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# GUNS

MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 2010

Vol. 56, Number 10, 659th Issue



## ON THE COVER

**TRAIL BUSTIN'  
POWER**

Smith & Wesson's  
Model 629 Big-bore  
Personal Protection  
.44 Magnum

**STORY:**

John Taffin

**PHOTOS:**

Joseph R. Novelozo

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## COLUMNS

6 **CROSSFIRE**  
*Letters to the Editor*

8 **SHOTGUNNER**  
HOLT BODINSON

12 **RANGING SHOTS™**  
CLINT SMITH

14 **RIFLEMAN**  
DAVE ANDERSON

16 **OPTICS**  
JACOB GOTTFREDSON

18 **MONTANA MUSINGS**  
MIKE "DUKE" VENTURINO

22 **HANDLOADING**  
JOHN BARSNESS

24 **HANDGUNS**  
MASSAD AYOUB

26 **GUNSMITHING**  
HAMILTON S. BOWEN

58 **VIEWS, NEWS & REVIEWS**  
*RIGHTS WATCH:* DAVID CODREA

78 **ODD ANGRY SHOT**  
JOHN CONNOR

82 **CAMPFIRE TALES**  
JOHN TAFFIN

## DEPARTMENTS

28 **SURPLUS LOCKER™**  
HOLT BODINSON

30 **OUT OF THE BOX™**  
• *BOB DOZIER'S NEW FOLDERS*

32 **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**  
JEFF JOHN

66 **QUARTERMASTER**  
*FEATURING GUNS ALLSTARS!*  
**THIS MONTH:**

• JOHN CONNOR  
• JUSTIN CARROLL

70 **NEW PRODUCTS**

72 **CATALOG SHOWCASE**

75 **GUNS CLASSIFIEDS**

75 **CUSTOM CORNER**

76 **GUN OF THE MONTH**  
*KIMBER 84L .30-06,  
REDFIELD 4-12X SCOPE*

80 **ADVERTISER INDEX**

12



GA Precision's FBI HRT.

22



The truth about short magnums.

30



Bob Dozier's new folders.

28



SIG's sensational Model 556.



76

PHOTO: JOSEPH R. NOVELOZO

## GUNS MAGAZINE GUN OF THE MONTH

**KIMBER 84L .30-06, REDFIELD 4-12X SCOPE  
TICHBOURNE RIVERBOAT GAMBLER BOWIE AND  
BENCHMADE BONE COLLECTOR KNIFE!**

34

### TESTING RIFLE SCOPES

There's a lot you can do before squeezing the trigger.

JOHN BARSNESS

40

### TRAIL BUSTIN' POWER

Smith & Wesson's Model 629 Big-Bore Personal Protection .44 Magnum.

JOHN TAFFIN

46

### A TRACTOR RIFLE

Or is it? This project turned out so nice it might not stay on duty.

HAMILTON S. BOWEN

52

### GUNS OF THE PACIFIC

HBO chronicles the WWII island battles against the Japanese.

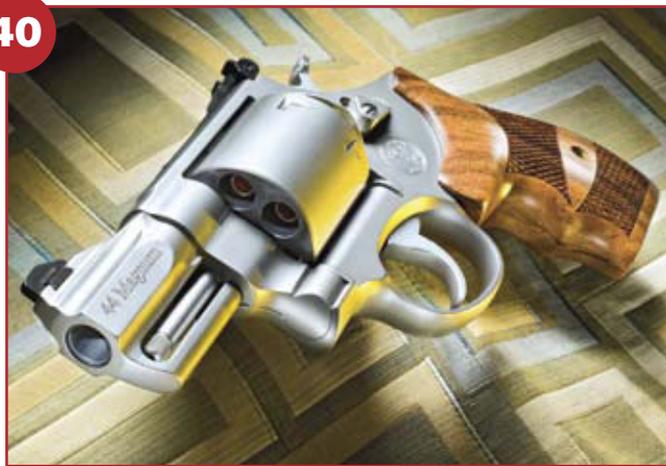
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40



52



FEATURES

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GUNS MAGAZINE  
AUGUST 2010

# CROSSFIRE

## LETTERS TO GUNS

GUNS Magazine® welcomes letters to the editor. We reserve the right to edit all published letters for clarity and length. Due to the volume of mail, we are unable to individually answer your letters or e-mail. In sending a letter to GUNS Magazine, you agree to provide Publisher's Development Corp. such copyright as is required for publishing and redistributing the contents of your letter in any format. Send your letters to Crossfire, GUNS Magazine, 12345 World Trade Dr., San Diego, CA 92128; www.gunsmagazine.com; e-mail: ed@gunsmagazine.com

### Glasses

I remember Duke writing he had his eye doctor adjust his glasses for shooting. It seemed like a good idea to me, so I took a gun to my eye appointment and showed the doc how I held the gun and asked for a separate pair of glasses for shooting.

Wow, when I got them what a great sight picture. I don't remember sights ever looking that good and I have worn glasses all of my life. There was only one problem: at 20' and greater distance, there was no target, a 6" black bull's-eye at 25' could not be seen with my new glasses. I guess my doc wasn't as smart as Duke's.

Shooting Times used to be my favorite, and one of the things I liked about it was you could read it front to back and the story was always continued on the next page, not way in the back.

Tell Connor he doesn't get a raise until we get to see a picture of his wife.

Michael A. Fitz  
Portland, Oregon

*You might consider bi-focals next time with the closer focus portion above the distance part. That way you can stand facing the target and just tilt your head down to focus on the sights. I know new glasses are expensive, so in the meantime, you might just try a Merit Optical Device on your regular glasses. It attaches with a suction cup and the adjustable aperture will help you achieve a greater depth of field. Contact them at Merit Corporation, P.O. Box 9044, Schenectady, NY 12309, (518) 346-1420, www.meritcorporation.com.*  
—Editor

### Likes Connor

You sure have some screwballs reading your magazine. (Hey, I don't blame you for taking their money, just don't publish their letters). I refer to the one knocking John Connor. The all-too-short Connor articles are

worth the price of your magazine, let alone the many pages of great interest that accompany it.

Yeah, Mr. Connor should be the first article. Keep it going Mr. Connor. You da man!

Robert L. Mead  
Menifee, California

Mr. Connor's article in the August issue is superb! Those who have not served usually have a hard time understanding articles of this type. As a retired Navy CPO, (1955-1974) I was quite emotional while reading this. How could it be better said? Our troops are beautiful people, profanity and all. They are proud, willing, courageous and quite intelligent. Some may not agree, but I see this article as a major part of the magazine. Thank you John.

Tom Dunn ADJC USN, Retired  
via e-mail

### Likes All Of It

I just received my first copy today and I have to tell you it is the best mag I've read in a long time. I could not put it down! The articles are first rate and just the right amount of advertisement. I wish I heard of you a long time ago. Keep up the good work and I'll be your customer for a long time.

Rich Kierstein  
Benton, Kentucky

### Wishes

I have a little early Christmas wish-list addition. Either the .221 Fireball or the FN 5.7x28mm in Ruger's 77/22 Hornet platform or Remington's 541S reborn with a slightly larger action and a metal magazine. Both would make great varmint calibers and both companies make great firearms.

Michael Elliott  
via e-mail



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**C**igarillo-sized shells and little .410 bores have fascinated me over a lifetime of hunting and shooting. With its dinky payloads of shot, the .410 is controversial, of course, and its very mention during a gathering of shotgunners is about as good a way to stir up a heated debate on shotgun performance and efficiency as I know. Yet, this mild mannered little shell has been the introduction for hundreds of thousands, nay, millions, of novices to the shotgun sports.

More experienced shooters are savvy enough to fully appreciate the .410's qualities and limitations. A .410 with a properly choked barrel is lightweight, a joy to carry in upland covers for rabbits and small birds over point and a challenging master on the skeet field. And for an afternoon of family fun, I can't think of a better combination than a carton of hand-tossed clays and a .410 shotgun.

Today's .410 is not yesterday's .410. What crimped the .410's reputation for many years were the lack of advances in both ammunition and shotguns. The .410 shell is noted for some rather special and distinct characteristics. First, it operates at unusually higher pressures. The maximum chamber pressure permissible in the standard 12-gauge, 3" Magnum shell is 11,500 psi. In the 2-1/2" .410 shell, pressure is 12,500 psi and in the 3" shell, 13,500 psi. Secondly, in spite of its tiny .410 bore (actually a 67 gauge) and its light 1/2-, 11/16- and 3/4-ounce payloads, fired patterns follow the standard rules of chokes for any gauge.

Contrary to urban legends, within its effective, efficient range, which I



The Sporting 410 comes with factory-upgraded walnut (above). Remington's Sporting 1100 .410 is among the modern smallbores offering screw-in choke tubes (below), increasing its usefulness afield.



peg at 25 to 30 yards on smaller game and birds, the .410 will produce similar size patterns to a 12-gauge choke-for-choke. The patterns from the .410 will be thinner, of course, because of the lighter shot charges.

There is one caveat to the equivalent size pattern rule, and it is rather unique to the .410. Pushing 1/2 to 3/4 ounce of shot down a .410 tube results in an unusually large number of slightly deformed pellets. The advent of plastic shot wads did wonders for the patterning qualities of the .410, but shot deformation, especially with the long shot columns inherent with the 11/16- and 3/4-ounce payloads in the 3" case, pellet deformation occurs.

Compared to those of the 12-gauge, .410 patterns, at 20 to 30 yards using the same size shot in both gauges, open up faster and are larger than those of the 12-gauge. Deformed shot simply spreads out to the fringes of the pattern quicker. Loading hard magnum shot in the .410 changes this calculus a bit for the better as well as shooting 2-1/2" shells with their shorter shot strings and higher velocities.

The most significant improvement in .410 guns has been the introduction of screw-in choke tubes. Until recently, most standard, single-barrel .410s

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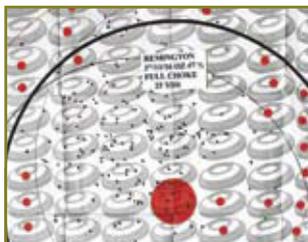


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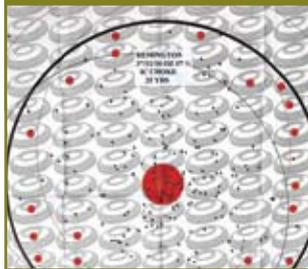
were choked full. It's amused me over the years how many svelte Winchester Model 42s you see in the field muzzled with big Lyman Cutts Compensators. Now that we have steel shot shells for the .410, which sell by the thousands down there in the flooded timber of Arkansas, a modern .410 with interchangeable choke tubes makes more sense than ever. If you really want to extract the best from this small bore in the field and on the range, there is no better excuse for sneaking a new gun home than the availability of interchangeable choke tubes for the .410.

To my eye and hands, the nicest .410 autoloader available with interchangeable choke tubes is Remington's Model 1100 "Sporting" .410. Stocked in nicely figured American walnut with a 27" ventilated rib barrel chambered for 2-1/2" and 3" shells, the Sporting .410 is factory supplied with extended Briley choke tubes in Skeet, Improved Cylinder, Light Modified and Modified.

What endears me to Remington's 1100 Sporting .410 is not only its screw-in chokes, but also its overall length of 47" and weight of 6-1/4 pounds. The Remington is no wimpy, whippy, little .410. This model puts enough weight between your hands and enough barrel out front to smooth out your swings while generating enough momentum to ensure positive follow throughs. To me, the Sporting .410 is the optimum



At 25 yards, the .410, more often than not, favors an IC choke (bottom) over the Full choke tube purchased aftermarket from Briley (above).



autoloading package for placing thin .410 patterns smack on target. It's also a superb teaching tool, permitting the gunner to pattern a multitude of loads in a variety of chokes.

The two targets pictured here are typical and illustrate the stark difference in performance between a full choke and an improved cylinder tube in the Sporting .410 at the optimum range of 25 yards with a specific load. The patterning target is HunterJohn's excellent "Clay Pigeon" sheet featuring silhouettes of clays 4" in diameter and 2-1/4" high, just about the right size to represent

the body area of a dove or quail. The target is also overprinted with five, 30" circles, each slightly offset from the other, which makes circling your pattern for analysis a cinch.

The target load was Remington's 3" Express with 11/16 ounce of 7-1/2 shot. Ideally, three pellets are required for a kill. Inside their respective 30" circles, the Full choke killed 21 birds, the Improved Cylinder accounted for 28. The F choking resulted in 43 totally missed birds (red dots), the IC, only 28 and the F choking placed two pellets in only three birds, the IC in eight.

Conclusion? For this load in my Remington Sporting .410 at the effective range of 25 yards, the IC tube bettered the F choked tube consistently with five targets fired from each tube. Using another load, shot size or choke, the results could be entirely different. That's why interchangeable tubes and time spent at the patterning board are so important to good and humane shooting, particularly with the .410 bore.

Haven't tried an updated .410 lately? Models like Remington's Sporting .410 fitted with Briley tubes might just be a pleasant revelation for you and the family.

**GUNS**

**MODEL 1100 SPORTING**

**MAKER: REMINGTON ARMS  
870 REMINGTON DR.**

**P.O. BOX 700, MADISON, NC 27025  
(800) 243-9700, WWW.REMINGTON.COM**

**ACTION TYPE:** Semiauto

**GAUGE:** .410, 2-1/2" or 3"

**CHOKE TUBES**

**SUPPLIED:** SK, IC, LM, M

**CAPACITY:** 4

**BARREL LENGTH:** 27"

**OVERALL LENGTH:** 47-3/4"

**WEIGHT:** 6-1/4 pounds

**FINISH:** Blue

**SIGHTS:** Twin Bead

**STOCK:** Semi-fancy walnut

**LENGTH OF PULL:** 14"

**DROP AT COMB:** 1-1/2"

**DROP AT HEEL:** 2-1/2"

**PRICE:** \$1,105

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• CLINT SMITH •

## GA PRECISION'S FBI HRT A very special .308 Winchester rifle.

**T**he United States Federal Bureau of Investigation has a long history of defending this country from enemies foreign and domestic. Like everyone and every agency, they have passed through days filled with glory and other days that can pass none too soon.

Although it might be considered a small part of their work, some tasks require firearms to be a part of the tools of their trade. Historically, the types of people the FBI has to deal with—as in the 1986 Miami shooting—requires agents be able and willing to use firearms in the performance of their duties.

Today, while expending significant energy on high-tech criminal opponents, the FBI still steps up to the plate and accepts responsibilities for other types of situations often addressed by the military in other countries worldwide. These missions, roles or tasks may be arguably better suited—at least at first appearance—to the military but you gotta love America. We still remember the King was here, so we try to not have the military running around “fixing” broken stuff inside America proper—another arguable point for some.

All opinions aside, let us just say if there is a hostage thing similar to the Munich Olympic gig or the Iranian Princes Gate deal, there is a strong chance the FBI will show up probably dressed in the form of the Hostage Rescue Team.

The FBI Hostage Rescue Team, founded in the early 1980s, still serves today as a domestic response and resolution answer to terrorism in the form of hostage or high-risk situations. With the current ongoing war on terror, individual agents, who also often deploy overseas using skills helpful to other US units, allow them to gain additional personal skills.

Highly trained and cross-trained, the group has historically had access to a broad selection of state-of-the-art weapons to draw from and use over the years. I recently had the opportunity to access and shoot one of the newest weapons in the HRT arsenal.

I was not surprised at all when the FBI considered and then accepted the GA Precision rifle into the sniper role for HRT. Having personally used GA Precision rifles for a number of years, I can attest this choice will prove to be a good one. The HRT rifle was built on the Templar short action with a 1-piece fluted bolt. On top of the action, additional 20 minute-of-angle elevation bases in the form of a 1913 Picatinny rail are in place. The pipe is a No. 5 stainless steel 22" long Bartlein barrel with cut rifling of 1:11.2"



*The action of the GAP rifle showing enlarged, fluted bolt, detachable magazine and pistol grip stock. On top sits the Schmidt & Bender 4-16x50 PMII Mil Dot scope. The rifle comes with a Harris Bipod.*

twist that translates into a medium weight barrel chambered for the .308 Winchester. The end of the barrel has the SureFire 7.62 Suppressor mount system with adaptor and brake all in one package.

The rifle is pillar bedded in an olive-drab-colored McMillan A3-5 stock equipped with an adjustable cheekpiece and spacer systems for setting the length of pull for the individual shooter. Additionally, the stock is set up for the Harris bipod and four flush cups for the use of a TAB sling. The front end of the stock wears a Badger EFR mount for the PVS22 or 27-night vision system.

The rifle has the Badger Ordnance M-5 detachable magazine system capable of using 5- or 10-round magazines.

The rifle scope is the outstanding Schmidt Bender 4-16x50 glass with an illuminated Mil Dot reticle set up to adjust with centimeter increments.

### The Range

To the point, the rifle performed as GAP rifles always do. After the initial zero at our 5,000'-plus elevation, the rifle was shot from prone to 700 yards on steel targets with no effort using both the .308 Federal 168-grain Match and a small amount of the new Hornady 178-grain BTHP Match Superformance ammunition, which also shot very well. The rifle shot less than one MOA in my applications with both types of ammo. The Hornady 178-grain did not require as much elevation down range. I did not have

*The GA Precision FBI HRT rifle was fired out to 700 yards at the range.*

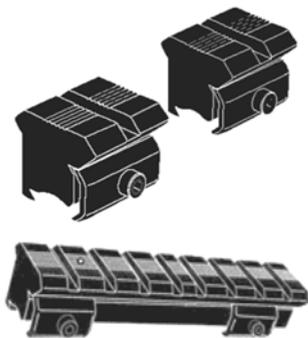


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## FBI HRT RIFLE

**MAKER: GA PRECISION**  
1141 SWIFT ST.  
NORTH KANSAS CITY, MO 64116  
(816) 221-1844  
[WWW.GAPRECISION.NET](http://WWW.GAPRECISION.NET)

<b>ACTION:</b>	Bolt action
<b>CALIBER:</b>	.308 Winchester
<b>CAPACITY:</b>	5 or 10
<b>BARREL LENGTH:</b>	22"
<b>OVERALL LENGTH:</b>	Nominal 40"
<b>FINISH:</b>	Olive Drab Cerakote
<b>SIGHTS:</b>	None, M1913 20 MOA rail
<b>STOCK:</b>	McMillan A3-5
<b>PRICE:</b>	\$4,000

## 4-16X50 PM II

**MAKER: SCHMIDT & BENDER**  
P.O. BOX 134  
438 WILLOW BROOK RD.  
MERIDEN, NH 03770  
(800) 468-3450  
[WWW.SCHMIDTBENDER.COM](http://WWW.SCHMIDTBENDER.COM)

<b>MAGNIFICATION:</b>	4X to 16X
<b>OBJECTIVE DIAMETER:</b>	50mm
<b>EYE RELIEF:</b>	3.3"
<b>INTERNAL ADJ.:</b>	56 MOA elevation
<b>CLICK VALUE:</b>	1cm
<b>TUBE DIAMETER:</b>	34mm
<b>OVERALL LENGTH:</b>	15.4"
<b>RETICLES:</b>	Mil Dot
<b>PRICE:</b>	\$3,000 (Approx.)

the SureFire suppressor, so I don't know how or in what manner the can will affect the rifle's accuracy. Also, I did not fire this rifle with the PVS optics in night or low-light environments. Having shot the suppression systems and PVS optics in question previously on other rifles, I have no reason to doubt the GAP rifle will perform in a very effective manner as might be required by the HRT shooters.

It is my understanding GA Precision has a version of this rifle available to the rifle shooting market should you want one. This rifle shot well and handled without flaw or incident. It might be a bit heavy for some people but weight and comfort are often an individual perception rather than a reality.

That said, one reality not in question is the GAP rifle is a wise choice for the FBI HRT and the rifle will be a rock solid performer. 

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# RIFLEMAN

• DAVE ANDERSON •

## GREAT GLASS

### Minox offers great binos and now great scopes.

**T**here's a new player in the field of premium binoculars: the Minox APO HG 8x43 made at Wetzlar, Germany. As with top-end binoculars from prestigious European makers such as Leica, Swarovski and Zeiss the concept of the APO series is to use the most up-to-date technology, make the best possible product and charge whatever it costs.

A good binocular is one of the good things in life, because it is so useful, used so much and, given reasonable care, lasts so long. It is worth stretching the budget for a binocular, more so than for even a rifle and scope.

Generally in big-game hunting you can expect to spend a couple of hours a day, sometimes much more, using the binocular. The rifle and scope may get used for a few seconds on the entire hunt—admittedly a few critical seconds in which they have to work, but reliability doesn't have to cost a fortune.

Moreover, once the hunt is over and the rifle has been cleaned and stored away, the binocular can still get a lot of use for spectator sports, camping, hiking, fishing, and watching birds and wildlife. At home, Simone and I always have a couple binoculars handy by the door and at the kitchen window for identifying birds at the feeders or wildlife in the yard (usually deer nibbling at the trees).

The Minox APO HG 8x43 gives full-size performance and mid-size weight. For hunting I prefer "mid-size" binoculars such as my old 8x30 Swarovski SLC, or the 8x32 Zeiss FL I borrowed for an African hunt. Another favorite is the Minox HG 8x33, a very sharp, compact glass, which was (and is) a great value.

I like this size mainly for their weight (in the 20- to 25-ounce range). They are heavy enough to hold steady while glassing, and light enough to stick inside the shirt while crawling or slithering on a stalk. For me at least, binoculars are like rifles in that "medium weight" works best. Too heavy is a nuisance, too light is hard to hold steady. In between is just right.

Bigger objective lenses of 40mm and more do provide advantages over smaller objectives. Field of view is often wider, edge resolution and low-



*The Minox APO HG 8x43 is a premium-grade binocular built to combine the brightness and field of view of a full-size binocular with the lighter weight of a mid-size. Built on a magnesium frame for strength and light weight, the APO series uses the best optical glass available, 21 layer multicoating, retractable eyecups and fast, close focusing.*

light performance better. A larger diameter objective means a larger central "sweet spot" where image quality is highest.

The top-line binoculars do offer other advantages. They use specially selected optical glass, highly developed lens coatings, tough exterior lens coatings. The purpose is to provide more accurate color transmission, better resolution in low-light conditions, greater resistance to dust, water and lens scratches.

Top-end binos use costly construction methods and materials, tough exterior lens coatings to resist scratches, and are better protected against moisture and shock.

The Minox APO, built on a tough, light magnesium chassis, combine the advantages of full-size 43mm objectives lenses and the weight—22.9 ounces—of a midsize. Other features are ones you'd expect of a premium binocular: phase coating, Schott ED fluoride glass, aspheric lens technology for better edge resolution, 21-layer M\* multicoating, hard external coatings to repel dust and

water, watertight seals (to 16.4') and argon gas filling.

Eyecups are click adjustable to four positions for customizing eye relief. Focusing is quick and precise, with a close-focus distance of 8.2'. Close focus is important to birders, though in hunting, once I'm 8.2' from the game, I'm looking for my knife.

Optical performance is outstanding and comparable to other premier makes. Putting full-size performance in a very tough binocular with the weight of a midsize is an impressive achievement. This is the closest I've seen to a perfect hunting binocular. Retail is more than \$2,100, but you should shop around for a deal.

The Minox riflescope line includes ZA5 models with a 5X variable range (2-10X, 3-15X, 4-20X). Being a conservative type I asked to borrow a more conventional ZA3 scope, a 3-9x40 with BDC reticle.

Minox riflescopes were designed in Germany and are assembled in the USA, using both US-manufactured and imported components. The glass is made by Schott AG of Mainz, Germany. Otto Schott, Ernst Abbe and Carl Zeiss founded Schott AG as part of an optical group in 1884. Today the company, which employs more than 17,000 people, is a division of the Carl Zeiss Foundation.



*The bright, sharp optics of the Minox ZA3 made it a pleasure to use in long shooting sessions at the range. The 1/4 MOA click adjustments were accurate and repeatable. The Minox is a premium scope and provides great performance for the cost.*

As one would expect, the optics are excellent with a sharp, bright image. I could use .22 cal. bullet holes as aiming points at 100 yards and .30-cal holes at 200. Low-light performance, including shooting toward the setting sun, was outstanding.

The ZA3 uses a quick-turn focusing eyepiece. It turns with solid precision, firmly enough it is not going to move in a gun case or scabbard. I very much like the BDC reticle, which has short additional horizontal wires for longer-range shots. A more conventional "Minoplex" reticle is also available.

The ZA3 has a conventional "American riflescope" appearance, and I mean that as high praise. It uses the American standard 1" main tube and the 3-9X range has been by far the most popular with American hunters for at least 50 years.

Adjustment turrets are centered in the long 5-9/16" straight portion of the tube, providing maximum flexibility for mounting on both short and long actions without the need of specialized extension rings. Adjustments are 1/4 MOA clicks and proved very accurate and repeatable, making a nearly perfect "box" at 100 yards.

I gave the ZA3 the usual tests for weatherproof integrity, submerging it in warm water (with turret caps removed) for 10 or 15 minutes and then deep freezing it overnight. There were no fogging or other problems. Minox uses high-quality seals and argon gas purging to ensure resistance to moisture and fogging.

This is an exceptionally fine hunting scope. I currently see it priced right around \$400 on various optical websites. At that price point, I think it is an excellent value for the quality received. Minox has a very good lifetime no-fault warranty, which covers most anything other than fire, theft, loss or intentional damage. **GUNS**

#### ZA3 3-9X40

**MAKER: MINOX USA INC.**  
438 WILLOW BROOK RD.  
MERIDEN, NH 03770  
(603) 469-3080, WWW.MINOX.COM

**OBJECTIVE LENS:** 40mm

**MAGNIFICATION:** 3X to 9X

**EYE RELIEF:** 4"

**CLICK ADJUSTMENTS:** 1/4 MOA

**ADJUSTMENT RANGE:** 60 MOA elevation and windage

**TUBE DIAMETER:** 1"

**OVERALL LENGTH:** 12-3/16"

**WEIGHT:** 12.8 ounces

**RETICLES:** Minoplex, Minox BDC

**PRICE:** \$419

#### APO HG 8X43 BR

**MAKER: MINOX USA INC.**  
438 WILLOW BROOK RD.  
MERIDEN, NH 03770  
(603) 469-3080, WWW.MINOX.COM

**MAGNIFICATION:** 8X

**OBJECTIVE LENS:** 43mm

**FIELD OF VIEW:** 379' @ 1,000 yards

**EYE RELIEF:** .76"

**CLOSEST FOCUS:** 8.2'

**DIMENSIONS:** 2.08" x 5.15" x 6.02"

**WEIGHT:** 22.9 ounces

**WATERPROOF:** 16.4'

**PRICE:** \$2,179

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# OPTICS

• JACOB GOTTFREDSON •

## USING HOLDOVER BARS Quickly now.

**S**ometime back I asked friends how they would use holdover bars to make an extremely quick determination of which holdover bar to use. It was a quiz of sorts. Since they didn't respond with an answer, I thought I'd better go ahead and provide it here.

Over the past 15 years, the industry has gone from the simple plex reticle to a reticle with bars on the vertical crosshair below the main, horizontal crosshair. Some have them above and some have them on the horizontal crosshair as well. The explosion on this theme by manufacturers has begun to make my eyes go crossed. Dots, circles, bars, upside down Christmas trees, asymptotic curves. The list goes on.

For anyone shooting at targets or animals, the bars are a tremendous help in determining range, holding off for wind, and knowing rather than guessing holdover to make first round hits. You simply determine ahead of time where each bar, or dot, etc. reflects the point of impact of the bullet at some range.

For simplicity's sake, let's assume you see an elk at rather long distance and you decide to use the bars to range the animal. You decide the target's chest area is 24" tall. You put the main

horizontal crosshair on the top of the target and then count down the number of bars to the bottom of the target. You happen to be using a 7mm SAUM with 140-grain Barnes Triple Shock bullets and a Nightforce scope with their NP-R2 reticle. Assume each bar in my example subtends 2" at 100 yards (see side bar). You note bar number 2 is exactly at the bottom of the target. In your head you figure  $24" \div (2" \text{ per bar} \times 2 \text{ bars}) = 600 \text{ yards}$ . Since each bar subtends 2" at 100 yards, the second bar down from the main horizontal crosshair is  $2" + 2" = 4"$ , and  $24" \div 4" = 6 \times 100 = 600 \text{ yards}$ .

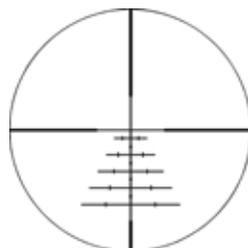
You know from your ballistic software and from shooting on the range if you put

bar number 6, for example, it will be a holdover of 10" at 100 yards and will result in a hit at 600 yards. You fire and hit the elk in the kill zone. Down he goes and the winter is spent showing off his horns and enjoying your favorite elk recipe. Life is good!

There are three basic premises in all this. 1) You had a very good rest that allowed you to hold the rifle steady while you ranged and shot. 2) The animal was obliging enough to stand still while you accomplished number one. 3) There was sufficient time.

That is the concept behind the development of holdover bars. It has been the basic methodology

used by the Military for generations in their mil dot scopes. Instead of each bar subtending 2" at 100 yards, they subtend 3.6". It makes the math a bit more cumbersome, and in some cases ranging is more difficult because of the distance between each dot. The size of the dot often covers the target entirely, which gave rise to Leupold's TMR, Valdada's MP-8, Schmidt & Bender, and others with slim bars instead of dots. But the basic idea is identical.



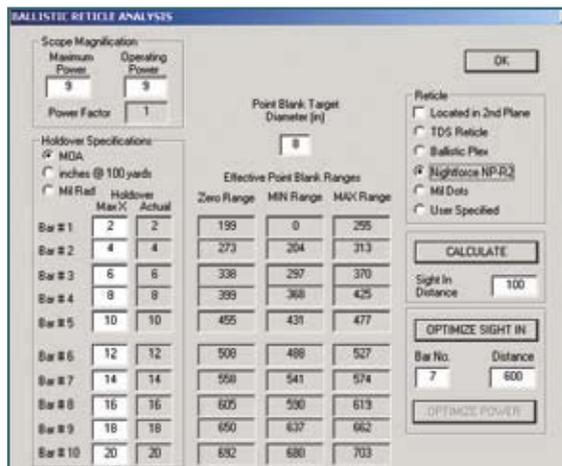
**This is the new BRX reticle from Swarovski. Instead of placing the bars at even increments of subtension, they use a method of ballistic curves, thus, the bar subtension is something like 1.8", 5.4", 9", 12.6" and 16.2". That still fits the method of solution presented here, as does any style of bars, circles, dots, or whatever. You only need to know the subtension at 100 yards of each line crossing the main vertical crosshair.**

Snipers often use another technique. Once situated in a stand or hide, they map the area in front of them and then range several objects. When something appears, they already have the distance and either dial for it or use the bars or dots for holdover.

But suppose the target doesn't wait around while you do all that. Suppose the target is a royal majestic bull you paid dearly to find and take. Suppose you suddenly

spot him on the way back to camp. That is a lot of supposing, but not uncommon. He is about to go into the trees, and you realize you'll never see him or another like him as long as you live. There is no time for a rangefinder, no time for a solid rest. You have to determine the range and the bar to use in the next four seconds and fire in the following two seconds. As a second difficulty (quiz), let's assume the animal is at an angle of about 20 degrees up or down. We will leave that one for a moment.

The solution to both problems begins at home, first with some thinking, second with some playing with your favorite ballistics program, and finally with some time on the range. In a nutshell, here is how it works. Your bull elk is approximately 28" deep just behind the shoulder (don't get too fixated on an elk. This will work for any animal). You



Bar #	Holdover Specifications		Effective Point Blank Ranges		
	Max X	Actual	Zero Range	MIN Range	MAX Range
Bar #1	2	2	199	0	295
Bar #2	4	4	273	204	313
Bar #3	6	6	338	297	370
Bar #4	8	8	399	368	425
Bar #5	10	10	455	431	477
Bar #6	12	12	509	488	527
Bar #7	14	14	558	541	574
Bar #8	16	16	605	590	613
Bar #9	18	18	650	637	662
Bar #10	20	20	692	680	703

**The Exbal program from www.Perry-Systems.com calculates the zero of each bar (for any configuration of bars). It also tells you the low hit and the high hit for any kill zone you pick. In this example, Jacob picked an 8" kill zone. The software calculates the numbers as shown. The table is for a .308 Winchester, 175-grain bullet at standard environmental conditions.**

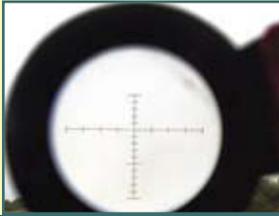
# CURVE BALL

I have used Nightforce's NP-R2 Reticle for simplicity because their bars subtend the same amount from bar to bar. Some manufacturer's reticle bars subtend in inches, some in mils. Nightforce, however, subtends in MOA.

To simplify the explanation, I used inches for Nightforce's bar subtension. Thus to range a target or animal 24" deep, I used the formula:  $24" \div (2" \times 2 \text{ bars}) = 6 \times 100 = 600$  yards. However, MOA is inches times 1.047". So the true formula for the Nightforce NP-R2 reticle is  $24" \div (2" \times 1.047" \times 2 \text{ bars}) = 5.73 \times 100 = 573$  yards. The difference of  $600 - 573 = 27$  yards, which would produce a miss.

As you can see, working in MOA makes the math more difficult to do in your head—also true for mil dots, which use 3.6" sub tension at 100 yards for each dot.

People often think MOA is so close to inches it is not important. The use of MOA is sound and is a function of angular increments of a circle. However, the hunter is much more used to inches in his head than he is inches times 1.047. It



*For the example in this article, I have used Nightforce's NP-R2 reticle. Each bar subtends 2 MOA at 100 yards. Each 5th bar is wider, which helps make the counting faster. The horizontal bars subtend 5 MOA at 100 yards. The NP-R1 puts additional bars at the half points.*

does not matter much at short distances, but, as we can see, it resulted in a miss of 27 yards in thinking the target was at 600 yards vs. 573 yards.

We often tend to cross-reference between mils, MOA and inches. Wait until you happen to go hunting with a trained sniper. You are about to bust an animal with your rifle whose bars are increasing incremental bars like the Swarovski BRX or the Zeiss RZ800 and he gives you a call of "2.6 mils elevation, 1.5 mils left windage." The guy next to him uses the Nightforce NP-R2 reticle and cries out, "8.9 MOA elevation and 5.6 MOA windage." You look at your bars and have no earthly idea what their calls mean.

An easy way to get around the 1.047 MOA per inch is to think in terms of the 5-percent error, using 10 percent as a tool. For example,  $24" \div (2" \times 2 \text{ bars}) = 600$  yards minus 60 yards, half of which is 30 yards and 600 minus 30 yards is 570. At least your estimation of range is a lot closer and a lot easier to compute in your head. Yet, what if the target is 2.8 bars down? Then  $24" \div (2.8" \times 2 \text{ bars}) = 24" \div 5.6$ . Again the math is a bit difficult to do quickly in your head. Better keep the batteries fresh in your rangefinder. **GUNS**

quickly see the elk is between the main horizontal crosshair and just less than the 6th bar. Using the main horizontal crosshair will result in a hit in the kill zone. If he is between the main horizontal crosshair and the 5th bar, using the 2nd bar below the main horizontal crosshair will result in a hit in the kill zone. If he is between the main horizontal crosshair and the 4th bar, using the 3rd bar below the main horizontal crosshair will result in a hit in the kill zone and so on. That's just an example. It must be worked out for whichever style of reticle you have and the bullet's flight path.

Normally we would be working for an exact hit, given enough time. Here we simply want to place a bullet anywhere in the kill zone. If we assume a 10" kill zone, we want the bullet somewhere in that circle. If the animal subtends more than the 3rd bar but a bit less than the 4th bar, say 3-3/4 bars we know he is somewhere between  $28" \div (2 \times 3.5) = 400$  yards, and  $28" \div (2 \times 4) = 350$  yards. We know bar number three will put a bullet's zero at 338 yards. And we know the bullet in this case will be slightly above or slightly below that zero but still in the 10" kill

zone. For an 8" kill zone that would be a 338-yard zero, but still be in that kill zone from 297 yards to 370 yards.

You can train yourself to do this quickly. For example, for an elk with a chest approximately 28" deep and using the 7mm SAUM as described above:

- Between bar 6 and bar 5, use main crosshair
- Between bar 5 and bar 4, use bar 2
- Between bar 4 and bar 3, use bar 3
- Between bar 3 and bar 2, use bar 5

This does not mean the animal is perfectly still or you have a great rest. It just requires you have the short amount of time it requires to determine between which bars his body fits.

If the animal is at an inclined angle as great as 20 degrees up or down, and by again studying the ballistic software, you get a sense of which bar to use. For example, if the range indicates bar 4, simply move to bar 3. It is not exactly that simple, but close and will be reserved for another article.

With a little thought, running through your ballistic software, and studying your particular reticle system, you will begin to get a sense of all this and which bar to use in each situation quickly. **GUNS**

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## SHARPS RIFLE TERMS & CARTRIDGES

### Setting the record straight.

**R**ecently, in another major gun magazine, a writer described a Sharps Model 1874 rifle as having "double locking bolts." That has gotten many laughs from the knowledgeable because a Sharps Model 1874 doesn't have *any* "locking bolts." So for this column I'm going to do a brief primer of Sharps' rifle terminology and some details on the cartridges for which that fabulous old "buffalo rifle" was chambered.

The many designations the Sharps Rifle Company assigned to their Model 1874s stemmed from differences in their basic configurations. These encompassed differing lengths and weight of barrels and also full-round, half-round/half octagon, and full-octagon shaped barrels. Their stocks could be with crescent, rifle, or shotgun buttplates and with straight grips or pistol grips. All their actions were essentially the same, but there were minor differences, as I will talk of shortly.

The varying Model 1874 configurations were named Sporting Rifle, Mid-Range Rifle, Schuetzen Rifle, Hunter's Rifle, Business Rifle, Long Range Rifle, Creedmoor, Military Rifle and Carbine. Space won't allow a complete description of each style but be sure of this fact. In the 1870s, the Sharps Rifle Company was almost a custom shop so there is much variation due to individuals ordering their idea of the perfect rifle. For instance, Sharps Model 1874 Sporting rifles are known to have been ordered with barrels as

short as 21.5", as long as 36" with total rifle weight running from 7 to 25 pounds. Stocks could have crescent, rifle or shotgun style of buttplate with straight or pistol grip and either single trigger or the double-set trigger arrangement. And they could be mixed in combinations of those features.

The company also had some odd ideas about sighting equipment. A standard Sporting Rifle, Hunter's Rifle or Business Rifle had Lawrence-style rear barrel sight with a silver blade front. But they were drilled and tapped on their tangs for peep sight mounting. Long Range, Creedmoor and Mid-Range target rifles rarely had a barrel mounted rear sight but did have tang mounted peep sights. But, (and this is a big *but*) those peep sights had a totally different screw spacing and spring system than the ones used on Sporting Rifles. Then to confuse matters even more, Military Rifles and Carbines did not have their tangs drilled and tapped for mounting either sort of peep sight.

An uninitiated person would be confused if



*This modern Sharps Model 1874 reproduction by C. Sharps Arms Company of Big Timber, Montana, is shown with a schnable tip forearm installed, and with a pewter tip forearm beside it.*

hearing Sharps rifle owners asking one another if their rifles had "the tulip" or a "Hartford collar." Both terms regard where the barrel joins the receiver. When the Sharps factory was located in Hartford, Conn., most rifles had a machined ring at that juncture. During the transition to and after the factory was moved to Bridgeport, Conn. that changed to a flare, which has come to be known to collectors as "the tulip." There were also pewter fore-end tips and schnable types, and both could be had when the rifles were made in either city, although pewter ones predominated from Hartford and schnable ones from Bridgeport.

### Transition To Cartridge

And let's not forget "conversions." By the 1870s there were thousands of obsolete percussion Sharps carbines floating around. Many gunsmiths converted them to fire metallic cartridges. The factory also did likewise both for the US Government and later for commercial enterprises. Those



*These four original cartridges represent the four bore sizes for which the Sharps Rifle Company made rifles. From left: .40 2-5/8" case, .44 2-1/4" case, .45 2-1/10" case and .50 1-3/4" case.*



*This rifle appears to be a standard Sharps Model 1874 Sporting Rifle, but it is actually a Sharps Factory Conversion of an earlier percussion carbine.*

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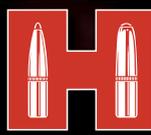
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### SHARPS RIFLE COMPANY CARTRIDGES

ORIGINAL DESIGNATION	MODERN NAME
.40 1-11/16" SBN	.40-50 SBN
.40 2-1/4" SBN	.40-70 SBN
.40 2-5/8" SBN	.40-90 SBN
.40 1-7/8" SS	.40-50 SS
.40 2-1/2" SS	.40-70 SS
.44 1-7/8"	.44-60
.44 2-1/4"	.44-77
.44 2-5/8"	.44-90
.45 2-1/10"	.45-70
.45 2-4/10"	.45-90
.45 2-6/10"	.45-100
.45 2-7/8"	.45-110
.50 1-3/4"	.50-70 Gov't
.50 2"	No Modern Name
.50 2-1/2"	.50-90

latter ones are called Model 1874 Factory Conversions. I have one and it is a great rifle. They were a bargain to buyers in the late 1870s costing about \$20 when a regular Model 1874 of the same caliber and configuration would have been about \$38.

Now come Sharps cartridges, and there is much confusion with them. First off, the Sharps Rifle Company never termed their cartridges things like .45-70 or .50-90. They listed them by caliber and case length. Therefore what we know as .45-70 was to them .45 2-1/10" and .50-90 was .50 2-1/2".

Sharps Model 1874 rifles were made in four bore sizes: .40, .44, .45 and .50. The rifles were so stamped. The .40s could be had with either straight or bottleneck chambers and then their cartridges were labeled SBN or SS for Sharps Bottleneck or Sharps Straight. Case lengths for the bottleneck rounds were 1-11/16", 2-1/4" and 2-5/8". For the straight cases they were 1-7/8" and 2-1/2". In .44 there were only bottleneck cases of 1-7/8", 2-1/4" and 2-5/8" In .45 there were only straight cases of 2-1/10", 2-4/10", 2-6/10" and 2-7/8". Likewise, only straight cases were offered in .50 with cases lengths being 1-3/4", 2" and 2-1/2". I've put a little chart of Sharps cartridges and their modern names at the end.

Some rifles were marked with the case length upside down on one of the barrel's octagon flats. Others were not marked for case length at all, only with the bore diameter on top of the barrel just ahead of the action.

And finally here's one thing I like to stress about Sharps Model 1874s. I say they should be noted as the most famous firearm with the least produced. Counting all the configurations there were only about 12,000 made between their introduction in 1871 (yes—1871 not 1874!) and 1880 when the company closed its doors.

GUNS

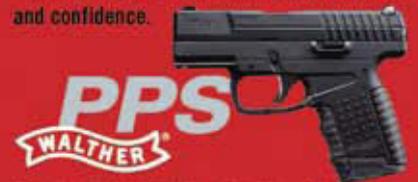


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# HANDLOADING

• JOHN BARSNESS •

## THE TRUTH ABOUT SHORT MAGNUMS And some new powders for loading same.

**I**t's been a decade since the Winchester Short Magnums (WSMs) and Remington Short Action Ultra Magnums (SAUMs) showed up to beguile the average shooter into tossing aside his old 20th-century magnum. There were three main advantages claimed for these short, fat, beltless (SFBL) magnums, according to the advertising hype.

The new rounds burned powder more "efficiently," due to their short cases, so the same ballistics could be achieved with less powder, resulting in lighter recoil. The SFBLs were also more accurate, since the powder burned more consistently. Because they fit in shorter actions, hunters could easily climb higher mountains and stalk thicker cover, because the rifles would be lighter and handier.

As with most advertising, these claims turned out to be "not exactly."

When ammunition is tested for pressure, more than just average pressure enters into the equation. The pressure of individual rounds also isn't allowed to rise over a certain level. The SFBLs do burn powder more

consistently, and this does allow the average pressure of their ammunition to be a little higher than with those old-fashioned belted magnums. The consistent pressure of SFBL rounds allow the level of the safe average pressure to be a little higher.

For instance, the average pressure allowed by SAAMI for the .300 WSM is 65,000 psi, while the average pressure allowed for the .300 Winchester Magnum is 64,000. That may not sound like much, and it isn't. It's also the reason the .300 WSM, contrary to advertising hype, can't match .300 Winchester Magnum ballistics, because the .300 Winchester has more powder capacity. As somebody once said in regard to gasoline engines, "there's

no replacement for displacement." The same principle applies to rifle cartridges: More powder room is the only way to get more speed at equal pressures.

This also relates to the real reason some people believe rifles chambered for the SFBL's recoil less than larger belted magnums: Their ballistics don't quite match those of larger cartridges. Plus, if by some chance the muzzle velocity of an SFBL is the same as that of a belted cartridge, recoil is indistinguishable. This is basic Newtonian physics.

But the SFBLs do burn powder more consistently than longer cases, so do indeed have more potential for accuracy. Bob Nosler tells me the Nosler ballistic lab used to use the .308 Winchester for accuracy testing of lighter .30 caliber bullets, and either the .30-06 or .300 Winchester Magnum for testing heavier .30-caliber bullets. These days Nosler just uses the .300 WSM for all their accuracy testing.

However, that's with a heavy, top-grade barrel, shooting on an indoor range. In factory-made hunting rifles any accuracy advantage is more elusive. My .300 WSM is a newer FN-made Winchester Model 70, a 2008 Limited Edition with fancy wood. It is very accurate, but no more accurate than my .300 Winchester Magnum, a Heym SR-21. Similarly, my 7mm SAUM, a stainless/synthetic Remington 700 BDL, is also very accurate, but still doesn't shoot any better than a synthetic 700 ADL in 7mm Remington Magnum I owned a few years ago. The 7mm SAUM, by the way, gets just about exactly the same ballistics as the .280 Remington Ackley Improved, because the 7mm SAUM and .280 Ackley have just about exactly the same powder capacity.

As for the shorter, lighter rifle advantage of the SFBLs, the average "short" action, whether a Remington 700 or Winchester Model 70, is less than an inch shorter and only 3 or 4 ounces lighter than a long action of the same make. This is why both of my SFBL rifles weigh more than 8 pounds scoped and, with their 24" barrels, are just slightly shorter than a "normal" rifle. In the real world this makes no difference at all.



*Theoretically, rifles chambered for the short, fat, beltless magnums are lighter and kick less than "normal" magnum rifles (above), but, in reality, the difference is so tiny it doesn't exist. The two test rifles (below) are an FN-made Winchester Model 70 in .300 WSM and a Remington Model 700 BDL in 7mm SAUM.*



**.300 WSM HANDLOADED AMMO PERFORMANCE. GUN: WINCHESTER MODEL 70, 24"**

BULLET (BRAND, BULLET WEIGHT, TYPE)	POWDER (BRAND)	CHARGE (GRAINS WEIGHT)	VELOCITY (FPS)	GROUP SIZE (INCHES)
NOSLER 150 BALLISTIC TIP	RL-17	69.0	3,347	.56
SIERRA 180 GAMEKING	RL-17	66.0	3,078	1.94
SIERRA 180 GAMEKING	Hunter	68.5	3,026	.57
NOSLER 200 PARTITION	H4831SC	67.0	2,887	.98

**7MM SAUM HANDLOADED AMMO PERFORMANCE. GUN: REMINGTON 700, 24"**

BULLET (BRAND, BULLET WEIGHT, TYPE)	POWDER (BRAND)	CHARGE (GRAINS WEIGHT)	VELOCITY (FPS)	GROUP SIZE (INCHES)
HORNADY 139 SPIRE POINT	H4350	60.0	3,152	.49
HORNADY 139 SPIRE POINT	H100V	62.0	3,285	.69
SIERRA 160 GAMEKING	RL-25	66.0	3,044	.87
SIERRA 160 GAMEKING	Magnum	68.0	3,036	.93
NOSLER 175 PARTITION	RL-22	59.0	2,872	1.44

Similarly, there really isn't all that much difference between handloading for the SFBLs and "normal" cartridges. One of the supposed problems of handloading SFBLs is a lack of powder space. This has caused some people to claim somehow the SFBLs won't work with long, heavy spitzers due to the base of the bullet taking up too much powder room. This is even suggested in more than one handloading manual.

Well, there's a simple formula that predicts the velocity any cartridge should achieve with any bullet weight, as long as we know the potential velocity with another bullet weight:

- 1) Add the two bullet weights together.
- 2) Divide this number by two.
- 3) Multiply the answer by the velocity of the known bullet weight.

As an example, let's use a well-known cartridge, the .270 Winchester, and predict the potential muzzle velocity of 150-grain bullet from a 130-grain bullet at 3,100 fps:

- 1)  $130+150 \div 2 = 140$
- 2)  $140 \div 150 = .9333$
- 3)  $.9333 \times 3,100 = 2,893$  fps

Thus, a 150-grain bullet from a typical .270 Winchester should be capable of about 2,900 fps—and this is the velocity shown in most loading manuals.

If we apply the same formula to the SFBLs, and compare it to the muzzle velocities suggested by the loading manuals, then we find that the 7mm SAUM and .300 WSM get exactly what they should with 175- and 200-grain bullets. So no, there is no loss of potential velocity with heavy bullets just because the cases are shorter. After all, one of the reasons the SFBLs attain their velocities is because they're fat. The result is most of the same powders that work in taller cartridges also work in the SFBLs. Even bulky old IMR4350, the originator of the term "log powder," works pretty well.

However, since 2000 there have

been a few powders introduced at least partially for use in SFBLs. These powders tend to be denser, with smaller granules, so they don't get crunched as much when we seat bullets. Also, they have filled holes in the powder companies' burning-rate gaps, providing a slight edge in performance with some bullet weights. Among these powders are Alliant Reloder 17, Hodgdon H100V and Ramshot Hunter.

Trials with some of the newer powders have resulted in mixed results, as can be seen in the charts. Reloder 17, for instance, worked great in the .300 WSM with 150-grain Nosler Ballistic Tips, but not so great with 180-grain Sierra GameKings, though the same rifle loves GameKings with Ramshot Hunter. So, as with the cartridges themselves, there's no automatic magic powder.

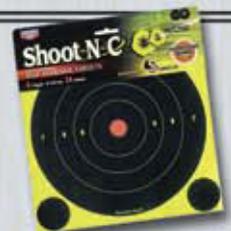
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# HANDGUNS

• MASSAD AYOOB •

## COMFORTABLE VS. COMFORTING

Finding the balance.

**F**riend and colleague Clint Smith is the guy who said, “A defensive handgun isn’t supposed to be comfortable... it’s supposed to be comforting.” As they say on the Internet, “true dat!”

But, if we’re gonna go with Internet gun forum values, one tradition there seems to be if I carry more hardware than you, I’m a paranoid mall ninja, but if I carry less, I’m a “sheeple.” Hmm... maybe we’ll step away from the ‘net for a minute and get back to Clint.

Every time I’ve ever seen Brother Smith on his home turf, he was carrying substantial hardware at his hip, usually a .45. His trademark guns include the 1911 .45 and the Smith & Wesson N-frame in a potent chambering, both in Thunder Ranch Special iterations. Of late, he’s been known to spend a lot of time packing the Springfield Armory XD45 .45 ACP, a 14-shooter no one has ever accused of being tiny in either size or power level.

Why full size? Because folks like Clint who’ve “seen the elephant”—and who know this breed of elephant is prone to unscheduled return visits—carry a gun with the realization they might actually have to shoot something with it. The larger guns tend to be easier to shoot fast and straight under stress than the baby ones, and Clint knows all too well,

hitting the target in the right place is the non-negotiable baseline of priorities in stopping the action quickly. Moreover, once the bullet gets to that “right place,” it needs to damage body parts badly enough to make them stop working immediately. The more power, the more damage. The greater the damage, the sooner the cessation of hostile activity. Pretty simple, really.

Bro’r Smith is living proof you can comfortably carry a pistol of comforting size and power. Let’s look at how that’s accomplished.

When I’ve been around Clint, he has most commonly carried inside the waistband (IWB), usually in the classic Summer Special holster designed by the late Bruce Nelson, or something equivalent. The flat 1911 pistol was discovered to ride inside the waistband with wonderful comfort somewhere around, oh, 1911. The adoption of holsters that stabilized it there, and gave the gun some protection from perspiration came later, but was a most welcome and practical innovation.

The XD45 is enough thicker than a 1911 to notice, but not so thick it can’t be accommodated. Where people get turned off on inside-the-waistband carry is, they stuff a holstered gun in there and find it uncomfortable. Well, no kidding, Sherlock. The user bought the pants to fit his waist. Now they have to fit his waist and a holstered gun, and maybe even a matching



*This duty-size Glock is held tight to the body and well concealed in a Ted Blocker thumb-break riding on a properly sized dress gunbelt.*

IWB magazine pouch. The quick test for comfort is to undo the top pants button, let the belt out a notch or two, and then try IWB carry for a week. The comfort improvement is immediate and palpable. It is nature’s way of telling us we just need to start wearing pants a couple of inches larger in the waistband. That, plus a forward-tilt carry angle reduces butt bulge (the gun’s, not ours) and locating the holster behind the hip instead of at the point of the hip, and we’re good to go at a new level of comfort and concealment with that comforting sidearm Clint has been steering you toward all along. If sharp edges dig into the “spare tire,” rigs like the CrossBreed come with shielding to eliminate the discomfort.

If inside the waistband doesn’t cut it, we’ve had for years outside-the-waistband (OWB) holsters that ride tight to the body for ample concealment to go with the comfort level required. Way back in the ‘70s, Roy Baker’s “Pancake” concept of belt loops fore and aft instead of behind the holster showed the way to snug the holster in against the body for a “ride” both more discreet and more comfortable.

With either type of holster—but particularly with OWB, which tends to cantilever itself outward otherwise—it’s imperative to have the proper belt. You want it fairly wide, and perfectly mated to the belt slots of the holster to prevent slippage and outward tilt. The belt should be firm enough to hold the holstered heavyweight in place, but not so rigid the bottom edge bites into the hips in the area of the iliac crest.

Space age materials have worked out surprisingly well for gun carrying. The Wilderness Instructor belt, made of nylon and Velcro, has become



*Full-size, full-weight Remington 1911R1 .45 rides comfortably and concealably in this Ayoob Rear Guard holster by Mitch Rosen, worn inside the waistband.*



*With outboard belt loops, the Aker Flatsider holster keeps this full-size Glock 17 with Advantage Tactical sights comfortably concealed on the hip of a 5' female.*

ubiquitous among its namesakes for good reason: infinite (and therefore perfect) adjustment to the tiniest fraction of an inch, and just the right blend of “rigid where it needs to be, yet supple where it needs to be” for all-day comfort when a heavy handgun is holstered on it. The Kydex holsters from Blade-Tech, FIN, and other makers ride tight enough OWB for good concealment under anything this side of a fitted suitcoat, and even those can be tailored to accommodate them. My girlfriend, 5' tall, carries a Colt CCO .45 (Commander barrel/slide on lightweight Officers frame) daily in a Blade-Tech scabbard on a Wilderness belt, and it goes unnoticed under casual clothing.

Clint Smith was right when he said it was more important for your handgun to be comforting than comfortable. But he never said it couldn't be both.

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# GUNSMITHING

• HAMILTON S. BOWEN •

## OH, SAY CAN YOU SEE...? The sights, of course.

**B**ack in the glory days, telescopic sights were not nearly so refined as today and were often viewed with suspicion. Virtually all high-quality American firearms had provision for sophisticated iron sights from domestic makers Lyman, Redfield, Marbles and several others. Installation was usually no more complicated than bolting on the sight and, perhaps, installing a different front sight. Often as not, a good peep sight would provide accuracy on par with the scopes of the era.

Most sight sets provided on factory iron-sight rifles these days are pretty rudimentary and, fairly, cry out for improvement. The resident M77/44 Ruger bolt-action carbine, nice a gun as it is, is no exception. The integral scope mounts and rings provided with the rifle gives you the impression the gun was intended to sport a scope and the simple folding U-notch rear and gold bead front sight were merely an afterthought. I figured a 6-pound .44 Magnum with an 18" barrel would remain a lot lighter and handier without a scope, but it still needed a serviceable set of iron sights for best performance.

I had a New England Custom Guns detachable peep sight for Ruger integral rifle bases lying around and thought it would be just the ticket. The sight clamped right onto the Ruger base without drama. On the first peep through it, however, it was clear the barrel-mounted factory sight was

nowhere near the new line of sight afforded by the NECG peep and the factory front sight. Little chance this combo would shoot on the paper; a quick trip to the range and a couple shots confirmed suspicions. A different front sight was clearly indicated.

Musing on front sight prospects, I consulted the Brownells and Midway catalogs, in search of a military-style post blade compatible with my NECG peep sight. Nothing jumped out at me. While both Marble and Williams produce a wide selection of classic ivory and gold bead sights, none were properly configured for the Ruger base. Furthermore, gold beads blend nicely with groundhog fur, making for a murky sight picture. Ivory beads now come from the tusks of the Eastern Nauga, a porcine creature whose hide is used extensively now as a leather substitute. Nauga ivory glitters in bright sunlight like a halogen headlamp in the dark, which obliterates the sight bead edges in the sight picture.

About to give up and resort to making a proper sight, it occurred that we have used XS Sight Systems front sights on handguns for years and perhaps they might have something in their catalog. As it turns out, they not only had their excellent white-line post, but also in three heights just for the little Rugers. In my experience, this arrangement, designed by



*The New England Custom Guns receiver sight (above) is a simple, hardy peep sight. For the Ruger, it requires no gunsmithing to install and fits into the integral scope mount. The XS Sights white-line blade (below) went in with minimal fitting and improves sight performance all out of relation to its cost.*



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**The Federal .44 Magnum ammo gave excellent performance thanks to the new sights. Minute-of-deer and then some at 50 yards.**

Ashley Emerson, is the best possible combination of precision and visibility in bad light. In favorable light, the blade post stands out clearly without interference from the white line. In dim light or against a dark target, the white line with allow sufficient contrast for a precise shot.

Now for the \$64 question: Which height did I need? For years, the Brownells catalog has had a handy chart for divining sight heights and corrections. Alas, their charts did not account for handguns with much shorter sighting radii, so years ago I started using a simple formula, which would accommodate all barrel lengths. Works perfectly well on windage, too.

Sight radius (inches) x amount to move group in inches ÷ distance to the

target in inches. Answer will be in .001" increments.

The calculation is made with all values in inches. The sight radius is simply the distance from the rear faces of front and rear sights. In solving for X (sight blade adjustment), multiply the sight radius by the needed correction and divide by the distance to target and you will have the amount of adjustment (height or windage) of the front sight. In the case of the .44 Magnum Ruger:  $22" \times 6" = 132" \div 1,800" = .073"$

At 50 yards (1,800"), I needed to lower the point of impact about 6", which required a front sight .070" taller than the rifle had. The .600" XS blade selected worked perfectly.

Installation of dovetailed sights is not terribly complicated but can be a bit tricky. Just remember the cardinal rule: always file on the cheapest and most easily replaced part, in this case, the sight blade insert. In the case of the XS blade, it started easily without any filing though I had a 60-degree dovetail file at hand just in case. Once started, it is best to use a sight pusher if you have one. Otherwise, you can use a hammer and a nylon-tipped punch to do the job, assuming you have a hardy base that won't be knocked loose with the hammering. Once you are certain of the regulation, Loc-tite the insert in

place to prevent any movement.

Now, we have a fast set of iron sights to acquire and precise under most all shooting conditions without any sacrifice in rifle weight and general handiness. Better still, it took less time to do the sight work than the calculator and phone work to procure the correct parts. Odd as it may seem, most of us buy guns to shoot, not to work on.

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## SIG'S SENSATIONAL MODEL 556

### Will the gas piston rifles replace the AR-15?

**D**o I hear a death rattle for Eugene Stoner's direct-impingement, gas operation system that's been the cornerstone of the AR-15/M16/M4 platform? I think so, judging from the variety of re-engineered, gas-piston-driven uppers being offered to civilian and military markets today. More germane, the latest AR models have been designed from the ground up to maximize the use of the gas-piston engineering like FN's Special Operations Forces Combat Assault Rifle (SCAR) and the SIG 556.

Gas-piston technology is not unfamiliar in US weapon design. The M1 rifle, the M1 Carbine and the M14 rifle are excellent examples of long- and short-stroke, gas-piston designs. And let us not forget the king of the long-stroke piston, Kalashnikov's AK-47 and the widely distributed FN/FAL.

Direct-impingement, gas operated systems are certainly not inherently deficient. The AR-15/M16 family of weapons has been continually refined and successfully engaged in some of the toughest armed conflicts for 48 years. In the civilian market, AR-15s have achieved an enviable reputation for competitive accuracy, and there is no finer treatise on wringing out the best in the design than the book written by our field editor, Glen Zediker, in his definitive *The Competitive AR15*.

Yet, Eugene Stoner's direct-impingement gas operation system is inherently dirty when compared

to similar systems. In milsurp circles, the finest direct-impingement gas system design I've seen is exhibited in the French MAS49 and MAS49/56 and secondarily in the Swedish Ljungman. The MAS features a direct-impingement design in which a puff of gas is delivered from the gas tube into a small blind hole in the bolt carrier. The only significant fouling to contend with is the carbon deposited inside that short, blind hole, which can be readily wiped out with a Q-Tip. Compare that to having to tear down the M15/M16 bolt and bolt carrier for cleaning and having to worry about the arrangement of the gas rings on the bolt body itself.

There's no question the US military is definitely marching in the direction of the gas piston, and it's time we took a look at recent gas-piston AR developments. This month we begin with the readily available SIG 556 semiauto civilian model.

556 CLASSIC	
<b>MAKER:</b>	SIG SAUER
<b>18 INDUSTRIAL DR., EXETER, NH 03833 (603) 772-2302, WWW.SIGSAUER.COM</b>	
<b>ACTION TYPE:</b>	Gas-piston rotary bolt semiauto
<b>CALIBER:</b>	5.56 NATO, .223
<b>BARREL LENGTH:</b>	16"
<b>OVERALL LENGTH:</b>	37.1"
<b>LENGTH COLLAPSED:</b>	34.3"
<b>LENGTH FOLDED:</b>	27.1"
<b>WEIGHT:</b>	8 pounds, 6 ounces
<b>FINISH:</b>	Black
<b>SIGHTS:</b>	4-position rotary diopter; mini-red dot. Square front post.
<b>STOCK:</b>	Polymer
<b>PRICE:</b>	\$2,250

The Swiss are a shooting culture. The male population constitutes a well-trained, well-armed reserve force in which issued arms and a basic load of ammunition are maintained at home in their private residences. The advanced designs generated by Switzerland's indigenous firearms industry, Schweizerische Industrie-Gesellschaft (SIG) in Neuhausen am Rheinfall, have insured Switzerland's long-standing reputation for finely crafted and exceedingly accurate arms. The new SIG 556 is no exception.

In the 1950s, Switzerland fielded their radical looking Sturmgewehr 57 (StG 57), known also as the SIG 510 in commercial form, which replaced all of those lovely Schmidt-Rubins that have washed up on our milsurp shores. The StG 57 featured a delayed, roller-lock mechanism, based on an earlier Mauser design. A few years later, SIG introduced the Model 530 series chambered for 5.56 NATO. While the model still retained the roller-locking bolt, the stocking and outward profile of the SIG 530 family set the pattern carried on in the SIG 556 today.

The next SIG generation to make its debut was the SIG 540 (5.56 NATO) and SIG 543 (7.62 NATO) in the early 1970s. The significance of this development with regard to the current



Handling qualities of the SIG 556 are superb. The handguards (above) are well ventilated and designed with an ergonomic "U" shape. The barrel sports a conventional bird-cage flash suppressor. The SIG 556 (below) is blessed with great ergonomic design and lines.



# Disassembly/Reassembly

**C**ock. Engage safety. Remove magazine. Clear the chamber. Close bolt. Push the rear takedown pin and forward pivot pin out from left-to-right. Separate the upper and lower.

Depress operating handle catch and pull handle out. Remove bolt carrier and bolt from the rear of the receiver. Rotate the bolt head counter-clockwise and

remove from carrier.

Depress gas valve catch, rotate valve to left and pull it out. Remove piston/operating rod from gas tube.

Gun is now sufficiently fieldstripped to be cleaned. SIG SAUER suggests further disassembly in their well-illustrated instruction manual.

Reassemble in reverse order.

**GUNS**



SIG 556 is the earlier roller-locking system was replaced by a long-stroke, gas piston activating a bolt carrier and a rotary locking bolt.

The new SIG 556 in 5.56 NATO incorporates the best qualities of those earlier designs.

The SIG 556 upper is composed of corrosion resistant, stainless steel in which the 16" hammer-forged barrel is threaded into a massive, hardened steel monoblock also incorporating the locking recesses for the bolt. SIG claims the rigidity of this design delivers exceptional accuracy, and after field testing the SIG 556, I would agree it's an inherently accurate platform.

SIG's long-stroke gas piston system is interesting. It's simple and easy to maintain. Approximately 11" from the breech, a multi-purpose gas block positions the gas tube and operating rod, houses an adjustable, 2-position gas valve, mounts the front sight and supports the front handguards.

In the vertical position, the gas valve normally delivers sufficient gas volume to operate the system. If cycling problems develop due to excessive fouling or substandard ammunition, the valve can be rotated clockwise to a mechanically indexed position to provide maximum gas flow to the piston until the functioning issues are resolved.

The full-length operating rod, wound about with a

coiled mainspring, extends from the gas block to a recess inside the bolt carrier where it is captured and secured to the carrier by the operating handle that passes through a slot in the end of the operating rod.

The double-lugged bolt housed inside the bolt carrier is rotated in-and-out of battery by a cam system. Two integral steel rails inside the upper retain and guide the bolt and bolt carrier as they reciprocate. In short, the SIG system is similar in concept to that of the AK-47.

By the way, the SIG 556 is the first AR I have ever tested in which the moving mechanical parts came factory lubricated and in the SIG, lubricated with Mil-Com Products excellent PTFE based TW25B grease. It was a surprise but a pleasant one.

Attached to the top of the upper is a Picatinny rib for sighting devices. SIG supplies three rear sights with the gun. The first is an adjustable, emergency aperture rear sight that flips up from a seat inside the rear of the rib. The second is rotary diopter sight incorporating a close-quarters combat open V and rotating apertures for 100, 200 and 300 meters. The third is a 1X power, SIG SAUER mini-red dot sight with a 4 MOA reticle. I found the rotary diopter sight matched with the square post front sight ideal for daylight conditions.

The forged aluminum lower carries the fire control system, the magazine well

and the buttstock. The magazine well accepts standard AR-15 magazines, which is a plus. The synthetic SIG SAUER 30-round magazine provided with the gun is neat because it features a clip system allowing you to quickly snap two magazines together. The 2-stage trigger has a bit of creep, but the let-off was consistent at 7 pounds. The ambidextrous safety is an excellent design, but neither I nor anyone else could reach the safety with their thumb while maintaining a normal, firing grip on the pistol grip. The safety lever is too short and needs to be lengthened a tad.

Stocking design, in large degree, determines what is fashionably known as "ergonomic design," and the SIG has it. The SIG stock design dates back to the earlier SIG 530, and it's terrific, particularly the ventilated handguard. Comfortably "U" shaped, it places your forward hand close to the barrel and in line with your rear hand like the stock of fine pointing shotgun. The balance point is found by wrapping your hand around the magazine well just aft of the operating handle. The rigid, folding buttstock features two extension positions: 12" when collapsed and 13-1/2" extended. Those two will actually satisfy 90 percent of humanity.

With its 1:7" NATO twist, the SIG 556 favors bullets ranging from 62 to 77 grains. Shooting the diopter sight at 100m, my 3-shot groups ranged between 7/8" to 1-1/4" with both CorBon 62-grain DPX (2,885 fps) and Black Hills 69-grain Sierra MatchKing (2,664 fps). This impressive level of accuracy could only be improved by the use of a scope.

What gas fouling there was, was confined to the small surfaces of the gas valve and piston head and just barely present along the operating rod and inside its housing.

The gas piston-driven SIG 556 combines a number of proven design features that make it a standout in its field. If you're tired of cleaning up carbon fouled ARs with direct-impingement gas systems, you're going to love the SIG.

**GUNS**



*The SIG 556 sports handy accessory and battery compartments in the pistol grip and buttstock (above). SIG SAUER magazines (below) are designed to clip together.*

*The 556 also will accept standard AR-15 mags as well.*



## FURTHER READING:

**THE COMPETITIVE AR 15** GLEN D. ZEDIKER, SOFTCOVER, 470 PAGES ©2008, \$34.95, ZEDIKER PUBLISHING,

P.O. BOX 1497, OXFORD, MS 38655.

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• PAT COVERT •

## UTILITY HUNTER

Bob Dozier's new folder is a winner afield.

**A**rkanas knifemaker Bob Dozier is well known for his rock-solid sporting and tactical, fixed-blade knives, but his folding knives tend to get buried under the thunder of his more than brisk straight knife sales. One reason is he simply doesn't make nearly as many folding knives as fixed blades, and in a cutlery industry burgeoning with folders it's easy to get lost in the shuffle. The knifemaker's reputation is for making "hell bent for leather" working knives and his newly released Utility Hunter model doesn't disappoint.

Two things struck me when I initially handled Dozier's new liner-lock folder. First off, this knife is ample in size. The handle is 4.75" long, a size those with large mitts will find accommodating. Secondly, the sculpted handle is very clean and simple in design without a lot of the twists and turns festooning many folders today.

A couple of other things stood out upon closer inspection. When the blade is opened, a ramp on the backside of the blade rolls out to form a very natural thumb guard that mimics the finger guard on the front handle topside. Consequently, there is more than average finger protection and gripping power than found on many folders. Another thing that struck me is the beefy frame liners, .085" to be exact, which not only makes for a

pretty stout knife, but also increases the strength of the liner-lock mechanism, therefore decreasing the chance of failure. The blade rolls out using a thumb stud facilitated by a machined groove and détente in the upper front portion of the handle scale.

### Blade Design

Complimenting the simple handle design is a deep-bellied 3.75" drop-point blade (3.5" cutting edge) that puts the overall length of the knife at 8.5" fully extended. The drop-point blade (.150" thick) is the most popular design among hunters due its snag-free shape when turned upside down for skinning. The deep hollow grind on the blade enhances the knife's slicing ease and ability to make deeper cuts. Dozier is a huge proponent of

UTILITY HUNTER	
<b>MAKER:</b>	BOB DOZIER KNIVES
	P.O. BOX 1941
	SPRINGDALE, AR 72765
	(479) 756-0023
	WWW.DOZIERKNIVES.COM
<b>TYPE:</b>	Folding liner lock
<b>BLADE STYLE:</b>	Drop point
<b>BLADE MATERIAL:</b>	D2
<b>BLADE LENGTH:</b>	3-3/4"
<b>OVERALL LENGTH (CLOSED):</b>	4-3/4"
<b>WEIGHT:</b>	5 ounces
<b>SCALES:</b>	Linen Micarta
<b>SHEATH:</b>	Cordura
<b>PRICE:</b>	\$500

D2 steel and is almost singularly responsible for the cult following this enigmatic alloy steel has today. Technically speaking, D2 has enough chromium content to qualify as a stainless steel, but its carbon content is too high to classify it as such. What you end up with is a steel with excellent resistance to corrosion and high edge retention without sacrificing ease of sharpening.

Other features on the Utility Hunter include Torx screw construction (for



Dozier offers his new folder in two styles, the combat ready Utility Tactical (top knife) and the jack-of-all-trades Utility Hunter (bottom knife). You can see the difference between the blade styles of Dozier's new folder. The tactical blade has a double grind, while the Utility Hunter (bottom knife) has a skinning and field friendly deep-bellied drop point.



Thick Titanium liners make for a rock-solid folder and vault-like blade lock-up (above). Users can either use the clip for pocket carry or the ballistic nylon belt sheath included with the knife. The Utility Hunter's D2 steel blade (below) ate rope and carved seasoned hardwood with gusto. This superior "working steel" rips through anything in its way, yet still offers ease in sharpening.



easy parts cleaning), removable pocket clip allowing tip-down carry, a lanyard hole in the base of the handle, and a Cordura sheath provided for belt carry (a leather belt sheath is also available). Linen Micarta is the standard handle material, but Dozier also uses a wide range of options including wooly mammoth ivory, exotic woods such as Cocobolo and Desert Ironwood, and state-of-the-art carbon fiber. You can also choose to have the rear guard plain or notched for added purchase. This knife is also offered in a tactical version, dubbed the Utility Tactical, with a double ground drop-point blade giving it more penetration for combat.

The Dozier Utility Hunter I tested came with natural linen Micarta handles with a notched thumb ramp; otherwise it was "bone stock." The blade deploys easily using the thumb stud and snicked into position tighter than a drum thanks to the thick locking leaf. Strong construction is essential in a utility folder and this knife makes no apologies.

Another asset you should always look for in a working knife, folder or fixed blade, is comfort, especially



An ample handle, versatile drop-point blade and ironclad construction make Dozier's new Utility Hunter a winner in the field.

if you need to perform field chores for any extended period of time. A handle with sharp edges will start feeling uncomfortable in the bare hand real fast and can draw a blister on your hand faster than you'd think. The Utility Folder's handle had none of that; its nicely domed contours and gently curved profile made for pleasurable cutting. This is a knife you could use for an hour or two and never feel the bite.

I tested the blade on several of my favorite materials: 3/8" rope and both seasoned and green hardwood. The hollow-ground blade sliced through the rope with ease in sharp, concise cuts, requiring much less pressure than expected. The dense, seasoned

hardwood peg gave the blade more of a workout, but I was able to take off long slivers without a lot of stress.

This is where the D2 steel shined. The differences in steels is often subtle, but test enough of them and you'll realize that some like to "dig" into whatever you're cutting more than others. This is what D2 does so well, and why many devotees call it a good "working steel." I put the Utility Hunter through a battery of other tests such as shaving bark, slicing off small branches and puncturing cans and it never complained. Whether you are a casual hunter who needs a good skinning knife or a hard-core survivalist, this knife will do anything you ask without complaint.

The Dozier Utility Hunter is not going to fit everyone's budget, but it's a handmade knife with top-flight construction that won't lay down on you when the going gets tough. A knife like this will give a lifetime of service with very little effort to keep maintained, and it cuts like a house on fire.

GUNS



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• JEFF JOHN •

## 1863 Trapdoor Springfield?

**Q:** Every month I look forward to finding *GUNS* in my mailbox and devour each issue cover to cover. I really enjoyed the article by Duke concerning the Indian Wars in the June issue. I am puzzled by one thing and hopefully you can clarify. On page 38 there is a picture of a Springfield rifle with the "trapdoor" open. The caption says it is a Model 1873. I have a rifle just like this that has been passed down through several generations. On the hammer side, a stamp identifies it as a Springfield, however, the date stamp is 1863. How can that be? The firing pin in the trapdoor is 2-piece since the hammer strikes to the right side and the firing pin must strike the center of the cartridge. When I was about 8 or 10 years old, (I am now 76) I would fold 6 to 8 "shots" from a roll of caps and stick it on the broad area of the firing pin. I thought it was cool until one day some of the residue almost blinded me. I don't know what caps were made of, but they were very corrosive. As a result the firing pin is still stuck to this day. Does anyone have any ideas to free it up?

Vernon E. Bang  
Plano, Texas

**A:** The Trapdoor was adopted by a country—the USA—with

huge debt just after a major internal war. There was little money for new arms, but the vast superiority of the metallic cartridge meant the military muzzleloader was forever obsolete. With at least 1 million .58 muzzleloading muskets and plenty of parts on hand, Army Ordnance decided the most cost effective way to modernize was by converting them to a metallic cartridge. The first attempt was adoption of Springfield Armory Superintendent Erskine Allin's design of the "trapdoor" breechblock by cutting away the top of the musket barrel and chambering it for .58 Rimfire. This proved unsatisfactory—both the rimfire round and the conversion—and led the Army to adopt the .50-70 Gov't centerfire round and a much improved "trapdoor" system in 1866.



*The concept behind the trapdoor was to convert the huge stockpile of Civil War muskets to a metallic cartridge. The original caliber, .58 Rimfire, proved unsatisfactory, leading to the adoption of the .50-70 Gov't. Many of these early conversions have Civil War dated lockplates (this one is dated 1864, above). The actual model number is stamped on top the "trapdoor." Here "1866" is stamped above an eagle's head (below). Models of 1868 and 1870 were made in .50-70 before the adoption of the Model 1873 .45-70 (M1866 courtesy Martin Miller collection).*



Many of the locks at this time still have Civil War dates of manufacture. If you inspect your musket closely, you may find a date on the breechblock or barrel of 1866, 1868 or 1870. By the time the 1873 in .45-70 was adopted, it was simpler to just fabricate parts for the new rifle than to shoehorn in old ones.

Your firing pin is of the 1-piece kind and if it is in two pieces, I fear it is broken. Taking off the breechblock and soaking it in Kroil overnight or a few days should loosen the parts. Maybe a little heat, too, since it's been frozen for quite some time. Kroil is available

from Brownells and many gun and hardware stores. A new firing pin is available from S&S Firearms. **GUNS**

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# TESTING

*Rifle*



## John Barsness

**T**oday's shooters expect any new scope to function perfectly. The scope shouldn't leak in a hurricane or break down on a .416 Rigby. The adjustment clicks should be precisely repeatable, and the scope should put every shot in the same hole whether magnification is set on 2.5X or 30X—and yes, we expect each scope to function both for still-hunting in thick timber and for shooting targets at 1,000 yards. Oh, and the optics should be good enough to see in the dark. In short, we expect it all—and modern advertising fuels our expectations.

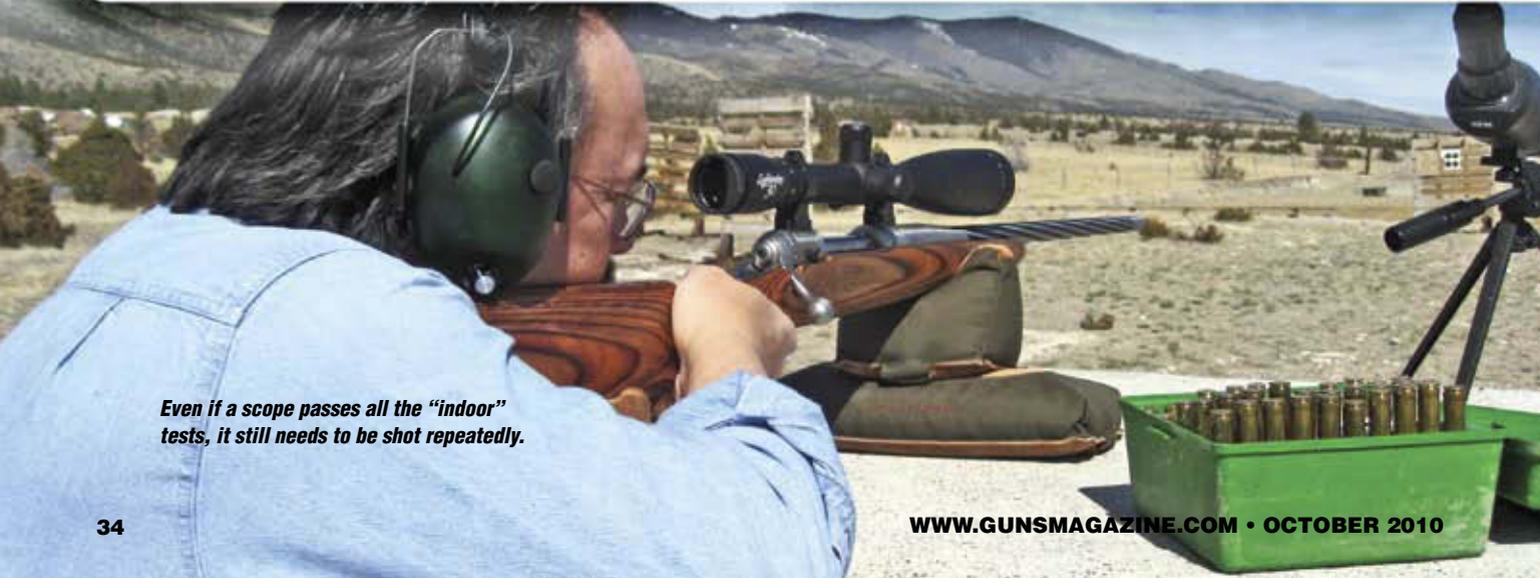
By nature I'm something of a skeptic, especially since my personal experience suggests not every scope is infallible. Over the years I've used many methods of actually testing rifle scopes to see if they're really ready to go. Some of these methods were stolen from other people, without the slightest guilt. And why not? If every human had to start at the beginning of technology, our notion of an optical lens would be a flake of dark-gray obsidian.

Back in the 1990s the first thing I did with any new scope was take off the turret caps and immerse the entire scope in a sink full of medium-hot water. The warmth of the water expanded the gas inside the scope, causing bubbles to ooze from any leak.

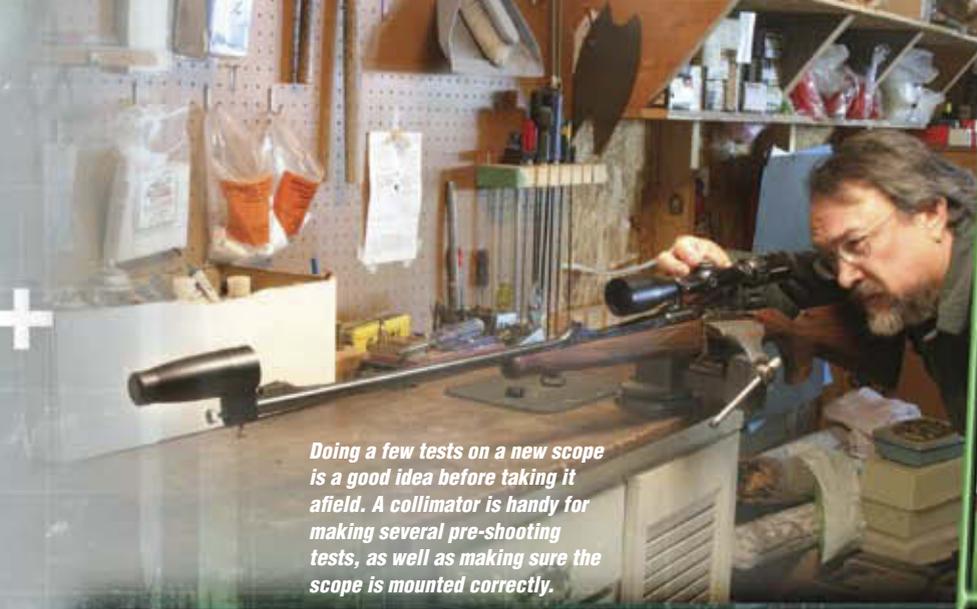
At the time this test was actually instructive, since some scopes weren't totally sealed against outside moisture. Believe it or not, this included both really cheap scopes and some of the

most expensive. Back then more than one top European manufacturer didn't seal the adjustment turrets with O-rings, something just about every American and Asian scope manufacturer had been doing for decades. These European companies were counting on removable turret caps to keep moist, exterior air from getting inside their scopes. This optimism was why some hunters went to damp places such as coastal Alaska and their expensive scopes developed interior clouds.

However, that changed by the early 1990s, partly due to real optics regularly appearing in shooting magazines. Before then the occasional optics article was usually a rewrite of a pamphlet published by Bausch & Lomb in the 1950s, explaining such optical terms as pincushion distortion, thus providing zero practical knowledge to the reader. Today it's very rare to find any scope leaking in any way, so unless some magazine demands the dunk



*Even if a scope passes all the "indoor" tests, it still needs to be shot repeatedly.*



*Doing a few tests on a new scope is a good idea before taking it afield. A collimator is handy for making several pre-shooting tests, as well as making sure the scope is mounted correctly.*



**A**



**B**



**C**



**D**

test, I don't do it.

Instead the scope gets mounted on a rifle of at least .300 Magnum recoil. There's a definite line between the recoil of lesser rounds and .300 Magnums. Most scopes mounted on .30-06s and lesser rifles will last a long time, but scopes mounted on .300s start malfunctioning. The defects may be small, such as erratic adjustments, or large, such as an adjustment spring coming loose, but a .300 Magnum (or .338 or .375) will find it, sometimes within one box of ammo.

Mounting the scope *correctly* is essential. Many of the "defects" encountered in new scopes are actually the result of bad mounting. For any realistic tests the scope must be mounted so the reticle is in the center of the adjustment range, and lined up with the bore. A scope's adjustment dials are actually the heads of screws that push on the erector tube, a smaller tube inside the main tube that holds the erector lenses. (These turn the image right-side-up, so we're not aiming at a deer that appears to be standing on its antlers.)

The erector tube is round, so at the very limits of the scope's adjustment range the screws can be contacting the tube somewhere off-center. This can cause problems, especially erratic adjustments. Many scopes get blamed when the problem is in the mounting, not the scope itself.

Erratic adjustments can also be

caused by mount rings being too tight. For some reason many people think a scope's rings should be cinched down like the lug-nuts on a 3/4-ton pickup. A scope, however, is not a heavy-duty 16" wheel, but a thin-walled aluminum tube containing many precise and relatively delicate parts. Crank down on the ring screws and all sorts of weird things can happen. I have seen variable scopes converted to fixed-powers by zealous ring-tightening and reticles broken.

Before mounting the scope, the reticle should be centered, either mechanically or optically. Mechanical centering is done by counting the number of turns in each adjustment dial, then setting the dial in the middle of its range. Optical centering is done by placing the objective bell against a mirror, then looking through the scope. If the reticle isn't centered there will appear to be two reticles, the real reticle and its mirror image. The scope is then adjusted so the two reticles coincide. I prefer mechanical centering, because the front of the objective bell may not be precisely square to the rest of the scope, and because mechanical centering allows for maximum adjustment.

The scope is mounted so the aiming point of the reticle is as close as possible to the center of a collimator's

*A) When testing a new scope, Barsness mounts it on a rifle with a minimum of .300 Magnum recoil. B) If a hunting scope is going to be used in cold weather, it helps to test it in cold weather. C) Today many true tactical scopes like the 5.5-22X Nightforce on this .338 Lapua are built to take severe punishment, but any scope can break—or have a problem out of the box. If you've priced .338 Lapua recently, you'll know why a few simple bench tests are important. D) Even inexpensive scopes can be pretty tough. This Redfield Revolution from Leupold took more than 100 rounds from this .350 Remington Magnum without a problem. If a scope is defective any problem will usually show up within 20 to 100 rounds on a hard-kicking rifle.*

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TESTING RIFLE SCOPES

grid. (Good collimators are also adjustable, and should be tested on several rifles that are already sighted-in.) This may require adjusting or shimming the mounts, but one very fine solution to an off-center scope is Burris's Signature rings, with plastic inserts of various thicknesses inside the rings.

The ring-screws are then tightened either with a torque-driver, or with the small Allen or Torx wrench many ring manufacturers now supply. If neither is available, I've found that holding a screwdriver with only my thumb and first two fingers provides about the right amount of torque to the rings screws. Most manufacturers recommend 20-some inch-pounds. This may not seem like much, but it's sufficient to hold a scope on a .458 Lott.

It also won't mark up a scope. If your scopes consistently show "ring marks" after mounting, either the rings have very sharp edges, which weren't smoothed during manufacturing (uncommon) or you're over-tightening the rings (all too common).

Once the scope is mounted and a collimator fitted to the rifle's muzzle, we can test whether turning the magnification ring changes where the reticle points. This "reticle shift" is rare but not impossible on modern scopes. Within the past year I tested one \$350 scope where the reticle shifted about 1-1/2" at 100 yards when the magnification ring was turned. (The exception to this test is a scope with a first focal-plane reticle. These can't shift in apparent position, because the reticle is in front of the magnification-change mechanism.)



*This Schmidt & Bender Summit (above) got the top rating ever on John's night test, an 8+ on the chart. Today many scopes are expected to consistently change elevation for shooting at longer ranges (below).*

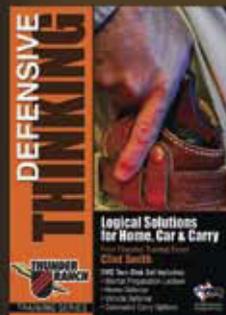


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A collimator also allows us to perform a preliminary click-adjustment test. After centering the reticle on the collimator's grid, we can click the adjustments in any direction, then see if the same number of clicks returns the reticle to the center of the collimator grid. We can even look through the scope while clicking away, to see if each click actually moves the reticle.

However, a collimator test of the clicks is only preliminary. Adjustments can work differently when a .300 Magnum is actually fired, shaking up the innards of the scope. But if the adjustments don't work reliably while the rifle is sitting placidly in my workshop, then I don't waste ammo by taking the scope to the range.

### Eye Relief

Another indoor test checks eye relief. Switch on a small flashlight, then gently place the front end of the flashlight against the objective lens of the scope. Hold some flat object (your palm will do) about three inches behind the eyepiece. A dot of light will be "projected" on your palm. This is the exit pupil of the scope.

Move your hand until the dot is as small and sharp as possible, and the distance from the rear of the scope to your hand is the eye relief. You can measure this distance with a ruler, or you can make a cardboard tool that includes both a flat surface for the image of the exit pupil and a short ruler.

Not surprisingly, the real eye relief is often different than what's advertised. Now, there is a little slack allowed in manufacturing tolerances, but when I run into a scope that only has 2-3/4" of eye relief when the company's spec sheet says 3-1/2", I'm not entirely pleased, especially when shooting a .300 Magnum.

Until a few years ago, eye relief varied at different magnifications from the same variable scope. These days many variables (but not all) have minimal differences in eye relief throughout their magnification range. This can also be checked with the flashlight test.

Now it's finally time to take the scope to the range. A range test both re-checks the adjustments, and also determines if the scope will hold up for a reasonable period when subjected to hard recoil. This is why I mount a new scope on a rifle of known accuracy: Any major variation from normal accuracy indicates something may not be quite right with the scope—though sometimes a problem is really obvious, such as a lens actually coming loose.

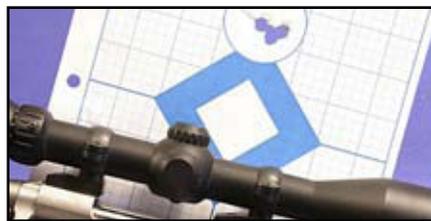
Yes, that can happen, but the

range of sick-scope symptoms can be very wide. Sometimes one of the adjustments comes totally loose, resulting in "groups" strung randomly across the target, but sometimes groups just grow larger. I thought I'd seen it all until a couple of years ago, when one scope's entire objective bell started unscrewing itself with each shot.

You should also be aware such problems are not totally confined to "affordable" scopes. I have had several scopes, costing \$1,000 or more, come apart within 20 to 100 rounds.

The traditional method of testing a scope's adjustment accuracy is to "shoot the square." Once the scope is sighted-in, it's adjusted a certain amount left, say 20 clicks, and a shot taken. Then it's adjusted 20 clicks up, and another shot taken, then 20 clicks right, etc. The test continues until groups start forming at each corner of the adjustment square.

This is all ducky, but today most shooters either want their scope to simply stay sighted-in, or want



***These days a scope's adjustments are expected to work perfectly, but in order to tell if they do, the scope should be mounted on a dependably accurate rifle.***



***Each click should move the reticle the distance declared on the turret.***



***Over-tightening the ring screws can make scopes act weird or even cause permanent damage. If you don't have a torque driver, then holding a screwdriver gently will do.***

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repeatable elevation adjustments so they can crank the scope up to shoot something a long way off. Often I simply adjust the scope so groups are dead-on at 100 yards, to see if the adjustments change point of impact exactly the way they're supposed to. Then I either shoot a bunch of groups to make sure the rifle stays sighted-in, or I start cranking on the elevation dial and shooting between adjustments.

This should result in bullet holes directly above the dead-center sight-in. Partly this tests whether or not we actually got the scope set up squarely on the rifle, so is an essential test if we intend to do any longer-range shooting. But it also tests the accuracy and repeatability of the scope's adjustment. Aside from the scope not returning to zero when it's clicked back down, a line of shots wandering from side-to-side can indicate a mounting problem, or a windage adjustment spring that isn't consistent. (Of course, these tests should be made on as calm a day as possible.)

Once a scope has passed all those trials, it's time for the optical test. This is done at night on a chart of my design, consisting of alternating black and white lines that start out 1" wide at the top of the chart and become narrower toward the bottom, the last



*In the past it was common for scopes to fog in cold or damp weather, but all modern scopes are sealed against exterior moisture. Eileen Clarke worried more about freezing herself on this cold Montana day than her scope fogging.*

pair of lines 1/16" wide. The chart is set up 25 yards away, and is lit by the 100-watt bulb on my back porch.

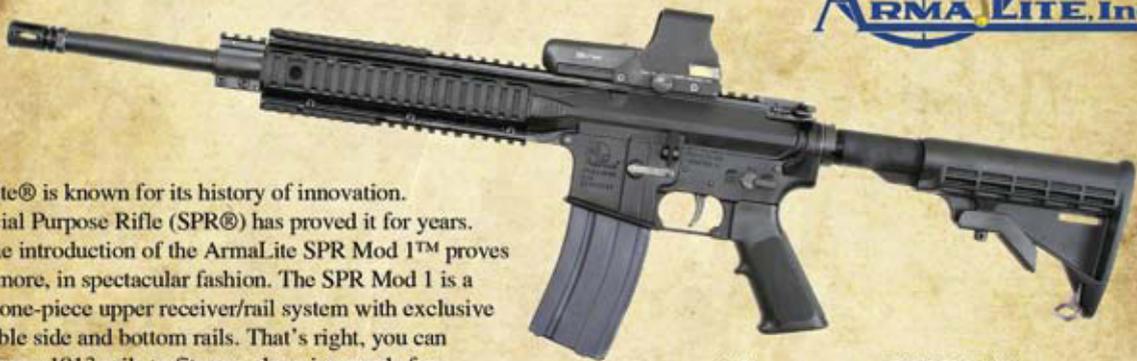
Every scope is set on 6X. This not only levels the playing field, since magnification plays a part in apparent brightness, but at 6X just about any modern scope has an exit pupil at least 6mm in diameter. This closely matching to the diameter of the average

human eye's pupil in dim light, so we're actually testing the scope's optics, not whether the exit pupil is too small to transmit enough light to our eye.

The rifle is then placed on a steady rest in a window, so the light illuminating the chart doesn't shine on the scope, and the scope is precisely focused. A scope's rating is determined by the smallest line that can be definitely seen. All the scopes I've ever tested have rated between 5 and 8 (the No. 5 lines are 3/8" wide, the No. 8 lines 1/8" wide). The 5 was from an early 1950s Weaver with uncoated lenses, the 8s all from scopes costing \$1,000 or more, though some \$1,000+ scopes didn't rate quite that high. A 6 is typical of a modern scope with multi-coated lenses in the \$200 to \$400 range, and a 7 is better than average. Sometimes I'll give a scope a 6+ or 7+ if the bottom line is exceptionally clear.

Color rendition is not rated, because individual eyes see color in very different ways. I'm also not worried about the field of view being a little fuzzy around the edges, because over the years I've noticed that we aim with the center of a scope's view, darn near every time. Once a scope passes all those tests, then it's ready for some serious shooting. **GUNS**

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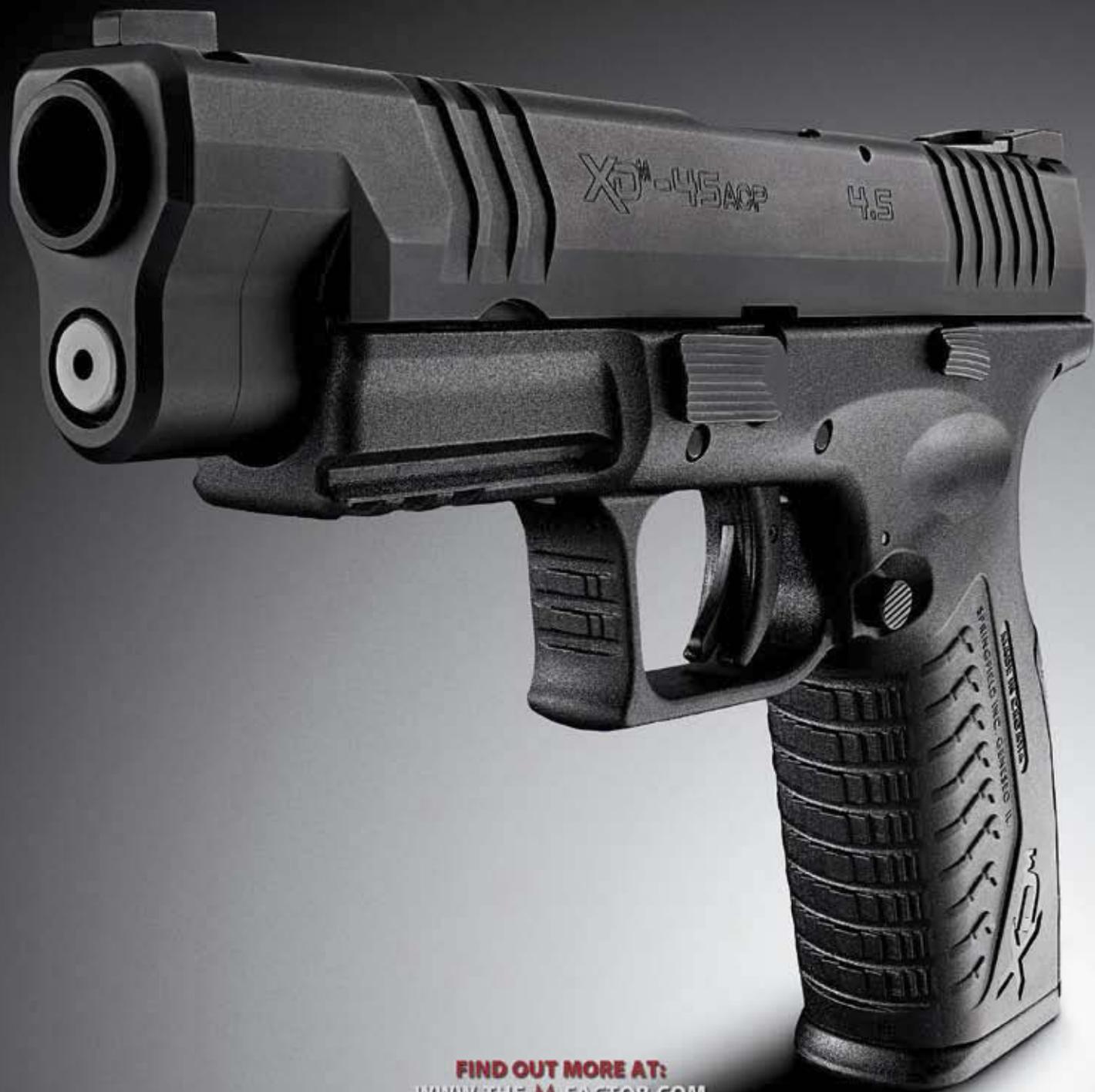
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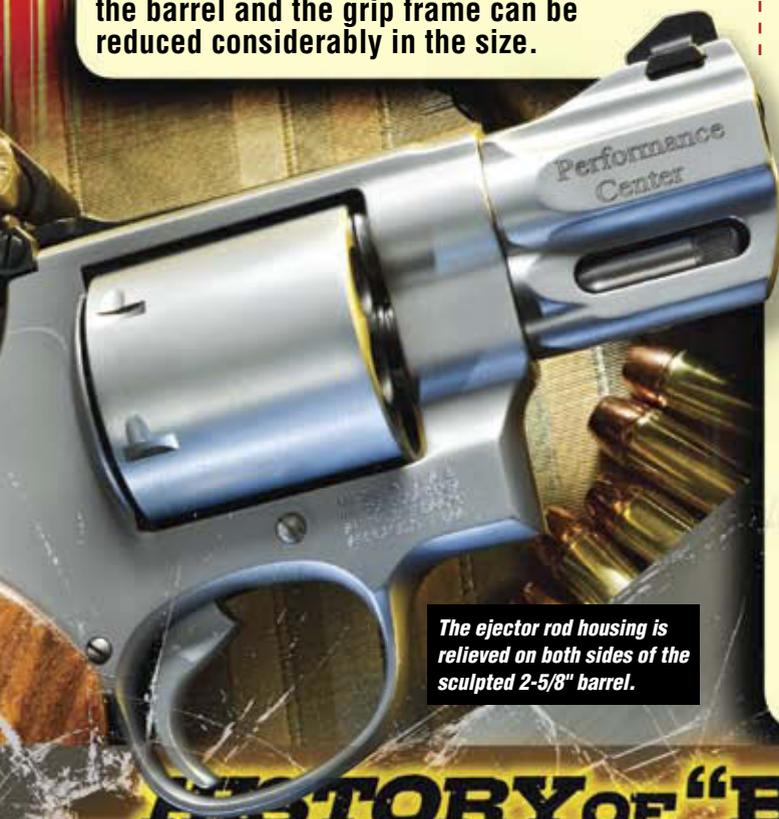
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# TRAIL BUSTIN' POWER

## SMITH & WESSON'S MODEL 629 BIG-BORE PERSONAL PROTECTION .44 MAGNUM.

**John Taffin Photos: Joseph R. Novelozo**

**T**oday we have all manner of chopped and channeled sixguns and semi-automatics as well as a large selection of excellent leather for concealed carry. Semi-autos, having a much flatter profile, are normally easier to conceal than a big-bore sixgun with a 6-shot .44 or .45 cylinder. There is simply nothing to be done to downsize a 6-shot cylinder, however, both the barrel and the grip frame can be reduced considerably in the size.



If my memory is correct, sometime in the 1980s custom sixguns arrived taking up where Colt's Fitz had left off (see sidebar) with custom sixgunsmiths offering roundbutted, short-barreled revolvers with modified ejector rod housings to go below the 3-1/2" length of the original short-barrel .357 Magnum of the 1930s.

In recent years Smith & Wesson has reached back into history to offer many of the old Classic sixguns such as the original .357 Magnum, .44 Magnum and .44 Special of the mid-20th century. They have been resurrected and built to 21st-century specifications and requirements. At the same time S&W is offering lightweight Night Guard revolvers in .44 Special, .357 Magnum and .44 Magnum, and the short-barreled, easier to conceal, all-steel, big-bore sixgun has not been forgotten; it has now arrived as a custom Model 629 from the Performance Center.

The original prototype .44 Magnum Smith & Wesson was built in 1954 on an existing 1950 Target Model, which had been chambered in .44 Special. The engineers at Smith & Wesson fitted a new, specially heat-treated cylinder to the 6-1/2" barreled 1950 Target, which had a weight of 39 ounces. The sixgun performed fine, however, the recoil was so fierce the engineers deemed it prudent to add more weight in the form of a heavy bull barrel and full-length cylinder, which brought the weight up to an even 3 pounds. This latest .44 Magnum from the Smith & Wesson Performance Center weighs the same as the original prototype. In the past 55 years, since the advent of the .44, Magnum sixguns have gotten bigger and heavier to tame the recoil of heavier loads, and a 39-ounce .44 Magnum is going to kick fiercely with regular full-house .44 loads.

The original .44 Magnum was built with the hunter in mind. This one is aimed at those who want a big-bore sixgun for personal protection, a term that covers a lot of territory. Since what we have to be protected from depends on just where our wanderings happen to take us. By going with a powerful big-bore chambering such as the .44

## HISTORY OF "BELLY GUNS"

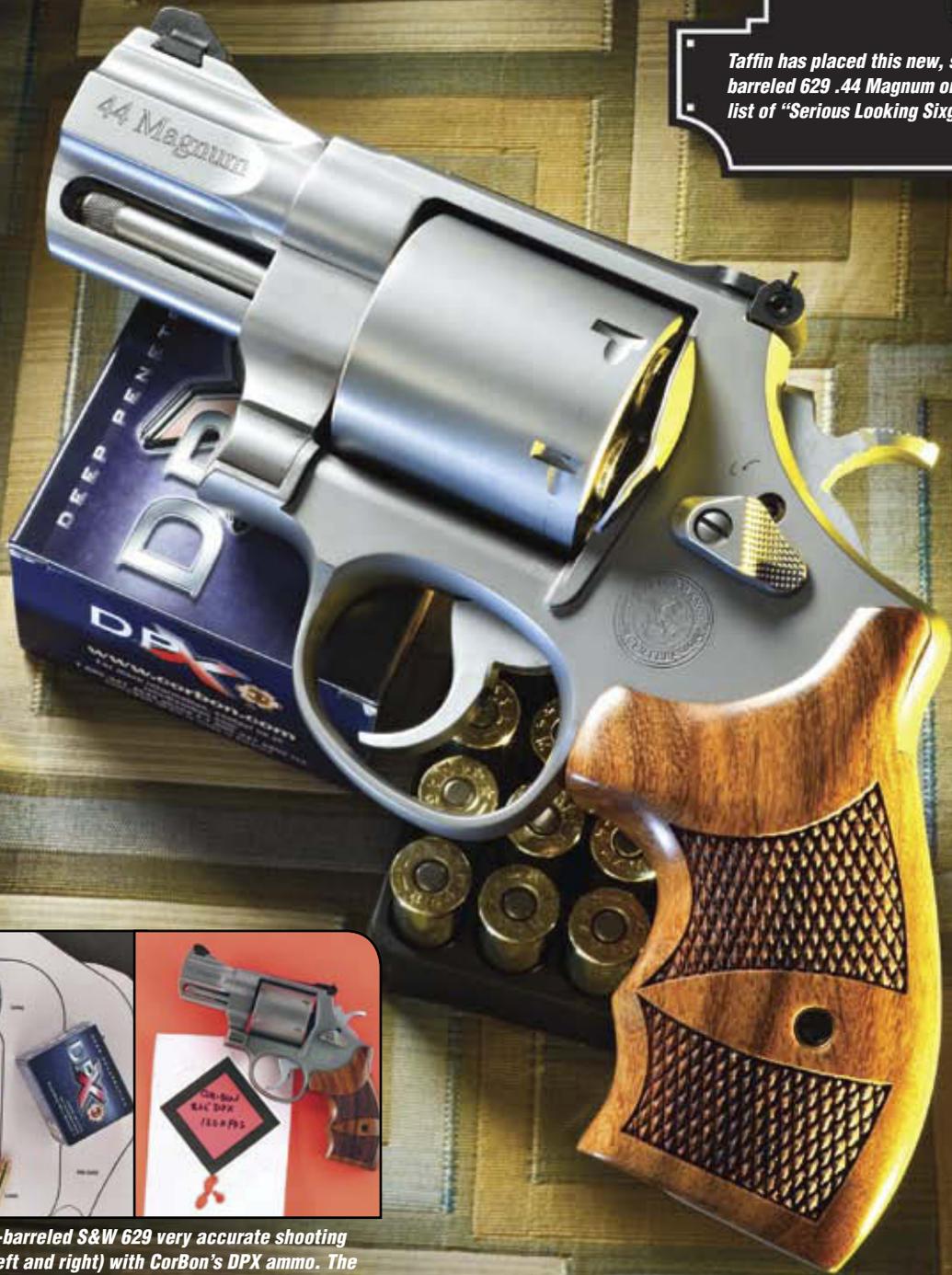
**John Taffin**

**I**t always looks so easy in the movies especially those wonderful old cowboy and gangster films of the 1930s and 1940s. The hero or villain is dressed in a tailored double-breasted suit and at the proper time reaches his left hand in below his breast pocket and pulls out a full sized Colt Single Action Army or 1911, which is somehow carried magically with nary a bulge detected. It is movie magic at its best, however, in reality it is not easy to carry and conceal a big-bore sixgun or semi-automatic.

The first Colt sixguns were not easily concealable but by the time the 1851 Navy and 1860 Army arrived, enterprising individuals found a way to make them more easily concealable. It wasn't long before barrels were chopped short and the big-bore pocket pistol had arrived. With the advent of the Colt Single Action Army, some enterprising types even removed the barrel altogether to make it fit easily into a pocket. Colt began offering short-barreled Store Keeper Models in the SAA as well as the new Lightning and Thunderer double actions of the 1870s.

In more modern times (well at least in the 1920s), John

Taffin has placed this new, short-barreled 629 .44 Magnum on his list of "Serious Looking Sixguns."



Taffin found the short-barreled S&W 629 very accurate shooting at 10 yards offhand (left and right) with CorBon's DPX ammo. The chosen load for this test, CorBon's 225-grain DPX .44 Magnum ammo, delivered 1,200 fps from the Smith & Wesson's 2-5/8" barrel. Photos: John Taffin.

Henry Fitzgerald, "Fitz" of Colt, looked at the large Colt New Service chambered in .45 Colt and saw a pocket pistol. He shortened the barrel to 2", roundbutted the grip frame and, to make it even faster on the trigger, removed the front of the triggerguard. He was able to easily conceal a pair of these in the somewhat voluminous pockets of the trousers of that era.

Up to this point in time Smith & Wesson was making some of the finest large-frame, double-actions sixguns in existence especially their .44 Special and .38/44 Heavy Duty. By 1935, the .38/44 had evolved into the .357 Magnum with the first examples being outfitted with 8-3/4" barrels with the hunter and outdoorsman in mind.

To make the new .357 appealing to law enforcement Smith &

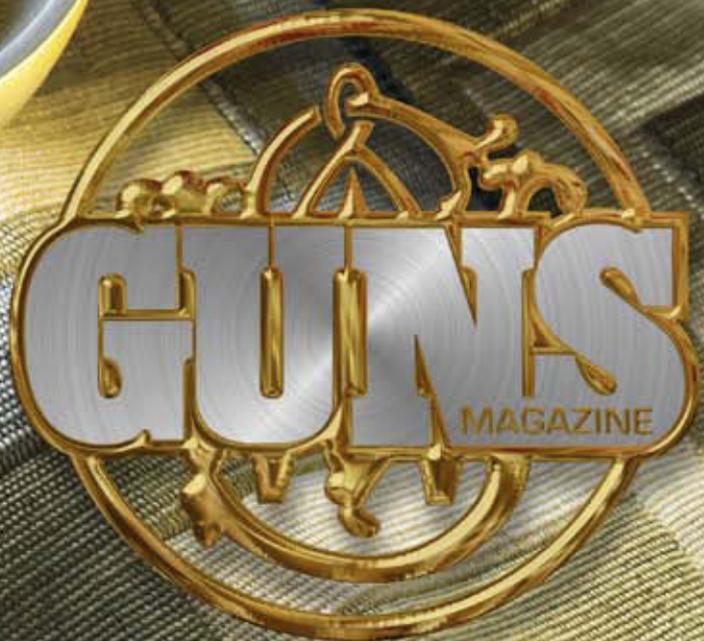
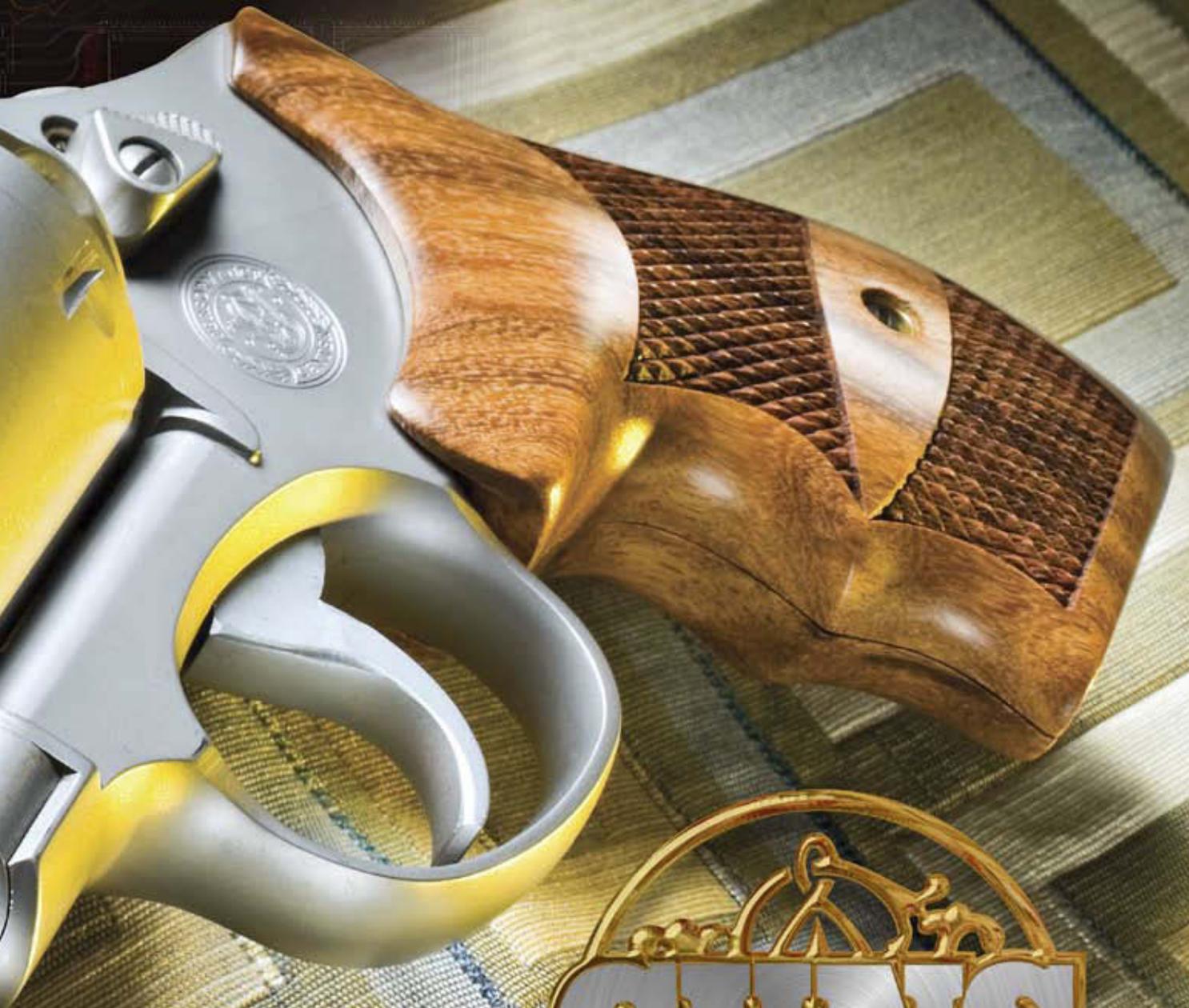
Wesson cut the barrel as short as possible without interfering with the ejector housing. The result at 3-1/2" was not only one of most business-like looking revolvers ever produced, it was also carried easily in a Tom Threepersons-style holster under a suitcoat where it may not have been exceptionally comfortable but it was at least concealable.

When Smith & Wesson introduced the .357 Combat Magnum in 1955, they used the M&P .38 Special frame with its slightly smaller cylinder and added a 4" bull barrel to come up with what Bill Jordan called the Peace Officer's Dream. Then in the 1960s the Combat Magnum/Model 19 came out in a version with a roundbutt and a 2-1/2" barrel making it much easier to conceal and carry all day than the original .357 Magnum. **CUNTS**

# TRAIL BUSTING **POWER**

SMITH & WESSON'S  
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PERSONAL PROTECTION  
.44 MAGNUM.





Magnum with proper loads, we are set for self-defense against the nastiest of creatures no matter how many legs they may have, well at least short of the big bears of Alaska.

There has been a noticeable trend in recent years, especially in this first decade of the 21st century to once again offer short-barreled big-bore sixguns. This is not Smith & Wesson's first short-barreled, all-steel offering as I have an older 3" Model 29 with the same roundbutt and un-fluted cylinder as this current offering. Smith & Wesson Night Guards are lightweight revolvers, while this new 629 is all steel.

The 3-1/2" N-Frame .357 Magnum and 2-1/2" .357 Combat Magnum are

two of the most business-like looking pistols ever devised. Now we can add this new 629 to this select group. With its 2-5/8" barrel it fits right into the "Serious Looking Sixgun" list. It not only says serious, but it is also one good-looking sixgun! The major parts of this "little" .44 Magnum, barrel, cylinder and frame, are matte stainless steel while the hammer and trigger are hard-chromed steel.

The hammer has a most attractive teardrop shape, which is larger than a standard hammer spur but not quite as large as a target hammer. The trigger is non-target size with a smooth face making it easy on the trigger finger and it has a built-in trigger stop on the back. This is the one thing I do

## PERFORMANCE CENTER MODEL 629

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<b>ACTION TYPE:</b>	Double-action revolver
<b>CALIBER:</b>	.44 Magnum
<b>CAPACITY:</b>	6
<b>BARREL LENGTH:</b>	2-5/8"
<b>OVERALL LENGTH:</b>	7-5/8"
<b>WEIGHT:</b>	39.6 ounces
<b>FINISH:</b>	Matte stainless steel
<b>SIGHTS:</b>	Adjustable rear, ramp front
<b>GRIPS:</b>	Checkedered walnut
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not like about this .44 Magnum. I do not believe trigger stops belong on anything except a target pistol. For my use I would either remove it or file it down. I just do not want to take the chance of it ever backing out to the point the trigger will not go all the way rearward. It would probably never happen, but we all know what Murphy says.

The sights are excellent with a standard adjustable white outline rear sight matched up with a ramp-style front sight with a red insert. The front sight is also set in a dovetail should you need more windage than afforded by the rear sight or if a taller or shorter blade is desired. The ejector rod housing is cut all the way through making the ejector rod visible from both sides. Instead of the typical front locking feature of Smith & Wesson double-action revolvers, this one has a ball detent lock up with a ball on the front of the yoke fitting into a slot at the bottom of the ejector rod housing.

Grips are always, well almost always, a sore spot with me on factory double-action revolvers, but it's not the case here. These grips are exceptionally good looking, appearing to be of nicely grained walnut and are well shaped and designed for maximum concealment. They are checkered above and below the grip screw for a good secure feeling. The left grip is slimmed down at the top so as not to interfere with the ejection of cases, and both panels taper toward the bottom of the grip frame making them fit the hand quite comfortably. The grip frame itself has been roundbutted, which allows the use of such smallish grips.

There is a wide array of .44 Magnum ammunition available in weights from 165 grains up to 340 grains. I don't

# HELTON CUSTOM KNIVES

## Roy Huntington

Since moving to the country outside of Joplin, Mo., I've found a wealth of local craftspeople. From custom furniture makers, weavers, potters and painters, to tractor restorers, blacksmiths and now—a sterling knifemaker.

An *American Handgunner* reader, Ms. Yvette, sent me an e-mail and simply said, "You need to meet this young man and feature him in your magazine." I phoned Billy Helton, and discovered he lives in Claremore, Okla., about an hour from me (the home of Will Rogers, by the way). I found him to be typical of the country people around here—polite, hard-working, modest-living and the kind of fellow whose handshake is a promise not to be broken. His hand-forged knife-work immediately took me, showing old school "hands-on" hard work, blending with an obvious creative enthusiasm for design and innovation. I immediately bought three knives from him.

I slated Billy to be featured in *American Handgunner's* Nov/Dec 2010 edition, and the work showcased in that article is stunning indeed. A dramatic leap in talent for someone who only began to make knives a few short years ago. His work, done in his small shop at home, shows the kind of care and attention you can only find in a hand-made knife. Each knife Billy makes comes with a letter of authenticity. In it, Billy describes the knife and signs it showing he made it personally. But what caught my eye is one line in that letter:

*"I believe that quality is the measure of a man's success, and I apply that to each*



*The Helton knife features a blade almost as long as the overall length of the S&W 629. This pair would make serious traveling companions and earn the title of "Trail Bustin' Buddies."*

*and every knife."*

The featured knife is a hand-forged bowie with bronze and copper fittings and an ironwood handle. While it is a one-off knife, Billy can make a dream come true for you too. And the prices begin at a very modest \$250 for hand-forged work, and only \$75 for a simple, stock removal model for everyday carry.

GUNS

### BILLY HELTON

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**A**

**B**



**C**



**D**



*A) The 2-5/8" barrel is well sculptured and nicely crowned. Rather than having a second locking point at the end of the ejector rod, a ball detent locks the cylinder crane to the frame. B) The front sight is set into a dovetail and has a fluorescent red strip for high visibility. C) As with all modern S&W revolvers, the firing pin is mounted in the frame. The hammer is given a nice teardrop shape and is well checkered. Both hammer and trigger have been hard chromed. Note the fully adjustable white outline rear sight. D) The cylinder is unfluted to add a little weight to this otherwise lightweight sixgun. No matter how you cut it, a 6-shot .44 Magnum cylinder makes for a big revolver.*

want to even contemplate setting off some of the latter in this little sixgun, nor even 300 grainers, or 240s or 250s for that matter. CorBon offers just about anything a .44 Magnum user would want including 165- and 180-grain hollowpoints as well as their 225-grain DPX. To go with the Smith & Wesson Performance Center .44 Magnum CorBon sent along several boxes of their DPX .44s.

DPX bullets are designed for Deep Penetration while the extremely large hollowpoint matches the penetration with maximum expansion. In the very short barrel of the Model 629, the 225-grain DPX bullet clocks out right at 1,200 feet per second. Recoil

is substantial, though not punishing, and the grips do a really good job of controlling felt recoil. All shooting was done at a "combat/self-defense" distance of 10 yards. It didn't take much concentration to put all six shots in one hole at this distance. For me, the typical red ramp insert washes out in sunlight or when shooting indoors. The red front sight of this .44 Magnum is a florescent strip extending the full length of the rear sight and shows up brightly for me even when shooting indoors.

Life is always full of trade-offs. If we want the most the .44 Magnum can offer we will opt for a long-barreled, long-cylindereed version built to handle

the heaviest bullets. This type of sixgun is normally very large, very heavy and recoils tremendously. The Model 629 from the Performance Center is at the other end of the spectrum and what we give up in maximum performance is made up with ease of carrying and concealing while at the same time being able to deliver a respectable payload quite accurately at a reasonable distance. For anyone who roams off the beaten path this Model 629 could be a veritable lifesaver.

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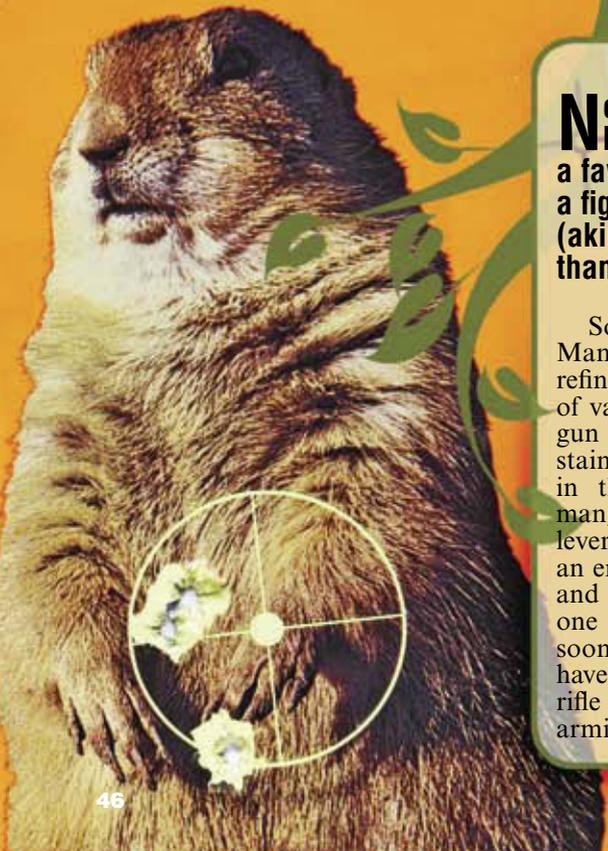
# A TRACTOR



## OR IS IT? THIS PROJECT T SO NICE IT MIGHT NOT

7" Vermin Target

Crating Pec



### Hamilton S. Bowen

**N**ot every undertaking turns out all that well. Indeed, some are best forgotten and unreported. One way to increase the odds of a favorable outcome is to practice first, which will usually give you a fighting chance in the main event. Unmanly as this may seem (akin to asking directions), your wallet and reputation will often thank you.

So, with a couple of the resident Mannlicher carbines in want of stock refinishing, it seemed the better part of valor to practice on an expendable gun first to get the stock finish and stain color right. A good rummaging in the shop corners uncovered a mangy Marlin M57M .22 WRM lever rifle, the perfect victim for such an enterprise. The stock was cracked and had some chunks missing. Well, one thing led to another and pretty soon it looked like we might just have the makings of a fine "tractor" rifle on our hands, just the ticket for arming the Kubota for bush-hogging

missions about the old home place.

No self-respecting farmer in my neck of the woods ever sortied on the ol' Massey Ferguson without some sort of firearm. The couple I knew best as a kid seemed preternaturally preoccupied with worries about 2-legged varmints, so they carried ratty S&W revolvers in the tractor tool boxes, usually wrapped in an old sock or tattered gun rug. Another I recall, sensibly more worried about groundhogs bent on destroying the foundations of every barn in the county, armed himself with a Marlin .22 auto of decidedly shady aspect.

# RIFLE

Rifle, shovel and sledge hammer. This old Marlin was just another implement and nothing special—yet.

## TORN OUT STAY ON DUTY.

Spending more time these days on a tractor around the old Bowen family homestead put me in mind of the need for a suitable tractor gun of my own. The old Marlin looked like the ideal candidate once its duties as a wood-working guinea pig were discharged.

Tractor guns are the ultimate in utility guns and first and foremost must be cheap, i.e. expendable. They spend a lot of time in dust, rain and mud in an environment full of sharp steel corners. They get beat senseless rattling and lurching around day in and day out. Dropping is always a possibility. They may also meet especially violent ends. While I do not know of a specific case where a tractor gun died the hard way, I am aware of at least one chainsaw smashed flat as a flitter under the track of the resident bulldozer. The crawler pilot (mercifully not Yr. Obt. Svt. for a change) also suffers from the genetic disorder BPS (Bowen's

Preoccupation Syndrome) and was evidently committing multi-tasking with predicable results.

### Suitability

The old Marlin needed a few modest improvements and modifications to make the gun handy and effective. This wasn't a complicated gunsmithing exercise, but a pleasant one showing that in some old clinkers lurks a pretty good gun and an opportunity for weekend gunsmiths to hone their skills without risk to anything but their pride.

Some rifles do wear out from use. My M57M Levermatic was weary enough to have acquired the annoying habit of dropping the finger lever slightly at the slightest jar, which would, in turn, unlock the action. Accordingly, a bit of tinkering was in order.

While these hammerless lever rifles have an extremely short lever throw and run fast as lightning, all manner

of links, slots, camming surfaces and mousetrap springs go lame over time. Poking around on the Internet turned up a low-mileage cartridge lifter, snappier lifter spring and a new lever cam plate, which, once installed, cured that problem. Naturally, the new lifter caused feeding trouble, but a bit of file and stone work cured this. I must freely admit a lack of familiarity with the entrails of these guns, so I was especially happy to have a copy of J. B. Wood's book *Disassembly of .22 Rifles* at hand.

While patrolling on a tractor doesn't exactly make you a member of the cavalry, the problem of unwieldy weapons is the same. The needlessly long and cumbersome 24" barrel was bound to get tangled up in the gun rack, roll bar, front-end loader controls, low-flying tree branch or some other obstruction. A minute on the band saw trimmed it to a handier 18". As with many economy-grade .22s,

the barrel was pinned to the receiver. So, rather than remove the barrel and crown it on the lathe the right way, we did it the down-and-dirty way with a piloted spot-facing tool, filing the outside chamfer by hand. Cutting the

magazine and inner magazine tube and milling a new dovetail slot in the barrel for the front tube hanger completed the trimming. Remounting the front sight required only drilling and tapping a couple of screw holes.

Like many 50-somethings, I suffer from optical menopause and am constantly frustrated by failing skills as a marksman because I simply can't see ordinary rifle sights any more. Most of my serious rifle shooting is with vintage rifles on which optics are an abomination, which made it difficult to warm up to the idea of a scope, even for a utility gun. Happily, peep sights have given me a whole new lease on life with iron-sighted rifles and that's how this Marlin was equipped.

The Levermatic family of rifles was made for a few years in the late '50s and early '60s, so finding a dedicated receiver sight is troublesome. As it happens, the out-of-production Lyman 66 for the Ruger .44 auto carbine has the same mounting-hole pattern and, with just a bit of work on the base mating surface contours, bolted right up. Appropriately enough, a previous owner had obviously dropped his gun and bent the cross bar on this sight. A bit of straightening set it aright and afforded a useful lesson on Lyman peep sight repair.

Despite the woodworking lesson, notwithstanding, this thing really needed some help. The first order of business was to remove as much of the original finish as possible. Jasco Stain and Varnish Stripper from the



*Yr. Obt. Svt. on tractor in weeds (above). No telling what monsters might be hiding in those weeds and require dispatch. The Kolpin Gear Grips (below) keep the "tractor rifle" secure and handy, thanks to its quick-release feature.*



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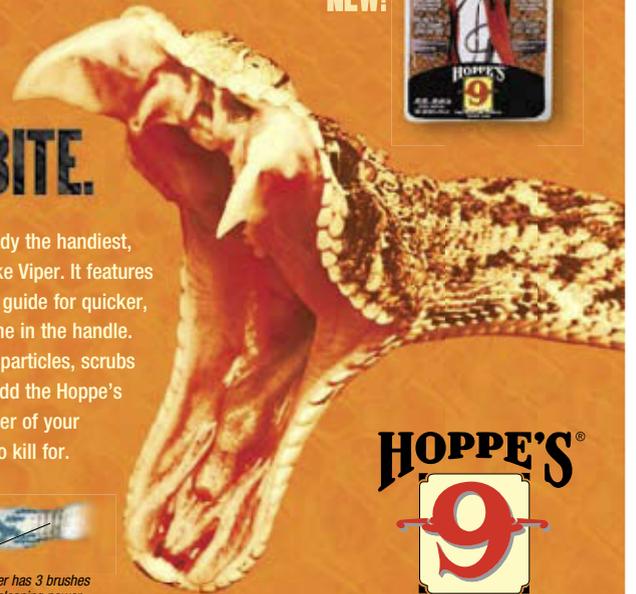
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local Ace Hardware store worked well, abetted by a bit of judicious scraping and steel wooling. Somewhere in its life, this poor rifle sustained a beating that cracked the stock through the wrist. The tang area had chipped out leaving an unsightly garf which required a small plug of wood to fill. A little Elmer's wood glue blown into the cracks and some sawdust rubbed in rendered it sound once again.

Typical of its vintage, this gun featured a short, high-comb, monte carlo stock which would have fitted perfectly the average 4', 11" 6 year old with a giraffe neck. Attacking the monte carlo comb with a rasp and some simple shaping eliminated the annoying appendage and gave far better handling with the iron sights. The quickest way to lengthen a stock is by adding a recoil pad, which also affords a no-slip butt surface, a great aid to shooting in awkward positions—such as the saddle of your tractor. Plus, I hadn't installed a recoil pad in forever and was happy of the practice.

All the woodwork needed was the finishing, the actual purpose of the job. The Pilkington's English Red stain, totally out of place on a beater Marlin, is never-the-less a delight to my eyes and, while not totally authentic, may still get the nod in the end for the



**The "new" Marlin M57M is light, handy and fast on its feet, just the ticket for a tractor gun. She will never look this good again. Of course, it might be reassigned to more benign duty, since it came out as well as it did.**

Steyr guns.

Like most personal gunsmithing projects, this one began to suffer "mission creep." What with all this fancy wood and metal work, it just wouldn't do to leave off rebluing even though we were heading toward a \$500 bill on a \$100 rifle. A serious polishing effort wasn't in the cards, so we applied our faux rust blue, which covered a lot of sins of economy at manufacture and a lot of the hard miles since. Most any gunsmithing shop will have a bead-blast cabinet and use a variety of media, depending on the job at hand.

While aluminum oxide at high pressure is great for cleaning off rust and solder, it opens the pores of the metal and etches the hell out of it. Proper rust bluing has a bit of a sheen to it so a softer, smoother matte is indicated on finish work. The Bowen Classic Arms shop formula is glass beads at 40-50 psi, which, before actual bluing, yields a bright, frosted matte much like on stainless handguns from the Smith & Wesson Performance Center. It does not, however, cover any sins of metal preparation as often imagined.

New from

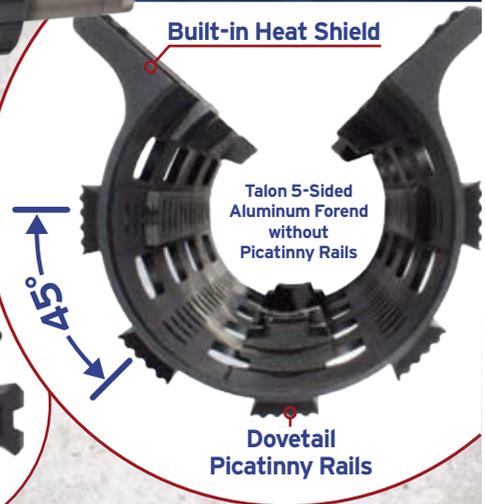


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A TRACTOR RIFLE



Rear sight staff, wedge and hammer used in repairing the bent Lyman rear sight staff. Sometimes fixing something really does take a hammer.



This crown was performed with a hacksaw, file and piloted crowning tool in about 3.4 minutes.



Yr. Obt. Svt. at vise rasping on the stock. This gun wasn't destined to be scoped, so the homely monte carlo comb on the stock had to go.

Once blued, this treatment bears a suspicious resemblance to the rust bluing found on fine custom sporting rifles. Not near as durable as the real thing, this inexpensive finish is nevertheless quite handsome. Alas, I did succumb to the irresistible urge to have Turnbull Restorations color case the lever, a senseless and futile gesture to be sure but, hey, no free-living, self-supporting groundhog should ever suffer the indignity of getting whacked by an ugly gun except under the most desperate circumstances.

With all the finished bits and pieces in hand, the gun was reassembled for testing and sighting. The CCI TNT Green ammo with its 30-grain hollowpoint bullet flying along at near 2,000 fps gave surprisingly good accuracy in the indifferently bedded M57M and produced some quarter-sized groups with iron sights at the 25- to 50-yard distances tried initially. A hopeful sign indeed.

Carrying the gun on the tractor didn't present any difficulties. My particular machine had a roll bar just abaft the seat which afforded a handy place to rig a gun rack. After reviewing the available ATV racks and mounts, I settled on a set of the Kolpin Gear Grips. Some Monsieur mouse engineering and fabricating resulted



**Retribution of biblical proportions on thievin' varmints need not be large or loud. The CCI 30-grain HP at 2,000 fps is the wrath of God on small and medium critters.**

in a simple, solid mount that affords reasonable protection and ready access to the gun.

This rehabilitated Marlin is now a faithful companion around the farm and will, over time, doubtless account for the occasional varmint, especially coyotes, which have discovered the delights and bounties of life in beautiful East Tennessee. Not beloved by local farmers or domestic pet owners, perhaps I can knock a bit of the lustre off their lives here in the Promised Land. The old Marlin does its work well and provided some important answers to stock refinishing questions on Mannlicher-Schoenauers. As a "tractor rifle," however, it wasn't a real success.

Alas, I have taken a bit of a shine to this old clinker and now kind of hate to beat it to death in the field and am obliged to be a bit careful with it. But at least I did not violate one of the cardinal principles of good gunsmithing: Never buy a perfectly suitable \$200 gun when you can take a \$100 gun, spend \$500 on it and have the same thing.

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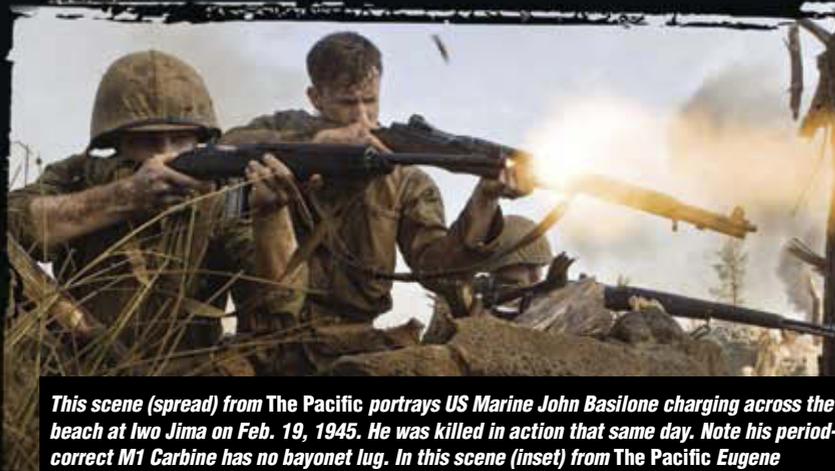
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# GUNS OF THE PACIFIC



*This scene (spread) from The Pacific portrays US Marine John Basilone charging across the beach at Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945. He was killed in action that same day. Note his period-correct M1 Carbine has no bayonet lug. In this scene (inset) from The Pacific Eugene Sledge is portrayed with two other US Marines fighting off an attack by Japanese troops. Sledge in the middle is firing an M1 Garand. The Marine at left is using an M1 Carbine and the Marine to his right is firing another M1 Garand. Photos: David James/HBO*

# HBO chronicles the WWII island battles against the Japanese.

Mike "Duke" Venturino

Photos: Yvonne Venturino, David James/HBO

**L**ike millions of others I recently finished watching the 10-part HBO mini-series *The Pacific*. Its subject was the US Marine Corps' campaigns in the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) during World War II. *The Pacific* was based on three non-fiction books: *Helmet For My Pillow* by Robert Leckie, *With The Old Breed At Peleliu And Okinawa* by Eugene Sledge and *Black Sand, Red Blood* by Charles Tatum.

The wartime experiences of three US Marines are collectively traced from the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, until Leckie and Sledge returned to civilian life after the Japanese signed the surrender on September 2, 1945. The third Marine, John Basilone, was awarded the Medal of Honor for his combat performance on Guadalcanal in October 1942 but was killed the morning of Feb. 19, 1945 on the first day of the invasion of Iwo Jima.

*The Pacific* is focused on the three men, because all of them served in the 1st Marine Division. (Basilone was with the 1st Division on Guadalcanal but was serving with the newly formed 5th Division on Iwo Jima.) The USMC's 1st Division, the "Old Breed" made America's first offensive move against the Japanese when Guadalcanal was invaded

on Aug. 7, 1942. It also hit the beaches of Okinawa on April 1, 1945 in America's last island invasion of the Pacific War. In the interim, the 1st Division also invaded Cape Gloucester on New Britain late in 1943 and attacked the island of Peleliu on Sept. 15, 1944.

As the story of Leckie, Basilone and Sledge spanned almost a 3-year time frame, viewers interested in weapons history could watch as *The Pacific* showed in detail how the firearms the US Marines carried into so many island campaigns evolved. All in all, *The Pacific's* makers led by Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks did an excellent job in what must have been a most difficult undertaking. In regards to firearms they made only one glaring error that I saw, which will be detailed later.

When the 1st Marine Division invaded Guadalcanal, the issue remained in doubt for several months. Only a couple of days into the operation, the US Navy was forced to retreat by the Japanese Navy's surface ships and air forces, which left the Marines on shore short of everything from food to ammunition. Even at the time the Guadalcanal invasion was characterized as a "shoestring operation."

Captured Japanese rice augmented US food supplies, but in regards to ammunition their small arms needs in 1942 were simple in variety if not quantity. USMC infantry at that time used only .45 ACP for handguns and submachine guns and .30-06 for rifles and full-size machine guns. Although the US Army had adopted the semi-auto M1 Garand as early as 1936, the US Marine Corps clung to their bolt-action Model 1903 "Springfield."



They considered the '03 more accurate and reliable than the new semi-auto, despite the fact the M1 could fire eight rounds with a pull of the trigger for each, while the '03 required bolt manipulation for every one of the five rounds its magazine held. In the close range jungle combat that was more the rule on Guadalcanal, precise accuracy was not as important as firepower, as ordinary Marine infantryman quickly realized. The .30-06's long-range capability was not needed in the jungle, but its ability to penetrate foliage and even trees was appreciated.

Perhaps the most important infantry weapon on Guadalcanal, as well portrayed in the mini-series, was the belt-fed Browning Model 1917 water-cooled heavy machine gun (also .30-06). Both Leckie and Basilone were machine gunners on "the 'Canal" as Marine lore came to call the island. Respectively, they participated in stands against fanatical Japanese attacks at the Tenaru River in August (it was actually the Ilu River; Marine maps were that poor), and on a ridge south of the all-important American airfield in October. The Marine's defense in both fights centered on those big tripod-mounted Brownings. Also at that time, USMC machine gunners' personal weapons were pistols. They were the 1911A1 .45 ACP and *The Pacific* showed both Leckie and Basilone using theirs.

Gun savvy viewers probably noticed much firearms detail in the Guadalcanal segments of *The Pacific*. I saw at least one Reising submachine gun in the hands of an officer leading a patrol, and several scenes with



**In this scene from *The Pacific* US Marine Eugene Sledge attacks across the airfield during the battle for Peleliu in September 1944. He is a member of a mortar crew, and he and his companion are correctly shown with M1 Carbines. Photo: David James/HBO**

Thompson submachine guns fitted with drums. Marines liked Thompsons but detested Reising's because combat conditions made them very unreliable. They were withdrawn from service shortly after Guadalcanal.

The Model 1928 Thompsons available in 1942 could use 50- or even 100-round drum magazines while later

versions took only 20- or 30-round stick magazines. Also in the scenes showing the night fighting, for which Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor, was a Marine helping to defend the machine gun position. He is shown firing a Winchester Model '97 pump action, 12-gauge shotgun.

In late October 1942, the US Army's 164th Infantry Regiment arrived on Guadalcanal with its riflemen carrying M1 Garands. Marines were famous for their pilfering of Army stores whenever possible and one of the mini-series' scenes shows how disgusted a young Marine was upon opening a crate of Garands while raiding a supply dump. He says something to the effect, "The Army gets these while we fight with rifles my grandfather would have used!" Soldiers of the 164th Infantry have said if they set down their Garands and turned their backs for just a moment a Marine's arm would snake out of the jungle and swipe it. So many were taken that when the 1st Marine Division finally left Guadalcanal in December 1942, US Army officers were stationed at embarkation points to confiscate all M1s carried by Marines.

After recuperating in Australia from their ordeal on Guadalcanal, the 1st Marine Division's next invasion was Cape Gloucester on the soggy, swampy



**Here, US Marine Eugene Sledge during the battle for Okinawa in May 1945 when it rained 17" in 15 days. Note he is carrying an M1A1 Thompson submachine gun and his holstered Colt New Service revolver is barely visible. Photo: David James/HBO/The Pacific**

island of New Britain. This was just after Christmas 1943, and by this time the USMC was re-equipped. Now the average rifleman was also packing an M1 Garand, while members of crew-served weapons such as machine guns and mortars had M1 Carbines. The weapon used its own dedicated cartridge, so Marine supply officers had to add .30 Carbine ammunition to .30-06 and .45 ACP.

On Cape Gloucester, Robert Leckie is now serving as a scout and is armed with the new Thompson submachine gun—the M1A1. They are easy to discern from earlier 1928 Thompsons by the shape of the protecting “wings” on the rear sight. By this time the Marines were attacking more than

defending, so more of the much lighter, air-cooled Browning Model 1919A4 light machine guns were in use. Whereas the water-cooled Model



*When the Marines turned to the offensive in the Pacific War they began using the M1919A4 much more than the water-cooled 1917s because of the former's lighter weight.*

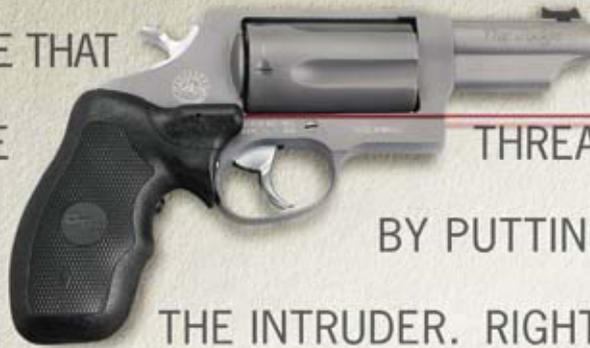
1917 weighed 93 pounds with tripod, the air-cooled Model 1919A4 weighed 45 pounds with tripod, thus easier for men on the move.

In the Cape Gloucester scenes, *The Pacific* touches on a trait nearly universal among American military personnel in WWII—the quest for souvenirs, as illustrated by Leckie finding a Japanese Type 14 8mm “Nambu” pistol when overrunning a Japanese camp. Other Marines are envious of Leckie’s treasure, offering to buy it and an officer even steals it only to have Leckie “re-appropriate” it.

In the spring of 1944 the 1st Division left Cape Gloucester to take up residence in a rest camp on Pavuvu

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Island. There, Eugene Sledge joins the 1st Division and here again a scene stresses handguns. In it, Sledge receives a package from home containing a .45 ACP revolver, obviously a Colt New Service double action. Of course, sending a handgun in the US Mail was just as prohibited then as today, but it was done much during the war. Sledge's friend, Sid Phillips, then repeats a bit of the mythology believed by so many young GIs and Marines of that era. He says that if you hit an enemy only in the hand with a .45 then it will likely

blow off his entire arm. Of course, that's nonsense. Regardless, such was commonly believed back then.

It is also very interesting how Sledge's handgun was portrayed later after the 1st Division landed on Peleliu. By then, the Japanese seldom engaged in those life-wasting, nighttime, "Banzai charges" so common early in the war. Instead they held up in caves and bunkers, trying to inflict as many casualties on the Marines as possible before dying themselves. At night infiltrators were sent crawling into

Marine lines, with the hopes they could slay sleeping Marines in their foxholes or at least keep them so on edge no one rested. Those infiltrators were not expected to return. In nighttime Peleliu scenes in *The Pacific* Sledge is shown gripping his Colt New Service, notably with his finger off the trigger. (Evidently they had good firearms instructors for the young actors of this production.)

The gun handling shown in *The Pacific* was realistic. Nowhere was there wild hip shooting with Thompsons, Carbines or rifles. Most shooting was aimed fire from the shoulder as befitted US Marine WWII training in rifle marksmanship. During the scenes of the wild melee on that October 1942 night when John Basilone's fighting resulted in his Medal Of Honor, they do show the machine gunners swinging their Browning 1917s to and fro instead of having them being locked into set fields of fire. Those who have fired such machine guns swinging loosely know how badly they spread bullets in that manner. Still, with the entire front covered with Japanese attackers, it is possible the Marine machine gunners did have to fire like that. Also, during those battle scenes Marines are shown working their Springfields' bolt with the rifle still shouldered. That is how they would have been trained.

Also, it was refreshing to see how the M1 Carbine was used in *The Pacific*. The little 5-pound .30 Carbine was not meant as an offensive weapon. It was intended for officers, dog handlers, corpsmen, wiremen and members of weapons crews to defend themselves from the enemy while going about their duties. Such duties didn't usually mean fighting with a rifle. During Part 8 of the mini-series, Sgt. Basilone is shown rushing about the Iwo Jima battlefield directing his machine gun crews as to where to set their guns and where to place their fire. He carries an M1 Carbine but doesn't actually fight with it. When he does decide to fight himself, he is shown handing off his carbine to one of his men and picking up a 1919A4 from its tripod.

American fighting men were blessed in WWII as the only nations' troops almost universally equipped with autoloading weapons or at least so after 1943. In Part 9 there is an instance when the more intricate mechanism of the semi-autos was not so beneficial. With Eugene Sledge on Okinawa, a Japanese charge occurs, right after he has fallen in the mud. (During the fighting on Okinawa in one 15-day period over 17" of rain fell.) His M1 Carbine is covered in slime, so he picks up someone else's dry M1 Garand. When it is empty he draws the Colt



In *The Pacific* there are scenes showing three types of handguns. They were (from left) US Model 1911A1 .45 ACP, Colt New Service US Model 1917 .45 ACP (loaded via 3-shot 1/2-moon clips) and Japanese Type 14 "Nambu" 8mm.



The M1 Carbine (top) was developed with the original intention of replacing both the Thompson submachine gun and the Model 1911 pistol for American troops. It actually did not in either case, instead augmented them.



In the early episodes of *The Pacific* when the USMC is shown occupying the island of Guadalcanal, there are several scenes showing US Marines holding Reising Model 50 submachine guns. They were pulled from service shortly after the Guadalcanal campaign.



**The primary defense on Guadalcanal was the Browning water-cooled M1917 machine gun in .30-06, shown here being fired by Duke and Clint Smith at Thunder Ranch.**

New Service revolver. The history of the 36-day battle for Iwo Jima is full of stories of both M1 Garands and M1 Carbines clogging with the island's black volcanic ash.

Except for the part about Robert Leckie's Japanese Type 14 Nambu, not much is made of Japanese small arms in *The Pacific*. In fact few close ups of Japanese soldiers were shown at all, and mostly then their rifles were bayoneted. In WWII, Japanese infantry doctrine stressed bayonet fighting as much as the USMC stressed rifle marksmanship. I did spot in one Peleliu scene one Japanese rifle lying on the battlefield, with its action's dust cover still in place. Both Japanese Type 38 6.5mm and Type 99 7.7mm infantry rifles were issued with such dust covers.

All in all the firearms coverage in *The Pacific* was excellent. The M1 Carbines all were sans bayonet lugs but did have the L-shaped rear peep sight proper for the time. Those are tiny details but significant to sharp-eyed gun people. So then one has to ask why *The Pacific's* firearms' advisor, whoever he was, had the Marines on Guadalcanal armed with Model 1903A3 rifles, instead of the proper Model 1903s? The rear peep sight of a Model 1903A3 sticks out like a sore thumb and several close-up shots show them. That alteration of the Model 1903 was not approved until May 1942, and the Marines did not have them on Guadalcanal.

That one mistake aside, *The Pacific* was an excellent production, at long last showing just how hard the climate, tropical diseases, and the fanatical enemy hammered America's Marines on those Pacific Islands. After viewing HBO's *The Pacific* anyone meeting one of those veterans should feel humbled.

HBO plans the release of the *The Pacific DVD* on Nov. 2, 2010. For those of you with cable, episodes are available for viewing On Demand.—Editor **GENS**

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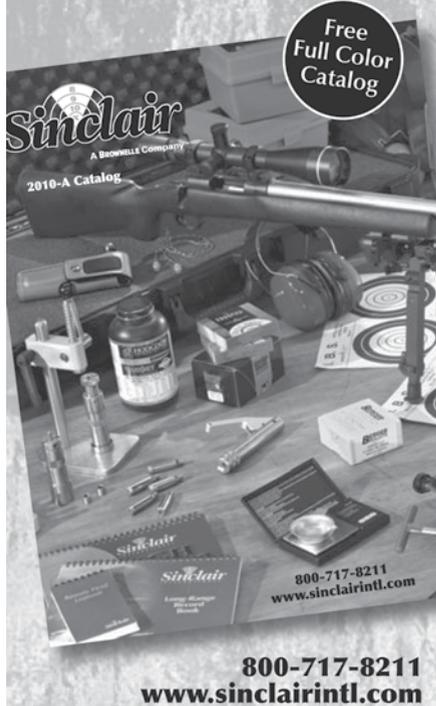
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# VIEWS NEWS AND REVIEWS

## RIGHTS WATCH

• DAVID CODREA •

### SECOND AMENDMENT RULED APPLICABLE TO STATES

The wait for a decision in *McDonald v. Chicago* (see July 2010 Rights Watch column “Due Process for Second Amendment?”) is over. On June 28, the Supreme Court settled the question of whether the Second Amendment was incorporated to the states with 10 words: “Held: The judgment is reversed and the case is remanded.”

This meant that a previous 7th Circuit Court ruling was overturned, that the case would be returned to that court to resolve conflicts between Chicago’s draconian gun restrictions and the right of the people to keep guns in their homes. Attorney Alan Gura, who had successfully argued the Washington DC *Heller* case, had chalked up another win.

It was a close victory, though, 5-to-4. Chief Justice Roberts, joined by Justices Alito, Scalia, Thomas and Kennedy found for the plaintiffs, with Justices Ginsburg, Breyer, Stevens and Sotomayor (unsurprisingly) dissenting. Writing for the majority, Justice Alito concluded “the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment incorporates the Second Amendment right recognized in *Heller*.” Justice Thomas, powerfully recounting the evils enabled by disarmament of blacks, concurred with the judgment, but argued incorporation via the Privileges and Immunities Clause which he argued is “a more straightforward path to this conclusion.”

Reaction from the “gun lobby” was jubilant.

“In effectively striking down Chicago’s handgun ban, and incorporating the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms so that it applies to state and local governments as well as the federal government, the high court affirmed that a constitutionally-protected civil right cannot be arbitrarily regulated as though it were a privilege,” declared the Second Amendment Foundation’s Alan Gottlieb, which, with the Illinois State Rifle Association, had sponsored

the *McDonald* plaintiffs.

The Brady Campaign was quick to put on a face-saving spin.

“We are pleased that the Court reaffirmed its language in *District of Columbia v. Heller* that the Second Amendment individual right to possess guns in the home for self-defense does not prevent our elected representatives from enacting common-sense gun laws to protect our communities from gun violence,” Brady President Paul Helmke wrote in a press release.

Less pleased was Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, who pledged to do everything in his power to impede the rights of his constituents to own guns, to include, per the Associated Press, “a strict handgun ordinance to replace its doomed gun ban that will likely include limiting each resident to a single handgun, requiring gun owners to have insurance and prohibiting gun stores from setting up shop in the city.”

The truth of the matter is, as with *Heller*, the narrow decision leaves much unsettled and “shall not be infringed” completely unacknowledged. Many challenges to determine legal recognition boundaries remain, and SAF has already hit the ground running. Joining with Grassroots North Carolina, Alan Gura will once more be representing plaintiffs in *Bateman v. Perdue*, to challenge state statutes banning the keeping and bearing of arms and ammunition during declared emergencies—when the need for self-defense can be most critical.

A Churchill quote comes to mind: “Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” **GUNS**

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IEWS NEW AND REVIEWS

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## KAHR PURCHASES MAGNUM RESEARCH

Kahr Arms, has announced the purchase of Minnesota-based firearms manufacturer, Magnum Research, maker of the Desert Eagle Pistol.

Kahr Arms offers customers a selection of unique niche-type firearms, such as the world famous "Tommy Gun" and Auto-Ordnance line of M1 .30 caliber carbines. The addition of Magnum Research products will provide Kahr Arms and Auto-Ordnance customers another unique line of firearms to choose from.

Magnum Research was founded in 1979 and was responsible for the design and the development of the Desert Eagle Pistol. The firearms in its current product lineup include the Desert Eagle (available in .50 AE, .44 Magnum or .357 Magnum), Baby Desert Eagle "Fast Action" Pistol (9mm, .40 S&W), Desert Eagle 1911, Micro Desert Eagle Pistol (.380 ACP), Magnum's BFR (Revolvers in .44 Magnum, .45 LC/.410 or .45-70), Mountain Eagle Magnum Lite Rifle (.22-250, .223, .30-06, .280 and 7mm) and Magnum Lite Rifle (.22LR, .22 WMR or .17 Mach 2).

To learn more about these products and more offered through Kahr Arms, visit [www.kahr.com](http://www.kahr.com) or [www.magnumresearch.com](http://www.magnumresearch.com).

—Courtesy Monica Arnold, Blue August

## MAY FIREARM SALES

Data released by the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) reported 1,016,876 checks in May 2010, ranking the month the second-highest May for most NICS checks. This figure, while



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being a .6 percent decrease from the 1,023,102 checks conducted in May 2009, is an increase of 14.7 percent compared to checks in May 2008. The total number of background checks reported since the beginning of NICS is 115,931,009. —*Courtesy NSSF*

VIEWS NEW AND REVIEWS

## HMS CHATHAM DESTROYS PIRATE BOATS

The Royal Navy Type 22 frigate HMS Chatham, currently deployed as NATO's counter-piracy flagship, has destroyed two boats after intercepting a group of suspected pirates in the Somali Basin.

In a co-coordinated search with an EU Naval Force maritime patrol aircraft, operating out of the Seychelles, HMS Chatham's Lynx helicopter spotted a larger vessel towing the two attack boats approximately 150 miles off the coast of Tanzania on Friday, May 14, 2010.



*The crew of one of HMS Chatham's Pacific 24' rigid inflatable patrol boats speed off to investigate a suspected pirate vessel. Photo: Petty Officer Airman Owen King, Crown Copyright/MOD 2010*

After monitoring the vessel through the night, at dawn, in a well-planned operation, the pirates were forced to surrender by the overwhelming force posed by HMS Chatham, her Lynx helicopter and fast boats containing the ship's Royal Marines detachment.

The Royal Marines team boarded the larger craft and found 10 Somalis and a large amount of fuel on board. The suspected pirates had been observed throwing items, including their weapons and other piracy-related

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VIEWS NEW AND REVIEWS

equipment, into the sea.

The two smaller attack boats were fitted with powerful outboard engines and again contained a considerable amount of fuel. These were separated from the larger craft by the Royal Marines team and HMS Chatham and her Lynx helicopter used their combined firepower to destroy the smaller craft, ensuring that the suspected pirates could not continue with their mission.

Disarmed and without the means to commit an act of piracy, the 10 Somalis were left with only enough fuel in the larger vessel to return to Somalia.

NATO has contributed to the international counter-piracy effort off the Horn of Africa since December 2008. The mission has expanded from escorting UN and World Food Programme shipping under *Operation Allied Provider* to protecting merchant traffic in the Gulf of Aden under *Operation Allied Protector*.



**HMS Chatham goes "hands to boarding stations" after closing on a suspected pirate vessel in the Gulf of Aden. Photo: Petty Officer Airman Owen King, Crown Copyright/MOD 2010**

In addition to these activities, and as part of the latest mission, *Operation Ocean Shield*, NATO is working with other international bodies to help develop capacity of countries in the region to tackle piracy on their own.

The NATO Task Force consists of five ships from Standing NATO Maritime Group 2. These are HMS Chatham (UK), USS Cole (USA), TCG Gelibolu (Turkey), HS Limnos (Greece) and ITS Scirocco (Italy).

At sea, NATO is working closely with other partners including the EU Maritime Force and the Combined Maritime Force, as well as other navies including China, Japan, India and Russia.—  
*Courtesy MoD*

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This is a "Generation 1" device,

and you should think of "generations" in terms of increasing effective range. But performance is much better than the original Gen-1 devices like the old "Starlight" scopes of the Vietnam era, due to better electronic technology. The Night Cougar has a detection range of 150 yards and recognition range of 100 yards. It's a "total darkness" NVD at short range—many are not—thanks to an on-demand IR illuminator, and range of focus is 1 meter to infinity.

The housing is fiberglass reinforced plastic and weather resistant. It features simple push-button digital controls, and the front lens system is a fast, high-resolution F1.4, 35mm setup. All six optic elements are multi-coated glass. Focus is manual, and the diopter adjustment can tune it for your eyes. Runtime on a single lithium CR123 battery is 10 to 20 hours depending on use of the IR illuminator. Forget a 2-semester course on operation: The Night Cougar is very easy to set up and operate.

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Justin Carroll

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I recently had the opportunity to try out the Badlands 2200 daypack, and was immediately impressed with the pack's quality of construction. The pack body is made of an extremely rugged, water-resistant fabric. All seams are double stitched and stress points are reinforced with nearly



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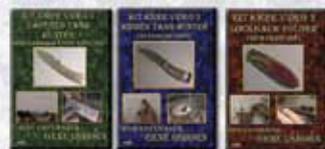


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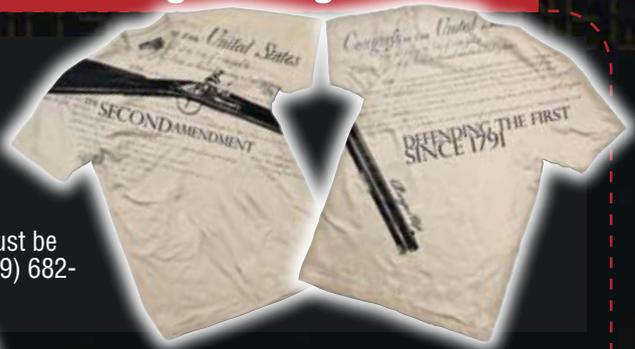


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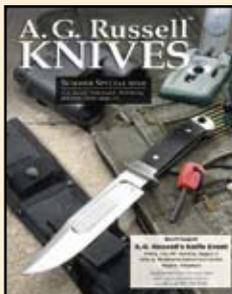
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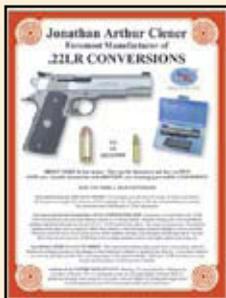


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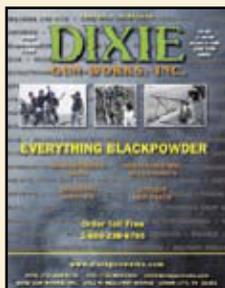
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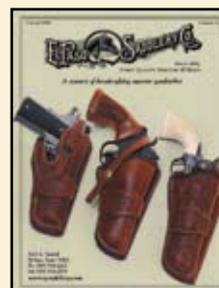


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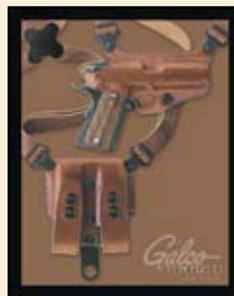


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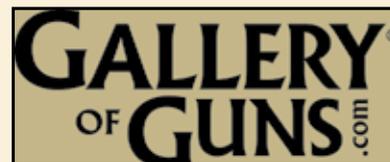
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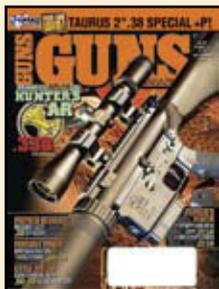


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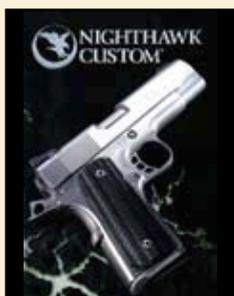


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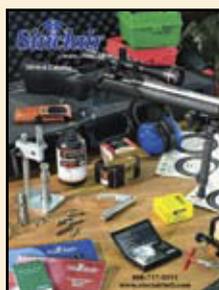


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GUNS



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**BLADE MATERIAL:** 440C stainless steel,  
 RC 56-58 cryogenically treated

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**OVERALL LENGTH:** 14-1/2"

**WEIGHT:** 1.73 pounds

**SCALES:** Sambar stag

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**MAKER: BENCHMADE KNIVES**  
 300 BEAVERCREEK RD., OREGON CITY, OR 97045  
 (800) 800-7427, WWW.BENCHMADE.COM

**OVERALL LENGTH:** 5.71"

**WEIGHT:** 1.54 ounces

**BLADE MATERIAL:** 440C stainless steel full  
 tang blade (58-60HRC)

**BLADE STYLE:** Protected Skinning

**SCALES:** None

**FINISH:** Matte stainless

**SHEATH:** Nylon

**VALUE:** \$30

### MODEL 84L

**MAKER: KIMBER MFG.**  
 ONE LAWTON ST., YONKERS, NY 10705  
 (800) 880-2418, WWW.KIMBERAMERICA.COM

**ACTION TYPE:** Bolt, controlled round feeding

**CALIBER:** .30-06 (tested),  
 .270 Win, .25-06 Rem

**CAPACITY:** 5 + 1

**BARREL LENGTH:** 24"

**OVERALL LENGTH:** 43-3/4"

**WEIGHT:** 6 pounds, 2 ounces

**FINISH:** Matte black

**SIGHTS:** None, bases supplied

**STOCK:** French walnut

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City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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# ODD ANGRY SHOT

• JOHN CONNOR •

## GARCON!

There is something in my coffee.

**“That last Odd Angry Shot was pretty somber,” the Memsaab said, sipping her coffee and sniffin’ the morning breeze. “Maybe you should try something light, like....”**

But my attention was on the big, ugly bug flying our way, lookin’ like a fat, dusty roach. His stubby, too-small wings flailing, he pitched and yawed like a shot-up Swordfish biplane torpedo bomber coming in for a carrier-deck landing. As he approached, he buzzed like a tiny, two-stroke engine running outta gas, pulled nose-up at the last instant, and—*Plop!*—landed smack in my coffee cup....

“Bruno!” Helena laughed, and I laughed with her. And the memories came like a warm wave.

Sitting on the bank of a muddy stream in French Guyana, home of the Foreign Legion’s jungle training facility, I was listening to “Bruno the Belgian” wax eloquently about his favorite subject: coffee. I had to admit, he knew more about “The Blessed Bean” and loved its essence more than anyone I’d ever known. I’m a coffee nut; he’s a coffee freak; a guy who actually went on “coffee vacations” the way some people go on wine-tasting tours. And there amid the muck, he proved that even under jungle conditions he could produce two consummate cups of magnificent moju-juice; one for him, one for his new American pal.

Somewhere in the riverbank debris, the younger legionnaires had found a vintage badminton shuttlecock; one made with real feathers and a leather nose. It was old, filthy, foul and reeking. Lacking rackets and net, the boys slapped it back and forth with their hands as they ran and shoved, slipping in the mud, playing their game more like Australian-rules rugby, complete with tripping, elbow-pokin’ and body-slamming. As Bruno

brought his mug to his lips for his first sip, *Splash!*—the feathered filth-missile impacted—a bull’s-eye in his cup.

The troops froze. Silence fell, broken only by heavy breathing. Bruno’s purple passion for coffee was as well known as his temper—and his strength.

“Garcon,” he stage-whispered, “There is something in my coffee.” He winked conspiratorially. Relieved, one kid extended a tentative, faltering hand to retrieve the dirty birdie from Bruno’s cup.

“No!” He shouted, as he rummaged in his blouse and came up with a mini-Minox camera. “Get away,” he commanded, and they eagerly complied. He carefully lined up his shot, grabbing a legionnaire who, for an instant thought Bruno was gonna snap his neck, to hold a tree branch back out of the light. He took several shots, at one point subtly adjusting the position of the nose-down shuttlecock, and finally seemed satisfied.

“Now,” he muttered. “I must...”

—and he lifted the cup, grimaced, sipped—and swallowed. “Phah! Foo! Blucchh!” he spluttered, spitting out bits of who-knows-what as his eyes watered. “C’est fini,” he pronounced. “One more for the book.”

### Bruno’s Book— The Other One

I knew Bruno was writing a book on coffee—history, varieties, roasting processes, grinds, methods of preparation, and the art and science of presentation and savoring. But I didn’t understand how slurping contaminated coffee fit that format.

“Non different book. This one,” he said as he struggled for words. “Big! Un grand livre. A... a coffee-table book. All big photos. The subject is, things which have fallen into coffee, yet I drink regardless. I have many photos, many very strange bad things; many different places. It will be chef-d’oeuvre—a masterpiece! Peut-etre, perhaps, title will be *Garcon, There Is Something In My Coffee.*”

Keys, pens, pencils, map-markers, which created kaleidoscopic swirls; a solvent-soaked bore brush, a tree leech, insects of all kinds; a nasty bowel-bomb by a seagull, festooned with shards of fish-bones; notes, nail clippers, cigarettes, a Zippo lighter, a pachinko ball, a bloody bandage, even a partially-consumed lizard dropped by a passing bird; all had bathed in Bruno’s coffee.

“The lizard, dat falls in anodder guy’s coffee, but me, I drank from it, as he would not,” he admitted.

Bruno was certain such a book would sell briskly to “Germans, Brits and French. They love such strange sickness. Not so the Italians. Those odders, they drink coffee—in Italy, they reverence fine coffee. My book would be burned there. I would be... savaged.”



Have a sip? Uhh... No thanks.

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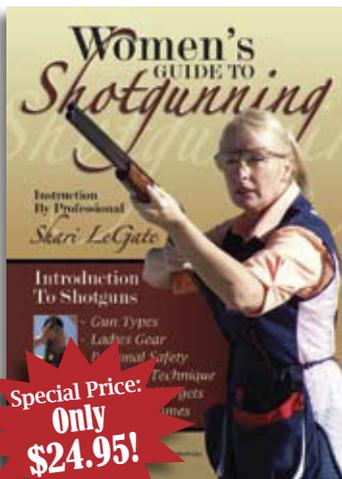
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Since then, I've kept a modest record of my coffee-bombings. Few are as interesting as Bruno's best, but one exotic example stands out: a teensy spritz of hummingbird pee. If you're curious, no; I couldn't detect any taste-change at all... and I didn't slurp after the Swordfish-roach.

## The Watta-Boo

“Now you have to tell 'em about watta-boo,” Helena giggled. “I dare you. I double-dog dare you!” Oh, geez... If I don't, I'll never hear the end of it. Tomorrow, next Tuesday, late December, whenever; lying in bed, porch-sittin' with our dog Sancho, outta the blue I'll hear Helena's clucking-chicken impersonation, followed by “Connah! Watta-boo!” – and more clucking. OK, I give. You win, Memsaab.

Yeah, once upon a time I had a nickname. I didn't want it, never liked it, but that's how it goes sometimes. It's a long story, but here's the bullet:

Two American “military advisors” were training the army training officers of a certain Asian nation. The trainees were uniformly nut-brown, 5-foot-nothin' featherweights, their rifles ex-American M14s. The officer in charge, who was also our interpreter, we called “Poncho Marley,” because his accented English sounded both Spanish and Jamaican. All was going well until a band of blundering commie insurgents enlivened a field exercise with a firefight. We were caught in the open. Naturally, I was closest to them—and in a crouch, I began “advising” as fast as I could put out rounds.

Troops moved up behind me and engaged—one on each side of me, their muzzles about a foot from my gourd, bangin' my eardrums into oblivion. Then suddenly, I felt like a field-goal kicker for the Green Bay Packers was repeatedly punting my crotch! One had gone prone between my legs, his muzzle due South of my fly! I realized—they were using me for cover!

It was over quickly, and if surviving means winning, we won. Poncho Marley was slappin' me on the back and yelling something. All I could hear was the bells of Notre Dame, but my fellow advisor heard all—and told all, to anyone who would listen.

Poncho had shouted, “Connah-mon! You betta cubba danna watta-boo!” Translated: “Connor, man! You're better cover than a water-bull! (water buffalo).”

And so it goes, and so it went in certain small circles, for years—and now you know: Watta-Boo, OK? No clucking, Helena! *Connor OUT.* **GUNS**

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# GUNS

MAGAZINE

OCTOBER 2010

## ADVERTISER'S INDEX

The companies listed have featured advertisements in this issue. Look to them first when you are ready to make a purchase.

ADVERTISER	PAGE
Advanced Technology International	49
Al Mar Knives	25
American Gunsmithing Institute	10
ArmaLite	38
ATK/Nitrex	9
Barnes Bullets Inc.	57
Barska	14
Benchmade Knife Company	13
Birchwood Casey	23
Bond Arms	69
Boyd's Gunstock Industries Inc.	8
Bravo Company USA	C2
Browning Safes	15

ADVERTISER	PAGE
Burger Knives	37
Cannon Safe	27
Conetrol Scope Mounts	79
Crimson Trace Corp.	55
CrossBreed Holsters LLC	64
D & L Sports	75
Daniel Defense	C3
DeSantis Holster	62
Elite Sports Express	50
European American Armory	11
Fenixlight Limited	17
Fobus USA	21
G96 Products Co. Inc.	10
Glock Inc.	67
Helvetica Trading USA LLC	26
Hogue Inc.	64
Hoppe's	48
Hornady Manufacturing Inc.	20
Huber Concepts	75
Insight Technology	69
Jantz Supply	68
Kahr Arms	65
Kimber Manufacturing Inc.	C4
Kirkpatrick Leather Company	79
Kwik-Site Co.	13, 32, 36
Lee Precision Inc.	65

ADVERTISER	PAGE
Leupold & Stevens	33
Mag-na-port International Inc.	60
MTM Case-Gard	31
Nighthawk Custom	19
Old West Reproductions Inc.	51
Otis Technology Inc.	3
Pride Fowler Inc.	60
PrOlix	37
Rock River Arms	51
S & K ScopeMounts	58
Savage Arms	59
Sierra Bullets	50
SIG SAUER	C2
Sinclair International	58
Smith & Wesson	61
Springfield Inc.	39, 63
Spyderco Inc.	62
SSK Industries	75
Steelcutter Publishing	79
Ten Ring Precision	75
Thermold Products	60
Tichbourne Knives	57
Triple K Manufacturing Inc.	8
TruckVault Inc.	25
Umarex USA	66
Walther USA	21

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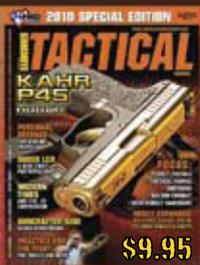
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- Guncrafter Industries
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- S&W Pro Series 1911
- Becoming a Gun Writer
- Handgun Not Enough?
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continued from page 82

totally explained. By the time I obtained it I had learned much about working leather and put together what, even if I do say so myself, was an excellent plain black rig for my Blackhawk. The drop loop belt was 2-1/2" in width, the holster was set so the backstrap of the Blackhawk was even with the top of the belt, and I placed 12 bullet loops on the left side of the belt. I almost wished I had this outfit back as much as some of the firearms I let get away.

I've mentioned Boyle's Gun Shop before and my weekly trips there with my shooting buddies. About 20 miles farther south was Shell's Gun & Archery Farm, which was also a great gun shop with a pit excavated from the side of a hill for shooting sixguns. We managed to hit this place a couple times a month at least. It was on one

of these trips, which I believe was in early 1957, I purchased my third Ruger. This time it was one of the new .44 Magnum Blackhawks, and like its .357 smaller brother is now known as the Flat-Top. Factory ammunition was definitely no fun to shoot in this big sixgun, and I was not smart enough to know that I did not have to load everything full house. I just wouldn't consider anything except the Keith bullet over 22.0 grains of 2400. It would take several years before I would learn to shoot that sixgun and load. Today my most used load is more in line with Keith's .44 Special load—a 250-grain bullet at 1,100 or 1,200 fps.

A few years later my friend and I were out shooting, and I was wearing this .44 Magnum Blackhawk in another leather rig I made for myself, this time in a basket-stamped tan finish, when my friend and I were asked by a farmer to help him load a cantankerous old bull. I said would, but if that bull came for me I would shoot him. The farmer said no problem, so we set about helping him. Well the bull did come for me and instead of shooting him I jumped up (I was much younger in those days!) on the back of an old wooden hay wagon that was there. The bull came up after me and by that time I had the .44 Ruger out with a hammer back. The floor of that wagon was strong enough to hold me but not him and he fell through and was trapped. I don't have the slightest

idea how the farmer ever got that bull out of there; maybe he butchered him on the spot.

I never really cared for the 6-1/2" barrel length on that Ruger .44, so I had it cut back to 4-5/8" and carried it for many years in the Lawrence No. 120 Keith holster in the sagebrush, foothills, forests and mountains of Idaho. When I wanted that barrel to build a custom .44 Special I sent the Blackhawk off to Ruger to have a 7-1/2" barrel installed. This was long before the liability warning appeared on the left side of Ruger barrels. When I wrote my first book, *Big Bore Sixguns*, I admitted to a 7-1/2" single action being my favorite type of sixgun. Then when my editor at *American Handgunner*, Roy Huntington, pinned me best two out of three falls and forced me to pick one favorite sixgun it was no great chore to come up with this 7-1/2" Ruger .44

Magnum Flat-Top Blackhawk, which I have had for more than 50 years as my favorite.

Over the ensuing decades, there been many favorite Rugers, the Old Model .45 Colt Blackhawk whether with a 4-5/8" or 7-1/2" barrel is right at the top of the list. I've used both the .357 Magnum Flat-Top and Old Model Blackhawks to have several gunsmiths do custom sixguns chambered in .44



**It took the passing of time and a few custom touches before Taffin really appreciated the New Model Ruger such as this .45 Colt Blackhawk with Herrett's stocks, custom Bisley Model .44 Magnum by Ben Forkin and .38-40 Blackhawk.**

Special, .41 Special, .45 Colt, .44-40, and .38-40. These are all great sixguns and will eventually be divided among my grandsons. Recently Alan Harton did a premier conversion for me, a 5-1/2" octagon-barreled .44 Special on an Old Model .357 with a Bisley Model grip frame and Turnbull case colored frame and hammer. It is certainly one of the finest .44 Specials I have. It has taken quite a while for me to really appreciate the New Model Rugers, however, several .22 and .32 L'il Guns by Andy Horvath are treasures. I just had Ben Forkin do a matching trio of 5-1/2" Bisley Models again with Turnbull case-colored frames and hammers in .45 Colt, .44 Magnum and .41 Magnum. Any one of these are easily top candidates for the prized title of "Perfect Packin' Pistol."

Bill Ruger had a great idea what he modernized single actions in the 1950s. Bill is now gone but as long as there is freedom, his single actions will be enjoyed for generations to come. **GUNS**

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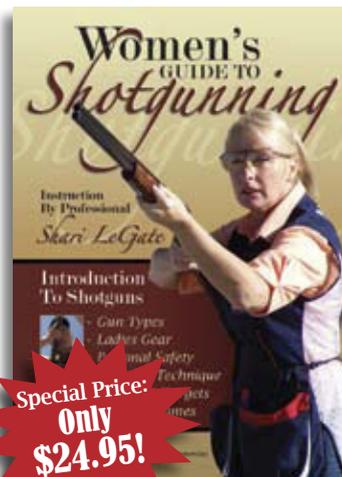
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# CAMPFIRE TALES

BY JOHN TAFFIN

## A HALF CENTURY WITH SIXGUNS Ruger Single Actions

**T**he year was 1953. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, known to everyone as Ike, is inaugurated president on Jan. 20; Stalin our enemy, then our “friend” in World War II, and then our enemy again as the Cold War unveiled, dies in Russia; and a very young Queen Elizabeth II ascends to the British throne. The use of monthly payments for car purchasing increases dramatically; the average car sells for \$1,650, gas is 20¢ a gallon, a color TV is \$1,175 and a new house is just less than \$10,000. The Yankees beat the Dodgers in the World Series and one of the all-time great Western movies arrives with Alan Ladd as *Shane*. I am a freshman in high school, and Bill Ruger modernizes the single action.

Before Colt resurrected the Single Action Army in 1956, even before Great Western began replicating the Colt in 1954, Ruger was ready to take advantage of the demand for single actions brought about mainly by the showing of old “B” Westerns on the relatively new medium of television. People wanted Colts, but they were expensive so was the ammunition. Ruger wisely brought out a single action with a grip frame identical to that of the Colt Peacemaker, however, the rest of the gun was down-sized to be more in line with the .22 it was chambered in. Ruger not only provided a modern single action with coil spring operation, but he also chambered a cartridge everyone could afford to shoot.

In 1955, Ruger used the same grip frame and coil spring action, found on his .22 Single-Six to build a Colt-sized single action not only with adjustable sights, but a massive flat-topped mainframe as well. He called it the Blackhawk and it first arrived chambered in .357 Magnum. *Outdoor Life* featured a full-sized picture of the .357 Blackhawk and it went up on my wall, which also had pictures



Taffin's oldest big-bore sixgun, his Ruger Flat-Top .44, is still his No. 1 favorite.

of all the provinces in Canada and all the Cleveland Indians players. The top half of the sidewalls of my room tapered toward the center, so I could easily see anything on the wall while lying in bed. That Blackhawk was strategically placed to be the last thing seen at night and the first thing seen in the morning. I dreamed of the day I would have one.

Three years after Ruger introduced his .22 Single-Six I was in a position to purchase my own. We didn't have

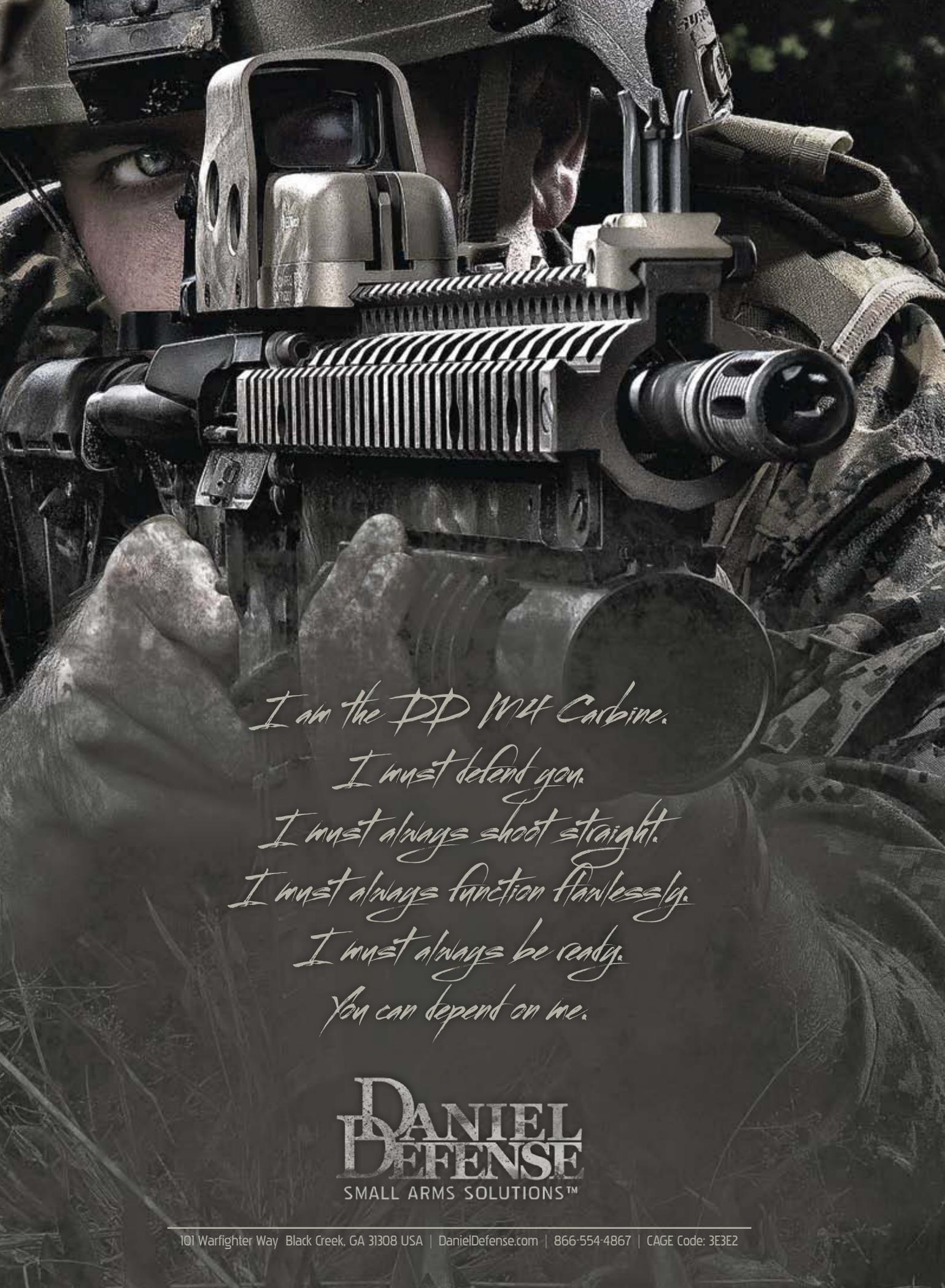
a whole lot when I was a kid. Today we would be classified as working poor. If there was such a thing as welfare or food stamps my folks would have refused them anyhow, and mom managed to keep a clean, dry, food-filled, loving home while my step-dad, who never made much money, made up for it by working two jobs most of the time. I doubt kids today, who have so much of everything, could even begin to appreciate how I felt with that first .22 single action. I shot it every week, then religiously cleaned it afterward and to this day the smell of Hoppe's No. 9 still brings back many pleasant memories. I've since learned, at least in the climate I live in, guns do not need to be cleaned every time they're shot anymore than my pickup truck needs to have the oil changed every time I drive. Maybe if I cleaned my guns more often I could bring back a lot more pleasant memories.

Shortly after buying the .22 Ruger, I found my first .357 Blackhawk. Bullets were cast from a single-cavity Lyman mold and loaded in .38 Special brass which was a whole lot cheaper and definitely easier to find than .357 Magnum brass. In those days there were no gun shops, at least not in my area, with large reloading sections, no catalogs to order from as far as I knew and definitely no Internet where virtually anything could

be found. We made do with what we had and the Keith 358429 bullet over 13.5 grains of 2400 in .38 Special cases was a load to be reckoned with. In fact, it is actually more powerful than many of the .357 Magnum loads available today.

Just as with the .22 Ruger it is impossible to explain how much I enjoyed that first Blackhawk. Things like this can only be experienced, not

*continued on page 81*



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