

we must decide if we are selecting a weapon to be carried by the individual military man on the front. That was the approach taken by the U. S. Army during World War I when the goal was to equip every U.S. soldier with a handgun.

As a former company-grade infantry soldier, I think this is an excellent idea. I know I would much rather have a 5-shot .38 alloy-frame revolver and a Boy Scout knife than the commonly seen big fighting knife or bayonet. I could use the folding knife for all my cutting needs, kill better with my revolver, and use my entrenching tool instead of a knife for any attack purposes, and still dig my holes to hide in. Are we selecting a weapon for the pilot, staff officer, rear-echelon trooper, or criminal investigator? Those people do not carry a rifle, so if they need to fight they will use their handgun as a primary fighting tool. Also, such people are, frankly speaking, more valuable to the army than the front-line solder and, hence, a greater expense in protecting them can be accepted—both in acquisition costs and training.

Faced with these dissimilar needs, we can either select different weapons or attempt to somehow select some weapon that will be acceptable to both groups of basic users, realizing at the same time that we are destined to fail in some measure at either extreme.

After all this, you're probably wondering what combat handguns are at the top and bottom of my list. After all, I have tested most of the main military-style weapons in use for the last 125 years. With the understanding that my heart is with the infantry soldier who will be carrying his or her handgun in addition to the shoulder weapon, I can recommend the following handguns as the best possible weapons.



The author's M65 357 Magnum custom revolver with the barrel and butt both chopped, shown here with THV .357 Magnum ammunition.

THE BEST COMBAT HANDGUNS

1. *Smith & Wesson M65 .357 Magnum*, with the barrel trimmed to 2 inches and the butt trimmed, loaded with Hague Conference-approved THV ammunition. This is my personal favorite, although it is only available as a custom creation. This is the weapon I selected after all my testing and evaluation as my military weapon for the future.
2. *M940 Smith & Wesson*. I think this comes very close to the M65 when loaded with THV ammunition.
3. *Glock 17*. It is a tough, lightweight, high-capacity weapon whose cartridge has good penetration. Although I have some real doubts about the use of the Glock as a law-enforcement weapon (because of problems associated with weapon



Smith & Wesson M940 9x19mm.

snatch and holding suspects at gunpoint), it is the best choice for a military handgun.

4. *SIG P225 in 9mm or the SIG P220 in 45 ACP*. Both are lightweight, extremely reliable, accurate, and easy to use. As with the Glock, they may not be suitable for law enforcement tasks because of the lack of a manual safety, which is often helpful when dealing with weapon snatches and the problem with holding suspects with a cocked pistol.
5. *Smith & Wesson .38 Special 2-inch stainless-steel Chief Special or the M642*. The Smith & Wesson .38 Special was much sought after during the Vietnam War, and the M642, its successor today, is even lighter to carry. Either makes an excellent companion when thrust in the top pocket of your uniform jacket.

THE WORST COMBAT HANDGUNS

1. *Dreyse .32*. This must clearly be considered the worst pistol tested.
2. "*Brixia*." This Italian handgun was a close runner-up.
3. The *Montenegrin* revolver would be next in

line for this dubious honor.

4. *Japanese Type 26*
5. *Italian 10.35mm*.

Although any of these weapons would be better than the best knife in the world, they are all terrible examples of the gunmaker's and designer's art, especially when we consider what was currently available from other sources.

THE MOST SURPRISING WEAPONS TESTED

In this category are those weapons with which I was unfamiliar or those I would have thought only

average or worse when, in fact, they turned out to be superb fighting handguns, not good enough to make the final top five but really great and within the top five in their own times.

1. *French M1873 11mm revolver*. Although not as powerful as the Colt 45, the M1873 is so far superior as a fighting handgun that there is simply no comparison. It was designed by people who knew what it took to make a serious combat revolver.
2. *Mauser M96*. When viewed on the formal range, it seems clunky and hard to handle, but on the cinema range, you suddenly realize it is a real fighting pistol. The men who used this pistol had a very serious fighting handgun. It is fast to use, accurate, and powerful. The M96 is a good gun that only reveals its qualities in the hands of those who are sophisticated enough to use it as it should be used: as a fighting tool, not a remote-control paper punch.
3. *Roth-Steyr M1907*. This is perhaps the real jewel of the entire test series. This is a weapon that few get to shoot, and you often read many disparaging comments about it in

the gun press. You add a detachable magazine and chamber it for 9mm, and you have a 1907-made Glock pistol. This pistol is so far superior to any other fighting pistol of the time as to be beyond comparison. A truly wonderful pistol!

4. *Webley Mark VI*. The Mark VI went into production in 1915 and was considered by many the ultimate Webley. Although not as well finished as the semicustom Webley-Wilkinson or Webley-Greene, this Webley—like the others—is a real combat revolver. It was not designed to shoot targets or game but rather to rapidly stop aggressive foes at short range. For this purpose, it is far superior to the Colt or Smith & Wesson of the period. Many who remember the \$10 Webley pistols for sale in the 1960s tend to view them as junky top-breaks; instead, they are perhaps the finest combat revolver ever.
5. *Soviet PSM in 5.45mm*. When you first hear this handgun described, you can only wonder why it was designed and produced. After testing it, you realize that the Russians who designed it are the same people who routinely produce chess wizards. Its small size, lightweight ammo, easy carry, and ability to penetrate the armor now commonly worn on the battlefield are all clues to its mysterious origins, as well as traits that make it one of the best combat pistols of the late twentieth century.

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It was great fun researching all the handguns for this book, getting my hands on them, and test-firing them for this book. As I stated in the Acknowledgements, the gathering together of more than 100 of the world's best and most exotic weapons for such a task could only have taken place in the United States. I trust this book will be a fitting memorial to those honorable men who created the Bill of Rights that separates the United States from so many other countries. Fifty years from now, it may not be possible to assemble and test such weapons because of their rarity or the prohibition against having such weapons. Even now, getting some of the weapons was a formidable challenge, as was tracking down the ammunition. I am certain that it will be more difficult in the future.

Even though a lot of work, time, and expense have gone into the production of this book, I am glad I did it. It allowed me to do something that no one else has been able to do (to my knowledge) and something that is unlikely to be repeated in the future. For me, it was an exciting, educational experience. For readers, my hope is that you have learned something that may someday save your life in some faraway outpost, educated yourself as to the possibilities of that "old pistol" in your collection, or, if nothing else, acquired greater respect for our predecessors who waged war on each other in generations past with these war weapons.

Preparing Your Handgun for Combat Duty

One of the key objectives of this book is to prepare you in the event you wind in some distant backwater with only an odd or unusual weapon available to you. You need to know what to look for in a combat weapon, as well as how to handle a weapon that you may never have encountered before and what to expect of it. Bearing in mind that when you are in such wastelands (be it Trenton, New Jersey, or Asia Minor), any pistol is better than no pistol.

Let us assume that you have now found the handgun, whether from the local bazaar, black market, or a captured weapons cache. What should you do next? How should you prepare?

CLEANING AND INSPECTING

First, make certain the weapon is not loaded. You do not want to get shot in the eyeball because of your ignorance! Assuming the weapon is not loaded, you should clean the weapon properly. Weapons bought or found under questionable circumstances are frequently dirty and caked with grease. Assuming that typical gun-cleaning equipment is not available, gasoline, diesel fuel, or even soap and hot water will suffice. Use a toothbrush to clean the handgun carefully, removing old oil and grease that

may tie it up. A handkerchief can be used as a bore brush if you do not have a cleaning rod, or, if you cannot get a brush, a little window screen material wrapped about a rod (an ink pen filler, for example) will do a fair job.

As you clean the weapon, examine it carefully for cracks in the metal. Look at the firing pin and see whether it is broken. Test the action—does it fall sharply and hit with a snap, or is it sluggish? If the springs are tired, you can stretch them or put a shim in to help out. Then reassemble the weapon. Keep in mind that you rarely need to use force. Do not hammer on the parts to take it apart or reassemble. Look at the weapon and think about it. All weapons are designed by engineers; some for better, some for worse, but none of them are designed to be broken apart with a hammer.

REASSEMBLING AND LUBRICATING

After you have carefully cleaned the weapon and examined all the parts for cracks and weak springs, it is time to reassemble and lubricate. Absent gun oil, you can use sewing machine oil or even oil from your car. I had a Colt M1911 freeze up once from being totally dry, and a simple drop from my dipstick got me back in business. A friend in SAS reports that cleaning the weapon in gin works in the desert because the