
Jeff Cooper's Commentaries

Previously Gunsite Gossip

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September Song

Much discussion is circulating about the presumed new military pistol. It does raise a question, since it is not clear just what the pistol is for. Considered closely, it is apparent that the handgun is not a serious military item. The one-handed defensive firearm is conceptually a personal artifact. Soldiers normally express a desire to have a pistol, but they do not want to fight with it. I have asked several prominent warriors about this, and I have come up with several variegated answers. Beyond this, we see all sorts of pistols in military use, but not strictly speaking as combat weapons. McBride, the noteworthy *pistolero* of World War I, was a great believer in the 1911, which remains, I believe, the preemptive defensive sidearm of the present era. But McBride was preeminently a rifleman. Here at the beginning of the 21st century, it seems that the infantryman fights primarily with high explosives in the form of various kinds of personally directed bombs.

I find it interesting that I put in for fragmentation bombs for the 2.3" bazooka during the Korean war. I got no response. But I find that the idea is now widely accepted on both sides of the current holy war. We ride around in vehicles and they shoot at us with rocket propelled grenades. We retaliate where possible with massive applications of heavy automatic fire and vehicular-mounted cannon fire. This is an inconclusive arrangement, and will change in one way or another before any sort of decision is reached.

So the matter of a forthcoming military pistol remains afloat. Douglas MacArthur was very fond of the 1911. George Patton, as well as Mike Hoare, fancied the Peacemaker. I asked Rudel about this and he told me personally that he packed one of those miniature 25 caliber automatics on his antitank missions. When asked why, he replied, "Because I have never been a pessimist." Hanneken, of course, used the 1911 on his famous exploit, but that was strictly speaking an assassination, rather than a combat mission. So when we ask what the characteristics of the new pistol should be – if any – we come up with various sorts of responses, but they apply to the weapon itself rather than its cartridge. The cartridge – the venerable 45 ACP – seems quite satisfactory though its projectile might be improved by going to the jacketed truncated cone configuration (JTC). The new pistol, if any, will apparently carry the same cartridge we have used since 1911. New ammunition for this pistol seems to be going to feature the JTC bullet, which should be a distinct improvement. Thus the new gun will be 45 auto, using both reserve RNJ and the JTC at option. I believe this is good news. We can use all the surplus hardball until it is expended, and then use new issue JTC ammunition.

So the Mexicans have held forth with a hair-splitting national election! This is an occasion for great excitement. The Mexicans have a tradition of very exciting elections, even when they are one-sided. When they are pretty close calls, such as this last one, the results may be quite rousing.

Those of you who can put your hands on a large quantity of 30-30 ammunition ought to be doing very well in weeks to come, if not to say, months to come. The lever-action 30-30 has been the weapon of choice for all parties south of the border, during most of our lifetime.

Well I haven't heard the shooting yet, but we can expect it to begin at any time.

"We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails."

Bertha Calloway

Riflemaster John Gannaway tells us that he will have a 50-caliber service pistol available for display at the *Reunion* (plus a modest supply of ammunition); he will also bring "Baby" (plus a modest supply of ammunition). Here is something else to anticipate! (6–8 October 2006 at Wittington Center.) John Gannaway and Tom Russell will be overseeing the *Reunion*. If you need more information about the forthcoming *Reunion* call Tom at (214) 509-0602 or e-mail him: tom@americanfirearmsacademy.com.

We learn that Tom is now "in business" doing firearms training, and anyone wanting superior instruction from a proven master of the range, contact Tom.

The people at Smith & Wesson are hard at work playing with new ideas, ranging from the giant 50 caliber revolver to a baby 357, which should have less to recommend it. Looking at the reduced frame, 5-shot, 357 at the SHOT Show, we were reminded that when the new "Magnum" cartridge was introduced back in my youth, it was accompanied by all sorts of cautionary warnings about violence in handling, restricting its use to large and "brawny" hands. Times have changed. It appears we have grown up in some ways and down in others. Consider the Baby 17 Rimfire. I do not see any purpose for this last item. Just what, for example, is the mission of a Magnum 17? There is a purpose, I suppose, for an inner city pigeon gun, but it would seem to be widely illegal in most jurisdictions.

"Worry is the misuse of the imagination."

Dan Zadra

We have mentioned it before but we say again that the Spanish term "*macho*" is not a derogation. To be *macho*, at least in my day in Latin America, was to be spirited and manly. A previous president of Bolivia, by the name of Barrientos, made his point one day when he flaunted his command of the situation by playing with a parachute to the dismay of the political opposition. When President George Bush landed himself on the carrier on the way in from the war zone, he was being *macho* – to the dismay of the congressional left. He was manifesting *machismo*, and more power to him. Our notably *macho* presidents have been George Washington, Andrew Jackson and Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. We can use as much of that as we have lying around.

Our current US state of training in smallarms continues to decline. Poor as it was, it continues to get worse. We have people now who have no idea what a shooting sling is for – and this is for instructors, not just the troops at large! We have in possession a Boy Scout training manual dated from about 1937 which sets up an excellent standard for the individual rifleman. Dismal as this may seem, our currently standard poodle shooter is not much to work with, but we can do better than that, provided the need to do so is established. We get back some pretty fair sniper examples, but on the other hand, shooting after dark in short range urban situations does not offer us much of a goal for which to strive. Apparently today's infantry action is a matter of short range, high-explosive bomb-throwing. Not all outfits are the same, of course, and we get different strokes from different folks, much to our annoyance.

It seems that the European brown bear is moving westward into the protected forests of Central Europe. Not only are there now some pretty good sightings from Romania, but we recently hear of a sighting from Bavaria, right there in the land of beer and pretzels. This is good news, I guess, but it demands both verification and amplification. I think it is unlikely that 20th century big game hunting is about to catch on thereabouts, but one can always hope. *Waidmanns Heil!* and all that sort of thing!

Correction. We have been calling the Broomhandle Mauser a pistol for lo these many years. In this way I followed the example of Winston Churchill, who used his Broomhandle with notable success at the calvary charge at Omdurman, but we note the factory never so called the Broomhandle, but rather a "system." The people who made it called it the Mauser System 96, and in this they established a precedence which the public failed to follow. The Broomhandle, properly so-called, is a short-range collapsible carbine suitable for use by junior officers or senior NCOs, when properly packed in its GI wooden butt stock, which serves as both a shooting aid and a carrying case. As a "system," it was never adopted by any military establishment, but it did serve a purpose around the edges of the war-torn 20th century. Look at the sights. Those are not pistol sights. Note the extensive magazine capacity. That is not the feature of a pistol. Thus the Broomhandle is indeed properly labeled a system – and in the words of the factory, Mauser System 96. Its ballistics are somewhat strange, to say the least. A small caliber projectile of moderate velocity is not a fight-stopper. Neither is it properly an item of musketry, since it does not pack enough muscle to serve as an efficient item of battlecraft. In the hands of a cool-headed junior leader, however, it may be used as a sort of thickener of scuffles, bearing an item for which there is no regular military title. The Mauser people simply call it a "system." It never swept the markets, but it certainly was made popular by certain people at certain times, and Churchill, of course, was the preeminent example thereof.

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