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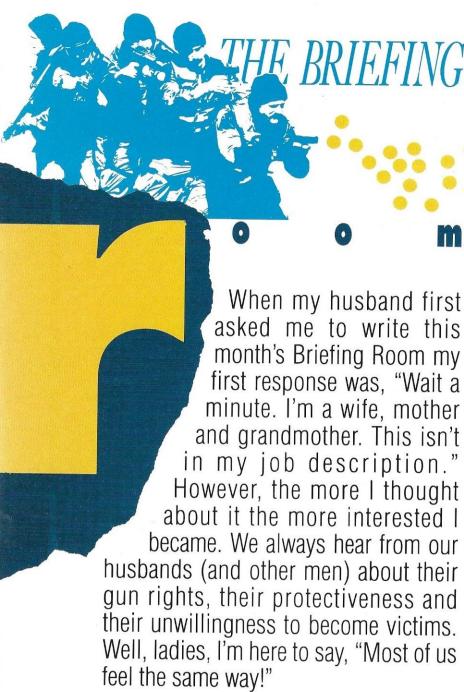
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Women who won't carry a gun upset me. They say, "I could never shoot anyone..." or, "I don't need one. I'll just call 9-1-1 and hide." Then there's always the good old (*continued on page 82*)

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IS. Garden Constant



Part I: Hand Vs. Handgun

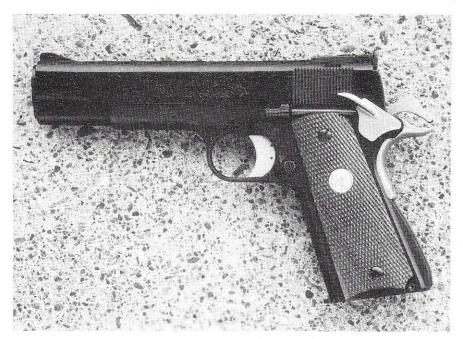
by Paul Berkowitz

his is not another article about handgun cartridge capacity, often incorrectly called "firepower." Rather, it is about the crucial and often ignored interrelationship between the separate issues of hands, guns, cartridge size and handgun capacity.

It's been over a vear since I discussed the evolution of police side arms in the article "Reflections On Duty Side Arms Of The 20th Century." That article, which appeared in the November 1990 edition of $S.W.A.T.^{\mathbb{R}}$, dealt with the ironies associated with the evolving history of side arm selection in the American police scene. These ironies continue.

Left: All hands, like most handguns, are different. What's good for one person may be all wrong for someone else.

Top inset: The first production 10mm handgun, the Bren-10 (bottom) was patterned after the CZ-75 (top). Handle design of both weapons is among the very best, minimizing bulk and girth.



Slicked-up Colt Government Model by the Robar Companies, Inc., represents the pinnacle of "userfriendly" design.

Since that time, several new developments have presented themselves. Notable among these is the introduction by nearly every manufacturer of share some form of higharm. This has been more recently followed by the introduction by several manufacturers of "double-action only" (DAO) semiautomatic pistols, designed to accommodate the "needs" of agencies that are making the transition from double-action revolvers to semiautomatics. Accompanying this, of

course, has been the rather dramatic rise and acceptance of the .40 S&W cartridge, as well as (to a far lesser extent) its parent 10mm cartridge.

I'd now like to s o m e thoughts on what I capacity duty side feel are significant issues often ignored or overlooked by agencies and individuals engaging in this transition and selection process. Many these of issues have come to the forefront for me, as the agency for which I work embarks this onsame selection process. It is my hope that the ideas presented here might help others to avoid some of the pitfalls that I have witnessed over the course of the weapon selection process.

Handguns should fit hands. Simple and obvious as this sounds, it's a point that seems to be ignored by a lot of firearms manufacturers.

Without naming names, any number of models of contemporary handguns come to mind that simply do not feel comfortable in the hand, and seem have been designed with very little thought given to shooter comfort and ease of manipulation. The priority, instead, seems to be the cramming of as many rounds as are mechanically possible into a weapon that can be picked up with one hand.

Likewise, it seems that a lot of police agencies make their transition side arms selections with very little regard given to the issues of comfort in the hand and ease of manipulation. More important, again. seem to be the issues of "firepower" (actually, magazine capacity), "safety" (read, poor trigger and difficulty of use), the everpresent "low-bid," and the absolutely essential matter of "uniformitv."

I was recently requested by another federal agency assist with training and qualifications of their personnel who had just "transitioned" with the Sig-Sauer P228. It is notable that while all of these personnel had already gone through course of instruction by FLETC-trained and certified "conversion" instructors, none of them seemed at all comfortable or familiar with their new duty side arms. Consequently, we spent a of time just 1ot going over semiauto basics. During this process another point became verv clear. The weapon which had been selected for them as the "standard issue" just didn't fit any of the shooters very well. In the process of attempting to select a weapon that appeared to offer a compromise in size for the variously statured and configured officers, they had actually come up with a handgun that fit nearly everybody poorly.

First, the agency had succumbed to the desire to offer a lot of "firepower." In so doing, they opted for the ubiquitous 9mm, presented in a double-column magazine. Then, in an apparent effort to meet the needs of small-statured or smallhanded officers, they selected the "compact" version, with reduced overall weapon size, particularly stock length.

Overlooked was the essential fact that almost every handgun that utilizes a double-column magazine is still going to be saddled with a circumference that is difficult for small-handed shooters to hold on to. Most of the female officers, as well as the small-statured male officers, simply couldn't get a proper purchase on the weapon's handle. They were forced to "monkey-grip" the piece just to get their index finger to reach and stroke the trigger. At the same time, the shooters with medium- to large-size hands (myself included), were forced to shoot the piece with their stronghand little finger left dangling out in space with nothing to hang onto.

After a couple of days working with these people (all of whom were eventually able to bring their scores up dramatically) I walked away convinced that they would have been much better served with the selection of a duty weapon that was



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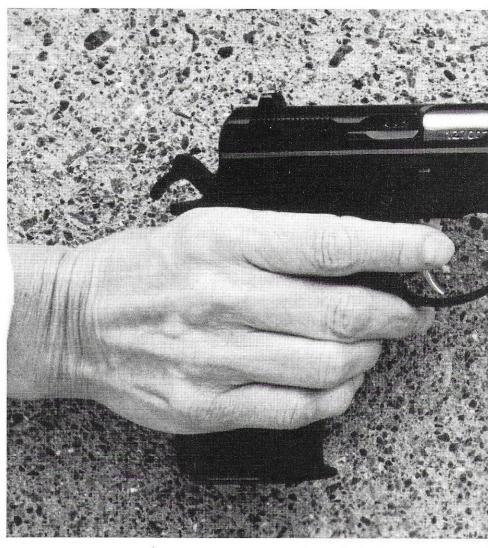
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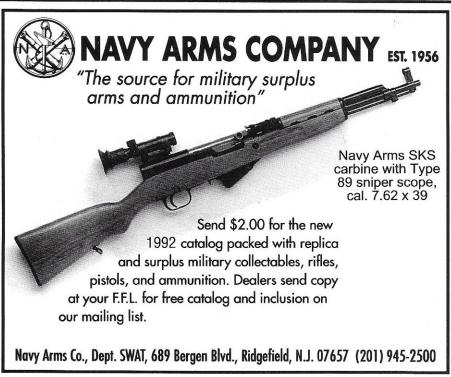
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either full-sized, like the P226 (if you're going to be stuck with girth you may as well have large-capacity, including full-length magazine and stocks) or with a weapon that took a single-column magazine, like the Sig P225.

This latter option would have offered a substantially reduced size for small-handed people, while retaining a full-length magazine and weapon handle. Better yet would have been to give their officers the choice of either a single or doublecolumn magazine in the same basic weapon configuration, so that each individual officer could personally select the piece that fit him or her best. In this case, for example, having already selected the Sig-Sauer double-action 9mm line, I would have preferred to see officers given the option of choosing for themselves between either the 225, 226, or 228. Even better would have been the additional options of Sig-Sauer's .40- and .45-caliber handguns, including the superb Model P220.

An equally logical alternative for this agency (given the other management-imposed constraints) might have been the authorization





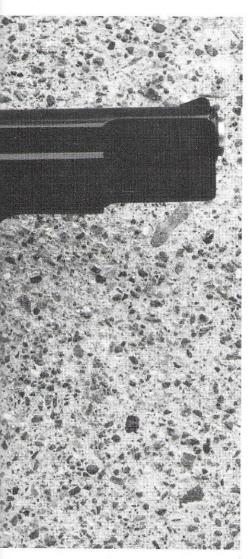
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of some variant of both the S&W 39 and 59s. Either way, with the authorization of either product line, training, handling and weapon maintenance would remain the same, but personal needs for size and shape could be accommodated.

The point is, not one handgun is likely to fit all hands well, or even adequately. Uniformity at the expense of poor "fit" is a high price to pay. And all the "firepower" in the world will do you little good if the weapon in which it is carried is too big to handle and shoot well.

The crusade for ever-increasing "firepower" is being pursued without regard for the real fundamentals of proper handgun design and selection.

Recall the very first lessons you (should have) received in the fundamentals of handgun shooting: grip, stance, sight alignment, trigger control, etc. Do you remember the part



Even the best-designed handguns that use double-column magazines may prove too large for small-handed shooters, as is the case with this shooter and a CZ-75.

about how the gun should sit in your hand, with the web of skin between your thumb and index finger centered nicely, high up on the backstrap so that the gun recoils directly back up the path of your arm? Well, that principle still applies, though the practice seems to have been all but abandoned.

Most of the new high-capacity semi-autos are just to big around for a lot of shooters to grip correctly. More often than not, as noted above, this forces the shooter to "monkey grip" the pistol so that much of the recoil is directed against the strong-hand thumb, rather than the much stronger muscles and bones of the arm. This oft-

encountered predicament may account for why so many shooters are intimidated by the recoil of anything more potent than the 9mm. It stands to reason that a diminutive person with small hands will have difficulty controlling a full-powered 10mm or .45 ACP if their small thumb is absorbing all that punishment, and shortening the stocks and the length of the magazine isn't going to fix that. But give them a pistol that really fits their hand and it becomes an altogether different story.

Now, recall the classic of all highcapacity pistols, the Browning "High-Power." It's significant that the P-35, known as John Browning's last and most advanced handgun design, holds only 13 + 1 rounds of ammunition (though it was originally intended to hold 15 + 1). Note also that this same classic handgun remains one of the most comfortable and user-friendly of all handguns ever designed. John M. Browning, knowing that handguns should fit hands, first and foremost, did not allow the quest for "firepower" to confuse his priorities. The same can be said of the newer "classics" in the handgun field. By this I

refer to both the CZ-75 and its descendant, the Bren-10.

One common practice in the selection process for semi-autos is to present an assortment of handguns to a representative sample of inexperienced shooters and allow them to select the specimen(s) that they think are the most comfortable and easiest to shoot. The problem with this is that most of these people will have no informed point of reference from which to make their selection. Now, throw into the works the option of choosing the feel of any of the three previously mentioned handguns, (Browning P-35, CZ-75, or Bren-10, which to my knowledge are never entertained as selection options) and guess which will be chosen. You could take the process even one step further and throw in a slicked-up and "dehorned" Government Model. (I know, it'll never happen, but talk about nice in the hand). "Comfortable" is a relative term. You might be content gripping a gun that feels like a two-by-four until you get the chance to shoot one that feels more like what Jeff Cooper graphically describes as "a

(continued on page 95)



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(continued from page 79)

soft bar of soap," that just melts into your hand.

At its best, a handgun should feel completely smooth and snag-free in the hand and should allow for the most secure purchase possible. Stocks or handles that are too big will be a detriment to control. The same can be said of a weapon that is too small in the hand, allowing it to twist with recoil and torque in the palm as the fingers overlap on themselves. Additional advantages are gained from stock/grip shape that allows you to tactilely sense or "index" weapon deflection, i.e., determine the subtle differences in where it is pointing within you hand. Usually, the more "round" or "fat" a gun's handle is, the more difficult it will be to subconsciously "index." Improperly shaped or sized stocks or handles will be a detriment to consistent grip placement and an impediment to practical accuracy.

Imagine yourself with nothing to hold on to but your side arm's stocks as you hang suspended 200 feet in the air. Would you rather be gripping a 15- or 18-round "wondergun" that tested the very limits of your hand size, or an eight or nineround single-column piece that allowed for a firm, positive, and secure grasp? While it's not likely that you will ever be dangling in midair by your handgun, it is entirely possible that you may need to resist someone else trying to wrestle your gun away. Likewise, the more securely a gun fits in your hand, the more control you will be able to exercise over it when you fire.

It is interesting to observe the differing priorities that manufacturers place in weapons design. Many handgun makers have been placing an emphasis on creating semiautomatic weapons with ever-larger magazine capacities, resulting in correspondingly larger stocks or handles. Yet, at the very same time, the trend in the revolver market has been to modify older designs to

allow for smaller and more rounded stocks. Witness virtually all of the newer Smith & Weapon product line, factory-altered to accept round-butt K-frame stocks, even on the classic N-frames. Just when the manufacturers finally get revolver stock-design right, they turn around and head the other direction with semiautomatics, abandoning all sense of ergonomic reason in the quest for "firepower."

About the only ray of enlightenment offering exception to this trend comes once again by the way of the teachings of Col. Cooper, whose on-site gunsmith will take any stock model 1911-A1 and cut it down in size (but not necessarily capacity) to better fit the smallhanded shooter. Likewise, former Gunsite gunsmith and rangemaster Robbie Barrkman offers, through his Robar Companies, a similar "grip reduction" service to any serviceable Government Model or 1911 variant. In fact, Robar is now offering their grip-reduction service to the Glock series of handguns, resulting in an overall reduction in size of approximately 20 percent. (A full test and evaluation of Robar's grip reduction will

appear in an upcoming issue of *S.W.A.T.*®—Ed.) Remember that the 1911-A1 in its original configuration is hardly a large stocked weapon by anybody's standards. If there truly is one service sidearm that might be said to "fit all" hands well, this is surely the one. And yet these world-renowned handgun authorities, including none other than the father of modern pistol-craft himself, embrace the idea of making this classic arm even more user-friendly by reducing its handle size.

Once again, handguns should fit hands. Do not lose sight of this principle as you go about selecting your new duty semi-auto.

Next month, Part II: Cartridge Size Vs. Weapon Capacity.



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