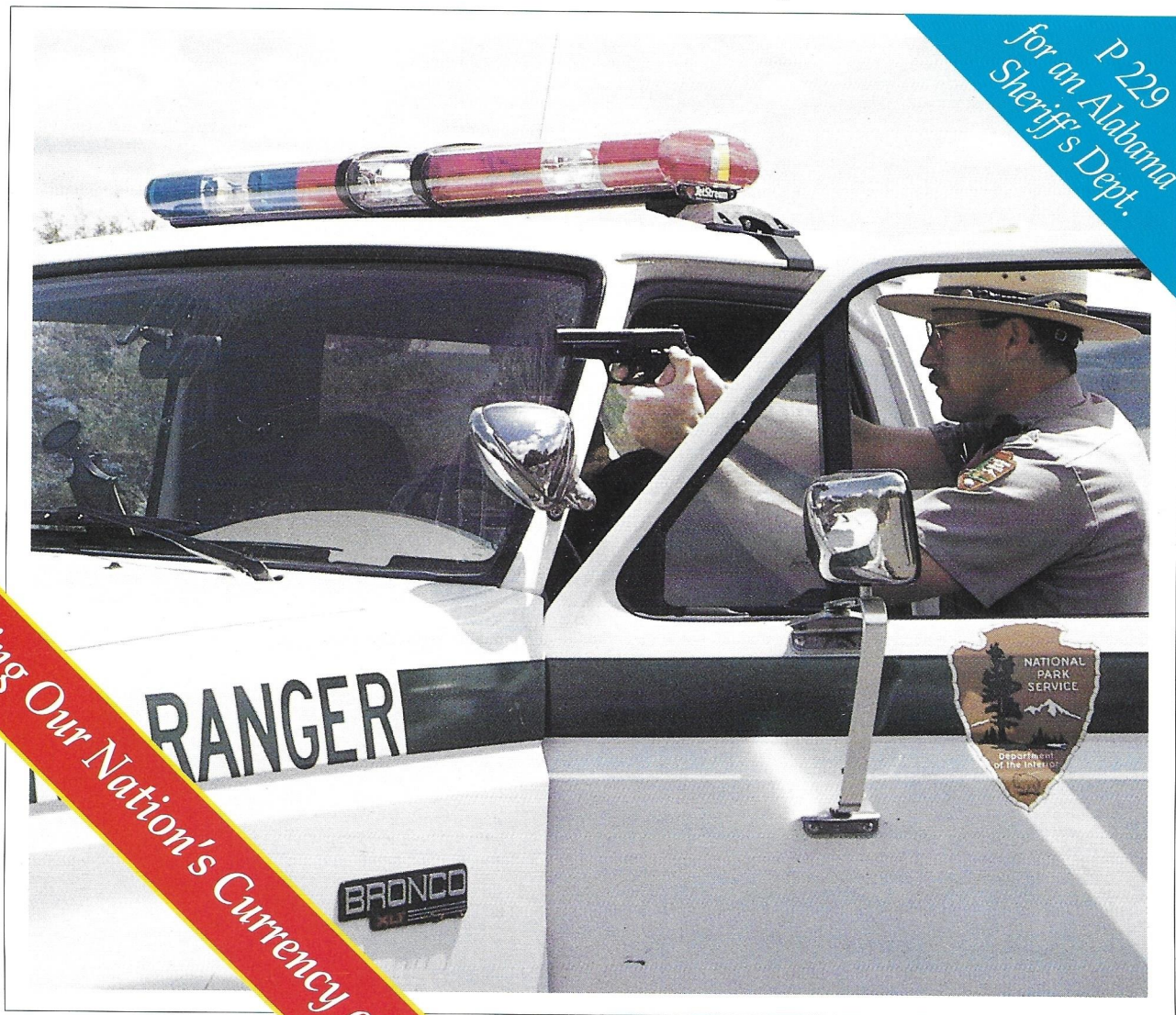


SIGARMS

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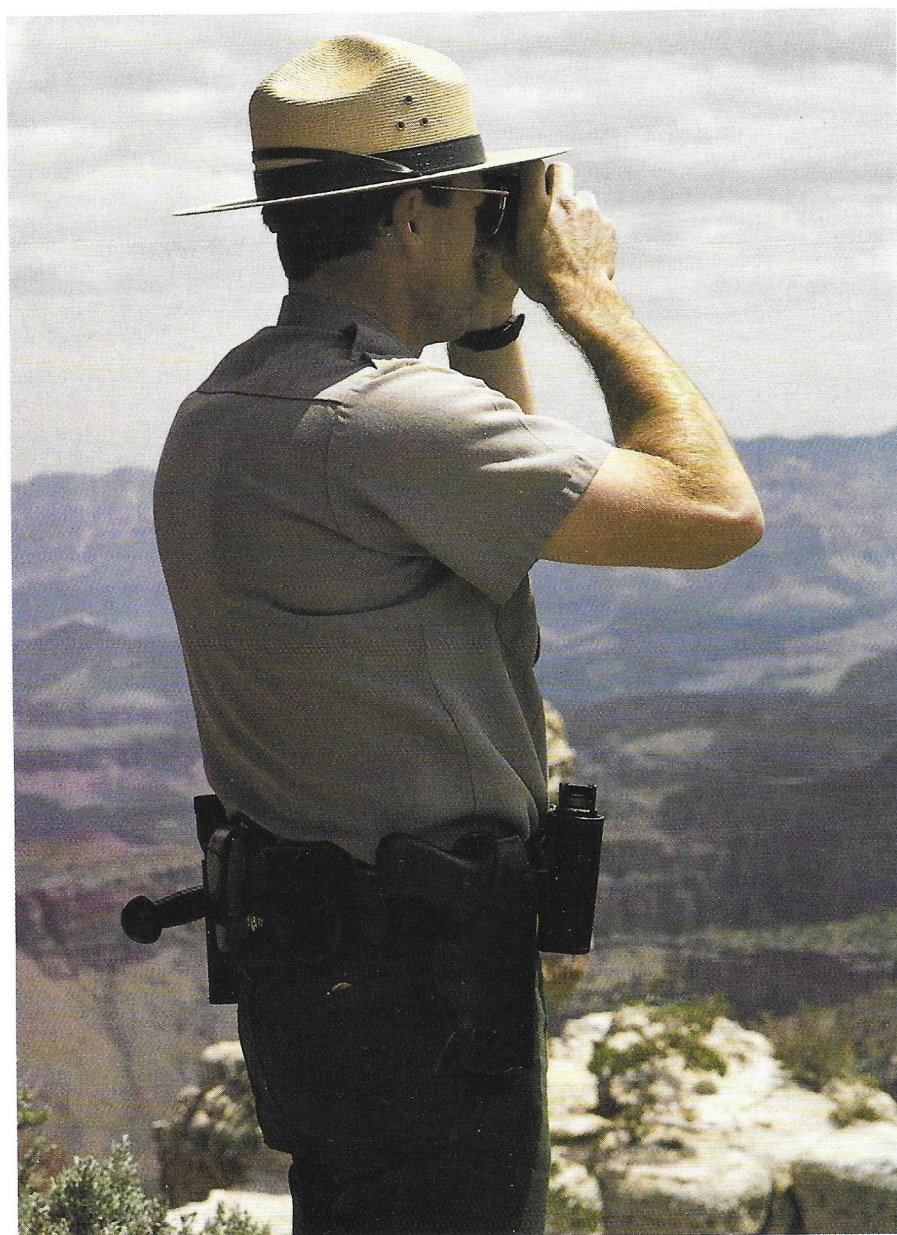
P 229
*for an Alabama
Sheriff's Dept.*



Guarding Our Nation's Currency and Parks

By Chip Moore

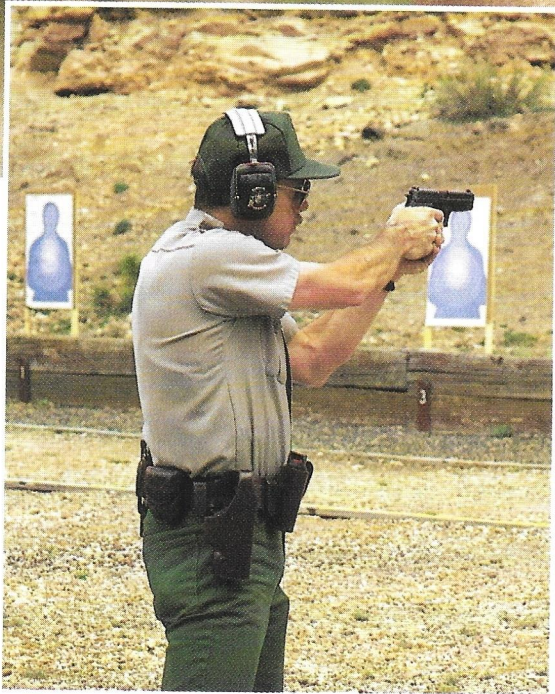
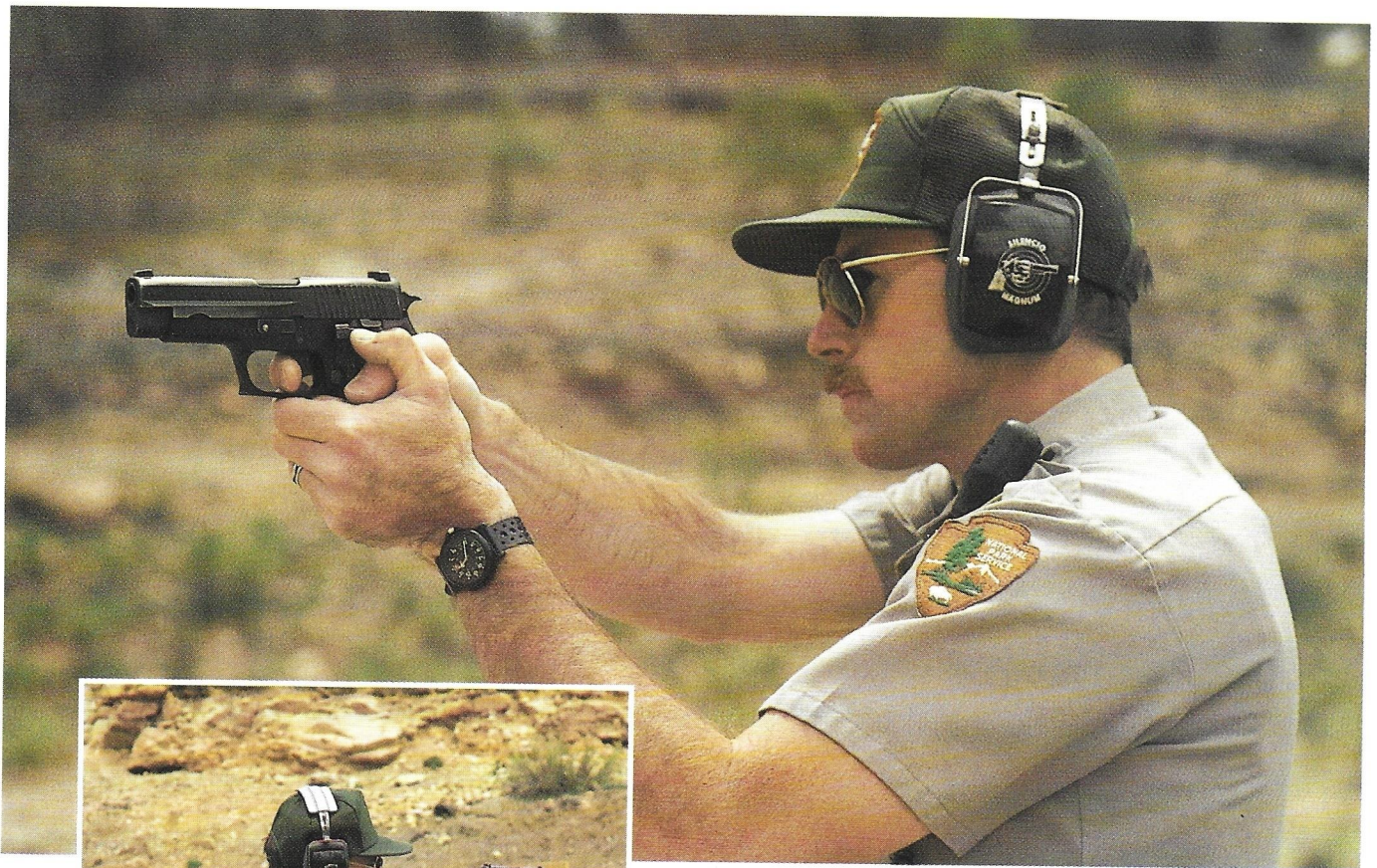
National Park Service ADOPTS A SIG FAMILY



Ergonomics—the science of adapting mechanical devices to the capacities and physical requirements of the user—has no more suitable an application than that of designing and engineering a firearm to fit the hand of a shooter. Properly fitted, a handgun becomes an extension of the body. It is common knowledge that if you point your finger at an object and sight along your finger, you will be right on target. A firearm that naturally orients itself in the same manner every time it's gripped can, with practice, be pointed instinctively at the target and recover the target that much more quickly for successive shots. The ergonomic excellence of SIG SAUER pistols has been an influential factor in their selection by many government agencies.

When the National Park Service began shopping for a gun to replace the aging revolvers carried by Rangers, they didn't merely seek a "middle-of-the-road" weapon that would meet a consensus of what would adequately fit the hypothetical "average" Ranger. Instead, they sought a whole family of firearms that functioned identically from model to model and also shared ideal ergonomic "pointability" and handling. This system would allow Rangers to train with one model of firearm and then select a particular pistol within that family to fit individual needs, physical characteristics, and duty requirements.

Chip Moore is a technical editor with the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment in Washington, D.C. A freelance writer in his spare time, he has had a lifelong interest in firearms, especially vintage firearms. He's a collector and a blackpowder enthusiast.



Above and left: Park Ranger practices with his newly issued SIG SAUER semiautomatic pistol. The 9mm P 228 was chosen for transitional training, but after that—for duty use—personnel had their choice of three calibers and five models, all sharing the same functioning and operational features.

- ❑ P 220— .45 ACP, 7-round mag.
- ❑ P 225— 9mm, 8-round mag.
- ❑ P 226— 9mm, 15-round mag.
- ❑ P 228— 9mm, 13-round mag.
- ❑ P 229— .40 S&W, 12-round mag.

It was paramount to Berkowitz that all agents be “comfortable and competent” with their weapons. Sameness for the sake of sameness was not the sole incentive for searching for a family of weapons. The Park Service was looking for a “measure of uniformity” that would also allow enough flexibility of choices to accommodate the varied needs of all officers. “That’s the beauty of the SIG SAUER family of pistols,” said Berkowitz, who is a firearms expert. “If you’ve trained on one, you’ve trained on them all.”

The family-of-weapons approach was a direct spin-off of an idea fostered by Berkowitz in *S.W.A.T. Magazine*, to which he is an occasional contributor. For too long, shooters have followed the tenet that “bigger is always better,” said Berkowitz. “But it doesn’t matter how powerful your weapon is or how many rounds you touch off if you can’t connect with your target.”

A Wide Range of Assignments

Rangers in the National Park Service occupy the most diverse beats of any

This reasoning was logically based on the size, scope of duty requirements, and geographic distribution of the Park Service. For example, whereas a 9mm pistol would be an excellent choice for a great many of the personnel, a Ranger stationed in Alaska might want the extra power of a .45 ACP. Then there is the question of hand size. What’s comfortable (and therefore efficient) for a husky, big-handed, six-foot male Ranger might not be the best choice for a slightly built female Ranger.

Assistant Special Agent-in-

Charge Paul Berkowitz, stationed at National Park Service headquarters in Herndon, Virginia, played a major part in both developing Park Service sidearm requirements and in the final selection process. After an exhaustive two-year survey, SIG SAUER semiautomatics were judged the best weapons to fit Park Service needs. With the 9mm P 228 chosen as the “backbone” pistol with which all Rangers would train and which many would ultimately pick as their duty weapon, five SIG SAUER models were selected:



Bank Miller, Director of Firearms Training for the SIGARMS Academy, instructs National Park Service personnel at Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

federal agents. Over the course of their careers, they may find themselves assigned to any of the 370 park sites in the country. And they may find themselves moving from one extreme to another—even, perhaps, from the Florida Everglades to the Arctic.

Sooner or later, it can happen that a Ranger is left with no choice but to shoot it out with poachers or to dispatch a crazed moose. This means it's essential to consider what obstacles a bullet might encounter on its way to the target. Loads that are very effective in warm climates, for example, may be less effective if they're expected to incapacitate after passing through multiple layers of heavy, bulky winter clothing. Agents in the Park Service must choose their weapons accordingly. With the SIG SAUER family of pistols, a Park Ranger can switch from the 9mm he or she used in the Florida Everglades to a .40 or a .45 in Montana or Alaska and not have to begin basic weapons training all over again.

The decision for the National Park Service to switch to a semiautomatic was an easy one. The revolvers Park Rangers carried were reaching the end of their practical life. Most

were 10 to 20 years old. "It made sense to go to a more modern weapon," said Berkowitz. Over the years there had been several instances when a perpetrator had been hit with six rounds and didn't go down. The switch to a semiautomatic allowed Rangers to fire faster, reload faster, and carry more ammo. Berkowitz also pointed out that Park Rangers often work in remote locales, with little or no backup. It is paramount for these agents to have adequate firepower.

National Park Service Rangers are required to carry a minimum of three magazines for the SIG SAUER semiautomatic they choose to holster—one in the weapon and two backups on the belt. The SIG SAUER pistols give Rangers a wide range of calibers and capacities, to fit the circumstances of an assigned locale. Agents in southern climes might opt for the full-size P 226. With a round in the chamber, a fully loaded 15-round magazine in the pistol and two full magazines on the belt, an officer choosing to carry this 9mm pistol has an impressive 46 rounds at his disposal! An officer choosing the potent .45 will have 22 rounds at hand—one in the chamber, seven in the magazine, and 14 more in the two extra clips.

Importance of Ergonomics

But ergonomics seemed to be the decisive factor in choosing a particular caliber/capacity combination, Berkowitz reports. Rangers generally had confidence in all three calibers available in this series of pistols since all three are popular among law-enforcement professionals and have long since proved their effectiveness. The Rangers therefore appeared to be more concerned with choosing a weapon that felt comfortable in the hand than in opting for capacity or power alone. Recoil was also considered but turned out not to be a significant factor. A gun that fits the hand properly is much easier to control, and recoil that much less apparent.

The National Park Service was so adamant in insisting that proper fit play a part in an officer's weapon choice that the following advice was part of the memo notifying Rangers of SIG SAUER as the manufacturer of choice:

"Essential considerations in the selection of a personal service sidearm include the officer's ability to control recoil, as well as their ability to 'manage' the weapon with respect to size and shape. No one gun will fit all employees. Additionally, not all officers possess equal strength, reflexes, concentration, or other attributes relating to skill in weapons handling. Where one officer may find a large weapon of large caliber or capacity easily manageable, another officer may be better served by a smaller weapon of smaller caliber and/or capacity that, though ballistically less effective, he or she can more readily manage and reliably use to hit a lethal target under crisis considerations."

The advisory also urged each officer "...to select that weapon that he or she believes provides the best compromise between comfort and manageability, and superior tactical capability as reflected by both caliber and capacity."

Citing "tremendous success with the weapons," Berkowitz said he was unaware of any malfunctions whatever, estimating that he himself had fired over 10,000 rounds through SIG SAUER semiautomatics without a hitch.

There was minimal resistance to the switchover from the familiar revolvers to the semiautos, and by the end of fiscal year 1994, virtually all of the estimated 2,000 Park Rangers had successfully converted.

As a result, there was a noticeable improvement in marksmanship. According to Berkowitz, Rangers were shooting "better, faster and with more hits."

"Confidence is up," he commented, "especially after the particu-

lar model in the P series is chosen by the officer."

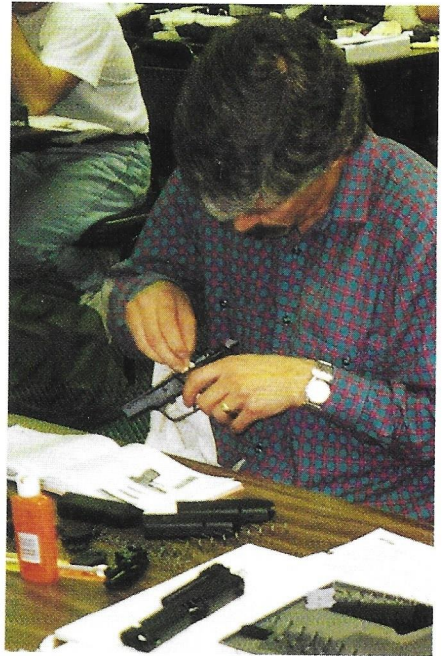
He also remarked that working with SIGARMS had been exceptionally smooth and efficient. "Their administrative and training branches have been outstanding in making the transition," he said.

SIGARMS played a major part in training. More than 100 Park Service instructors were certified to lead classes in the conversion from wheelgun to semiautomatic. All had prior semiautomatic experience and had completed an 80-hour Federal Law Enforcement Training Center program. In addition, SIGARMS provided another 40 hours of training specifically with the SIG

SAUER family of double-action/single-action pistols.

The double-action first shot and the decocking lever make these pistols "user-friendly"—safe and fast-operating. As with the double-action revolvers Rangers were accustomed to, there's no manual safety to complicate matters in an emergency.

In his 10 years of teaching comprehensive classes on the use of semiautomatic weapons, and after firing at least 10,000 rounds through SIG SAUER semiautos, Berkowitz said he has "never seen a SIG malfunction and never seen a problem in training. Whichever model is chosen, you know you have a superb gun." ●



The Park Ranger at bottom left is participating in a training exercise with his newly acquired SIG. The other photos on this page were taken during a classroom session at Lake Mead National Recreation Area, as Park Service officers familiarized themselves with disassembly, cleaning, and reassembly procedures.

