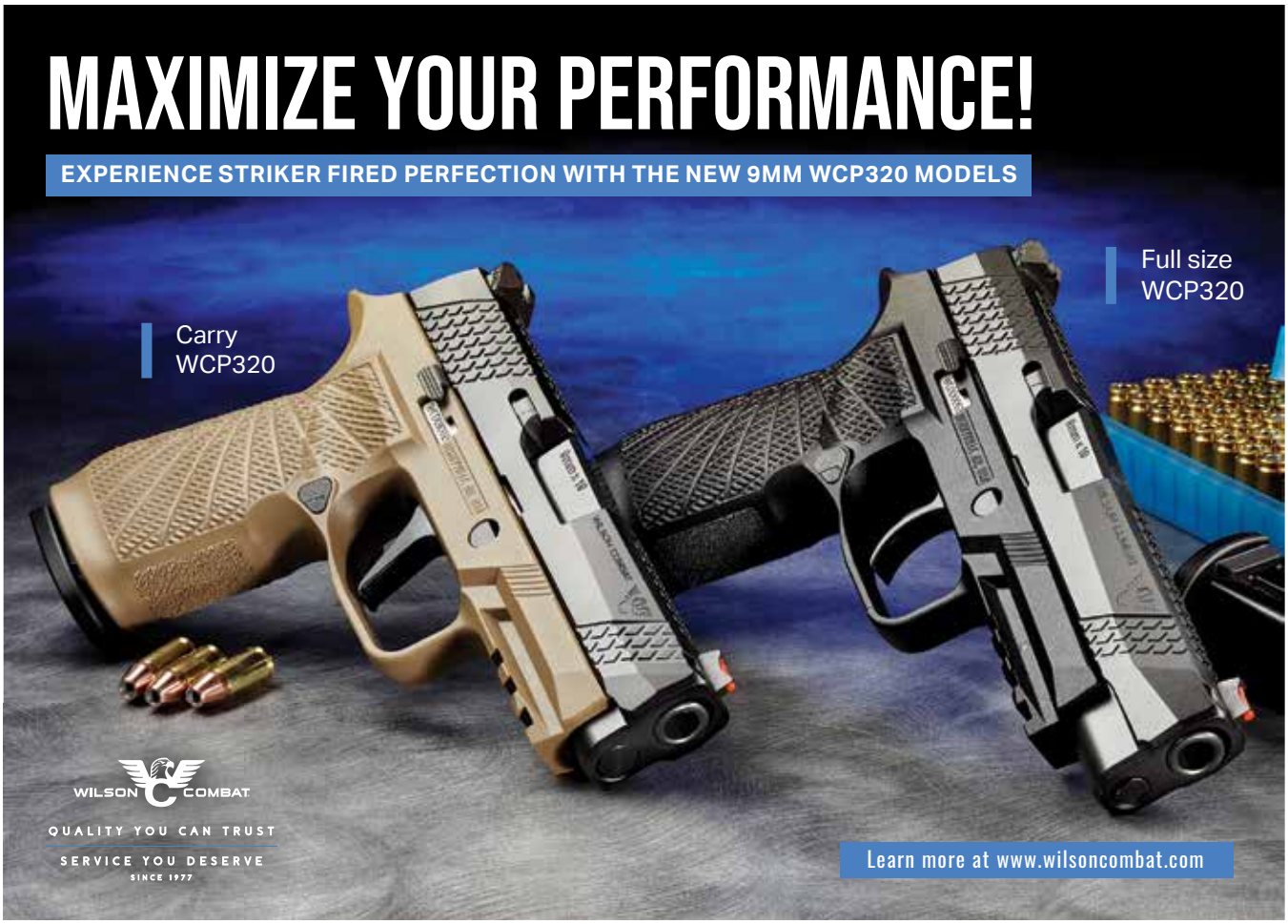
The ammo checker is machined from solid blocks of 6061 T6 aircraft-grade aluminum and cut with custom tooling to SAAMI minimum chamber dimensions, so if your ammo fits in the checker, it'll work in the most stringent actual chamber. The handgun version works with .380 Auto, 9mm Luger, .38 Super, .40 S&W, .45 ACP, .38/.357, .44 Mag/Spl and .45 Colt. *LymanProducts.com*

RMJ TACTICAL 3V TSATI KNIFE

Check out this exceptional knife from RMJ … It's an exclusive of the 3V Syndicate, composed of three very select groups: RMJ's craftsmen and designers, the hand-selected inner circle of RMJ's most dedicated dealers and purpose-driven users who seek the very best high-end cutting tools. Syndicate membership gives one access to exclusive products and limited runs.



The Tsati is from Ryan's Gold Point Forge custom line and reflects the classic fixed blade. At 9⅛" overall, it features a 4.5" CPM-3V (HRC 59-60) blade, honed razor sharp. Depending on the model, everything but the edge is Cerakoted in either Barrett Brown or Savage Stainless. Brown Micarta handles offer a sure grip, wet or dry. It carries in a stunning Chattanooga Leatherworks sheath. The whole package arrives in a cherrywood presentation box. Nice. *RMJTactical.com*



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MASSAD AYOOB

WHEN FRIENDS TURN INTO WEREWOLVES: THE SETH CASTEEL SHOOTING

SITUATION: An old friend turns into a brutal maniac during a cordial gathering.

LESSON: It's hard to have to kill. It's harder when the bad guy is someone you know ... and when your defense of family and self is called murder.

October 9, 2018. Seth Casteel and his wife, Jessica, and their six kids receive a visit from an old friend from their high school days. Rocky Russell has brought his girlfriend and her progeny. The kids spend time together as the adults, all in their 30s, catch up at a pleasant gathering around an outdoor fire, with the children toasting S'Mores.

The Casteels are delighted to see their old friend after so many years. They don't know Rocky's military career in Afghanistan has affected him profoundly, seeing him institutionalized for 18 days at one point to treat his PTSD. They won't know until later, when it's too late, he has gotten into drugs recently and beaten the hell out of his girlfriend. Seth is limiting himself to no more than one beer per hour, but Rocky is pounding down the booze, and it's starting to show.

These old friends speak of old times. Seth mentions to Rocky that he's the kind of guy Seth would want to take care of his wife and kids if something happened to him. Rocky becomes morose and answers he is a bad person who has done bad things. Seth tells him to STFU, he knows Rocky is a good man. Rocky starts muttering over and over, "Shut the f___ up."

Rocky is 6'1" and weighs 215 muscular pounds; Seth is 5'5" tall and weighs 135. Suddenly, Rocky is standing, looming over Seth from a foot away and looking over Seth's head with a thousand-yard stare.

And now, without warning, Rocky smashes his left fist into Seth's face.

Under Assault

The brutal blow is delivered full power, with Rocky's entire body weight behind it. The punch rocks Seth backward, and to keep from falling, he grabs Rocky's shirt. The two of them fall together, with Seth under the larger man. Seth's tongue can feel his two front teeth bent backward horizontally over his tongue by the punch. They roll on the ground together.

They separate for a moment. Rocky grabs Seth, swings him around and throws him. Seth is too stunned to remember it later, but one witness claims to see Seth thrown bodily through the air. Rocky tackles him full power, and they're on the ground again, Seth is on the bottom once more. The larger man punches the smaller one, again and again.

As suddenly as he has begun the assault, Rocky breaks it off. He stands and walks away from Seth for a moment, picking up chairs and throwing them. Rocky blurts, "It's him or me!"

Seth's wife goes to him, puts an arm around him, and helps him toward the house. Seth's mind is racing. Rocky seems to have gone crazy. What if he attacks Mrs. Casteel? Or one of the children?

Everyone, including Rocky's own girlfriend, tells him to leave. He stubbornly refuses. Seth leans against a wall to catch his breath and gather his thoughts. He decides that a gun might be a deterrent. He goes into the house and heads for the bedroom.

A part-time gunsmith, Seth owns about 70 firearms, mainly rifles and shotguns. He has only two handguns, a Makarov and a Para Ordnance GI Expert 1911 .45, and keeps the latter loaded and cocked and locked in a Serpa holster. Seth, a southpaw, retrieves the pistol and puts it in his left side pants pocket and then heads outside.

His kids stare in horror at Seth's bloody, broken face. He assures them he is okay and tells them to go inside for safety. Seth is outside now, by the grill in the carport and not far from the door.

Seth sees Rocky behind the wheel of his car, arguing with his girlfriend, who is begging him not to drive drunk. Their argument becomes loud. Rocky gets out of the car and approaches Seth. Seth and the girlfriend are both telling Rocky urgently he has to leave.

Continued on next page

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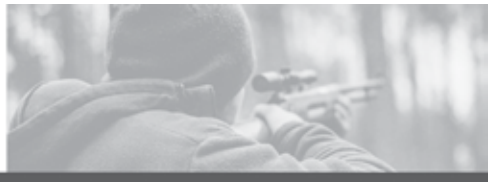
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Instead, Rocky goes straight to Seth and delivers a brutal punch to the jaw.

Knockout Blow

It's a knockout. Whether it was the fist to the jaw that did it or Seth's head hitting the concrete, he has lost consciousness.

Seth awakens down on the concrete in time to see Rocky throw Jessica against the wall. Seth's worst fears are confirmed: His wife is now under attack. As he rolls to the side to push himself up, Seth's right hand falls on the 1911 and he realizes it must have slipped from his pocket when he was knocked out. He picks it up in his non-dominant right hand as he struggles up to a standing position.

Final Moment

Having seen Rocky throw Jessica against the wall, Seth is no sooner standing than Rocky turns toward him, clenches his fists, and starts coming forward. Seth knows he can't let him get hold of the gun.

He raises his right hand, thumbs down the safety, and fires a single shot.

Rocky collapses instantly to the concrete floor of the carport.

And now, Seth finds himself on his knees next to Rocky's motionless body. He on-safes the .45, sets it down, and bursts into uncontrollable sobbing as he blurts over and over again, "My God! My God!"

That's how the first responding law enforcement officer finds him. Seth Casteel is arrested and ultimately charged with murder.

Preparing The Defense

The authorities apparently couldn't see past "unarmed man shot." Seth and Jess hired John Colley of Columbia, Tenn. as a defense attorney. It was a wise choice. I had done a manslaughter case a decade before with John, which concluded with a complete acquittal by the jury in record time. Colley approached this case with the same strategy he had used with that one: dismantle the State's case meticulously piece by piece, and, just as precisely, build Seth Casteel's case for lawful self-defense. There were many issues to deal with, some more subtle than others.

Issues And Answers

Most of the following comes verbatim from my pre-trial report in this case. It is offered here to encapsulate the issues.

Size and weight disparity greatly favored the deceased, Mr. Russell, over the defendant, Mr. Casteel. According to the arrest report, at the

time, Mr. Casteel stood 5'5" tall and weighed 135 lbs. At autopsy, Mr. Russell was found to be 73" tall (6'1") and to weigh 215 lbs.

In use of force training, the prevalent size and weight chart used to determine disparity of force was created by Juste David Myers for his book *Close Quarter Combat* and was popularized in John Peters' police training textbook *Defensive Tactics With Flashlights*. That chart (was) appended to this report.

By this standard, Casteel would be listed as a size "Small," and Russell would be categorized as a size "Large." According to the Myers chart, a person Casteel's size would have only a 30% chance of surviving a homicidal barehanded assault by a committed aggressor.

"They don't know Rocky's military career in Afghanistan has affected him profoundly, seeing him institutionalized for 18 days at one point to treat his PTSD."

Disparity in ability to fight and cause physical harm also favored Russell over Casteel. Mr. Casteel told me he does not recall having any training in hand-to-hand combat or physical restraint of violent people. Mr. Russell was a trained soldier who had done tours overseas in a combat zone. He had experienced things sufficiently dire to have left him with what his significant other perceived as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder requiring treatment. Even had they been equal in physical size and strength, one would expect a trained combatant and veteran of war zones to have significantly greater fighting abilities than a man with zero experience in such matters.

Moreover, the escalating violence in the minutes prior to the shooting had clearly demonstrated Mr. Russell's dramatically greater fighting skill compared to Mr. Casteel's. In their first encounter, Russell had caused Casteel to be seen "flying through the air," according to eyewitness testimony. In the third and penultimate physical conflict, the one directly prior to the shooting, Russell had knocked Casteel unconscious with a single, powerful punch to the left side of the face, which left him prostrate on the concrete floor of the carport where the shooting took place soon thereafter.

It is my considered opinion this would leave any rational person in

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Casteel's situation with the conclusion he would not be able to use his bare hands to stop Russell from killing or gravely injuring him and possibly others.

Having been decisively overpowered in the first two of the four encounters in this chain of events would support Casteel's conclusion he needed to arm himself to deter Mr. Russell from further escalating physical violence. He had reportedly armed himself between the second encounter and the third, in which he was knocked unconscious, and the pistol he had just retrieved fell from his pocket to the floor of the carport.

Reenactment

On June 22, 2021, while visiting the shooting scene and doing a "walk-through" re-enactment of the shooting, I performed a demonstrative evidence video to illustrate that point. At the actual shooting scene, Mr. Casteel stood where he recalled standing when he fired the shot in question, and he placed me where he recalled Mr. Russell standing at the moment the shot was fired. We measured that distance, which turned out to be some 103", torso to torso.

I had Mr. Casteel hold a dummy gun exactly replicating the size and shape of the weapon in evidence, a Para Ordnance 1911 .45 caliber pistol, extended at arm's length in his right hand as he recalled holding the weapon. From the position he recalled Russell being in, I then lunged forward to disarm him. We subsequently overlaid an app called "Coach's Eye" to break down the movements to 1/100th of one second. That video was titled *Ayoob Demo, Tennessee v. Casteel*. The breakdown is as follows.

As best I can determine by eye, my movement forward toward Mr. Casteel begins at 12.69 seconds on the video counter.

By 13.86 seconds, from Mr. Russell's position, I have closed the gap between us, used my left hand to deflect Casteel's gun away from me and to grasp his wrist, and have pivoted my torso away from the gun muzzle. At this point, shooting me is no longer his option — 1.17 seconds have elapsed since I began the forward movement.

At 14.60 seconds, I have stripped the pistol from Mr. Casteel's hand, as evidenced by my right elbow now pulling back away from him, the gun in my hand. What had been his gun hand is now trapped against my chest. An additional 0.74 seconds have elapsed.

At 15.50 seconds, 0.90 seconds later, I have turned the gun in my hand into firing position; have put his gun hand in a wristlock to keep him from grabbing the gun back, and my finger is pulling the trigger of the dummy gun. The gun muzzle is oriented to the center of his head for what would be a presumably fatal gunshot wound to the brain.

> **Seth awakens down on the concrete in time to see Rocky throw Jessica against the wall. Seth's worst fears are confirmed: His wife is now under attack.**

The total elapsed time from beginning to move forward to "shooting" Mr. Casteel through the brain with his own gun has been 2.81 seconds.

Therefore, I believe I can testify to a reasonable degree of scientific certainty that if Mr. Casteel had not fired



when he did, he could have been disarmed and shot to death with his own gun in three seconds or less.

Escalating Violence

The escalating violence of Mr. Russell toward Mr. Casteel showed no signs of diminishing. Russell's assaultive behavior had escalated from manhandling Casteel to rendering him unconscious with no sign of remorse. At the time the single, fatal shot was fired, Russell was approaching Casteel in a manner that could only reasonably be construed as an intent to disarm and cause further harm. In the final moments before Casteel fired, there is nothing in the discovery materials that indicates to me anything other than escalating, potentially homicidal violence in Russell's behavior.

The autopsy conducted by Dr. Tashjian, the forensic pathologist, states, "Direction of projectile — anterior to posterior, superior to inferior, and right to left." The bullet traveling front to back, downward, and from the right side of the body toward the left side can be oriented to the gun and the person holding it. It is consistent with a man moving forward with his head and torso aggressively forward. This, in turn, is consistent with an attack posture in relation to the person holding

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the gun and also consistent with the defendant's account of Mr. Russell moving aggressively toward him when the defendant fired.

As to Casteel having been drinking beer before the shooting: Only the jury can determine the reasonableness of Casteel's actions with an understanding of the dynamics of violent encounters. The doctrine of competing harms, aka doctrine of necessity and doctrine of two evils, forgives one for breaking laws or rules in the rare circumstance where following those laws or rules would cause more human injury to the innocent than breaking them. The actions, not the alcohol, determine. "Alcohol on board" does not automatically indicate bad judgment. If the jury concurs with the defense that Casteel's actions were those any reasonable, prudent person might have taken under the circumstances, his blood alcohol content becomes irrelevant.

Resolution

The Commonwealth Attorney's office apparently became increasingly aware of how flawed their Murder case against Seth Casteel actually was. In January of 2022, Seth accepted a plea of guilty to reckless homicide with a sentence of probation. This charge generally carries a two- to four-year prison sentence in Tennessee; Seth got zero time served, an almost incredibly good plea bargain for the defendant. While I was confident we were going to win at trial, I can understand why he made that decision. A conviction would have taken him away from his wife and children for many, many years. I firmly believe even the most "ironclad" case has a 10% disaster factor: a rogue juror blind to the facts, a surprise witness who lies but is believed, etc. Here, there were other factors. One was "sympathetic victim." Rocky was, after all, a heroic veteran who'd fought for his country. While Seth's alcohol consumption was low that night, there is always the chance of a juror who is the kind of teetotaler who thinks anyone who drinks more than he does is an out-of-control alcoholic. Seth's collapse next to the body and his anguished cries of "My God!" could be misconstrued as an admission of wrongdoing, as a similar action was apparently construed in the case during the same timeframe of Minnesota police officer Kim Potter, who mistook her GLOCK for her TASER.

Seth's family needed him at home, not in prison. As ace trainer John Hearne famously says, "It's not about the odds, it's about the stakes." We



need to remember what lawyers know: Acceptance of a plea bargain is not necessarily an admission of guilt.

The Werewolf Parallel

Let's explore that "sympathetic victim" element. I've come to think of it as The Werewolf Parallel. The werewolf mythos in horror movies goes back to the 1931 film *The Wolf Man*. It stars Lon Chaney, Jr. as kindly Lawrence Talbot, who risks his life to save someone from a wolf; he kills it, but it bites him, and from then on, the full moon turns him into a tragic monster who can't stop himself from killing the innocent. In the end, the werewolf is attacking a woman who is rescued by Talbot's father, played by Claude Rains, who beats the creature to death with a silver-headed cane.

If Mr. Casteel had not fired when he did, he could have been disarmed and shot to death with his own gun in three seconds or less.

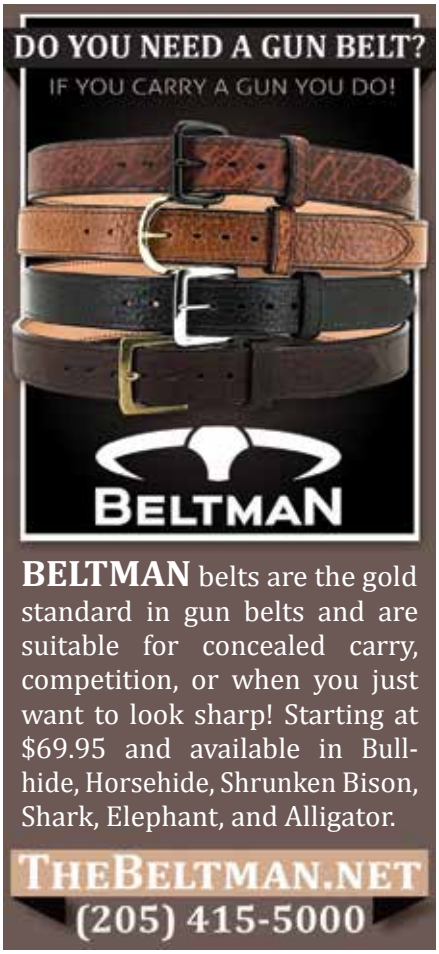
As the werewolf dies, it turns back into kindly Larry Talbot, and the movie closes with the horrified face of the father, who realizes he has just had to kill his own son.

In cases like this one, something similar happens. Rocky Russell was the good American, fighting for his country when he was "bitten" by the PTSD that changed him. Alcohol became the full moon that triggered Rocky's transformation. Seth didn't know about this until he and then his wife were attacked by the changed Rocky, whom he had to shoot as a last resort.

And after he fell dead, Rocky was seen to turn back into the hometown hero again. Moreover, the man he forced to kill him was overcome with grief at having had to perform that act.

In such incidents, there are no winners. All you can do is limit the degree of loss.

No lawsuit has been filed in the matter as of this writing. Seth and Jess are rebuilding their lives. The incident was a tragedy all around. The actions of Rocky Russell made his fatal shooting a last resort. If disparity of force and the deadly danger of being disarmed by a berserk assailant had been better understood within the prevailing system, I suspect Seth Casteel would probably never have been criminally charged at all. Noted Attorney Colley, "Tennessee has a very strong Victim's Rights law."



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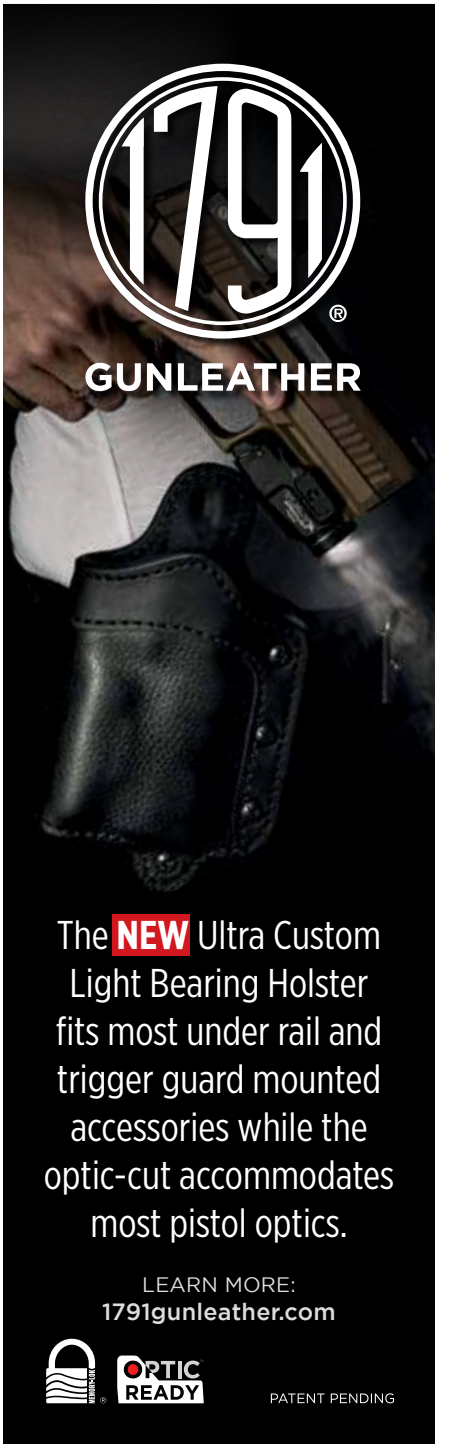


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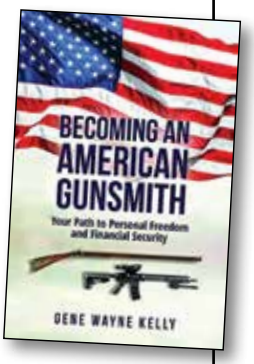
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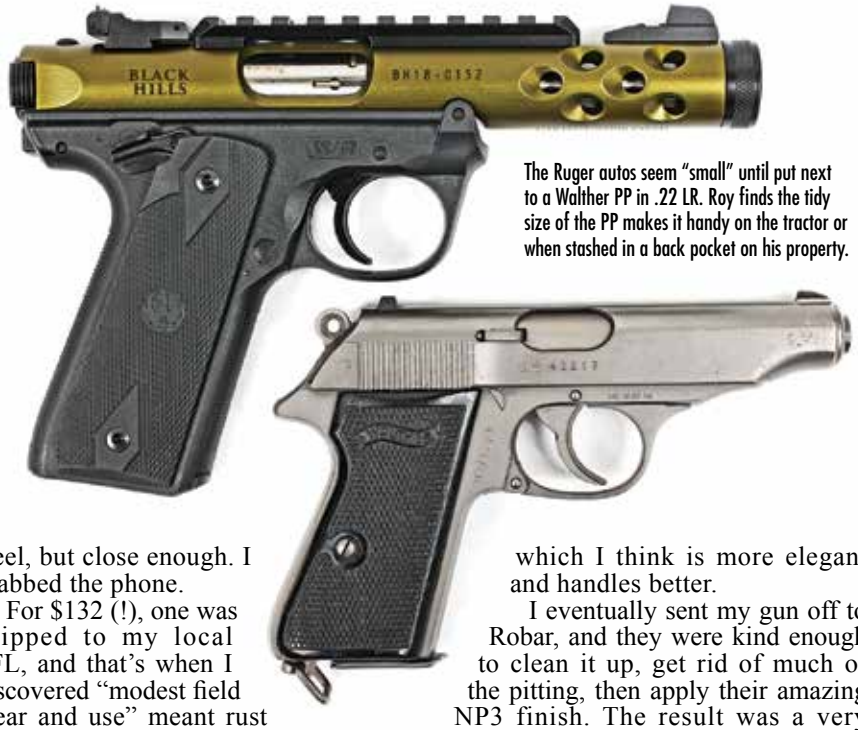
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Continued from page 82



The Ruger autos seem "small" until put next to a Walther PP in .22 LR. Roy finds the tidy size of the PP makes it handy on the tractor or when stashed in a back pocket on his property.

steel, but close enough. I grabbed the phone.

For $132 (!), one was shipped to my local FFL, and that's when I discovered "modest field wear and use" meant rust pits and cracked grips. But I could see past that, paid my transfer fee and soon had my "sort of dream gun" in hand. Some research led me to learn my gun was one of a batch sent to, of all places, the Ministry of Defense in Great Britain during 1974–1975. I was never able to learn what the MOD did with them, but mine had been used hard and put away very wet. Nonetheless, the bore was bright and the action tight, mirroring what so many law enforcement and military guns exhibit — carried a great deal but fired little.

I soon learned the little gun was a delight to shoot, accurate as all get-out and, unlike the .32 sister gun I had, didn't eat me out of house and home when it came to ammo costs. I also discovered something else. It was effortless to carry tucked into a back pocket, tossed into a pack or in a simple belt slide holster. I soon found my Ruger .22 Standard Auto tended to stay home when I went wandering in the high desert. The Walther did everything I needed, but in a tidy, 23-oz. package.

Improvements

The PP series was introduced in about 1929 and just pre-war really leapt into being as a military and police gun for the Axis. Post-war, various iterations continued to be made, extending into today, where Walther here in the states still manufactures these classic pistols. You can even get a PPK/s in .22 LR, but not a PP, which I think is more elegant and handles better.

I eventually sent my gun off to Robar, and they were kind enough to clean it up, get rid of much of the pitting, then apply their amazing NP3 finish. The result was a very business-like look and a newfound life for the old pistol. I was always a bit bothered by the fact it tended to shoot a tad high at 15 yards, so I recently carefully added a bit of TIG weld to the top of the front sight, then re-shaped it and zeroed it perfectly. If you do such a thing, keep in mind the Walther sights are hard as diamonds for some reason, and a standard file glides right off. I use diamond hones.

These days, the Walther rides with me often around the property here, most usually tucked into a back pocket. It's spent hundreds of hours on the tractor with me and is often in the hands of new shooters here too. Keep your good eye open, and just maybe, you might get lucky and have an interesting coincidence like the one I had. You might also keep your eye open for an old Beretta Model 71 in .22 LR. It sort of does the same job. Or maybe get both?



Roy calls the PP .22 a "Little Big Gun" since it handles like a big gun but is compact and handy.

Note the lanyard loop on this former military pistol.

AMERICAN HANDGUNNER

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GUN RIGHTS

Alan Korwin

GUN LIES MATTER

"If mass media would tell the truth about guns, the entire debate would end."
– Alan Gottlieb, President, Second Amendment Foundation

When historians look back on these columns and this magazine, they will be astonished at the degree of freedom we enjoyed with firearms and accessories — widely available at modest costs. As you know, you can buy unlimited supplies of ammunition (assuming you can find it under the supply-chain problems arbitrarily or deliberately created by current administrations). There is no limit to the number of guns you can own. True, you can't legally purchase anything over .50 caliber (except shotguns), and some gun types (full-autos, for example) are hard to find, strictly limited and exorbitantly priced. But basically, we're doing pretty well as an armed society.

Weaponized Myths

Yet as we look at it today, we are troubled by the degree to which anti-rights people attack our ability and our freedoms with myths, hoaxes and nonsense. Incrementally, they eat out our substance. Every one of their proposals and plans are clever ways, frequently disguised, to remove fundamental freedoms. If the media paid half as much attention to criminals using guns instead of the free market for guns or isolated psychopaths, the nation would be in a better place. How so?

For weeks now, as I write this, and maybe even by the time you get this fine magazine, you've been told 10 people, mostly black, were murdered by a psycho-child in a pretend gun-free zone. This has dominated gun and crime "news" and the attention of the political class. The deranged kid announced his plans, acted out on a good bit of it, posted his intentions online, and was left alone despite recognition by numerous adults and agencies. Afterward, officials fabricated lies about what happened. So now we're treated to endless stories about a tragic event, probably thousands of miles from where you live, and reporters don't notice something wrong with this picture. What's wrong?

What About ...?

A year ago, 9,941 black people were brutally murdered in the United States. Precise counts of the perps aren't known because no one keeps track, but experts agree almost all of the dead were murdered by other blacks. This takes place in what used to be known as "ghettos" but have been politically correcti-sized to "inner cities," or "disadvantaged neighborhoods," or sometimes just "the community."

"Yet as we look at it today, we are troubled by the degree to which anti-rights people attack our ability and our freedoms with myths, hoaxes and nonsense."

Those deaths and news suppression are proof positive that black lives don't matter — to the media and political class. The so-called "news" coverage simply supports the bogus narrative that guns are evil. The man currently in the White House has said so.

It defies logic. One million Americans dead from the Coronavirus don't count. Nuclear-armed Russia and China aggressively acting globally don't count. We're spending billions we don't have, on things we can't rationally justify or find in the Constitution, that don't count. Schools teaching children Marxism and convincing youngsters they're not really boys and girls don't count. I haven't even gotten up to the myths referred to in this column's opening quote. And I'm running out of space.

Carrying Myth Water

I've repeatedly documented the gun myths anti-rights people have used to denigrate, deny and revoke the rights we have. Their whole position requires mythology.

Even worse than that are the hoaxes perpetrated on the entire public by mass media and politicians, and as I said in the last column, all politics is gun politics. Our gun rights are assaulted by weakening the fabric of America with anti-gun lies and political correctness falsehoods.

This bears mentioning again, a topic I've needed to cover more than once: If political proposals would weaken or reduce your freedoms, you must reject them outright. Review proposed legislation through that lens.

Another awful hoax: When politicians brag arrests are down, that doesn't mean crime is down. It means fewer cops are working, making fewer arrests, letting perps go, looking the other way, and afraid to act because they might be called names or sued.

The White House hoax office across the street — a theatrical stage made to look like the White House, so the addled man in the Oval Office can be coached for good delivery — is the source of more nonsense about guns, politics and life than you can measure. It doesn't stop there.



Award-winning author Alan Korwin has written 14 books, 10 of them on gun law, and has advocated for gun rights for nearly three decades. See his work or reach him at GunLaws.com.



Walther PPs, .22 LR (left) and .32 ACP (right). Roy started with the .32 then discovered the joys of the twin in .22. Finish is Robar's NP3 on the .22.

A LITTLE BIG GUN: WALTHER'S PP .22

I'm a firm believer in .22 autos like the classic Rugers, Browning Buckmarks and modern models like S&W's "Victory" .22s introduced a few years ago. I've owned and shot all of them extensively. They're all accurate, reliable and most work very neatly with a scope or red dot mounted. But none of them are what I'd call compact pistols.

At the other end of the spectrum are guns like Ruger's newer LCP II .22 LR, Beretta's 21A .22 LR and their kin. All are true pocket pistols and are highly concealable and fun to shoot but aren't the best trail or "tractor" guns.

It wasn't until a happy coincidence I had in the middle 1980s I realized there was another category of personal .22 auto I call "Little Big Guns." I'd long been a fan of the Walther PP series, especially in .32 ACP. In the late 1970s, I picked up a nice, clean PP in .32 ACP and enjoyed it a great deal. I bought and later sold several PPK/s guns in .380 because I just found them not nearly as accurate as that PP .32 and not nearly as fun to shoot. They were snappy, and unless you really kept them clean and paid close attention to your grip, locked wrist and ammo, they tended to malfunction now and again. The little PP .32 ran like the proverbial three-year-old toward the candy counter and the almost nonexistent recoil and "shoot the jackrabbit at 30 yards" accuracy spelled sheer delight in the field.

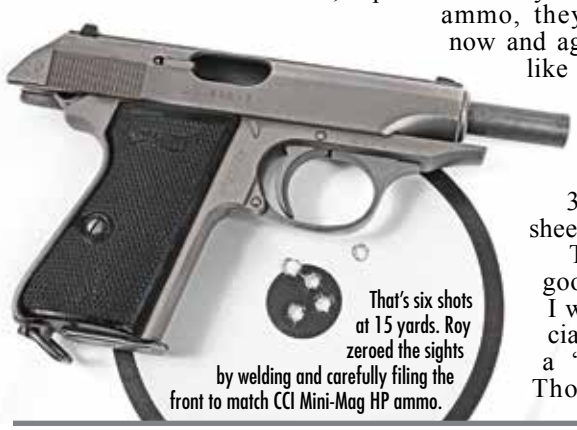


Take down on the .22 is classic Walther PP series.



Can't find a PP in .22 LR? Nose around, and you'll likely find a good deal on a classic Beretta Model 71 in .22 LR, about the same size.

Then I got to handle a good friend's PP in .22 LR. I was smitten instantly, especially when I realized it had a "Duraluminum" frame. Those Germans knew what they were doing. But alas, not only are those models rare, they're dear too. Can you say thousands? Then that coincidence occurred.



That's six shots at 15 yards. Roy zeroed the sights by welding and carefully filing the front to match CCI Mini-Mag HP ammo.

Import Dreams

If you remember the old *Shotgun News,* it was a newspaper format newsprint monthly chock full of great gun deals, surplus goodies, ammo and sundry other such wonderfulness at often tantalizing prices. I always zeroed in on the surplus stuff, and when my latest issue arrived right after seeing that Duraluminum gun, an ad jumped out at me. "Surplus Walther PP pistols in .22 LR. Limited numbers, so order fast!" These were all

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