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WEAPON REVIEW/TEST REPORT:

The ASP 9mm pistol

By John M. Comparetto

In the early 1960's, our silent services recognized the need for a truly concealable combat side arm, which would afford the user instantaneous response in a critical moment-of-need. The CIA version of the 1911 A1 .45 ACP represented the first attempt to solve the problem. However, the design fell short of the mark for several important reasons. The pistol's magazine held just four

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rounds; a chambered cartridge brought the total number of shots to five (the same number as Smith & Wesson's Model 36 Chief's Special). The on-target foot pounds of energy delivered by a short-barreled .45 is about the same as that of a .38 Special cartridge fired from a four-inch barrel (see *The American Rifleman*, May 1979, page 61). At seven meters, the "Pocket .45" was difficult to control, inordinately noisy, and generated excessive muzzle flash. Special ammunition was developed for the weapon by technicians at Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia. However, pistols tuned to such loadings were no longer able to employ standard factory ammunition or military hardball. Air America is said to have been the last special user of this

weapon.

A second more successful effort was initiated by U.S. Government Special Users, who requested a combat pistol based upon the most universally-available handgun cartridge, the 9mm Parabellum. Six criteria were specified:

- concealability;
- eight-round capacity (minimum);
- acceptance and cycling of all known military and factory 9mm parabellum ammunition;
- instantaneous target acquisition;
- ammunition indicator; and apparent recoil no greater than a Walther PPK .22.

The criteria were fulfilled when the chief engineer of a New York City design facility delivered the first prototype ASP 9mm pistol.

The virtual anonymity of the design to nongovernment users may be some indication of the weapon's success. Now, the ASP is available to other than U.S. Government Special Users. The ASP is a combat design, not a target pistol. The expense, features and philosophy behind the system restrict its appeal to operatives and the serious law enforcement professional—those who are at some time engaged in violent confrontations.

The ASP modification

The ASP is a conversion or, as the contractor, Armament Systems and Procedures (Appleton, WI) prefers to describe it, a remanufacture. The butt, slide, slide stop and safety of the Smith & Wesson M39 are dimensionally reduced. Computer-calculated lightening cuts are milled in the slide, serving two functions: to redistribute the balance of the weapon so that mass of the slide is correctly positioned over the shooting hand during recoil; and to aid in manual cycling of the weapon during combat clearance.

A custom barrel bushing is turned for each ASP and then permanently installed to the

slide under two tons of pressure. A custom recoil spring and recoil spring guide are also fitted. The magazine well is beveled for rapid insertion of magazines. The trigger guard is then relieved for either righthand or lefthand shooters. The procedure allows use of the weapon by agents wearing gloves. The barrel of the ASP is specially-throated and then polished until it will feed the most difficult of combat ammunition. The feed ramp is so smooth and the barrel so carefully fitted that even an empty cartridge will chamber in the pistol.

Every edge of the ASP is then hand radiused with a Swiss file so that the completed weapon will not wear the lining of clothing. The ASP is coated with matte black Teflon-S, an extremely expensive finish which is more corrosion-resistant than stainless steel. The finish is more durable than bluing and is self-lubricating, eliminating the need for dust-collecting gun oils, which can stiffen and jam a weapon in cold weather. Skin will not stick to Teflon, even in the most extreme cold. The finish is non-reflective, rapidly



cleaned, and requires little maintenance.

Patented features

The curved projections on the trigger guard of combat weapons which are now so prevalent in the industry were first conceived and patented on the ASP. Combined with another ASP patent, finger control magazine extensions, apparent recoil of the weapon in the hands of a

trained operative is reduced to little more than that of a .22 pistol. The forefinger pocket reduces the muzzle jump. The magazine extensions describe the circumference of the little finger and are angled to match the natural contour of the hand. Many combat weapons feature a cut-off butt which leaves the little finger without support, however the little finger provides great

grip strength and is critical in recoil reduction.

Grip panels of the ASP pistol are smooth injection-molded Lexan, a polycarbonate which is popular for its ballistic resistance. The absence of checkering allows the user to properly position the weapon during a panic grip by firmly squeezing the pistol. The grips are contoured to fit the hand and have a clear window through which the operative can see the number of rounds remaining in the weapon. Any officer who has engaged an assailant will attest to the absurdity of attempting to count shots fired during combat. The clear grips of the ASP provide a simple solution to the problem.

The pistol features a radical departure in sighting systems. It has no front sight to snag clothing. Instead, it incorporates a low-profile matte black Gutter-snipe advanced sighting plane with three internal yellow walls of equal dimension. The weapon is sighted by balancing the walls around the target. The unit's most outstanding feature is the visual cue it provides during incorrect sighting. Traditional notch and post sights are satis-

factory, if the shooter is on or off target a bit. However, if the front sight is below the notch, or too far to the right or left, the shooter must guess in which direction to correct the alignment. The Guttersnipe provides a visual cue in the form of optically-corrected yellow walls, which indicate if the weapon is held too high, or too far to the right or left. There is little difficulty tracking moving targets with the weapon, or engaging multiple divergent opponents. There is little doubt after shooting the ASP that it is one of the fastest on target pistols in the world.

Philosophy of the design

Questions often arise concerning the basic configuration of the ASP. An initial point of contention concerns the double-action feature. A dominant school of thought negates the double-action as a superfluous feature and praises the cocked and locked configuration of the 1911 A1. The advantages of the double-action automatic can be debated elsewhere. Two points are in order, however. The ASP was designed for use from a concealed position under clothing. As a result, there are



Field stripping the ASP for cleaning is simple.

no projections of any type on the weapon, and the hammer is spurless. Obviously, a spurless hammer is not possible on a 1911 design. And, any type of cocked and locked configuration yields a projection which can snag the lining of clothing in a

combat situation.

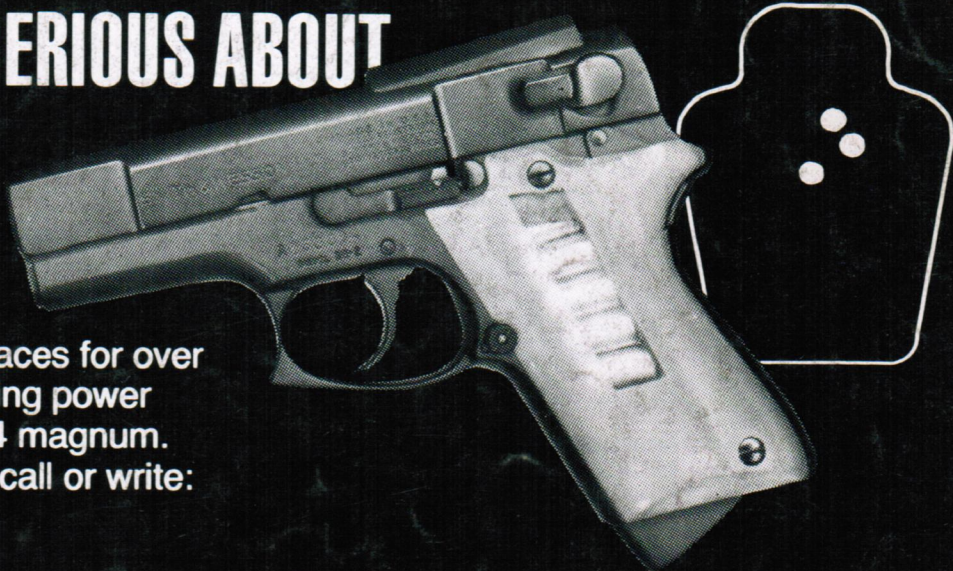
The \$350 cost of an ASP conversion is an expensive undertaking. However, for the operative who must purchase one weapon on which to stake his life, the workmanship of the ASP may be a small investment. **LEC**

ASP Specifications

Manufacturer	Armament Systems & Procedures, INC
Weapon Designation	ASP
Caliber	9 x 19mm (9mm Luger)
Mechanism	Center fire, locked breech, autoloading, double action
Length	6.75 inches
Height without magazine	4.75 inches
Weight with magazine	24 ounces
Barrel	3.25 inches, throated
Rifling	6 groove, right twist
Finish	Black Teflon-S
Sight	Guttersnipe Advanced Sighting Plane fixed to 6.4 meters
Grips	Contoured Lexan
Hammer	Spurless
Trigger Guard ..	Right or left hand relief with forefinger pocket (patented)
Magazines	Three supplied with Magnetic Holder (DCL)
Magazine Capacity	7 rounds
Magazine Well	Beveled
Portation	Patented benchmade scabbards available upon request
Delivery	6 months
Price	\$350 and a S&W M39

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9mm has been
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