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P. 10




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THE ARMORY LIFE

FALL 2025



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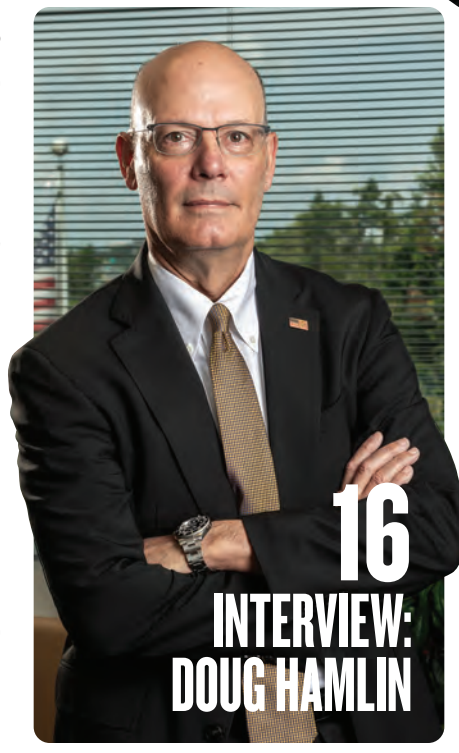
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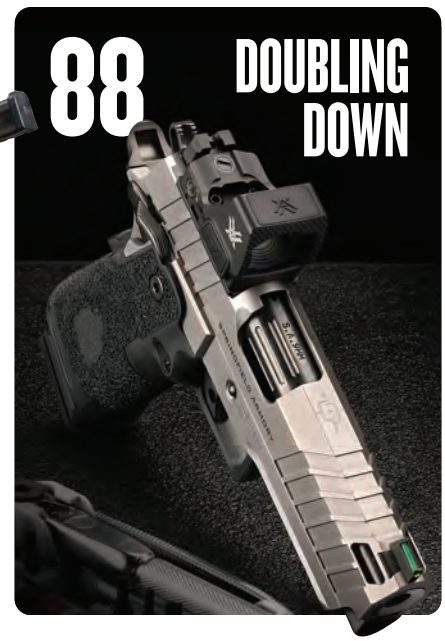












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IMAGE: OFFENSIVE MARKETING GROUP
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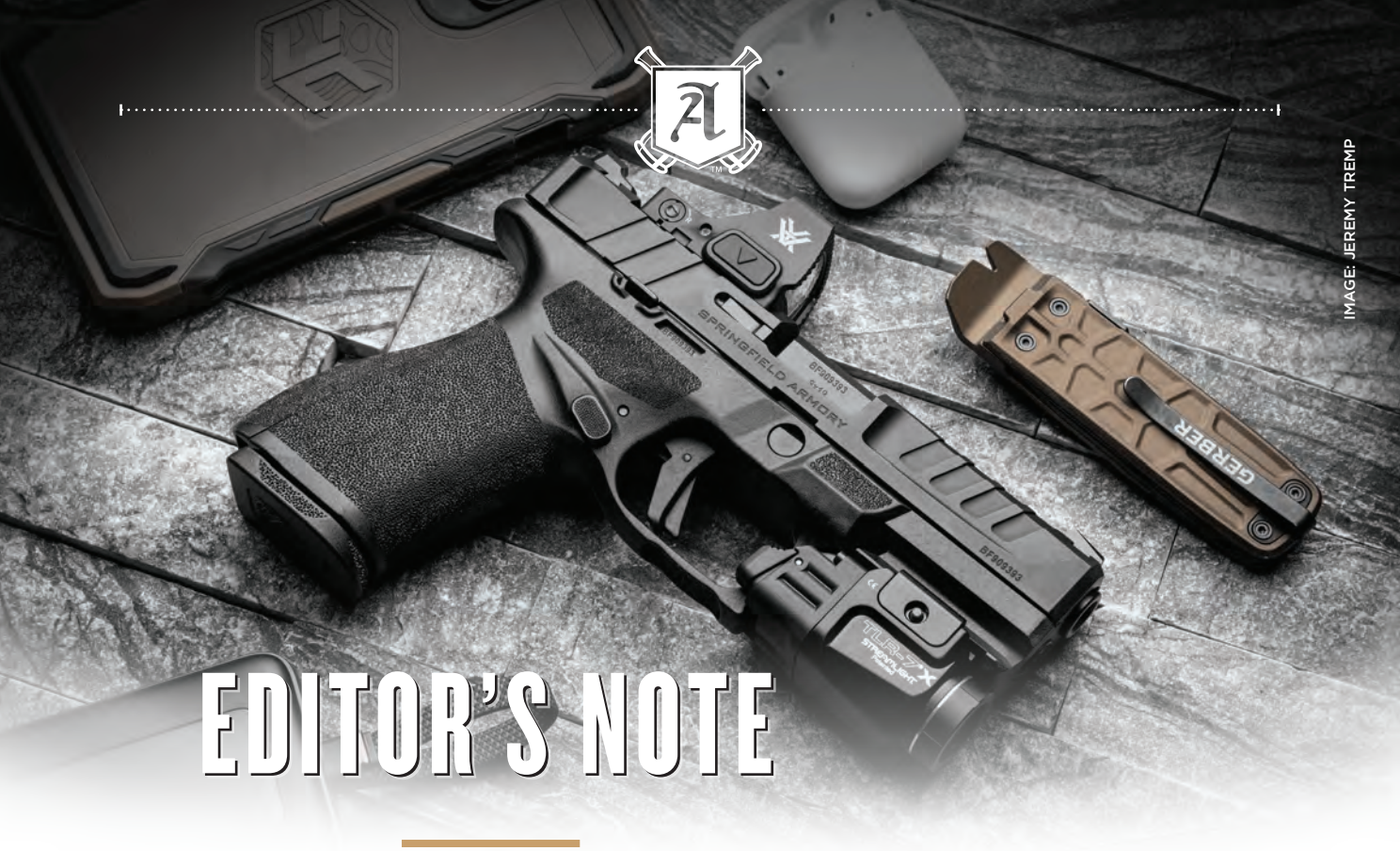


IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

EDITOR'S NOTE

MIKE HUMPHRIES

WE'RE PROUD TO PRESENT the Fall 2025 issue of *The Armory Life* print magazine. This issue is packed with great content, from our cover story review of the new roller-delayed 9mm Kuna pistol to detailed product reviews and much more.

The new Kuna represents a unique take on the PDW-style platform. Featuring a 30-round capacity and ruggedly reliable operation, the 9mm Kuna combines impressive power and performance with compact dimensions and impressive controllability. Turn to page 10 to find exactly how it achieves this feat.

The fact of the matter is that our Second Amendment freedoms are constantly under threat from those that wish to undermine this Constitutional right. Turn to page 16 to read our in-depth interview with Doug Hamlin, the National Rifle Association's executive vice president and CEO, to find out what the association is doing to defend this invaluable civil right—and how you can help.

Want to tune up your EDC system? Then check out our piece by Joe Kurtenbach on his personal RDP and his EDC rig—and why he chose it—starting on page 60.

Rounding out the issue are pieces on the new Model 2020 Heatseeker rifle, the SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm Pistol, the Delta 14 Gen 2 Chassis folding stock system for the M1A, and the NTOA awarding the Echelon 4.0C 9mm its highest award.

You know we love historical pieces here at *The Armory Life*. In this issue, we have Tom Laemlein tell the fascinating story of Operation Vengeance, America's mission to kill Yamamoto. Meticulously planned, expertly pulled off and shockingly dangerous, this mission took down the architect of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Read all about it by turning to page 76.

As always, I'm interested in hearing your thoughts about *The Armory Life*. You can reach out to me at support@thearmorylife.com to let me know what you think about the content in both the magazine and on the website.

So, welcome to the Fall 2025 issue of *The Armory Life* quarterly magazine. Flip through its pages, read some articles, scan some QR codes, visit the website and enjoy. And be sure to keep an eye out for future issues as well!

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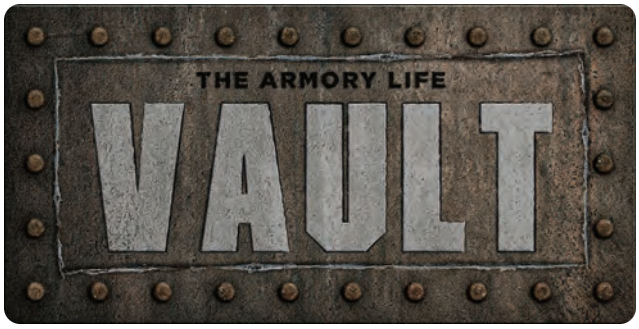
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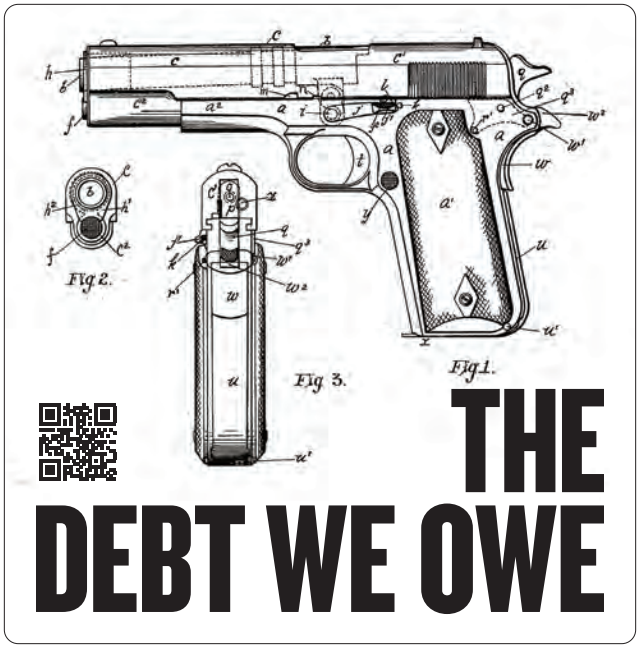
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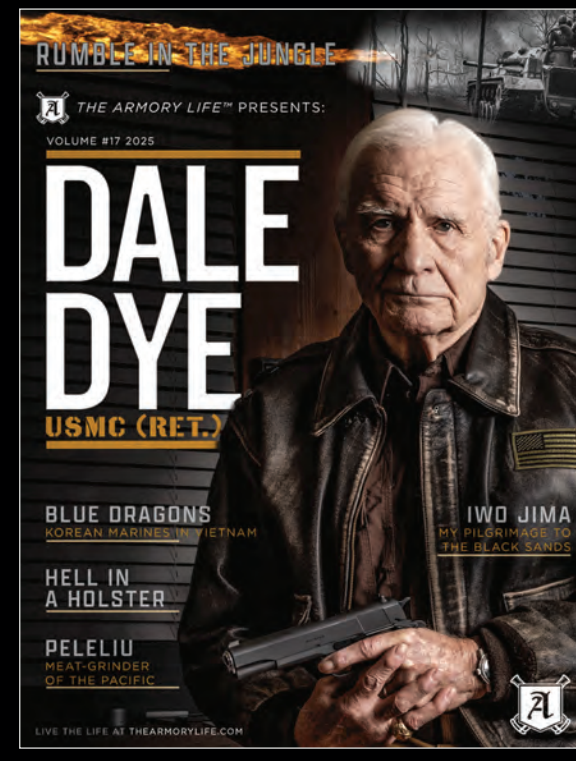
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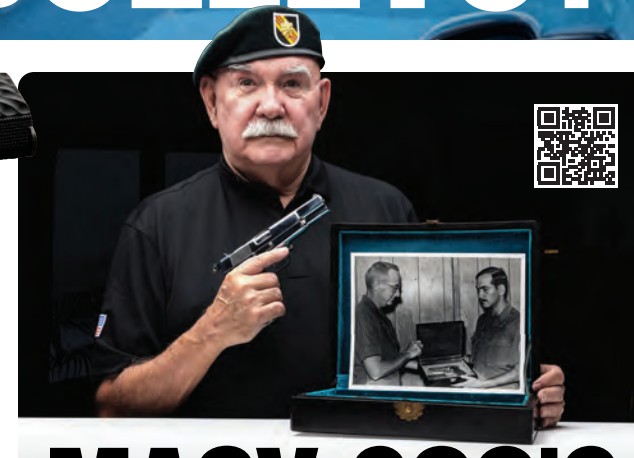
DODGING BULLETS?

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

AYOOB: IS EVERYONE WRONG?



MACV-SOG'S SECRET PISTOL

IMAGE: ALEX JOSEPH/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



HOME INVASION I NEVER FORGOT

IN THE B

HOW THE FIERCELY CAPABLE ROLLER-DELAYED KUNA COMBINES MINIMAL MASS WITH MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE.

JEREMY TREMP



Shown is a see-through rendering of the Kuna's roller-delayed operating system. Note the roller and detent recess located above the chambered round.

ALANCE



WATCH THE VIDEO:
RUNNING THE KUNA

IMAGE: OFFENSIVE MARKETING GROUP

KUNA MIGHT AT FIRST SEEM like a strange name for a firearm. I'll admit I was not familiar with what it meant when I first heard about this remarkable firearm, but I was intrigued to learn more. When I was offered the opportunity to review the new Kuna 9mm from Springfield Armory, I jumped at the chance and started digging into the details.

As a little bit of background, I learned the Kuna was developed by Springfield in partnership with HS Produkt in Croatia. The name comes from the European Pine Marten, which is referred to as a "Kuna" in Croatia. In addition to being a formidable hunter that is sleek, compact and fierce, it also happens to be the country's national animal as well as the namesake of some of the nation's military units. Sounds intriguing, right?

However, the name isn't the only remarkable thing about this firearm. For anyone thinking the Kuna is just a "me too" product, guess again. The Kuna represents what a demanding market wants—precision craftsmanship, feature-rich design and impeccable style—and all from a reputable manufacturer like Springfield Armory.

CORE FOUNDATION

Let's dive into what makes the 9mm Kuna stand out in a crowded market of 9mm PDW-style firearms.

We'll start with the most defining feature that everyone will love—the roller-delayed operating system. For those who know what this technology delivers, this is likely all I need to say to convince you that the Kuna is the next big thing. However, in case you're not familiar with the benefits of this type of system, let's go over the details.

Most firearms in this general configuration are blowback-operated designs. These are usually quite reliable in their simplicity, but they rely on both recoil spring pressure and—most importantly—bolt mass to keep the action safely closed during the firing cycle.

The Kuna's roller-delayed blowback system takes a completely different tack. It employs a small roller that locks the bolt into battery. Once the chambered round is fired, the force required for the roller to overcome this resistance delays the action opening until it is safe for the gun to cycle.

The genius of this design approach is that it allows for an extremely compact and lightweight system of operation. Simply put, this method of operation ensures an extremely smooth shooting experience that will also keep you on target for quick follow-up shots with minimal muzzle rise.

The Kuna is made to perform, utilizing a type III hardcoat anodized monolithic aluminum upper receiver featuring M-Lok slots at 3, 6 and 9 o'clock, and a durable and fully ambidextrous polymer lower assembly. The 6" barrel is cold radial hammer forged and Melonite treated for extreme durability and accuracy. Topping off the 1/2x28 threaded muzzle is a multi-port muzzle brake to help further reduce perceived recoil. In addition, the upper features a reversible folding charging handle to ensure full ambidextrous operation.

THE DETAILS

At the rear of the receiver is a Picatinny rail end plate. The pistol is offered "bare" for an MSRP of $999, or fitted out with a Strike Industries FSA folding brace for $1,149. The brace folds neatly along the left side of the pistol and locks up solidly in the open position. I found it to be very easy to open and close.



The Kuna, shown here with optional folding FSA brace by Strike Industries, offers shooters a compact yet powerful 9mm pistol.

As noted, beyond the ingenious operating system, the Kuna is fully ambidextrous. This includes the bolt lock/release, safety selector and magazine release on the lower, and the reversible non-reciprocating charging handle on the upper.

For those who are familiar with AR-15 controls, you will feel right at home when operating the Kuna. In addition, the pistol grip is a swappable AR-pattern unit utilizing Springfield's ever-popular Adaptive Grip Texture as found on the Hellcat and Echelon family of pistols, and the trigger is a flat-faced aluminum unit with a tactile break and an audible, satisfying reset.

The Kuna comes ready to roll out of the box with two magazines. These 30-rounders are designed specifically for use in the Kuna and are very reasonably priced at $25. They feature translucent construction along with steel feed lips. The result is a tough and durable magazine that allows quick visual access to round counts.

In addition, the Kuna features unique adjustable hybrid flip-up iron sights. They offer users either a precision aperture rear ring/post front sighting system when flipped up, or a pistol-style white dot front sight/U-notch rear unit when folded down. When they are in the down position, they blend right into the upper receiver and its top strip of Picatinny rail. Trust me, these are really cool.

HANDS-ON

All these features combine to make the Kuna one of the most impressive modern PDW-style firearms on the market, in my opinion. They truly took what people have been asking and looking for and put all of that into the Kuna, and I think it really shows.

For my Kuna, I set it up with an Aimpoint ACRO P-2 and SureFire Scout light. Additionally, I put a handstop on the lower portion of the handguard. I also ran the Kuna with a SilencerCo Omega 9K to test it out suppressed. I suspected the Kuna would make for an excellent suppressor host, with its compact nature as well as the roller-delayed blowback operation.



The author ran the Kuna with a broad selection of bullet weights and types on the range, with it running smoothly with all tested.

Let's dive a little deeper into what makes the Kuna such a fantastic suppressor host. When shooting suppressed, ideally, most gas escapes through the muzzle and ultimately the suppressor. However, once the bolt opens and travels rearward, gas can push back through the ejection port. With a locked system like this, more of the gas stays controlled in the barrel, allowing more of it to move forward through the suppressor, leading to reduced gas flowing out of the ejection port.

The roller-delayed blowback system is also known for its reliability. It helps ensure that, even with the addition of a suppressor, the firearm continues to function smoothly and cycle properly, minimizing malfunctions or stoppages. This is crucial when it comes to any defensive situation where reliability could mean all the difference.

RANGE TIME

On the range, the Kuna ate through ball and defensive ammo alike. The translucent polymer magazines were a breeze to load, and they fed with zero issues. I really like the look and feel of the Kuna magazines; they've got style and functionality but, equally as important, they are extremely affordable.

The recoil impulse on the Kuna is smooth and predictable. It doesn't thump you and jostle the pistol around. You know exactly what to expect when the trigger is pulled, and you stay on target with ease. The trigger is comfortable and situated in a natural position, allowing you to cleanly press for a proper and accurate shot. The reset is easily discernible, and you know when the Kuna is ready for that next shot from both a physical and an audible perspective.

The controls are well-designed and easily actuated, and easily within reach of your support or shooting hands. The controls share similar muscle memory to those of an AR. This made picking up the Kuna and working it quickly with precision a breeze. I didn't need much time to become familiarized with it, and for me, this is a huge positive.

The first five-shot group I shot at 15 yards was with Remington Golden Saber Bonded 147-gr. JHP. The second group was Hornady Critical Defense 115-gr. FTX. The third was Nosler ASP 124-gr. JHP. Finally, the last was PMC Bronze 115-gr. ball. The Kuna shot all four loads extremely well, with it showing a preference for the lightest 115-gr. loadings. All four ammo types ran without a hitch.



Strike Industries FSA Brace

From my experience, these groups are quite impressive from a 6" PDW-style firearm in 9mm. The Kuna is clearly a firearm built to perform when it counts.

CONCLUSION

It's always very interesting trying to explain in words an experience or feeling. The Kuna 9mm pistol is simply

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.)
KUNA

LOAD	GROUP (BEST)
HORNADY CRITICAL DEFENSE 115-GR. FTX	0.80"
NOSLER ASP 124-GR. JHP	1.20"
PMC BRONZE 115-GR. FMJ	0.80"
REMINGTON GOLDEN SABER BONDED 147-GR. JHP	1.25"

Accuracy results for the best of three five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a bench rest. Abbreviations: gr. (grain), FMJ (full metal jacket), FTX (Flex Tip eXpanding), JHP (jacketed hollow point).

KUNA™



KUNA

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	6″
WEIGHT	4 lbs., 10 oz.; 5 lbs., 5 oz. (with brace)
OVERALL LENGTH	15.5″, 15.5″-24.5″ (with brace)
SIGHTS	Hybrid flip-up
GRIPS	AR-pattern with Adaptive Grip Texture
ACTION	Roller-delayed
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	30 (two magazines included)
MSRP	$999/$1,149

very satisfying to shoot. Each and every shot feels good, and the highly capable pistol wants to come back to a neutral position to fire again and again.

I've really enjoyed my time shooting and reviewing the Kuna pistol. A PDW-style firearm like this holds a very important place in my kit as a defensive tool.

The extra performance, stability and accuracy that a firearm like this 9mm powerhouse can provide you with is hard to beat. You can mount a powerful light, a vis/IR laser, suppressor, larger red dot sight, and have 30 rounds per magazine.

When it comes down to it, what more could you ask for? With the features and reasonable price point of the Kuna, this one is going to be one that is extremely hard to beat.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM
AIMPOINT.US
SILENCERCO.COM
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As its executive vice president and chief executive officer, Doug Hamlin is bringing exceptional drive and energy to the National Rifle Association in defense of our Second Amendment rights.

***THE ARMORY LIFE* INTERVIEWS:**

NRA EVP AND CEO DOUG HAMLIN

MIKE HUMPHRIES

WHILE WE HERE IN THE UNITED STATES enjoy unparalleled liberty and freedom, the truth of the matter is that freedom such as this is never free. Its maintenance requires constant vigilance in defense of the principles upon which this nation was founded.

When it comes to a defense of our Second Amendment rights, few names are as widely recognized as the National Rifle Association (NRA). First founded in 1871, the NRA has been deeply involved in not only the effort to ensure the citizens of the United States are trained in the safe use of firearms, but also to ensure their right to possess them—as enshrined in the U.S. Constitution—is protected.

While the association has admittedly been navigating some rough waters recently, the election of Doug Hamlin in early 2024 by the NRA Board of Directors as NRA's new chief executive officer (CEO) and executive vice president (EVP) appears to represent a bold new direction for the group.

We recently had the opportunity to sit down with Mr. Hamlin and conduct an in-depth interview to learn more about him and his background, as well as how he sees the future shaping up for the NRA. We'd like to thank him for taking the time to speak with us.

***THE ARMORY LIFE* (TAL):** Could you tell us a little bit about yourself, and what has brought you here to the role you find yourself in today?

DOUG HAMLIN (DH): I'm a Midwesterner, born and raised in the great state of Michigan. I had great parents; my father was a Korean War U.S. Army veteran. And his hero was my uncle, Earl, who was a World War II veteran. I've always believed in patriotism and service to country—values that came from my family.

After college, I served in the U.S. Marine Corps for six years on active duty, then another six in the reserves as an infantry officer. And then I went into the publishing business with Petersen Publishing, starting at *Guns & Ammo* and eventually as vice president and group publisher for *Motor Trend*. After that, I started my own business. I've been a publisher or executive for more than 35 years.

I came to the National Rifle Association as the executive director of the NRA Publications Division in 2013 and then was elected executive vice president and chief executive officer in May 2024. I was unanimously reelected by NRA's Board of Directors in April. I put those values of service and patriotism to work every day for NRA.

TAL: We have no doubt that your position with the NRA is a demanding one. Clearly, you've taken on this role because you recognize the importance of the Second Amendment. Can you tell us a bit about how your life shaped this guiding principle, and

IMAGES: NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

why firearm rights are so important to you personally?

DH: I get to do some interesting things in this line of work as the EVP and CEO of NRA. On April 19, I was a speaker at the Gun Owners Action League in Massachusetts, and we celebrated the 250th anniversary of the "Shot heard 'round the world." It reinforced the commitment that our founding fathers made to freedom. They saw a tyrannical government that wanted to confiscate firearms and ammunition, and they made sure the Second Amendment was written into the Bill of Rights.

It's my right and my responsibility. I'm firmly committed to the freedom we have as Americans, as citizens. As a young man, I raised my right hand and swore an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. The Second Amendment is the ultimate check and balance for freedom. I spent most of my professional life in California, raised my family there, so I've seen restrictions on our Constitutional freedom. Speaking of California, NRA spends more on litigation there than anywhere else.

TAL: We've heard you've talk about a new direction for the NRA. Can you tell us a little bit about this, and what it means for current (and potentially new) members of the association?

DH: We will continue to defend the Second Amendment and remain its best advocate. Our belief is that members join because they want their Second Amendment rights protected.

We have five divisions across NRA, and in the past year, we've changed out leadership across every one of them. We are sharpening our focus on good business practices.

NRA is committed to honesty, transparency and accountability at every level. We have rigorous financial and ethical controls in place, as well as a chief compliance officer. You can trust us to be judicious with expenditures and member funds. I will not tolerate any malfeasance.

We want to rebuild the trust of the members, the donors, the staff and the industry. At the top of that list is the NRA membership. They are the reason why I took this job.

TAL: Considering the new approach of the NRA, and turning back to the topic of membership in the organization, what would you tell those who are currently members? Also, why should gun owners who are not currently members join the NRA? What does the association offer them?

DH: First, I want to thank each and every NRA member, because membership matters. NRA does everything, and what do I mean by that? You have some organizations that lobby, and that's their primary focus. We do that better than anyone. Yes, other groups offer training. But there was no firearms training for citizens, for law enforcement, and no hunter safety education before NRA led the way. And we continue to do so every day.

When you join NRA, you are not just helping safeguard the Second Amendment. NRA has programs and services that touch some 120 different areas. Go to nra.org and see for yourself. Eddie Eagle protects young lives, we offer youth programs, we offer events for women. We send millions of magazines out every month, produce television and post web articles every day. We have three museums around the United States.

TAL: Beyond what the NRA is facing, how do you view the status of our Second Amendment rights today? What strengths do we have, and what hurdles do we face?

DH: I believe that Second Amendment rights in the United States have never been stronger than they are today. That's because of NRA members voting for the right candidates, making calls, sending letters. We have pro-freedom majorities in the U.S. House and Senate, and an NRA Life Member in the White House.

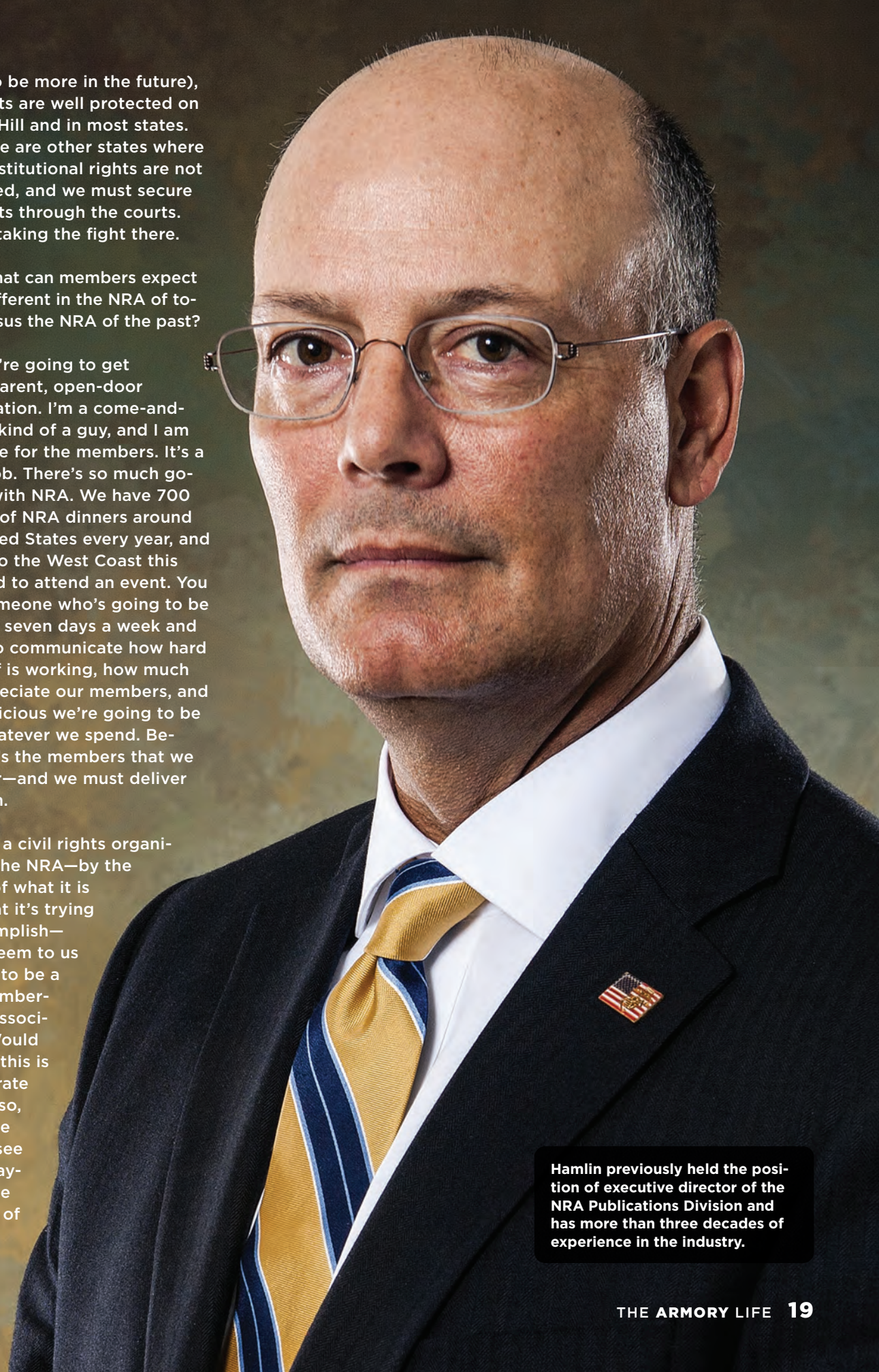
If you look at concealed carry across the country—thanks to the NRA-backed and funded Bruen case at the Supreme Court—with Constitutional Carry in 29 states (we think there are

going to be more in the future), our rights are well protected on Capitol Hill and in most states. But there are other states where our Constitutional rights are not respected, and we must secure our rights through the courts. We are taking the fight there.

TAL: What can members expect to be different in the NRA of today, versus the NRA of the past?

DH: You're going to get a transparent, open-door organization. I'm a come-and-see-me kind of a guy, and I am out there for the members. It's a tough job. There's so much going on with NRA. We have 700 Friends of NRA dinners around the United States every year, and I'm off to the West Coast this weekend to attend an event. You have someone who's going to be working seven days a week and trying to communicate how hard the staff is working, how much we appreciate our members, and how judicious we're going to be with whatever we spend. Because it's the members that we work for—and we must deliver for them.

TAL: As a civil rights organization, the NRA—by the nature of what it is and what it's trying to accomplish—would seem to us to need to be a very member-driven association. Would you say this is an accurate take? If so, what role do you see them playing in the defense of our civil rights?



Hamlin previously held the position of executive director of the NRA Publications Division and has more than three decades of experience in the industry.



In addition to being an avowed shooting enthusiast, Hamlin is also an avid hunter that enjoys getting out into the woods.

DH: The NRA, since 1871, has been the country's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Our tent is broad and wide open. We welcome all creeds, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and we represent the country—the citizens of this nation. We welcome all law-abiding Americans to participate with us and the freedom protected under the Second Amendment. You don't even need to own a firearm to be an NRA member.

Rights are, I believe, God-given, but they must be fought for. And that means we need to do it at the local level, at the state level and at the federal level, and your NRA has delivered. Our strength is in standing together. Because when you stand with the NRA, you are standing for freedom. Our voice is stronger together.

The more NRA members, the more power and influence we can wield when it comes to defending your rights. It's simple. Join us.

TAL: As noted earlier, firearms have been an important part of your life. Can you tell us a bit about your personal interests in the shooting sports?

DH: I've been a hunter and a shooter most of my life. I was exposed to a lot of different firearms in my youth, more when I was a Marine infantry officer, and then even more since.

I like handguns, rifles and shotguns, and I own a lot of all of them. I shoot for fun, but also to be more proficient. I have handguns from .22s all the way to .454 Casulls. I shoot my Springfield SAINT rifle quite a lot. I had to qualify with iron sights back in the day—we didn't have ACOGs then, but I do now.

I shoot as often as I can, but I also really enjoy upland bird hunting, whitetail deer hunting, boar hunting, and a few years ago had the good fortune to knock down a nice trophy elk in New Mexico.

TAL: Speaking of firearms, do you have any particular favorites from the Springfield catalog?

DH: I've already mentioned my SAINT, and I'm proud to say I own several Springfields. My current favorite is probably my SA-35. The finish, the walnut stocks, the great trigger—Springfield really made John Browning's classic modern and relevant again.

Although I've hunted with one before, I also recently shot the Model 2020 Waypoint rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor. If this job lets me have time in the Michigan deer woods, that Model 2020 may go with me. Or, maybe I'll get one in 300 PRC.

TAL: Thank you for taking the time with us for this interview and giving us this insight into the NRA today and your role in leading it.

DH: Thank you. I want to especially thank NRA Golden Bullseye Pioneer Award winner Dennis Reese for all he has done for the NRA. In addition, I'd like to thank Golden Bullseye Competitor Award winner Rob Leatham and all the rest of the great people at Springfield Armory for all the work they do for their customers and for their strong support for NRA.

And if your readers value their freedom, they should join. Join me. Join us. Join the NRA.

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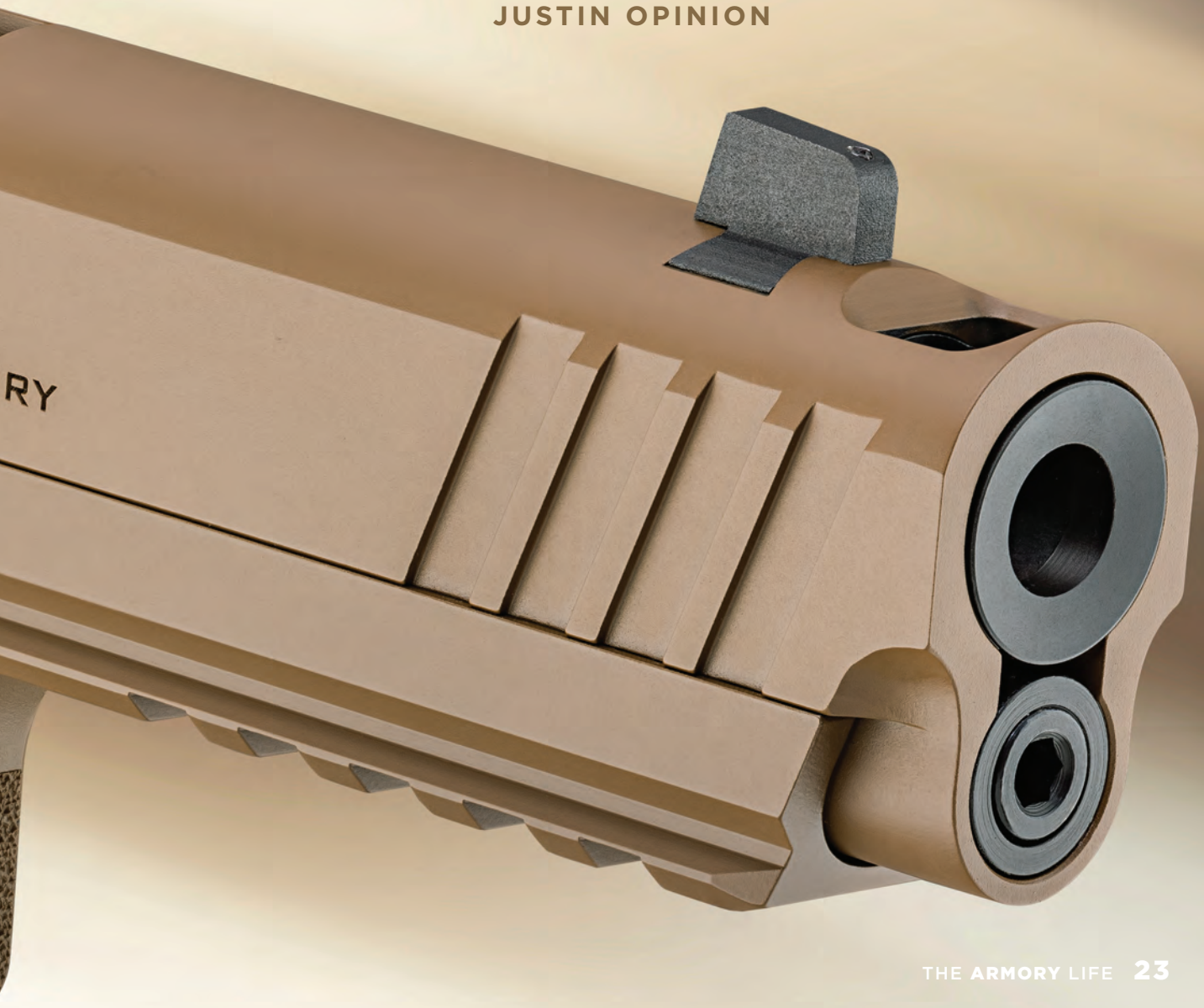


WATCH THE VIDEO:
TESTING THE COYOTE BROWN PRODIGY COMP

PARTS...

WITH A COYOTE BROWN FINISH AND INTEGRAL COMPENSATOR, THE 1911 DS PRODIGY COMP DELIVERS ON THE RANGE—AND BEYOND.

JUSTIN OPINION



THE LEGENDARY 1911 DESIGN has perhaps never been more popular in its 100-year-plus life than in the past decade. However, the one thing that might steer buyers in other directions is the single-stack capacity of the century-old Browning design. Thus, the innovation of the double-stack 1911 was born.

Chambering the pistol for 9mm and expanding the magazine to hold more than twice the legacy capacity was the core change of the design. The concept was a hit with both 1911 aficionados and competitive shooters—the latter group appreciating the precision and unmatched trigger of the classic gun, along with the capacity to compete with other models at the match. In addition, these characteristics could just as easily apply to a self-defense user.

Enter the Springfield Armory 1911 DS (which stands for "double stack") Prodigy. This design puts the impressive power of a double-stack 1911 chambered for 9mm into your hand, and all at an affordable price.

WITHIN REACH

The problem with the earliest offerings in this form factor from boutique companies was that they were far more expensive than most could afford, and there were some performance and support concerns. The Springfield Armory Prodigy was the perfect answer to this dilemma—providing a solid pistol made by a top-quality 1911 manufacturer, and putting it in your hands at a very affordable price.

To enhance the performance of the Prodigy, Springfield released the 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS in July of 2024. Available in 5" and 4.25" versions, the Prodigy Comp was integrally compensated to reduce felt recoil and muzzle rise.

Now available in Coyote Brown, this newest pair of Prodigy Comp pistols is ready for the desert climate duty kit, or blending in with your existing color scheme of gear. As a fashion statement, it speaks for itself.

The finish of the Coyote Brown Prodigy is darker and richer than many "tan" finishes on the market. The earthy tone is made up of a highly durable Cerakote finish. This means that it will look as great years from now as it does the day you buy it. The match between the polymer grip module and the Cerakote-finished forged slide and frame is great. Additionally, the use of black small parts—such as the ambidextrous safety switches, grip safety, optics plate, etc.—gives a very aesthetically pleasing two-tone

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

quality to the gun. The match-grade, forged stainless steel bull barrel is also black, with a diamond-like carbon (DLC) finish.

Like its stablemates, the Coyote Brown Prodigy is available in both full-sized 5″ and slightly smaller 4.25″ models. The new Coyote Brown 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS pistols wrap all of the fantastic features and options of the Prodigy handgun in this new color offering. There is a lot to unpack here, so let's get started.

THE DETAILS

It all starts with the base 1911 foundation, as the tried-and-true John Browning design continues to be the benchmark by which all handguns are measured. The Prodigy line-up is a natural evolution for Springfield Armory, which makes a plethora of top-quality 1911 models of all sizes and option levels.

The significant change with the Prodigy from a traditional 1911 is, of course, the capacity of the pistol. This is achieved by widening the grip enough to accommodate a double-stack magazine—allowing for the standard 17-round magazine and an extended 20-round magazine (the pistol comes standard with one of each, and 26-round mags are also available for purchase).

That wider grip module is a polymer component that is molded with the Hellcat's "Adaptive Grip Texture," and is nicely married to the forged steel frame. I like the feel of the grip surface, and appreciate that the texture is the same everywhere—the side panels, backstrap and frontstrap all feel the same and keep the pistol planted firmly in your hand. The polymer grip module includes the trigger guard, which has the same molded texture on the front edge and is nicely undercut.

The feel of the ambidextrous safety is ideal for my tastes. The levers are just wide enough to ensure a clean swipe and even serve as a thumb rest, but not so wide that they dig into you when holstered. The "touch" is just right—easy to swipe on and off, but with sufficient resistance to avoid accidentally doing either. The grip safety with memory bump operates smoothly and resolves to a nice beavertail.

The forged steel frame of the Prodigy has been slightly widened from the dustcover area to the manual safety, making for a clean transition from the frame to the slide. My favorite result of this widened frame is the recessed fit of the slide lock lever.

The feel of the Prodigy in the hand at the range is quite comfortable, even for a gloved hand. The fact that it's a



The Coyote Brown 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS, offered in 4.25″ (left) and 5″ (right) variants, features a tough Cerakote finish complemented by black controls.



Both Prodigy variants feature a polymer grip module in a matching Coyote Brown color, which is attached to the pistol's forged steel receiver.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

COYOTE BROWN 1911 DS PRODIGY COMP AOS

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	5"/4.25"
WEIGHT	33 oz./32.5 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	8.5"/7.8"
SIGHTS	Tritium front; black, serrated rear
GRIPS	Polymer, integral
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Cerakote Coyote Brown
CAPACITY	17+1 (one magazine), 20+1 (one magazine)
MSRP	$1,649

double-stack gun has little effect on trigger reach in my experience.

At the top rear of the Prodigy's slide is the Agency Optic System (AOS) slide cut—the optics-ready component of the Springfield Armory pistol that uses a series of plates to fit all major red dot footprints to the gun. Far from just an adapter plate, the AOS plates each come with a rear sight mounted, which is designed to co-witness with the majority of optics that fit that specific footprint. Each of these sights features an anti-glare blackout with a U-notch.

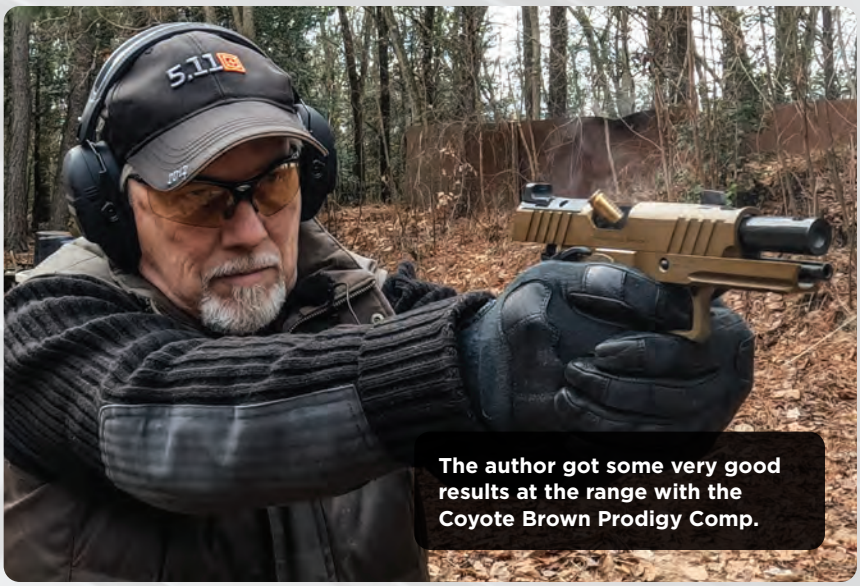
For superior mounting, the plate slides into a dovetail-style rear mount before the screws are fastened. This gives the optic mount a strong, stable platform that helps hold your optic's zero. Whether or not you are co-witnessing through your optic or using the iron sights, the tritium front sight gives you the benefit of a night sight. The pistol comes standard with a cover plate with rear sight and one HEX Dragonfly mounting plate with rear sight. Additional plates are available from the Springfield Armory Store.

And of course, this Prodigy is a Comp—which stands for compensator. The integral compensator is made up of a single port near the muzzle. The match-grade barrel itself is a bull barrel, and the port is fairly large and located at the top, front center of it. It's paired to a corresponding opening cut into the slide. Its purpose is to direct

hot gases straight up to counteract the natural recoil impulse that causes the muzzle to rise. Reduced muzzle flip means the sights return to target faster, which allows for faster follow-up shots.

During my testing at the range, I ran several rapid-fire sequences where triple-tap style shooting was easy and the shots easily stayed on target. This Prodigy is one of the flattest shooting guns I have ever fired.

Springfield wisely made the compensator port a direct upward venting port and placed it forward of the tritium/luminescent front sight. This keeps the carbon and particles that are mixed with the hot gases from fouling the sight and making it hard to see.



The author got some very good results at the range with the Coyote Brown Prodigy Comp.

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.)
1911 DS PRODIGY COMP AOS 5″ 9MM

LOAD	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
FEDERAL AMERICAN EAGLE 115-GR. FMJ	1.91″	2.16″
HORNADY CRITICAL DUTY 135-GR. FLEXLOCK	0.86″	1.03″
WINCHESTER USA READY 124-GR. JHP	0.90″	1.04″

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a CTK Precision pistol rest. Abbreviations: FMJ (full metal jacket), gr. (grain), JHP (jacketed hollow point).

DOWNRANGE

I spent nearly equal time at the range with both the 5″ and 4.25″ Prodigy pistols, and the porting provided great results with both. Normally, a shooter will feel more recoil impulse from the shorter barrel version of the pistol, but this difference was virtually indistinguishable with the Comp pistols.

For formal accuracy testing, I used the 5″ Coyote Brown 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS. I shot three different quality ammo loads that represented a good breadth of bullet weights and designs. Three five-shot groups of each were fired from 15 yards using a CTK Precision pistol rest. The included table shows the best of each of the three groups for every load, along with the overall averages of all three groups.

Easily achieving 1″ groups with two out of three ammunition loads on a cold windy winter day is a testament to the inherent accuracy of Springfield's 1911 DS Prodigy. Relying on the Prodigy to win a match, defend the home or serve as a duty weapon seems like a sound investment to me.

SUMMING IT UP

The ability to have increased magazine capacity levels in the legendary 1911 pistol design without sacrificing any of the design's classic benefits is something to celebrate. Springfield Armory has taken the double-stack 1911 from the boutique to primetime production. As a result, the consumer wins big.

With enough models offered to make a variant of the 1911 DS Prodigy that fits the needs of many—and more being added all the time—we not only have the variety and choice we need, but also ensures marketplace compatibility. Holsters and related accessories are plentiful and will continue to increase.

The 1911 DS Prodigy rocks the market with its attention to detail and a bevy of standard features that include an ambidextrous safety, two-piece guide rod, tritium night sights, generous Picatinny mounting rail, forward slide serrations, skeletonized hammer and trigger, the AOS mounting system, and more—and all at a price that doesn't take food off the table.

Springfield Armory is already famous for its vast selection of high-quality 1911 models that appeal to a broad range of shooters, from entry-level buyers to elite law enforcement operators. This 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS model in Coyote Brown is a perfect addition to the family—in either length.

The list of applications for a 1911 is as long as a tall man's arm—previously limited only to capacity considerations. The 1911 DS Prodigy family removes that potential caveat and turns a classic design into a modern marvel.

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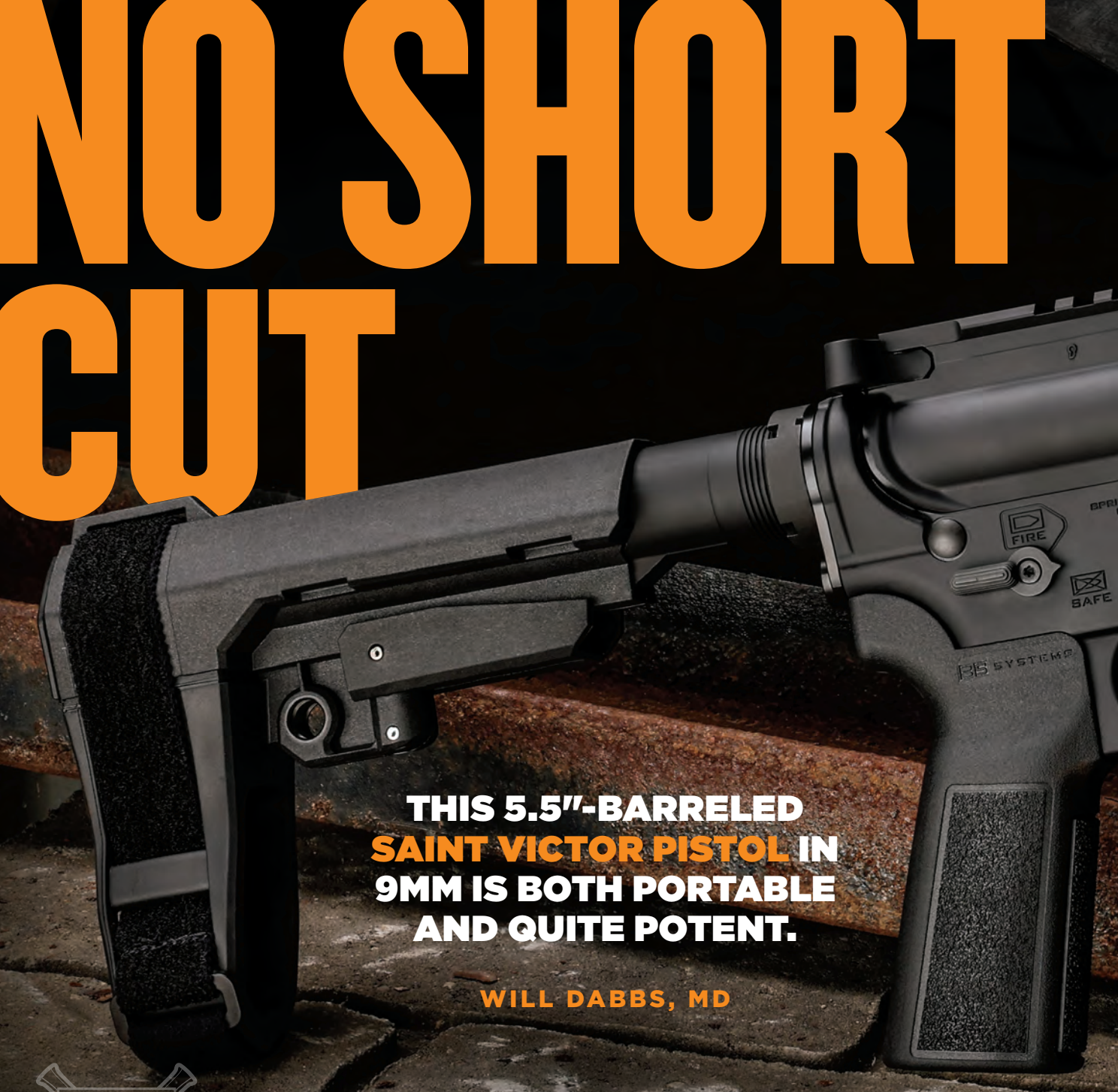
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NO SHORT CUT



THIS 5.5″-BARRELED SAINT VICTOR PISTOL IN 9MM IS BOTH PORTABLE AND QUITE POTENT.

WILL DABBS, MD

THE SAINT VICTOR 5.5″ 9MM PISTOL takes the storied line of Springfield Armory AR-pattern firearms in a fascinating direction. Featuring an ultra-stubby 5.5″ barrel and a very manageable, benign 9mm chambering, this SAINT Victor Pistol could be the ultimate home defense tool. In addition to keeping you and yours safe come what may, this lithe little close quarters gun is also a superlative way to kill a lazy recreational Saturday afternoon at the range.

This SAINT 9mm pistol orbits around a fairly traditional AR-15 foundation. Developed in the mid-1950's by Eugene Stoner and a few others, this basic ergonomic layout is apparently perfect. The flower of modern engineering prowess has tried and failed to improve upon the details. The classic orientation of the bolt catch, magazine release and safety are simply as good as mankind



The SAINT Victor 5.5″ Pistol packs in 32 rounds of 9mm firepower in a handy 5.5″-barreled package.

can make them in my opinion. If it ain't broke, don't fix it … .

Unlike a 5.56mm AR, the 9mm SAINT Victor Pistol is configured to accept a skinny double-stack, double-feed, Colt-pattern 32-round box magazine. The gun comes with one.

Anyone familiar with a traditional AR knows that they have a relatively cavernous magwell relative to their size, due to the length and size of the 5.56mm chambering. So, how does the skinny little 9mm mag of this pistol fit into an AR's magwell?

While many pistol-caliber AR firearms use some kind of rickety adapter to constrict the 5.56mm magwell down to accept magazines holding these stubby little pistol rounds, the forged 7075 T6 aluminum lower receiver of the SAINT Victor 5.5″ 9mm Pistol is designed from the outset to accommodate the popular 9mm pistol cartridge with a downsized magwell. The lower also includes Springfield's innovative Accu-Tite receiver tensioning system that allows you to excise any wiggle there from the chassis.

As with the lower, the forged 7075 T6 aluminum upper is also designed around the 9mm cartridge. To achieve this, it features a shortened ejection port and cover, a forward-positioned case deflector and no forward assist. Topping off the receiver is an integral strip of Picatinny rail to make mounting an optic as simple and straightforward as possible.

The Colt-pattern magazine requires no special tools to load and is as reliable as the tides. The muzzle includes a nifty-looking Springfield Armory Muzzle Drum. This ornately designed muzzle device further helps control the very minimal recoil of this pistol.

The design and operation of the gun is simplicity itself. It functions via an unlocked, direct-blowback action. A combination of recoil spring tension and bolt carrier mass keeps the action closed long enough during the firing process to safely cycle the action. It's simple, robust and extremely reliable. Also of note is the fact that the action locks open on an empty mag—not the case with all pistol cartridge-chambered pistols like this.

The manual of arms of the pistol is identical to any traditional AR you have ever fired. That makes the transition from a rifle-caliber AR to the SAINT Victor 5.5″ 9mm Pistol intuitive and painless. The trigger is a premium flat-faced nickel boron-coated unit that eclipses anything Uncle Sam ever put on his

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

SAINT VICTOR 5.5″ 9MM PISTOL

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	5.5″
WEIGHT	5 lbs., 12 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	20″-22.5″
SIGHTS	N/A
GRIPS	B5 Systems Type 23 P-Grip
ACTION	Straight Blowback
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	32 (one magazine included)
MSRP	$1,099

service rifles in my experience.

The pistol is really tricked out with some high-quality parts and features. The oversized polymer triggerguard comes from B5 Systems. This mates up with a B5 Systems P-Grip 23 that offers a more oblique grip-to-frame angle than is the case with traditional AR fare. In my experience, this geometry helps keep your strong-side elbow tucked in tight. This, combined with the B5 Systems polymer oversized triggerguard, makes for a great combination of ergonomic characteristics for the pistol.

The forearm of the SAINT Victor 5.5″ 9mm Pistol sports M-Lok real estate for accessories, allowing you to set it up exactly for your own needs and preferences. Additionally, the receiver end plate sports a QD attachment point—a well-thought-out and nice feature.

The back-end bit of the pistol comes equipped with an adjustable SB Tactical SBA3 pistol brace that fits on the three-position receiver extension.

ACCESSORIZING

A pistol this awesome needs some epic accessories attached to it. I mounted a Meprolight M22 Pro self-illuminated reflex sight up top. That which separates the standard M22 from the Pro is an external battery-powered light module that enhances the reticle during those rare times that the M22's onboard tritium illumination source might not be up to the task.

I also bolted on a Streamlight TLR-8G combination light and laser up front. This nifty rascal is about the size of a 12-gauge minishell, yet it puts out a whopping 500 lumens of brilliant

The SAINT Victor 5.5″ 9mm Pistol proved itself on the range with four different loads, providing very tight groups.



PERFORMANCE (20 YDS.)
SAINT VICTOR 5.5″ 9MM PISTOL

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)
BLACK HILLS 100-GR. HONEYBADGER	1,386 fps	0.25″
MAGTECH 115-GR. FMJ	1,210 fps	0.60″
REMINGTON 124-GR. JHP ULTIMATE DEFENSE	1,236 fps	0.50″
WINCHESTER 115-GR. FMJ ACTIVE DUTY	1,335 fps	0.30″

Accuracy results for best of five-shot groups measured in inches at 20 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of five shots measured in feet per second (fps) by a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. Abbreviations: FMJ (full-metal jacket), fps (feet per second), gr. (grain), JHP (jacketed hollow point).

white light. It also includes a powerful green laser for aiming duties. The whole light and laser rig runs off of a standard CR123A lithium battery.

The thread pitch on the muzzle is standard 1/2x28. That means you can set up a sound suppressor should you have one handy using a simple direct thread mount. Thusly configured, the SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm doesn't make a great deal of noise.

TRIGGER TIME

I learned that it takes perhaps a single magazine to take this nifty little gun's measure. It is reliably accurate, even out to 100 meters or more. Take your time, and you can expect single ragged holes at CQB ranges. I can also report that the SB Tactical brace does indeed do a splendid job of stabilizing the pistol. Double taps flow forth like Rachmaninoff's Piano concerto No 2 in C minor.

The gun weighs in at 5 lbs., 12 oz. So, it doesn't jump around much at all, even during rapid strings of fire on the range.

The gun locks open on empty magazines, which drop free when you stroke the magazine release. To put the gun back in action, just stick in a fresh mag and hit the bolt release. As the skinny 9mm mags are markedly more compact than a comparable 5.56mm P-Mag, it is easy to carry a bunch of them.

I tried every kind of 9mm ammo I could find in the pistol. I ran hardball, hollowpoints, lightweight copper solids and subsonic truncated cones through it. The Victor pistol didn't much care and shrugged it all off. Unlike some 9mm carbines and subguns, the SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm Pistol was not ammo-sensitive at all. It ran everything reliably and well.



The pistol features a collapsible SBA3 Pistol Brace made by SB Tactical, and is shown here topped off with an Aimpoint ACRO P-2 red dot optic.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

SAINT VICTOR 5.5" 9MM PISTOL



APPLICATIONS

9mm ammo is markedly cheaper than 5.56mm. It is also a more benign, softer-shooting cartridge with which to train. FMJ 9mm actually penetrates deeper through common building materials than does 5.56mm. That may be a bit counterintuitive, but it is predictable. However, you'll likely stoke this gun with top-quality hollow-points should you choose to use it for home or vehicular defense. Cheap FMJ rounds are for training and recreational blasting on the range.

Recoil with the SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm Pistol is markedly more pleasant than that of a comparably scaled rifle. Most importantly, however, is the muzzle blast. Out of short barrels like this one, standard 5.56mm will reliably loosen your dental fillings.

However, particularly with the SA Muzzle Drum installed, the downrange chaos in this 9mm chambering remains quite placid. You may love your 5.56 rifles, but I suspect you won't want to go back to your other, noisier guns anytime soon.

The argument could be made that the SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm Pistol has the makings for the ideal home defense tool. The gun is short, handy and reliable. These are all critical attributes for a close-quarters defensive arm. Properly secured, it would be right at home tucked behind the door to your closet or behind the seat in your SUV.

Once in action, the SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm Pistol corners like a Bugatti. When properly fed, it also carries ample downrange horsepower for any threat you might reasonably face. This gun has what it takes for a wonderful time at the range, and looks great while doing it. And with an MSRP of $1,099, it is also a great deal. In addition, a 8.5" version has also been recently released.

RUMINATIONS

The SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm Pistol combines all of the legendary AR ergonomics and efficiency with a soft-shooting cartridge with ample downrange thump. The gun is positively recreational on the range.

Tough yet svelte, the SAINT Victor 5.5" 9mm Pistol is an absolute joy to shoot. I've run them all, and I am convinced that this really is the ideal home defense gun.

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IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

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THE

The downsized Echelon 4.0C packs in all the duty-grade performance of the full-size model, but in a package ideal for undercover or EDC use.

GOLDEN RULE

HOW THE UNDERCOVER-READY ECHELON 4.0C EARNED A RESPECTED LAW ENFORCEMENT ORGANIZATION'S PREMIER RATING.



MIKE BOYLE

THE FAMILIAR FORMULA a manufacturer follows when launching a new pistol is to first build a service-size model and, if it gains traction, follow up with a compact version. With that in mind, I made note of all the positive feedback the Springfield Armory Echelon 9mm was receiving when it was introduced in 2023 and looked forward to the day a compact version would hit the market.

To my thinking, a compact-size pistol remains my ideal choice for everyday carry as it typically—if designed well—gives very little up to a full-size service pistol, yet is easier to conceal. My dream is now a reality with the Springfield Armory Echelon 4.0C 9mm, which was introduced in late 2024.

For me, the pistol hits all the right points on size. Compared to the 4.5″ barrel of the full-size Echelon 9mm, the 4.0C features a slightly shorter 4″ tube. In addition, the length of the grip has been shortened to accommodate a flush-fitting 15-round magazine, down from the 17-round magazine of the full-size pistol. In addition to the 15-rounder, the Echelon 4.0C also ships with an extended 18-round magazine. MSRP for the pistol starts at $649 with white dot sights, and runs up to $739 for the threaded barrel model with tritium three-dot sights.

I took delivery of my Echelon 4.0C 9mm pistol a short while ago and it has met all my expectations. Human engineering on the 4.0C is a cut above, complete with a great trigger and fast-to-read sights. To date, I have run a bucketload of rounds through mine, and reliability has been 100% with ball, frangible and hollowpoint duty-quality ammunition.

Other firearms instructors on my job have also given it a go and have had nothing but good things to say about it.

Clearly, we are in good company taking this position, as recently the National Tactical Officers Association (NTOA) Member Tested Program (MTP) took their own hard look at the Echelon 4.0C, and came up with some interesting results.

A BIG DEAL

The mission of the NTOA is to enhance the performance and professional standards of law enforcement personnel by providing training resources as well as a forum for the development of tactics and information

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



The smaller Echelon 4.0C still retains the pistol's ability to direct mount a wide range of optics, like this Trijicon RMR.

exchange. To serve their membership, the NTOA puts out *The Tactical Edge* magazine, offers webinars on a variety of topics, provides continuing education through NTOA Tactical Command College, and conducts an annual Law Enforcement Operations Conference and Trade Show.

Additionally, NTOA has the MTP, where products are given a hard look by experienced members of the law enforcement community to see if they are up to the rigors of police work.

To be evaluated in the NTOA MTP, a company must submit multiple examples of the product for review. These products have to be exactly the same as those sold or available to law enforcement without any special bells or whistles that would stack the deck. Products are then assigned out to field testers chosen by the NTOA, who then thoroughly evaluate the product and complete an online review.

The products submitted are tested and scored on a scale ranging from 0.0 to 5.0 in numerous categories. Depending on the item being tested, all categories

may not apply. At the end of the testing, scores are averaged both individually and cumulatively for a final rating. Products that score lower than 3.0 do not receive the NTOA recommendation. A score of 3.00 to 3.99 receives the standard logo, while a 4.00 to 4.49 rates a silver logo. A rating of 4.50 to 5.00 receives the coveted gold rating.



The Echelon 4.0C was subjected to this very rigorous testing, in the hands of two seasoned law enforcement officers. After this demanding NTOA field-testing and evaluation program, the Springfield Armory Echelon 4.0C received the coveted gold logo, with a final rating of 4.51.

Although NTOA itself does not endorse products, achieving the highest rating from these selected reviewers and being made part of the MTP program does speak very well for the Springfield Armory Echelon 4.0C 9mm pistol. In a market rich with different types of autopistols, having seasoned professionals weigh in on the practicality of a product and state that it meets the demands of law enforcement is extremely important.

CONTACT POINTS

A great handgun is comprised of many well-thought-out features, but none is more important than how it connects to the shooter. Quite simply, if a pistol is too big or too small for the hand, it has a less than optimum gripping surface or has poorly placed controls, the shooter will never be at their best and performance will suffer.

The 4.0C pistol comes with three differently sized backstraps (small, medium and large) that can be easily fitted for optimum fit. Also, the pistol features the Central Operating Group serialized chassis that sits within the polymer grip module. This design allows for easily swapping out the module for different sizes and colors. A small-size grip module is standard on the 4.0C (a medium comes standard on full-size Echelons), and small, medium and large alternative grip modules in a range of color options are also available on the Springfield Armory Store for a very reasonable $64.99. The modules come with the ambidextrous magazine release installed.



ECHELON 4.0C

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4"/4.7"
WEIGHT	24 oz./25 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.25"/8"
SIGHTS	U-Dot/three-dot tritium/ white dot
GRIPS	Grip module
ACTION	Chassis, striker-fired
FINISH	Black Melonite
CAPACITY	15+1 (one magazine), 18+1 (one magazine)
MSRP	$649-$739

The end result is a pistol that can be adapted to the widest range of hand sizes. One of the two evaluators selected by NTOA reported that he fitted the large backstrap to the pistol before beginning his test to create the optimum connection.

Not only is the size of the grip important, but also that skin-to-gun contact. Springfield Armory's Adaptive Grip Texture—as first seen on the Hellcat pistol—is another understated touch that registered with the evaluators.

One of the test participants stated, "the grip texture was just rough enough, but not so rough that it's going to ruin clothing like I have had with other factory direct stippling." Another tester notably remarked, "I appreciate the unique grip texture more than a checkered pattern. It is comfortable without giving up a useful bite."

I couldn't agree more. Many early polymer-framed pistols had grips I can only categorize as slippery, and it wasn't unusual to encounter users who put a strip of skateboard tape or stair tread on the grip frame to get a positive hold. I have also encountered pistols with too-aggressive a surface that proved uncomfortable in very short order. The Echelon 4.0C hits all the high notes and sports a no-slip surface that has proven very comfortable.

The placement of vital controls was also considered. I want to point out that all the controls—both the slide lock and the magazine release—are fully ambidextrous. One tester reported that the slide lock initially "looked way too small and that it would be hard to find and manipulate, but I was wrong." I had similar initial concerns, but the ambidextrous slide lock provided a positive release every time. High marks were also given for the aggressive and effective slide serrations that make manual manipulation a snap.

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

DOWNRANGE

Today, reliability with modern service-caliber pistols is usually very good. However, you cannot simply take it for granted, as I have witnessed many pistols from major manufacturers with teething problems. Always make sure yourself that your firearm runs with your selected ammo.

One evaluator reported he ran 1,500 rounds through his test pistol with zero malfunctions. This too mirrors my own experience, and I have yet to experience a stoppage of any kind with my Echelon 4.0C pistol.

One evaluator noted that the most intriguing technology of this pistol was the optics mounting system. In case you are not familiar with it, the Echelon's Variable Interface System allows the end user to mount more than 30 different popular optics directly to the slide without the use of an adapter plate

ECHELON 4.0C



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(although plates are available for the few optics out there that don't direct mount).

This is accomplished through the use of this patent-pending system under the cover plate that employs multiple interface holes and interchangeable/movable pins to fit a broad range of footprints. The system also employs self-locking pins that exert lateral pressure when tightened down, eliminating variance and left/right movement.

The end result is a low, direct mount and the ability to co-witness the factory iron sights through the optic in many to most cases. One evaluator mated the Echelon 4.0C to a Trijicon RMR and had no issues with the optic coming loose or off during his testing.

One of the advantages of compact-sized pistols is that they are equally well suited for carry in a duty holster or concealed, and I feel the Echelon 4.0C could easily fill both roles. In fact, left to my own designs, a compact-size pistol is tough to beat for EDC, for either the law enforcement officer or responsible citizen.



The Echelon 4.0C comes with one flush-fit 15-round magazine, as well as one extended 18-round magazine for added firepower.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In a crowded field of compact-sized 9mm pistols, the Echelon 4.0C is a standout. Springfield Armory did their homework on this one, and it clearly shows in the end result.

The pistol's ergonomics are top shelf, particularly the way it fits the hand, and the ambidextrous controls are yet another nice touch. Aggressive fore and aft serrations on the slide make the manual racking of the pistol to load or empty the pistol's chamber a snap.

No doubt, the ability to swap out the interchangeable backstraps and different grip modules of the Echelon 4.0C will make this pistol extremely appealing to law enforcement agencies. This kind of modularity and adaptability offer obvious benefits to an agency with a large number of officers.

I plan on running my 4.0C without an optic for the time being, but Springfield Armory's Variable Interface System is truly a game changer. This is particularly true for the law enforcement officer who regularly subjects his pistol to hard knocks.

Rest assured, the NTOA's MTP gold logo recommendation is a solid indicator that the gear tested is top shelf and should not be confused with hobby grade. They have concluded, as have I, that this is a pistol you can count on.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
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IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

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TORCH



THE MULTI-ROLE AND SUPPRESSOR-READY HEATSEEKER TAKES THE MODEL 2020 BOLT-ACTION RIFLE IN AN EXCITING NEW DIRECTION.

SEAN UTLEY

I'LL LET YOU IN ON A SECRET. Springfield's push—and a very successful one, I might add—into the bolt-action fray was anything but a surprise for me. In fact, I expected it.

Why? I was fortunate enough to get an early insight into the development of the Model 2020 family of rifles before the launch in the namesake year. I, being absolutely smitten by the bolt-action/precision rifle bug, realized then that the market needed more players—and, quite frankly, large manufacturers—to get involved to address the needs of the large number of bolt-action shooters out there. We discussed what was needed, why, and—importantly—where it should land in the grand scheme of capabilities and affordability.

So, when Springfield released the Model 2020 Waypoint, I suspected they had an absolute hit on their hands based on what I saw. To my mind, it was a product with a bright future of developmental growth and expansion ahead of it. And that clearly looks to be the path and plausible outcome with the release of

BEARER



The Model 2020 Heatseeker chassis rifle combines light weight and compact handling with extreme downrange performance.

this newest iteration, the Model 2020 Heatseeker. But more on that in a moment.

A NEW DIRECTION

In September 2020, I received my first test sample of the original Model 2020 Waypoint. I would go on to test and evaluate it as well as craft an article about its capabilities out to and beyond 1,000 yards—1,080 yards, to be exact.

"Wait," you might say. The original iteration was a completely hunting-focused platform—lightweight with a carbon fiber barrel and an AG Composite stock. That's not a 1K-plus distance set-up, right?

That might have been the case, but that didn't matter to me. A quality-built action with a high-quality barrel can do many great feats, and I was determined to find out if this one was up to the task. Due to my own interests, I may have "griped" at Springfield's decision to launch with a hunting-focused set-up, but I knew why they did it. It was a smart move.

Back then, I didn't consider myself a hunter, but rather a target shooter first and foremost. My decades-old habit of pressing triggers started in the tactical training arena where I'd graduated from pistols to AR platforms, with a heavy emphasis on NFA firearms.

My about-face from tactical-focused shooting came after precision shooting dug its claws into me. While I still love shooting pistols and ARs, precision exploits—to include target shooting and hunting—fuel my passion more than the former. And if you're like me in that regard, this Model 2020 Heatseeker could be the perfect rifle for you.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Upon encountering the Model 2020 Heatseeker for the first time—my test sample was in 6.5 Creedmoor (CM)—two things were immediately apparent: its insane light weight as well as its head-turning good looks.

Featuring a Sharps Bros. Heatseeker chassis and a Model 2020 action with a lightweight carbon fiber-wrapped barrel, I believe that Springfield chose the right color in which to release the 2020 Heatseeker—a Coyote Brown Cerakote finish.

Chambered in .308 Winchester or 6.5 CM, the rifle's beautiful Coyote Brown finish matches up nicely with the black-colored components. These latter parts include the AR-pattern buffer tube, top rail, bolt and bolt handle, making for some nice contrasting touches. Add to that the sexy threaded and suppressor-ready carbon fiber barrel of the rifle, and you have a thing of absolute beauty.

But, as we know, beauty without performance means nothing. I'm sure you guys with V6 Mustangs know what I mean. But I digress. In this case, the beauty comes with purpose, and my his-



The Model 2020 Heatseeker features a B5 Systems Collapsible Precision Stock on its AR-pattern buffer tube assembly.

tory with Model 2020 rifles gave me confidence that its shooting performance would only add to the appeal of its physical attributes. More to come on that.

The rifle's light weight—7 lbs., 7 oz., according to Springfield Armory—stems from the use of the 5/8x24 threaded carbon fiber barrel, which is a mere 16" in total length. However, this is not the only contributing factor. As noted, Springfield joined forces with Sharps Bros. and added the Heatseeker chassis, which graces the scale at just 1 lb., 3 oz. That's crazy light. The chassis is made of 6061-T6 billet aluminum, which is both strong and lightweight.

It's this barreled action/chassis combo that opens up the Model 2020 to an entirely new class of shooter because of its light weight and functionality. The Heatseeker chassis has a 10-oz., 14" free-float handguard and is laden with M-Lok slots around its circumference. This means you can add nearly anything you like as far as accessories are concerned. It's a bolt-action rifle, with precision as its focus, so a bipod is a must.

You can attach a pic rail or ARCA/RRS Dovetail Standard rail if you want. I prefer the latter for ease of use and adjustability. I added a Really Right Stuff 5.5" Dovetail section to the Model 2020 Heatseeker. This healthy forend will allow the addition of night and thermal optics and side rails if desired. You can also add weights to the forend if desired. Yes, you read that right. Add weight. Stick with me and I'll explain why this may be something you should consider.

At the rear of the chassis is a buffer tube extension, bringing AR compatibility into play. A B5 Systems Collapsible Precision Stock sits here, allowing for length of pull (LOP) adjustability as well as cheekpiece height, and additional LOP adjustment on the buttstock itself. You should have no difficulty finding the right setting for yourself with this highly



capable stock assembly.

The Collapsible Precision Stock also has QD points on either side. These, coupled with the QD cups on the forend, make for easy sling attachment. In my professional opinion, every rifle should have at least two QD attachment points on each side, just like you will find on the Model 2020 Heatseeker.

Also included is a B5 Systems P-Grip 23 AR-pattern pistol grip. In the tactical space, we've moved away from the standard-angled pistol grip toward more vertical orientations. In the precision rifle space, we abandoned the angled grip long ago.

The P-Grip 23 features a more vertical grip angle for ideal trigger interface, and it has excellent texturing. All in all, it feels quite proper for a precision-type rifle. Also, if you want a different AR-pattern grip on it, simply switch it out.

TRICKING IT OUT

My accessorizing of the Model 2020 Heatseeker rifle continued with the addition of an optic.

My first thought was Leupold's Mark 5HD. I love these optics for several reasons. For their size and magnification they are quite lightweight, with this 7-35x56mm version weighing in at just 2.1 lbs. You could opt for the 3-18x44 and save .2 lbs., but I decided I wanted the increased magnification power.

MODEL 2020 HEATSEEKER

CHAMBERING	.308 Win., 6.5 CM (tested)
BARREL	16"
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 7 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	35.5"-39"
SIGHTS	Picatinny rail
STOCK	B5 Systems CPS
ACTION	Bolt-action
FINISH	Cerakote Coyote Brown
CAPACITY	5 (one magazine included)
MSRP	$2,355



For serious precision shooting, an excellent reticle is a must. In my opinion, the PR2 is the crème de la crème. This tree-type reticle features reduced-size lines. The markings on the MIL version are in .25 MIL increments, which reduces your viewing clutter by some 40%. It's bright, clear and precise. I couldn't help but get it in FDE and, while not a perfect match in color to the rifle, it amply complements the tones of the Model 2020 Heatseeker.

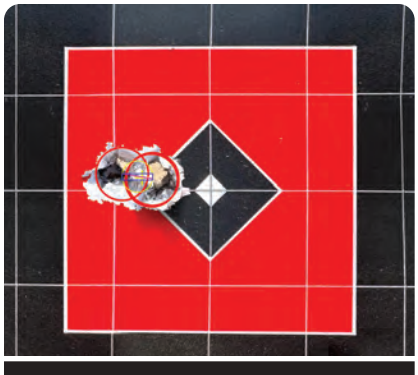
The Heatseeker comes with a threaded barrel, so it's ready for suppression. I obliged with the addition of what I think is one of the best precision-focused suppressors to be created—the Elite Iron Asset. This .30-cal. suppressor is modular with additional baffle elements and different end caps.

I set it up in its short version with the muzzle brake attached on the front-end, bringing the total length to 8" overall. While I can add some length for more suppression, I wanted to keep the rifle as short as possible while maintaining suppression and a good level of recoil reduction.



The author tested the rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor with an Elite Iron Asset suppressor, Leupold Mark 5HD 7-35x56mm scope and an MDT Ckye-Pod bipod.





The author shot this ultra-tight 0.16" three-shot group with Hornady's 143-gr. ELD-X load.

PERFORMANCE (100 YDS.)
MODEL 2020 HEATSEEKER 6.5 CM

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
BERGER 130-GR. HYBRID OTM TACTICAL	2,577 fps	0.56"	0.76"
FEDERAL PREMIUM GOLD MEDAL 130-GR. BERGER AR HYBRID OTM	2,606 fps	0.58"	0.65"
HORNADY 140-GR. ELD MATCH	2,489 fps	0.55"	0.65"
HORNADY 143-GR. ELD-X PRECISION HUNTER	2,532 fps	0.16"	0.53"

Accuracy results for two, five-shot groups measured in inches at 100 yards prone with bipod and rear support bag. Velocity is the average of five shots measured in feet per second by a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. Abbreviations: ELD (extremely low-drag), fps (feet per second), gr. (grain), OTM (open-tip match).

Suppressors that have muzzle brakes aren't as quiet as their standard closed-end configurations, but a good one gives solid recoil performance while giving up only a little bit in the way of noise reduction.

To me, the trade-off is worth it as I always (as you should, too) wear hearing protection while shooting suppressed—especially with centerfire rifles.

With all my added accessories, including an MDT Ckye-Pod bipod, the Heatseeker hit the scales at 13.1 lbs. For the intended purpose, this is perfectly acceptable for a general set-up with leeway to go lighter if necessary and heavier if desired.

This latter point is why I like the M-Lok slots on the forend of the rifle. I like to shoot a heavier rifle for general target use.

While a 13-lb. rifle can actually be somewhat light for extended shooting sessions, the M-Lok forend of the Model 2020 Heatseeker will allow you to add weights to the front of the bolt-action rifle to curtail some of the recoil and smooth things out a bit. You can add or remove them as necessary, making this rifle effectively modular.

If you want to go light, go light. If you need the heft, add it. It's a win-win for the owner/operator.

PERFORMANCE TO MATCH

Looks and other excellent features of the Model 2020 Heatseeker aside, any rifle—especially bolt-action types like this—need to post good numbers in the precision box.

The Heatseeker did just that. What most call accuracy testing, I refer to as precision testing. We want repeated impacts as close to each other as possible. Springfield guarantees three-shot groups to be 0.75" or less with match-grade ammunition and assuming the operator can, well, operate.

While I found several loads of factory 6.5 Creedmoor printing easily below the .75 MOA standard in the rifle, the Heatseeker achieved a most excellent 0.16" group with Hornady's 143-gr. ELD-X ammunition.

This was the only "hunting" ammo I used as I deemed it appropriate to include since this rifle has a dual personality. However, this ammo shot decisively better than the target loads, with the next closest group at 0.55" (a still very good group), with another Hornady load. That one was the 140-gr. ELD Match.

I live in Arizona, so it was sunny (per the usual) at the range. The temperature this day was 84° at roughly 10:00am.

I mention all of this to say that mirage was a real thing on this day. It was actually quite bad, with my point of aim dancing up to at least .5 MIL in several directions. This observation gives me confidence that the rifle is likely even more accurate than this outing shows.

During shooting, I found this set-up to be quite manageable and with much less recoil than I expected due to the Heatseeker's light weight.

Bolt throw was smooth and sure, with no issues feeding from the five-round, AICS-pattern steel magazine. Recoil was linear, just the way you want it. There were no anomalies or surprises; just a solid-shooting rifle that was a pleasure to pilot.

I had a hunch that the Model 2020 Heatseeker had a little more in it. So, I took the rifle out on another outing, this time in the morning when mirage wouldn't be an issue.

I loaded up the Hornady 143 gr. ELD-X and coaxed a five-shot, 0.4" group from the Heatseeker at 100 yards. Yes, it was against the three-shot protocol, but I needed to know.

Four of the rounds were stacked on each other, with one landing left, opening the group up. Regardless, I was happy with the result, and it told me that with the right load the rifle can perform consistently well.



FINAL THOUGHTS

The Model 2020 Heatseeker represents a rifle category that can be hard to nail down properly.

As I ponder, I realize that I consider this to be a working man's rifle, meaning it can do many things and adapt to them with little to no effort.

Its light weight and compact size make it easy to lug around, and the only thing I would change would be a folding stock option. But, as we all know, folders all come with their own unique challenges.

At its launch back in 2020, the Model 2020 Waypoint represented an interesting new direction for Springfield Armory. Offering custom-grade rifle performance and features at a very reasonable price, I could tell Springfield was really onto something. Now, with the Model 2020 Heatseeker, they're taking the platform in a fascinating new direction.

If you're looking to get into a solid bolt-action rifle but aren't willing to make a hard commitment to any singular path or use-case, the Model 2020 Heatseeker could be exactly what you've been waiting for. This rifle really can tackle a lot of different tasks, and do them all well. At a suggested retail price of $2,355, it might be too good a deal to pass up.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

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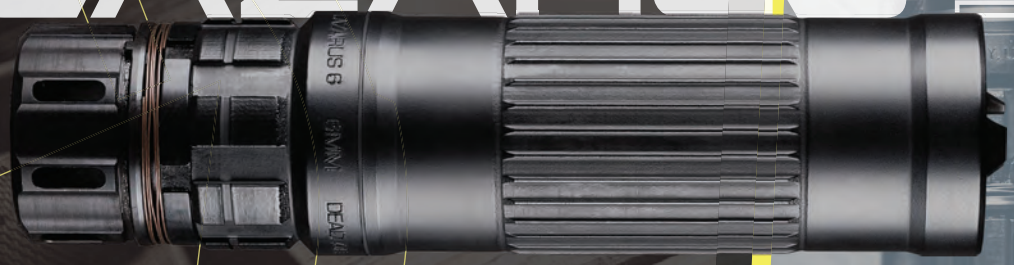

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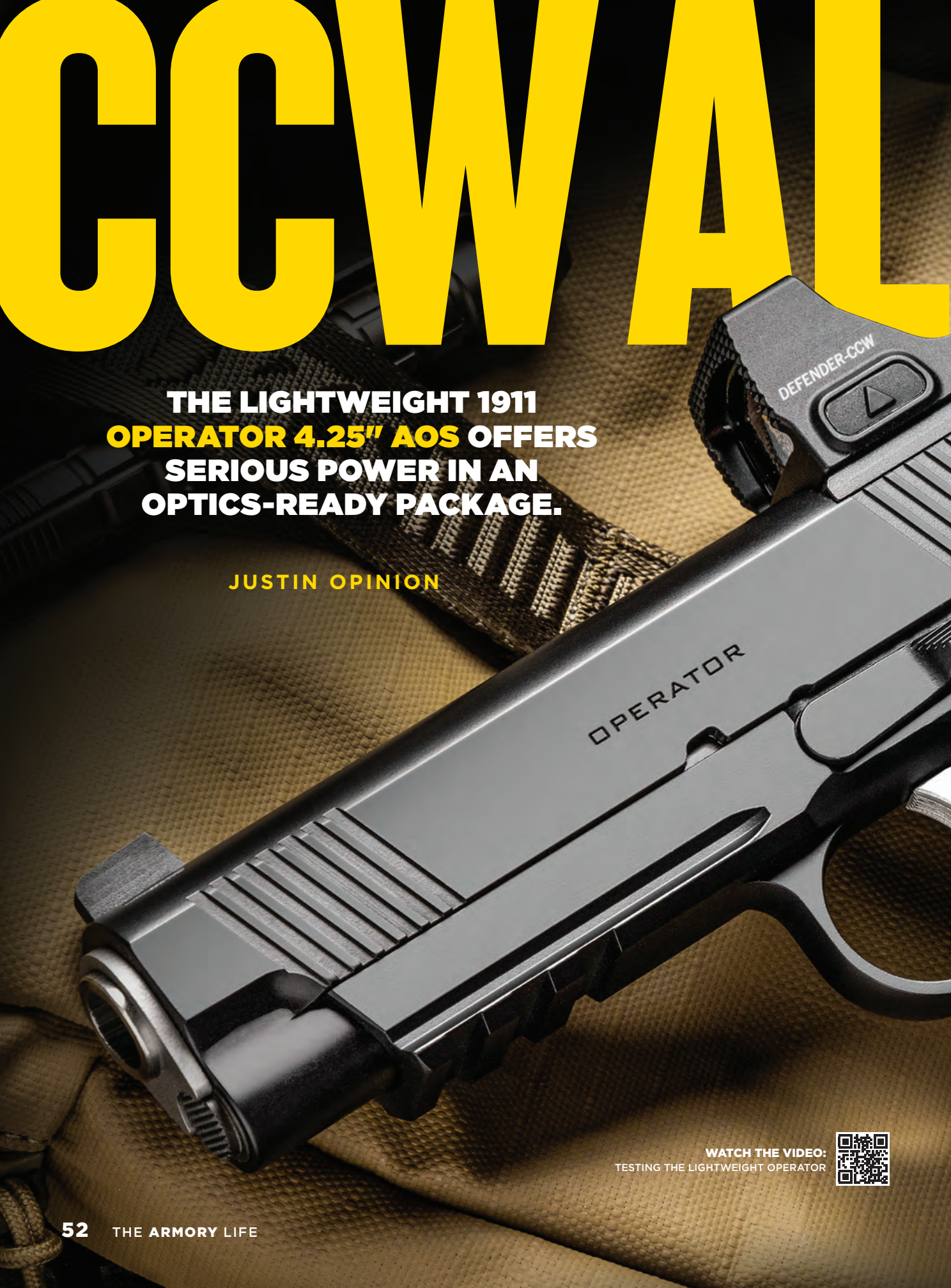
FLASH SUPPRESSION

COMPACT

CCWAL

THE LIGHTWEIGHT 1911 OPERATOR 4.25″ AOS OFFERS SERIOUS POWER IN AN OPTICS-READY PACKAGE.

JUSTIN OPINION



WATCH THE VIDEO:
TESTING THE LIGHTWEIGHT OPERATOR

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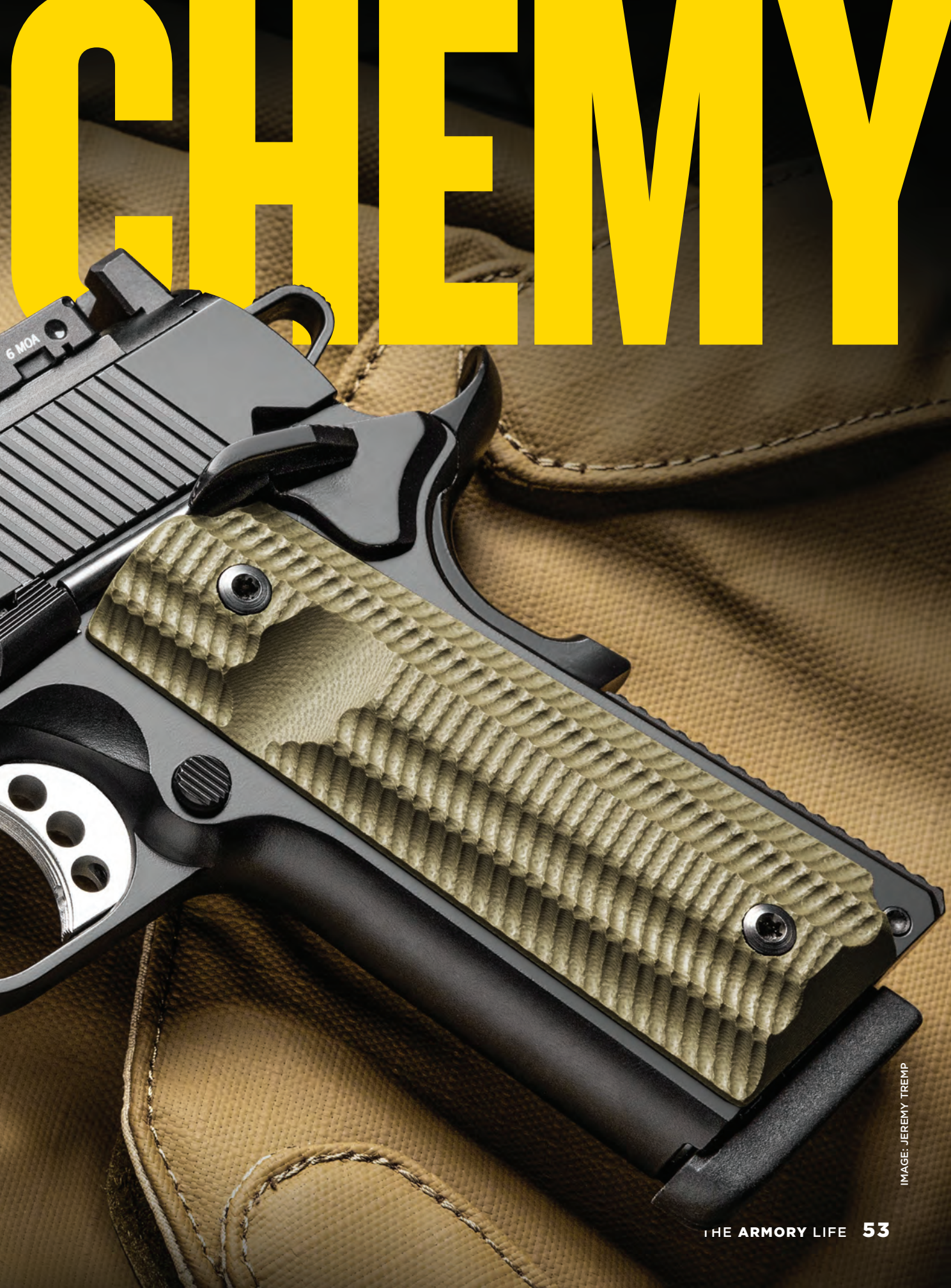


IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

HERE IT IS, nearly 2025, and we're still talking about John Browning's Model 1911. As I sit here pondering that thought, it sinks in just how amazing that is. A gun design that is more than a century old is not simply still in existence (which would be an accomplishment in and of itself), but is still a strong competitor at the gun counter.

A study of why that might be is a topic for a lengthy article all its own—if not an entire book. While I'll leave that to the capable hands of someone like Massad Ayoob, I'm almost never without an opinion.

In my opinion, humble or otherwise, I think a major reason for this unprecedented longevity is the delicate balance of continuous innovation while remaining true to the original design. A perfect example of this alchemy is the new Operator AOS. More specifically, the 4.25" alloy frame version of the Operator.

For ages, Springfield Armory has been making some of the very best production 1911s in the industry, and the Operator model is a purpose-built handgun designed to be tough and reliable without skimping on the best features or high-quality craftsmanship.

With this particular variant, we have one with a 4.25" barrel and an alloy frame. This makes the gun shorter and lighter, which in turn makes it a great choice for self-defense carry.

While I tested the new 1911 Operator 4.25" AOS in .45 ACP, it is also available in 9mm. In case you were wondering, both chamberings are also available in the full-size 5" Operator AOS.

THE AOS FACTOR

Being smaller and lighter is not the only significant change to the Operator. It is the latest pistol to offer Springfield Armory's excellent AOS configuration, which stands for "Agency Optic System."

For those who may not be familiar with AOS, it was designed in collaboration with Agency Arms, and it takes "optic ready" to a new level of modernity and capability for the 1911. Here's how it works.

The gun comes out of the box with its cover plate installed. The cover plate fits the shape and finish of the pistol's slide perfectly. If you want to run irons only, you're not trading off the nice looks of the 1911.

However, if you want an optic on your pistol, simply remove the cover plate—and the plate's sight goes with it.

The sight is dovetail-mounted directly into the rear of the cover plate itself and, usually, this would be a negative for me.

Why? This is because I've worked with other guns that leave me with no rear sight at all when I removed the cover and installed my optic.

That's where Springfield and Agency Arms knocked it out of the park. Each adapter plate has its own installed rear sight on it, and each sight is sized to best correspond to the optics that will fit that particular adapter plate.

In practice, this means that the plate for the RMR has a sight that is the right



height to co-witness with the RMR—and so on and so forth.

When it's time to mount the optic of your choice, you can simply visit the Springfield Armory Store and choose the AOS plate you need based on the provided compatibility chart.

The plates themselves are milled finished steel with an index number that corresponds to the compatibility list. The rear sights are all dovetail-mounted, which means they can be replaced if necessary.

One might be tempted to stop the description there, but there is another element to the system that is truly worthy of note.

In addition to a key and keyway fitting system, each plate locks into the slide at the rear in a dovetail cut. This ensures a stable and strong installation and helps take stress away from the mounting screws. It also helps to ensure your zero stays put.

The Agency Optic System ensures compatibility with RMR, Shield, Delta Point Pro, and Docter optics—to name just a few of the major names. And because most other brands use the footprint of one of those mentioned, the list of AOS-compatible optics for this 1911 pistol is long.

Co-witnessing a red dot with the iron sights is a prerequisite for me if I am to mount an optic on any gun intended for serious use. That would include, at minimum, home defense, carry for personal defense or competition.

As fantastic as electronic sights are today, things fail. Batteries die—and always seemingly when the stakes are highest! The AOS configuration allows the normal sight picture to be seen through the lens of the optic in most cases, keeping you on target when it counts.

BEYOND THE OPTIC

Getting back to the concept of preservation of a sacred design, the 1911 Operator 4.25" AOS we are discussing here is a compact 1911 clearly built for self-defense.

Whether in the nightstand drawer, a duty holster or inside the waistband under concealment, the Operator 4.25" is ideal for the task. There is a Goldilocks aspect to the build of the Operator—nicely appointed with just the right boxes ticked.

The model 1911 is, of course, a single-action only handgun with a legendary trigger. Springfield Armory has tuned the trigger to be neither too light for a defensive gun or too heavy to negatively affect accuracy.

My test copy measured in the "just right" range, averaging 5 lbs., 3 oz. in five pulls. The trigger is also skeletonized for light weight. Trust me, you'll love this 1911 trigger.

As mentioned, the frame of the Operator 4.25" is a forged aluminum alloy, unlike the full steel frame of the full-sized Operator. The gun tips the scale at 31 ounces, including an empty eight-round magazine—two of which are provided.



The 1911 Operator 4.25" AOS pistol employs the Agency Optic System (AOS) plate system for mounting optics. Note that both the cover and mounting plate each have dedicated rear sights.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



1911 OPERATOR 4.25" AOS

CHAMBERING	.45/9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4.25"
WEIGHT	31/32 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.9"
SIGHTS	Tritium front; black, serrated rear
GRIPS	VZ Grips, G10
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Cerakote black
CAPACITY	8+1/9+1 (two included)
MSRP	$1,184

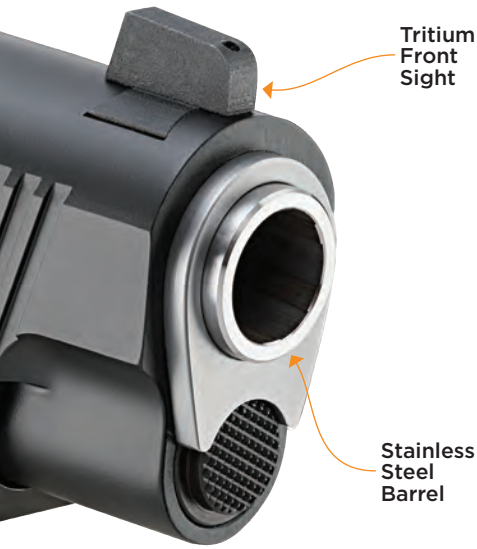
That's a whopping 11 fewer ounces versus the full-sized Operator AOS.

The stainless-steel, match-grade barrel is accompanied by a G.I. spec guide rod and recoil spring. It does a very nice job of managing the recoil of the .45 ACP round in this relatively lightweight gun.

While increased recoil is one of the common concerns people have with alloy frames and shorter slides on guns like this, I found this a non-issue during my

extensive range work with the 1911 pistol.

An interesting design element of the 1911 Operator 4.25" pistol is the choice that Springfield's engineers made to put a fully supported ramp on the barrel. This is one example where the



fundamental design has been significantly altered.

The way the barrel ramp fits into the notch in the frame is a thing of beauty. The frame includes an oversized and polished "pre-ramp" that appears to seamlessly give way to the barrel ramp.

I was initially concerned the two-part ramp might cause feeding problems during live fire, but the seam between the two parts is very tight.

Over several hundred rounds fired during my tests, I didn't experience a single malfunction with it. This includes shooting some very aggressively designed hollowpoints.

The Operator AOS 4.25" is equipped with an ambidextrous thumb safety, making it very southpaw friendly. Even for us right-handers, there are times when I'm shooting weak-hand-only in a match or a drill and it's truly appreciated.

A Picatinny rail on the dustcover allows mounting of lights or other accessories.

Made by VZ Grips, the grip panels are of G10 material with a nicely scalloped pattern and generous thumb cut. Together with the diamond-style backstrap texture, the shooter can expect a firm, slip-free hold. The front strap of the Operator has been left smooth—another homage to the traditional Browning design.

It's easy to overlook stock sights on an optics-ready pistol, but Springfield did not. I've talked about the rear sight being integrated into the cover plate and each available adapter plate. These rear sights are very high quality, serrated and blacked out, with Springfield's signature U-shaped notch. It provides both fast acquisition and the ability to take careful aim. Another Goldilocks component.

Out in front, the sight is tall enough for optics co-witnessing and contains a tritium dot for low-light situations. The surrounding ring makes for great daylight visibility.

RANGE TIME

At the end of the day, regardless of bells and whistles, it comes down to shooting the gun to really judge it. I made multiple range trips with the Operator 4.25" AOS—fitted out with a Vortex Defender-ST red dot—and threw hundreds of rounds of lead downrange. I shot everything from top-quality defense ammo to standard ball ammo, and even some bargain bin stuff. Performance with the pistol was excellent, regardless.

Most of my range testing was simply shooting off-hand at an array of steel targets, ranging from distances of 13 to 17 yards. It was easy to keep a fist-sized group going on the steel plates shooting at a relaxed pace. When I picked up speed, the groups were not as pretty, but they stayed on the plates with very few misses.

To quantify the performance



The pistol's stainless steel barrel features a fully supported ramp that seamlessly matches up with the aluminum frame.

IMAGES: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

more officially, I put several groups on paper at 15 yards, using a CTK Precision rest. Each round fired was measured for velocity with a Competition Electronics ProChrono to get the average for each group. Results were impressive, which you can see in the accompanying chart.

The ergonomics of the Operator 4.25" are, of course, those of the 1911 itself—but the nice touches of texture via the grips and backstrap, combined with the smooth front strap, give the pistol a comfortable feel without sacrificing grip.

The ambi safety switches are thin enough to make sense on a carry gun, yet easy to operate with the flick of a thumb. A nice positive click in each direction lets you know you've engaged or disengaged the safety.

All this, combined with good recoil management, makes the 1911 Operator 4.25" AOS a joy to shoot all day.



The author ran the pistol without any issues, and got very tight groups during his testing.

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.)
1911 OPERATOR 4.25" AOS .45

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)
FEDERAL 230-GR. HST +P	865 fps	1.75"
HORNADY CRITICAL DEFENSE 185-GR. FTX	983 fps	1.61"
SPEER GOLD DOT 185-GR. JHP	934 fps	1.98"

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a CKT Precision rest. Velocity is the average of five shots measured in feet per second (fps) by a Competition Electronics ProChrono. Abbreviations: FTX (Flex Tip eXpanding), fps (feet per second), gr. (grain), JHP (jacketed hollow point).



In most cases, the pistol's AOS optics-mounting systems allows for co-witnessing with the iron sights through the optic.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

CONCLUSION

The 1911 has clearly proven that it has some long legs. The world of today would likely be unrecognizable to anyone around when this pistol first appeared at the beginning of the 20th century. However, the 1911 still soldiers on.

As a result, people choosing a model 1911 handgun for personal protection or duty use is nothing new. Many civilians and law enforcement professionals do so every day.

The trick is to find the one that keeps up with today's standards for options and equipment, yet maintains the rugged reliability of the basic 1911 design we all love.

That's not as easy as it seems, but Springfield has found the right blend with the 1911 Operator 4.25" AOS. In this size, it's suitable for both IWB or OWB carry. Its alloy frame makes it lighter, and the superior AOS optics compatibility keeps it on the cutting edge.

Another feature I really like is the fully supported feed ramp of the pistol, which performed flawlessly in testing. Additionally, I'm a fan of the Agency Optic System and the positive locking of the plate to the slide.

Ultimately, shootability is what matters most. A gun you shoot well gives you confidence, and that's essential for a defensive firearm. In that sense, Springfield's 1911 Operator 4.25" AOS punches way above its price point!

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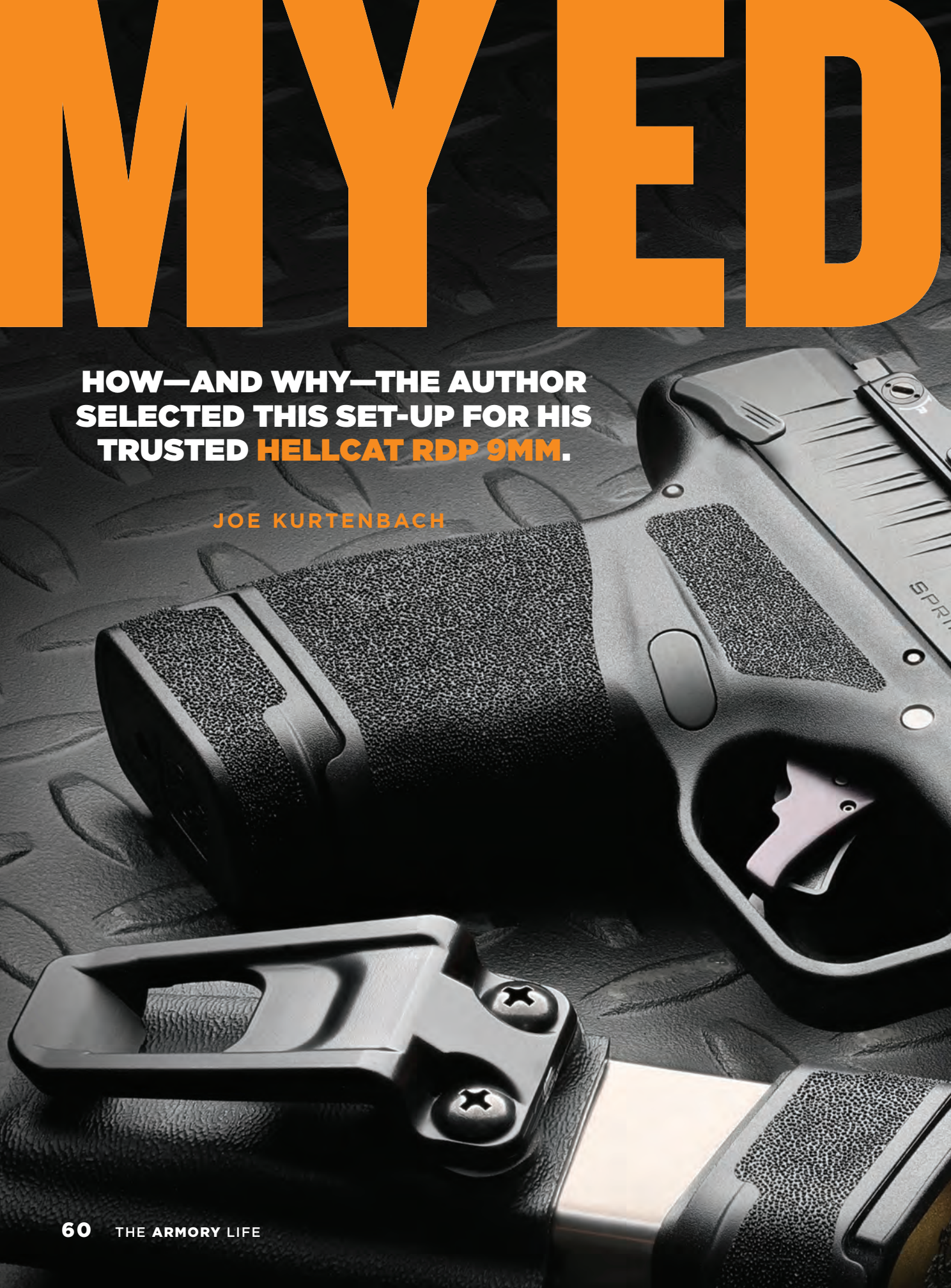
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HOW—AND WHY—THE AUTHOR SELECTED THIS SET-UP FOR HIS TRUSTED HELLCAT RDP 9MM.

JOE KURTENBACH



C RDP

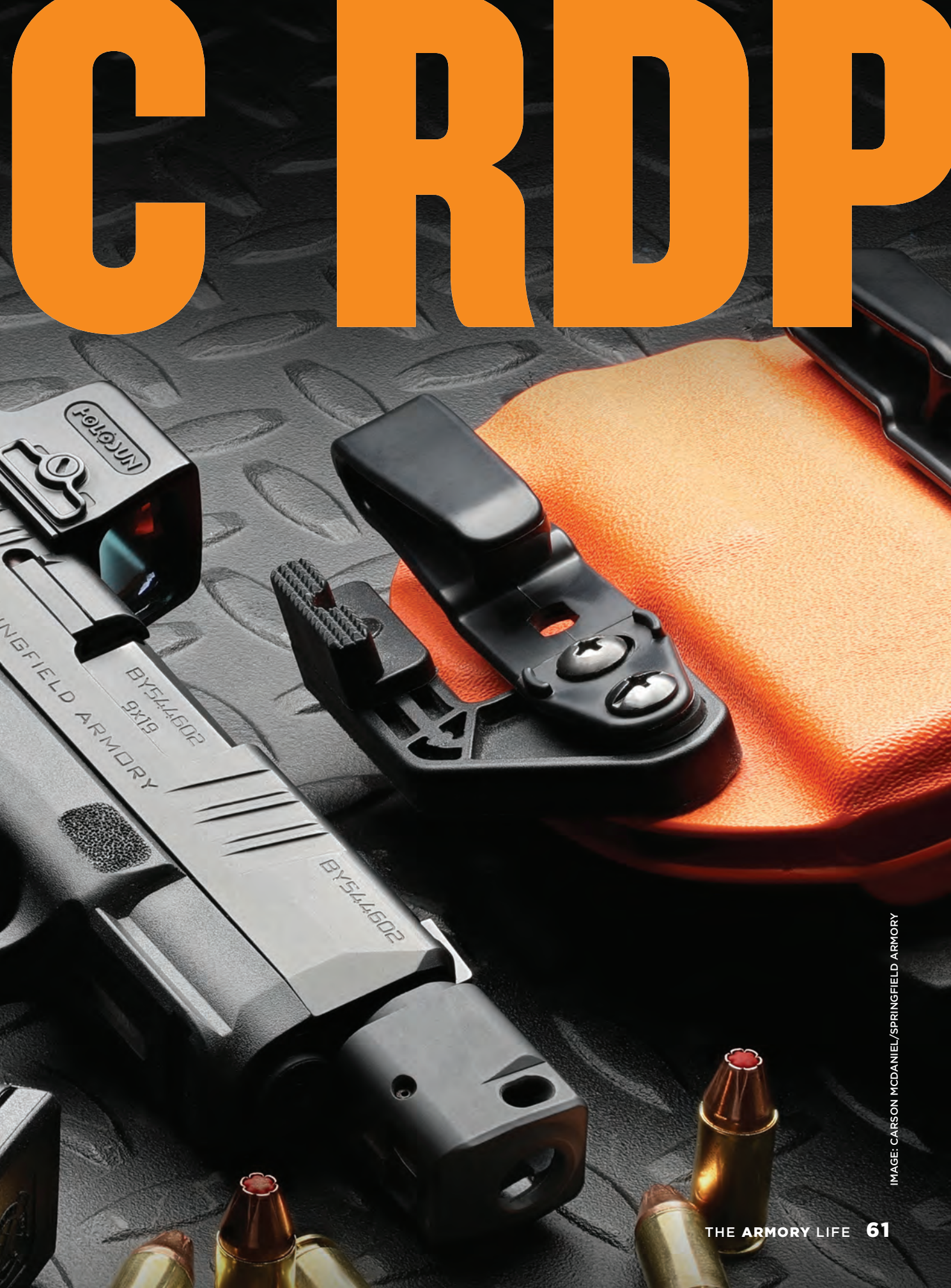


IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



The author carries his customized Hellcat RDP in an orange AIWB Wing Claw 2.0 holster from JM Custom Kydex and a spare 15-round mag in a Crucial Concealment Covert Mag pouch.

IN SOME WAYS, Springfield Armory's 9mm Hellcat is quickly becoming the elder statesman of the micro-compact category. At its introduction in 2019, the pistol achieved a lot of firsts, including leading its category with 11+1 capacity as well as being the first Springfield pistol launched with a day-one optic-ready model.

It wasn't that long ago that new handgun rollouts started with a full-size base model, and the market had to wait for compacts and additional features to follow. The Hellcat 9mm was proof the tide had turned and that the concealed carry market would drive many new introductions going forward.



RAPID DEFENSE PACKAGE

Springfield Armory unveiled the Hellcat Rapid Defense Package (RDP). Like carmakers adding an off-road trim, the RDP was all about showcasing the Hellcat's capability. Where the original was optics-ready, at launch, the RDP came from the factory packaged with an optic.

However, the most eye-catching addition was a self-indexing compensator mounted on a longer 3.8" barrel sporting 1/2x28 muzzle threads.

The "self-indexing" aspect of the RDP's compensator is very interesting. Fitting a compensator can be difficult, as it can require specific fitting or shimming to ensure proper alignment and timing.

Springfield has solved this issue with the RDP's self-indexing compensator. To install, you simply depress a retention lever on the lower portion of the device and thread the unit all the way on. Then reverse it one-half rotation. Depress the locking lever and rotate forward again until it stops. Rotate again in the reverse direction with the lever released until it locks into place. It's that easy, and it comes out aligned properly.

Acting like a booster to redirect pressurized gas and combat muzzle rise, the RDP's compensator effectively made the Hellcat the most shootable micro-compact pistol on the market, in my opinion.

Obviously, I had to have one.

I was lucky enough to procure an RDP—a model with the optional ambidextrous safety located at the rear of the frame—early on for review, and it quickly made its way into my carry rotation.

While its overall profile with optic and comp was creeping toward the "compact" category, the Hellcat was noticeably slimmer that traditional double-stack, striker-fired guns. That dimension makes a world of difference for concealed carriers, especially those who carry inside the waistband (IWB).

The old rule of thumb was to buy pants and belts with a couple extra inches around the midsection to accommodate a fightin' iron. Narrow-framed micro-compact pistols like the Hellcat, and the proliferation of flexible material in pant design, have made carry-sized clothes far less of an issue.

Magazine options were another boon to the Hellcat compared to more tenured compacts. Two magazines came standard with the pistols: an 11-rounder that could wear either a flat, flush-fit baseplate or a pinky extension pad; and a 13-round magazine with a textured grip extension. Not bad!

However, Springfield quashed all capacity considerations shortly after the RDP's release by introducing a 15-round magazine. Ultimately, we would learn that these new magazines were designed for the then-forthcoming slightly larger Hellcat Pro, but featuring a textured collar to allow it to mate with the smaller-framed Hellcats.

Launched as a standalone accessory, the mags put the Hellcat on even footing with the most popular carry pistols of the day.

RAPID DEFENSE PLUS

Daily carry, regular practice and personal preference inspired a few modifications to my RDP and helped refine my everyday carry (EDC) kit.

While the stock trigger on the RDP was quite good, I always like to try out new options whenever I can on my firearms. To that end, I installed an Action Enhancement Trigger from Apex Tactical Specialties.

Comprised of a new trigger shoe, sear spring and striker spring, the Apex trigger offered a very smooth and short trigger travel, as well as crisp break. Over time, it has also reduced the trigger pull weight. Measured by a Lyman digital trigger gauge, my RDP has worn-in to a 4-lb., 14-oz. pull.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

Perhaps my favorite Apex part, though, is the extended takedown lever. Beyond having aggressive stepped serrations to help with firearm disassembly, it also offers a nice ledge for the support-hand thumb when held in a firing grip. Springfield had already included textured reliefs near the dustcover of the polymer frame, but the ledge provided by this takedown lever further enhances my control of the gun when shooting.

Also installed from Apex are the hard chromed frame pins—trigger pivot pin, locking block pin and sear housing pin. These aren't functional upgrades—Apex offers them as spare parts—but I think the chrome adds a bit of style to the otherwise blacked-out pistol.

I've developed an affinity for Holosun's line of durable and well-appointed electro optics. Through rigorous training and countless hours of carry, I've come to trust them on my defensive handguns. The RDP currently carries an EPS Carry optic from them with a red, 6 MOA reticle. Powered by a single 1620 battery that provides 50,000 hours of runtime, the optic comes standard with an RMSc-to-Holosun K adapter plate to simplify mounting on pistols with narrow slides.

As a general rule, I prefer the larger dots in smaller optics, and smaller dots in larger-lensed optics. In both cases, I want to find the dot as easily as possible. If the window is small, as on red-dot sights for micro-compacts, I need the dot to pop—6 MOA reticles do that well. Larger optics with larger lenses tend to be more forgiving of imperfect presentations, and it's easier to pick up smaller dots in the wider and taller field of view.

There is also intended use to consider—I want speed and accuracy from a small self-protection pistol, but I'm willing to give up a bit of the latter to improve the former in a close-quarters encounter. Still plenty accurate for deliberate shots at longer ranges, the larger 6 MOA dot is absolutely faster for my eyes to acquire than smaller reticles.

The EPS Carry is an enclosed red-dot optic, meaning the LED emitter is fully encased by the housing and both a front and rear lens.

I've used and trained with both open- and closed-emitter optics extensively in all weather conditions, and can't identify major advantages or shortcomings for either system. Sights from reputable makers generally work as they are advertised, regardless of the lens count.

I do like the fact that the inevitable accumulation of lint and dust is easy to clean off the rear lens of the EPS Carry. Considering that removal of debris is routine maintenance on oft-carried sidearms, particularly when concealed against the skin, perhaps enclosed optics do hold a bit of an edge.

For magazines, my favorite carry configuration is to have a 13-round magazine in the gun. Among the available choices, it's the Goldi-

PERFORMANCE (7 YDS.)
CUSTOMIZED HELLCAT RDP 9MM

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
FEDERAL AMERICAN EAGLE 147-GR. FMJ FP	1,039 fps	0.48"	0.64"
FEDERAL HYDRA-SHOK DEEP 135-GR. JHP	1,029 fps	0.54"	0.61"
HORNADY AMERICAN GUNNER 115-GR. XTP	1,151 fps	0.40"	0.41"

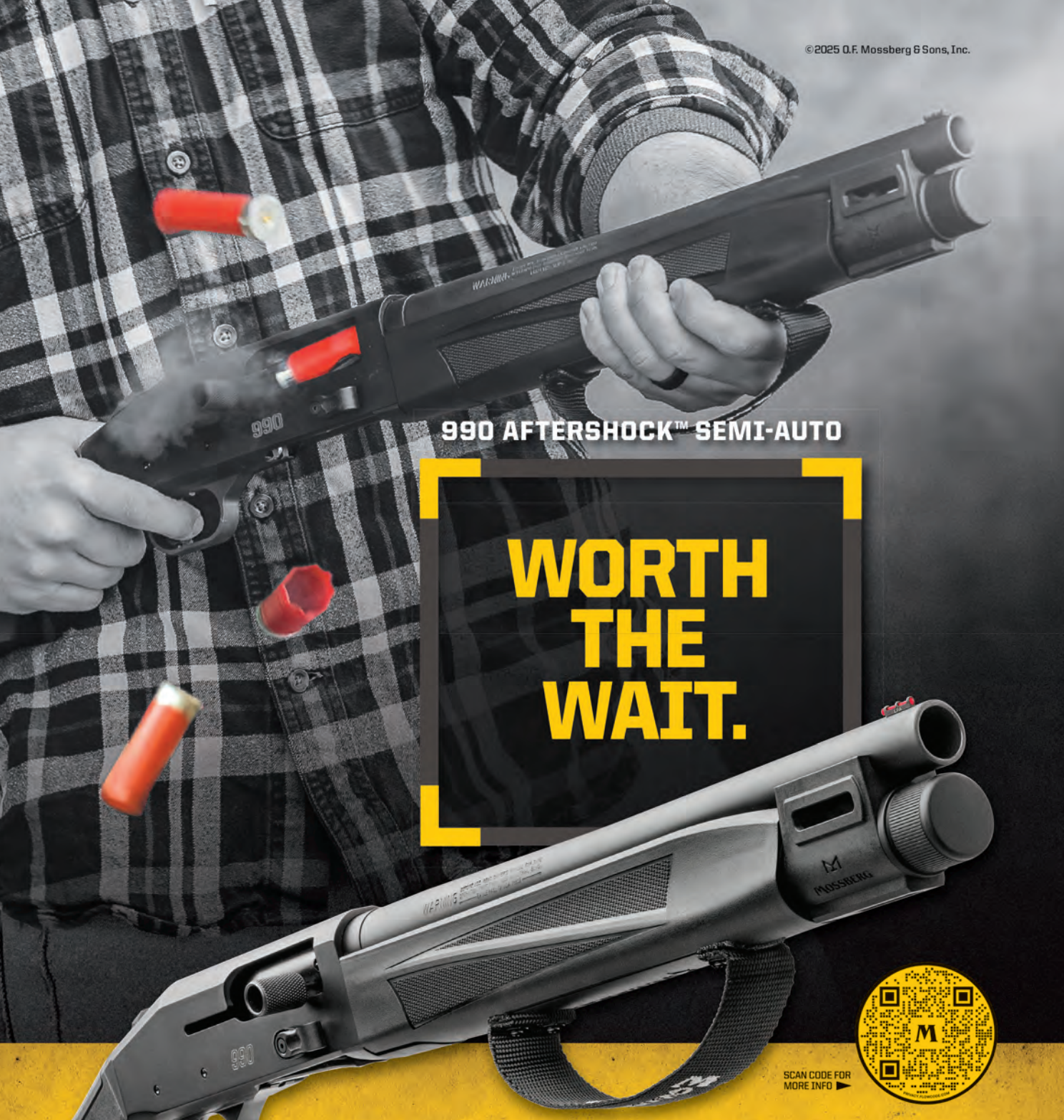
Group size is measured in inches and is the best of three five-shot groups, fired from a Ransom Rest at 7 yards. Velocity is measured in feet per second and is the average of 10 rounds measured by a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph. Abbreviations: feet per second (fps), flat point (FP), full metal jacket (FMJ), grain (gr.), jacketed hollow point (JHP), eXtreme Terminal Performance (XTP).



The enclosed Holosun EPS Carry red-dot optic on the author's RDP has its LED emitter fully encased by the housing, as well as both the front and rear lens.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

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locks option: Not too big, not too small. Its slightly extended baseplate still conceals without issue while providing +2 capacity over the flush-fit mag, and it allows me a full firing grip.

For a reload, I usually carry a 15-round magazine in a Crucial Concealment Covert Mag pouch. The pouch is a simple, low-profile unit that can be worn inside-the-waistband (IWB) or outside-the-waistband (OWB), and it accommodates both right- and left-handed shooters.

Finally, my holster is the AIWB Wing Claw 2.0 from JM Custom Kydex. I've been ordering holsters from owner Tony Mayer for at least a decade, and I got this particular unit shortly after the launch of the original Hellcat.

The problem with carrying subcompact guns IWB, particularly at the appendix position (AIWB), is that the short slide assembly does not provide enough of a "keel" below the beltline to keep the gun from rolling over the top of the belt.

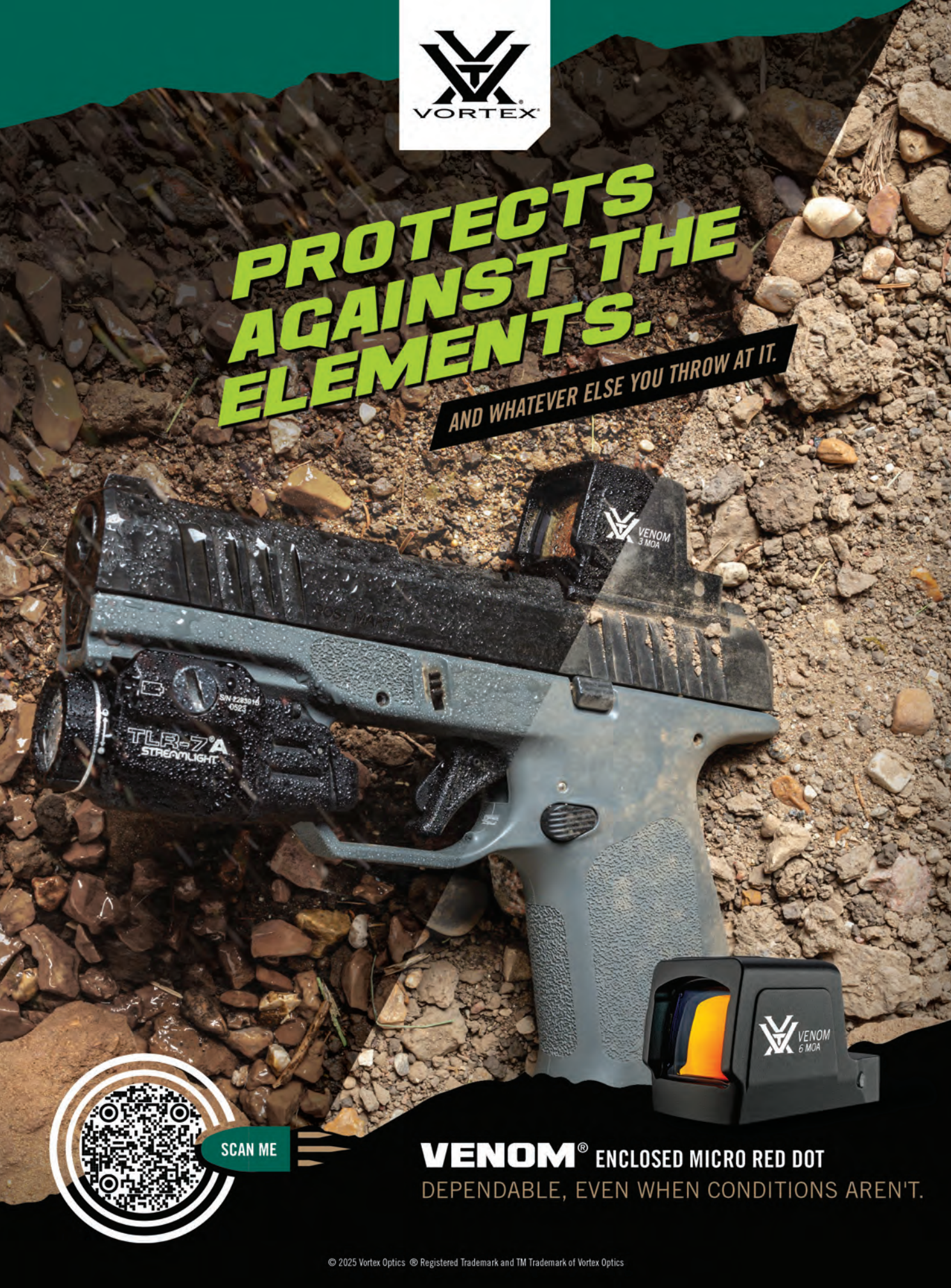
JM Custom Kydex was early to accommodate AIWB carry, and savvy enough to diagnose this issue and offer solutions. The company makes "Long" configuration holsters that extend as if the pistol's slide and barrel were an inch longer.

Too, foam wedges are offered for the back of the holster to apply outward pressure on the muzzle, thus rocking the grip frame closer into the body. Concealment claws and various belt attachments are also available for the fully custom holsters, as are options for optic cuts and skin guard height.

When the Hellcat RDP came out, it was a happy coincidence that my long Hellcat holster was a perfect fit. JM Custom offers holsters specifically patterned for the RDP, but I haven't had the need to switch.

RAGGED-HOLE PERFORMANCE

It wouldn't be much of a review if I didn't put the RDP through its paces. *The Armory Life*'s accuracy protocol includes testing three loads for accuracy and velocity at



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The author wrung out the RDP at the range with three loadings, getting very tight groups and flawless functioning.

7 yards—the prescribed distance for compact pistols. I opted for variety in both bullet weight and intended purpose with my ammunition choices.

Reliable, affordable and readily available, Federal's American Eagle brand is a range-day staple, and I opted for the heavy, 147-gr. flat point load.

On the other side of the spectrum, Federal's Hydra Shok Deep personal defense ammunition, topped by 135-gr. jacketed hollow points, was tailor-made for self-protection handguns like this.

For an all-purpose option, Hornady offers the American Gunner brand, which includes a 9mm load with a 115-gr. XTP bullet.

For each ammunition, I fired one, five-shot sight-in group. Then, using a Ransom Rest Multi Cal. Steady Rest for stability and a chronograph to measure velocity, I fired three, five-shot groups for accuracy.

The results with the Hellcat RDP were impressive. The average of best groups across the three loads was under half-an-inch at a mere .47", and the overall average was close behind at just .55". It was interesting to see three diverse loads perform so similarly, with each producing at least one, one-hole group.

Once the hairs were split, the best performer of the bunch was Hornady's American Gunner load with 115-gr. XTPs at 1,151 fps, as measured by a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph.

Only the sight-in group showed any kind of dispersion, likely due to the faster rate of fire; the three measured groups I fired were near-identical groups that looked more like three rounds touching each other than the actual five that were fired.

Every time I run a test with American Gunner I come away impressed. It's a versatile load well suited for both competition and defense that offers tremendous accuracy and consistency, while still maintaining a lower price point than many of its more specialized counterparts.

PARTING SHOT

While I train regularly with my personal carry gun, and a close facsimile in the form of a similarly equipped Hellcat Pro, it was really cool to put this pint-sized lion on the bench and let it roar.

Despite having owned the pistol for several years, conducting a range test like this reinforced my reasons for gravitating toward the RDP model and validated my choice in options.

From the self-indexing comp to the optic and the minor enhancements throughout, nothing boosts confidence in one's carry configuration like a morning spent cutting ragged holes in cardboard targets. It was reliable, easy to control and very accurate.

Compact yet capacious, discreet and deadly accurate, Springfield Armory's line of Hellcat pistols is rightly seen as top of the heap among modern micro compacts. It, in its numerous variations, has had a significant impact on how we view the role of micro- and compact-sized defensive pistols.

Further supporting that, the comp'd Rapid Defense Package variant of the Hellcat 9mm takes the bite out of recoil and reigns supreme for shootability. Sounds like a winner to me.

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THE NEXT GENERATION OF THE DELTA 14 CHASSIS GIVES A NEW LEVEL OF COMPACT MODULARITY TO THE M1A.

WILL DABBS, MD

THE M14-BASED M1A IS A BIG, brawny rifle—and we like it that way. Chambered in 7.62 NATO/.308 Win., it hearkens back to an era of wood and steel and exudes classic quality. But there often is a need for a rifle to be smaller and handier, and it's hard to overlook the benefits of employing modern materials. That's how we ended up with variants of the design like the M1A SOCOM 16 CQB, an exceedingly compact yet capable 16.25″-barreled version of the M1A.

But what if you wanted to take the downsizing of the M1A up a notch, so to speak? You inevitably arrive at a folding stock system of some sort, which brings us to the subject matter at hand.

ENTER THE DELTA

What we are discussing here is a variant of the Delta 14 Chassis Gen 2, a product I recently had the pleasure of trying out on a SOCOM 16 CQB. The Delta 14 is a drop-in chassis system designed for M1A-pattern rifles and constructed of rugged, yet lightweight glass-filled polymer.

Note that I'm calling this a chassis rather than a stock. There's a reason for this. At its core, the Gen 2 chassis, priced at $199.99, is a foundation for building out your M1A's stock system to fit a wide range of uses. Also, fitting your rifle into it is a simple drop-in affair. Pull your trigger group from your rifle, replace your stock with the chassis, reinstall your trigger group (fair warning—it's a tight fit), and you're ready to go.

The Delta 14 Chassis Gen 2 transforms the already-superlative M1A into something even more lightweight, compact, and portable.

ORIGIN STORY

Bill Bovensiep is the human dynamo behind the Delta 14. An electrical engineer by training, Bill was born a gun nerd. In 2016, Bill bought himself a Spring-

FOLD



Shown here is the Delta 14 Chassis Gen 2 for the M1A rifle, fitted out with optional Chisel Manufacturing folding stock assembly.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

field Armory SOCOM rifle. As he seemed unable to source exactly the furniture he wanted from the commercial market, Bill decided to craft his own. After a lot of trial and error, he produced the first Delta 14 Chassis.

Bill bodged together the original prototype in his garage. He tried making a version out of aluminum, but that proved to be both expensive and heavy. Bill eventually crafted that first stock out of industrial foam and two-part epoxy—the same stuff car companies use to make bumpers. He made 20 copies of that first design, christened it the Gen 1, and then beat the bejeebers out of it. That eventually led to the definitive Gen 2, released in 2018.

The Gen 1 weighed 1.25 lbs. and served as a learning experience. The Gen 2 weighs a paltry 0.75 lbs. and, in my opinion, reflects the current state of the art.

THE DETAILS

The real magic for this chassis system can be found at the near end. The basic chassis includes a Mossberg-standard mount on the tail that will accept any stock

compatible with the ubiquitous Mossberg 500/590 shotgun. That means everything from raw pistol grips to rugged side folders of a variety of flavors are drop-in and ready to go. A simple 5/16x18 fastener is all that is required to swap this stuff out.

Delta 14 offers a variety of exotic stock options on their website straight from the factory. You can even use this system to fit your M1A with an AR-style slider. My test gun came with a fantastic aluminum billet-cut side folder from Chisel Machining. Whether your proclivities lean toward a tactical folder or a nice, ergonomic Monte Carlo, Delta 14 has you covered.

While the rear portion of the Delta 14 Chassis Gen 2 is an important part of the design, the chassis system itself has many notable features. There's ample M-Lok real estate up front for accessories, and the large magwell is flared for quick magazine changes.

To ensure maximum durability despite the chassis' light weight, the front ferrule is formed from steel, and there is a universal steel T-nut mount in the back. If you can field strip your rifle, you can install this stock. Just pop out the trigger assembly, remove the action,



The Chisel Manufacturing folding stock assembly is manufactured from rugged aluminum and features a KICK-EEZ cheekrest and buttpad.



The chassis is designed to accept Mossberg 500/590-pattern buttstock assemblies, for maximum adaptability and modularity.

drop it into place in the Delta 14 Chassis Gen 2, and replace the fire controls. The fit is intentionally tight, but you'll figure it out.

The selection of glass-filled nylon for the chassis was well-reasoned. In addition to exceptional ruggedness at an insanely low weight, this material is also paintable should you harbor an affection for drab-colored Krylon. Additionally, unlike heavier aluminum options, this stuff doesn't really transmit heat. As a result, the stock doesn't heat up quickly under rapid-fire conditions.

The geometric design of an accessory like this is certainly important. Ergonomics is the science of interfacing mechanical objects with the human form, and this chassis is optimized in that regard. However, for an all-weather trinket like this, what you make it out of really determines its ruggedness and practical serviceability.

A BRIEF SCIENCE INTERLUDE...

There is a broad gulf between the flimsy disposable plastic used in junk toys and the rugged stuff Bill uses to craft his rifle chassis. He starts with DuPont Zytel, a glass-filled nylon composite material. That engineering term "composite material" simply refers to a material that is comprised of two or more separate components, each selected for their unique properties. Glass-filled nylon is rugged, lightweight and environmentally resistant. It is also fairly easy to mold into complex shapes.

The nylon bit is the binder, the part that takes up most of the space and defines the geometry of the part. Nylon is a trade name for a specific group of polyamides that are classified as thermoplastic polymers. That means you can heat them up and change their shape. This attribute lends itself to pressure injection molding. Raw nylon is typically white or colorless. When drawn into filaments, it resembles silk.

Nylon is used in all kinds of stuff these days. If you live on Planet Earth in the 21st century, your world is covered with a thin patina of nylon. However, in its pure form, nylon really isn't tough enough to form gun parts. Easy to mold, yes. Indestructible, not so much. That's where the glass bit comes in.

By adding glass in the form of tiny spheres or fibers, nylon can be made into something much more durable. Glass-filled nylon is markedly stronger, harder and more rigid than the pure nylon matrix. It offers higher creep resistance, better dimensional stability and increased wear characteristics than is the case with base nylon material. Glass-filled nylon also facilitates higher service temperatures. In short, glass-filled nylon is a great material from which to craft gun accessories.

A GOOD HOST

The AR is easily the most customizable firearm on the planet. Springfield Armory's SAINT line of Stoner-inspired rifles has you covered if that's your bag. However, sometimes you need a bit more horsepower. If that's the case, you'll be wanting some serious .30-caliber punch. Enter the Springfield Armory M1A.

As noted, the M1A is the semi-automatic version of the G.I.-issue M14 service rifle. Adopted in the 1950's, the M14 was the standard U.S. infantry rifle prior to the adoption of the lighter 5.56mm

IMAGES: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

M16 shortly thereafter. The M14 acted as a bridge between the bulky rifles of World War II and the lightweight carbines of today.

The M14 is, at its heart, a modified, magazine-fed version of the classic M1 Garand. The M1 was the most advanced infantry rifle of the Second World War, and the same basic, proven gas-operated, rotating-bolt action found its way into the M14 minimally unchanged. Unlike the M1, the military's M14 was selective fire and fed from a detachable 20-round box magazine.

The biggest departure was the M14's 7.62x51mm cartridge. Half an inch shorter than the .30-06 round fired by the Garand, the 7.62x51mm NATO offered almost the same ballistic performance in a package that was lighter and less bulky. The M14 was designed to prosecute WWIII in Europe. However, given the tight confines of the jungles in Vietnam, it proved a bit bulky.

Nowadays, Springfield Armory offers the venerable M1A in a variety of formats. Any of them are compatible with the Delta 14 Chassis Gen 2. The best fit, in my opinion, is obviously the SOCOM-16. Plop that bad boy down into a Delta 14 stock and you've got some seriously portable power.

HANDS-ON

Admittedly, the M1A is a big, steel gun. It will always be heavier than a comparable aluminum-framed AR. However, with the SOCOM's short barrel and the folding Delta 14 system, the resulting smoke-pole occupies about the same footprint as its smaller sibling.

The charging handle reciprocates with the bolt on the right. This means you could theoretically take a boot to it in the unlikely event it gets sticky. The magazine release is a handy midline thumb lever. Magazines must be rocked in and out in the manner of a Kalashnikov. However, this offers some significant mechanical advantage that allows you to seat a fully loaded magazine with the bolt closed. The midline safety in the trigger guard is easily managed with the index finger of your shooting hand.

The side-folding stock from Chisel Machining on my test model is as rugged as Chuck Norris' toenails and as versatile as a Swiss Army knife. Cut from aluminum, the stock is essentially indestructible. It features a KICK-EEZ cheekrest that is adjustable for height, as is the KICK-EEZ recoil pad. It is also festooned with sling mounting points. A swappable AR-pattern Magpul MOE-K2 pistol grip rounds out the package.

Many folding stocks can be flimsy, uncomfortable or both. This example from Chisel Manufacturing is none of that. It perfectly complements the Delta 14 chassis in my opinion.

Once mated with the Delta 14 chassis, the M1A SOCOM 16 was rock solid. The gun is a bit front heavy, but that helps manage muzzle rise during rapid fire. The Chisel buttstock readily adjusted to fit my particular anatomy for a reliable cheekweld. Also, the generous buttpad helped mitigate felt recoil.

On that subject, recoil is real without being onerous. This is a manly rifle firing a manly cartridge. You'll know you're shooting it. However, the experience is not particularly unpleasant thanks to the gun's exceptional ergonomics and the stock's efficient design. Downrange performance reflects that of the host rifle, which is superb. The Delta 14 chassis helps you wring every bit of horsepower, precision and range out of the already-superlative SOCOM 16.

Note the M-Lok slots in the chassis' forend. Rifle shown fitted out with optional 20-round magazine and Aimpoint ACRO P-2 red dot.

IMAGES: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



The left-folding stock assembly features a rock-solid locking mechanism and easy-to-actuate release button.

RUMINATIONS

Nowadays we customize our clothing, our cars, our electronic wallpaper and our smartphones. The Delta 14 chassis lets us customize our M1A rifles as well. Featuring superlative human engineering and cutting-edge materials science, the addition of the Delta 14 Gen 2 stock takes your M1A rifle to some exciting new spaces. Installation is easy, and the end result is both compact and powerful.

The M1A rifle is a brilliant survival, hunting and recreational tool right out of the box. However, dropping the action into a Delta 14 chassis makes it smaller, lighter and even more versatile. MSRP for the basic chassis is only $199.99. The chassis as-tested with the Chisel Machining folding stock assembly is priced at $579.99.

I was also informed by Bill that the company offers a no-questions-asked discount for any military and LE customers. The 10% discount code—MIL10—can be applied at checkout, and Bill says that there is no DD-214 or department letter needed.

The Delta 14 Gen 2 chassis and folding stock makes these great guns even greater.

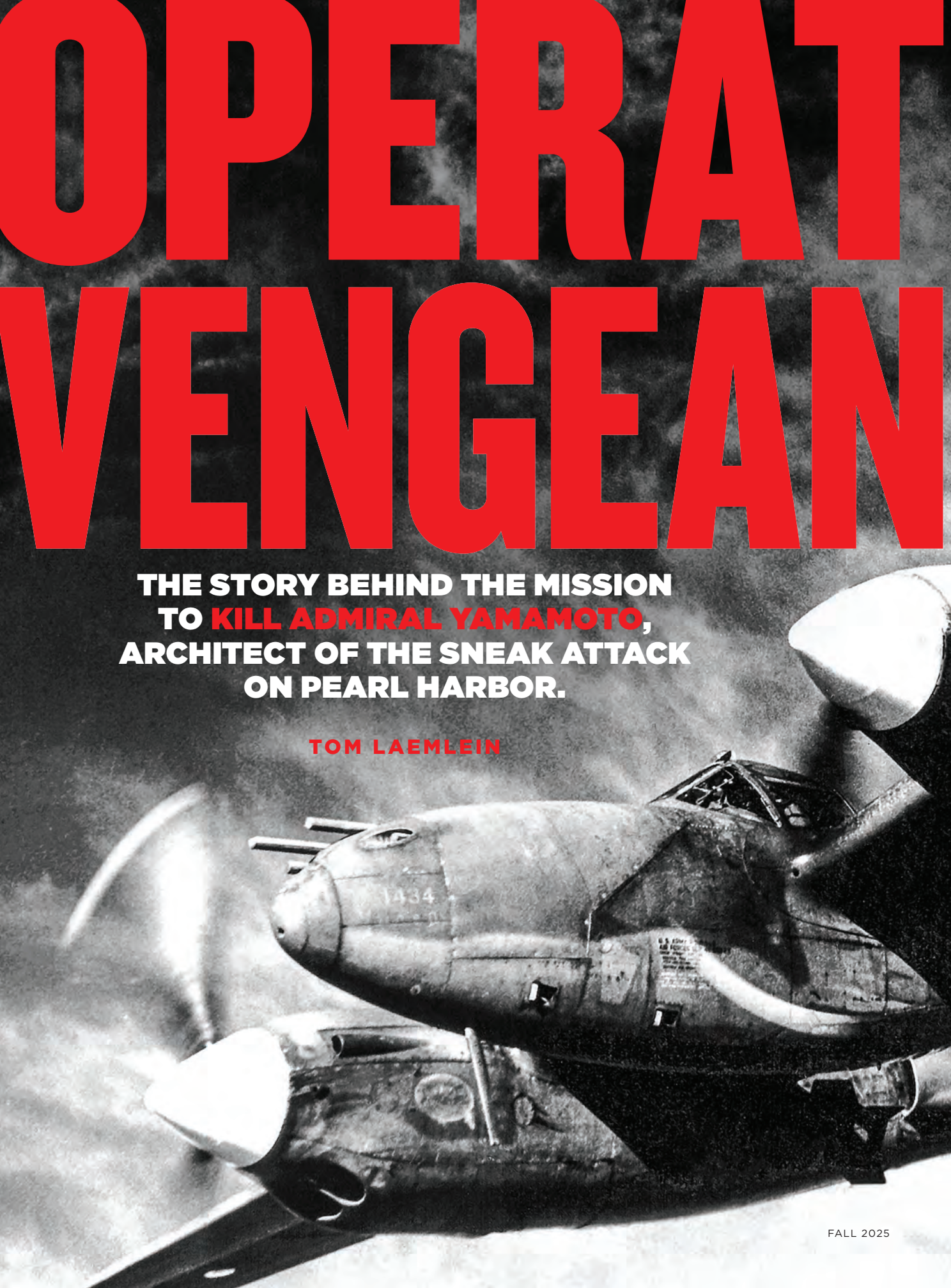
FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

DELTA14CHASSIS.COM
SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM
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CHISELMACHINING.COM

OPERAT VENGEAN

THE STORY BEHIND THE MISSION TO KILL ADMIRAL YAMAMOTO, ARCHITECT OF THE SNEAK ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR.

TOM LAEMLEIN



ION CE



While the P-38 Lightning also served in the skies of Europe, it played an outside role in the Pacific during World War II—including being part of the bold mission to kill Yamamoto.

IMAGE: DVIDSHUB.NET

IN THE EARLY DAYS of the United States' involvement in World War II, stateside motivational posters proclaimed, "Remember Pearl Harbor", and "Avenge December 7th". And while the "date which will live in infamy" focused America's rage on Imperial Japan, U.S. military planners in the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) dreamed of vengeance against the specific planner of the Pearl Harbor attack: Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.

Yamamoto, the commander-in-chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet, had originally been opposed to war with America, and had made his feelings known privately and even publicly. He warned that he believed Japan could not defeat the United States, as Japanese production could never match up against American industrial might. Even so, political pressure and his sense of duty led him to plan the daring first strike against America's prime naval base in the Pacific.

By April 1943, Yamamoto's prediction was proving correct. Japan was locked in a deepening war of attrition with America, and the situation was turning against the Rising Sun.

U.S. forces were advancing in the Solomon Islands, more and more Allied equipment was arriving every day, and the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) and United States Navy were beginning to achieve air superiority in some areas. The Japanese Mitsubishi A6M "Zero" fighter, while still dangerous, was no longer dominant. The tide was clearly turning.

THE BREAKTHROUGH

After the efforts of U.S. Navy code-breakers paved the way for the "Miracle at Midway" in early June 1942, the signals monitoring and cryptographic intelligence unit kept at their detective work. On April 14, 1943, the U.S. naval intelligence operation, codenamed "Magic", picked up an important Japanese naval transmission.

Once deciphered by Tech Sergeant Harold Fudenna, the message yielded the precise itinerary of Admiral Yamamoto's upcoming inspection tour of bases in the Solomon Islands.

On April 18th, the Admiral and key members of his staff would fly from the massive Japanese naval base at Rabaul (at 06:00 Tokyo time) and arrive at Balalae Airfield near Bougainville (at 08:00 Tokyo time). Yamamoto and his entourage would travel in a pair of Mitsubishi G4M bombers while escorted by six Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighters.

Known to the Allies under the code name "Betty", the G4M that would be carrying Admiral Yamamoto was not a transport aircraft but rather a land-based medium bomber of the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Service.

The Mitsubishi G4M (Type 1) attack bomber had been in service for two years at the time of the Yamamoto mission and was much prized for its long range—1,500 miles when carrying a bomb load, and up to 2,700 miles on a ferry mission. But the great range came at a price, and throughout its career the G4M was dogged by its light construction that allowed it to be easily damaged and ignited by gunfire. Early models lacked self-sealing fuel tanks, and Allied pilots called the Betty the "Type 1 Lighter" or "The Flying Zippo". There was little or no armor protection for the crew, the fuel tanks or the engines.

Even so, the G4M squadrons had their share of success in the first year of the war, including the participation in the destruction of the battleship HMS Prince of Wales and the battlecruiser HMS Repulse in December 1941, along with the heavy cruiser USS Chicago in January 1943.

SEIZING THE MOMENT

At first, American intelligence officers had a hard time believing that the Japanese would be so cavalier as to transmit such a message, even if it was encoded. But additional code-breakers stationed in Alaska and Hawaii also intercepted that message, deciphering it to reveal the same details.

The significance of this intelligence windfall would have been hard to overstate. U.S. armed forces had ample motivation to remove one of the most important chess pieces from the board, and Admiral Nimitz made the call. He judged that the opportunity to terminate Yamamoto and seriously damage the Japanese navy, as well as Japan's overall morale, was worth the risk of tipping off the enemy that their codes had been broken.

As a code name, "Operation Vengeance" seemed fitting for the mission. Vengeance was clearly on everyone's mind among America's military and political leaders. The pain of Pearl Harbor was still fresh, and Admiral Nimitz received permission to proceed from Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox.

Once cleared on the mission, Admiral Nimitz reached out to Vice Admiral William "Bull" Halsey, commander of the South Pacific Area. It was soon determined that there was only one American interceptor that was truly capable of performing this mission, and it was relatively new to the Pacific theater. That plane was the Lockheed P-38 Lightning.

Halsey immediately called upon the USAAF 339th Fighter Squadron based at Henderson Field, Guadalcanal, to handle the interception. Detailed plans for the mission were calculated and mapped out immediately. Vengeance was soon to come, and the Lightning would play an integral part in the mission.



IMAGE: NARA

A P-38 is shown here being fueled for a mission at Henderson Field in Guadalcanal.

THE RIGHT TOOL?

The P-38 became operational with the 5th Air Force in early March 1943. In that same month, the USAAF prepared a report titled "Tactical Suitability of the P-38F Airplane", which contained the following information that would be of critical consideration during the mission to intercept Yamamoto.

"The visibility over the nose is satisfactory for deflection shooting, but the armor plate window and gunsight obstruct the forward vision for search. To the sides, the view downward is limited by the position of wings and engines, and searching below will have to be accomplished by banking the airplane from side to side. The search view on both sides is greatly obstructed by metal strips where the canopy joins the window. The view to the rear is limited by the boom and rudders, and rear armor plate."

One of the men who would play a prominent role



A formation of P-38 Lightnings assemble in the southwest Pacific in April of 1943.

IMAGE: NARA



IMAGE: NARA

The target of Operation Vengeance was Japan's Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.

in the mission, Captain Thomas Lanphier, was interviewed after the mission for a confidential article in a Bureau of Aeronautics publication. The following excerpts provide some insight into how the P-38s were used in their early deployment, and what the combat pilots actually thought of them:

"P-38s are rugged, they take a lot of punishment. Apparently, they're vulnerable only in the engine. The pilot is pretty well protected. The Japs thought the P-38s were the best planes they were running into.

"The firepower … is quite satisfactory. The cannon uses all explosive ammo. The four .50s flying right straight up made a splendid concentration of firepower.

"When … (new pilots) … have flown the planes and learned how stable they are, how well the pilot is protected, what a lot of damage can be dealt out with them—in other words, once they get on a flight—they're okay. It doesn't take very long for the ordinary American kid to catch on."

Regarding Japanese fighter tactics, he had the following to say:

"The Japanese continue to fly as they always have, react the same way to an attack, and do the same fundamental things. I've never run into one who, when attacked from behind, would cut his throttle. Their planes, I should think, would stop abruptly if they'd cut the throttle and we'd overshoot them. Some of them are smart enough to pull off to the side, but that is usually taken care of by our wingman. Generally speaking, they still pull right up in the air, or roll upside down and go straight down, which puts them out of the fight. The Japanese pilots coming over are not so smart as they used to be; they are probably running into the dregs now."

On P-38 tactics against Japanese fighters, he stated:

"I had a four-plane section which had flown together for about a year, which is unusual for the Army. Each of us felt very responsible for the others; I was responsible for my wingman, and he was for me. We never had occasion to use any evasive maneuvers; we were never surprised from behind. We had planned that if we were completely surprised and had to get out in a hurry, we would pull off in a dive and scissor the way naval aviators do in the dive, except we would endeavor to pull off sideways and back. We try to stay in a ball within a mile area, each keeping his wingman in sight.

"The leader, being the ranking man, has the first chance to shoot. The wingman, although he also wants to shoot down enemy planes, suppresses that desire until the leader has taken care of his target. Then it is the wingman's chance, with the leader protecting him. We operate that way—just two fellows working together. It is the leader's responsibility, however, to keep the two pairs of planes in proximity to each other."

When asked if he goes head-on

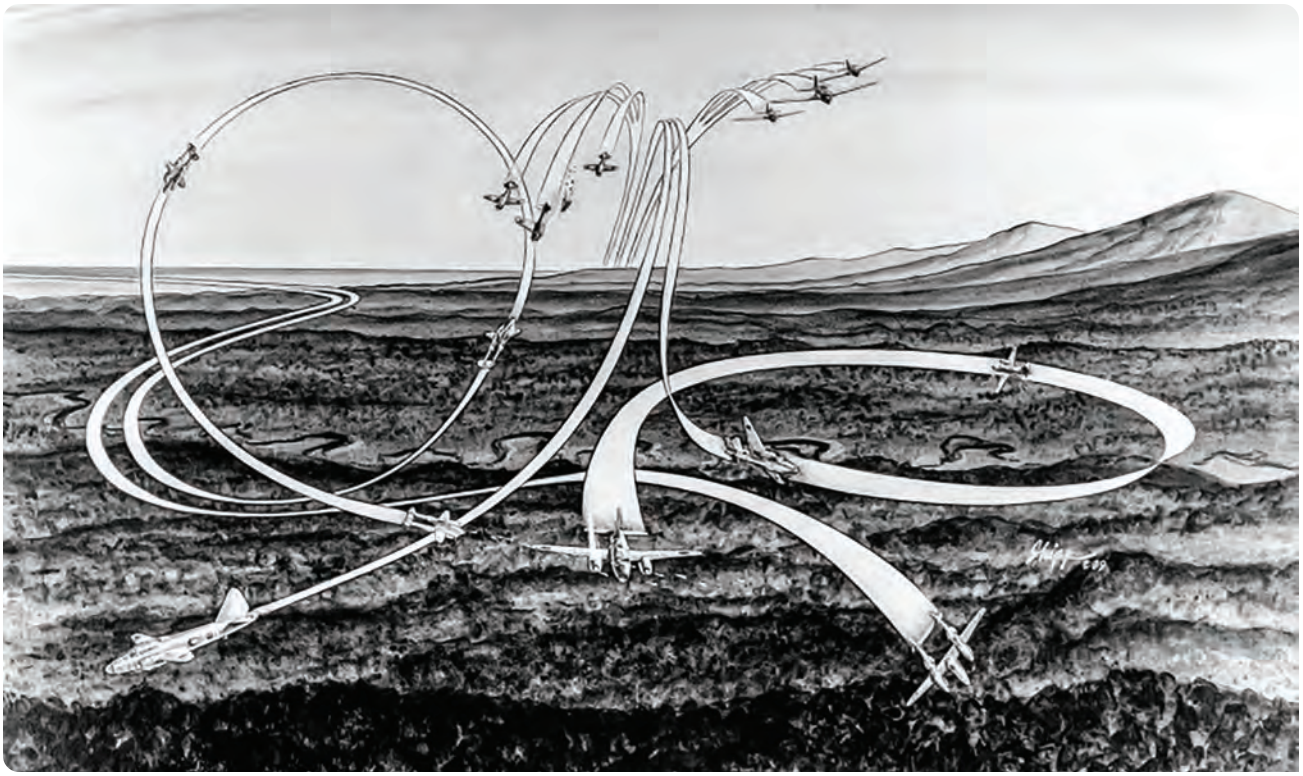


IMAGE: NARA

This USAAF diagram of the Yamamoto interception illustrates the engagement of the Japanese aircraft by the P-38 Lightnings.

against Japanese Zeros:

"I only got two head-on passes. If the Zeros saw there was a chance of us getting around them, they'd turn and go off. We couldn't seem to get them to tangle with us. The P-38 Lightning is a very maneuverable plane despite its size."

Regarding new pilots, he had this to say:

"New pilots are very cocky and independent when they first arrive. For instance, a big ex-All-American football star looks at the combat pilot to whom he has been assigned for training and asks: 'That little bird, what does he know? Am I supposed to follow that little weasel?' Some of the most experienced pilots have 'baby faces' and quiet manners, which seem incompatible with their exploits."

When asked about the P-38's maneuverability, Lanphier stated:

"We had some trouble fighting Zeros. We can't turn and approach as fast as they can. Some of us used our flaps and slowed up, staying behind the Zeros when they turned and then turning underneath them. That was frequently effective. If we had planned an attack on bombers, I think I would have my people dive with the flaps (making an overhead approach

Shown is the Mitsubishi G4M "Betty," the type of aircraft carrying Yamamoto during the interception by the Lightnings.



IMAGE: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



IMAGE: NARA

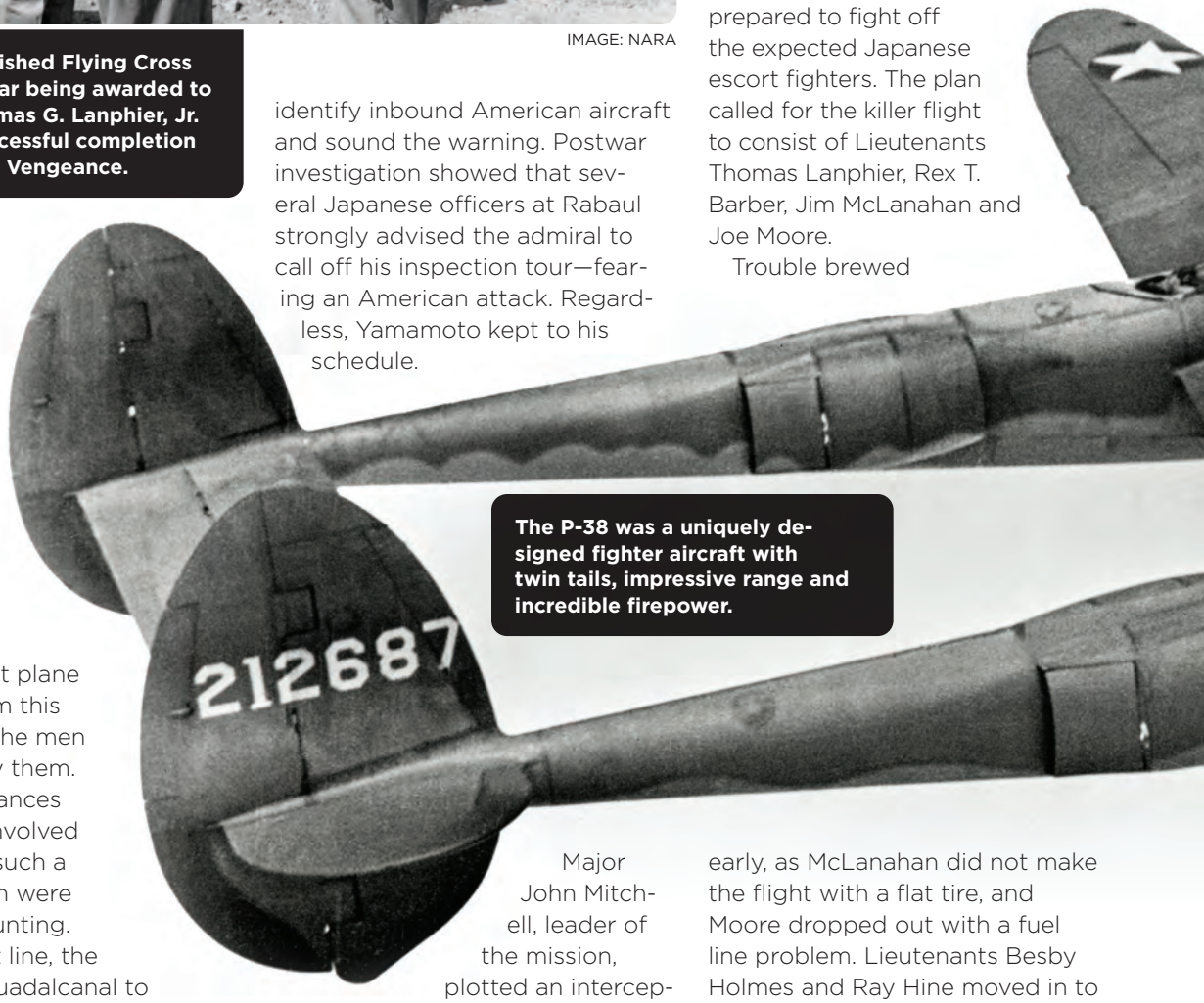
The Distinguished Flying Cross and Silver Star being awarded to Captain Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr. after the successful completion of Operation Vengeance.

and using the flaps to keep slow until making a run), then fold the flaps and dive."

LIGHTNING STRIKES

So, it was determined what plane would perform this mission, and the men who would fly them. However, distances and hurdles involved in pulling off such a daring mission were extremely daunting.

In a straight line, the range from Guadalcanal to Bougainville was 400 miles. However, there were several Japanese radar stations in the area, plus plenty of coast watchers ready to identify inbound American aircraft and sound the warning. Postwar investigation showed that several Japanese officers at Rabaul strongly advised the admiral to call off his inspection tour—fearing an American attack. Regardless, Yamamoto kept to his schedule.



The P-38 was a uniquely designed fighter aircraft with twin tails, impressive range and incredible firepower.

Major John Mitchell, leader of the mission, plotted an interception course that would take the 339th Squadron P-38 fighters out to sea and then back again, to emerge over Bougainville as the admiral arrived at 9:35am. The circuitous route would total 1,000 miles: 600 miles on the outward leg (at about 50 feet over the water), and 400 miles for the return flight. Extra fuel was allocated for the expected dogfights.

To make sure the P-38s had enough avgas, one of the two standard 165-gallon external fuel tanks was replaced with a 330-gallon tank. Despite the unbalanced weight, the fighters flew without problems.

A total of 18 P-38s would carry out the mission, with four of them designated as the "killer flight". Major Mitchell and the other Lightnings would fly top cover, prepared to fight off the expected Japanese escort fighters. The plan called for the killer flight to consist of Lieutenants Thomas Lanphier, Rex T. Barber, Jim McLanahan and Joe Moore.

Trouble brewed early, as McLanahan did not make the flight with a flat tire, and Moore dropped out with a fuel line problem. Lieutenants Besby Holmes and Ray Hine moved in to take their places. After this initial complication, everything went completely to plan.

On April 18, the P-38s took

off from Kukum Field at 07:25, Guadalcanal time. Major Mitchell's dead reckoning navigation was outstanding. The Lightnings reached the interception point about a minute early (at 09:34) and immediately saw the two G4M bomber/transports descending through a light haze. The P-38s jettisoned their tanks, turning and climbing into the bombers.

Thomas Lanphier and Rex Barber turned in behind the diving G4M bombers. The Browning .50-cal. AN/M2 machine guns and 20mm M2 cannons in the Lightnings' central nacelles tore apart the first Betty's right engine and sent shells crashing the length of the bomber's fuselage. The plane flipped over and, when Barber looked over his shoulder, he saw a smoke trail that terminated in the Bougainville jungle. This Betty turned out to be Yamamoto's.

At that moment, the second bomber was low over the water near Moila Point, under the guns of Besby Holmes and Ray Hine. Both pilots scored some hits on the Betty, but their speed carried them past the target. Rex Barber dove and picked up the chase, and he also scored some hits on the second bomber, which soon bellied into the water at high speed. Remarkably, Yamamoto's Chief of Staff, Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki and two other passengers survived this violent crash.

By this point, the Japanese escort fighters were on the scene and Rex Barber's and Ray Hine's P-38s received damage—but all the Lightnings exited the interception area. A Navy PBY Catalina patrol plane encountered Ray Hine on his trip home. The PBY noted his damaged P-38 (one engine feathered) and offered to pick up the pilot if he preferred to ditch. Hine asked for a compass bearing and headed towards Guadalcanal. Unfortunately, he never arrived, and no trace of his aircraft was ever found. He was the only American lost on the mission.

As for Admiral Yamamoto, a Japanese search party found his body near the crash site of the first Betty downed—thrown clear from the wreck but still in his aircraft seat, his hand on the hilt of his katana. The Japanese coroner on the scene concluded the Admiral was probably dead before the Betty hit the ground. Japanese media reported that he "met a gallant death aboard a warplane."

THE KILL CONTROVERSY

When Thomas Lanphier returned to Guadalcanal, he announced over a clear-channel radio frequency "I got Yamamoto!" as he entered the landing pattern. This was a major breach of communications security. Many of the other interception flight pilots reported that they heard him make the claim over an open line.

It was Lanphier who wrote the Fighter Interception Report, which described his own actions in glowing terms as being involved in the shootdown. It however did make specific mention that Rex Barber was involved in shooting down a Betty bomber. While the report mentioned the downing of three of the Zeros (one claimed by Lanphier as well), Japanese records show no losses among their escort fighters—just the two G4M bombers that were downed.

Kill claims have been frequently disputed since the beginning of air-to-air combat. The Yamamoto interception has been reviewed several times since the war, and most evidence points to Rex Barber taking down Yamamoto. All the pilots in the killer flight received the Navy Cross.

Whether Thomas Lanphier shot down Yamamoto or simply believed he did ultimately makes no difference in the final equation. The architect of the Pearl Harbor surprise attack, the day that would live in infamy, was dead. Operation Vengeance was a success.

IMAGE: NARA



Scott Conditt is shown here doing his best impression of his literary hero, Hunter S. Thompson—an enigma who brought a surreal perspective to his own work.

IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

GUNZO JOURNALISM

THIS YEAR'S CANTIUS AWARD WINNER'S UNIQUE STYLE AND INNOVATIVE PERSPECTIVE EARNED HIM OUR CONTRIBUTOR OF THE YEAR ACCOLADE.

MIKE HUMPHRIES

"YES!" SCOTT'S ANSWER to our invitation out to *The Armory Life* headquarters to receive this year's "Cantius Award" as our contributor of the year was emphatic and unhesitating. I would soon learn that Scott's enthusiasm was driven not only by his appreciation for being selected as our winner, but also because of the photo shoot to support his acceptance of the award we would be doing. More on that in a moment.



A LITTLE ETYMOLOGY

First, let's touch on *The Armory Life*'s Cantius Award itself. The award, now in its fourth year, is given to a writer the staff has determined provided uniquely valuable content for the site for that year.

For those curious as to the award's name itself, it was chosen due to its connection to the history of one of Springfield Armory's most iconic firearms—the M1A rifle, based upon the M14 service rifle.

Cantius refers to the middle name of John C. Garand, creator of the iconic M1 Garand rifle, which provided the foundation for the development of the M14.



Conditt was awarded both a Springfield Armory Kuna 9mm pistol as well as a burgundy Cantius Award jacket.

GOING GONZO

In discussing the visit with Scott, our team was brainstorming some concepts for the photoshoot and happened to offhandedly mention journalist Hunter S. Thompson, of "Fear and Loathing" and "gonzo-style" journalism fame. That struck an immediate chord with Conditt and spawned an in-depth conversation and detailed plan for the shoot.

"American literary icon Hunter S. Thompson's been one of my favorite authors since I was a teenager. I even named my firstborn son after him," Conditt told me. "Thompson was absolutely brilliant in how he captured the American story, painting vivid and surreal visuals like no one else," he continued. "He was an enigma, and that's what made him resonate for me. His writing was unfiltered, intense, and yet rang deeply true."

Clearly, we had our photo shoot plan.

SEAR & LOATHING

Scott was selected as this year's winner of the award—which earned him a signed certificate, his own example of the rare burgundy *The Armory Life* Cantius Award jacket, and a Kuna 9mm—due to his contribution of content covering cutting-edge tech in the firearms and outdoor community.

From his reviews of thermal reflex optics to solar-driven off-grid power sources to mastering the Echelon's Variable Interface System and more, Scott wowed us in article after article. It's obvious he loves guns and technology, and it came across in his writing.

"Being awarded the Cantius Award by *The Armory Life* means a lot to me. I admire *The Armory Life* for its strong editorial voice and talented contributor base. To be recognized for my work and placed alongside that group of writers is a real honor. It's something I'm deeply proud of," he explained.

As editor-in-chief of *The Armory Life*, I couldn't be prouder to present this award to Scott. He has been a part of the site and magazine since the earliest days, and I have known him for many years.

"This holds personal meaning for me because Mike Humphries was the first person in the firearms industry to give me a shot at writing and photography back more than 15 years ago," he explained. "That early opportunity helped shape my career and further fuel my passion for the 2A space, and I'll always be grateful for it. Working for *The Armory Life* continues to be one of the most rewarding parts of what I do as a creative."

ALTERED PERSPECTIVES

Our congratulations to Scott Conditt for being this year's Cantius Award winner. We have been truly impressed by all his hard work over the past year as well as the quality of the content he created, and look forward to seeing what he has to offer for the next!

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
THEARMORYLIFE.COM

IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

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DOUBLIN

CONTINUOUS PRECISION'S CUSTOM WORK ON THIS 1911 DS PRODIGY BUILDS ON ITS SOLID FOUNDATION OF QUALITY.

ANDY GROSSMAN

THE DOUBLE-STACK 1911 MARKET has absolutely taken off in recent years, with some truly remarkable pistols becoming available. While some of them can reach prices that could buy your teenager a nice, reliable vehicle or pay for a semester of college at a state school, that is not the case with one of my personal favorites.

That pistol is the 1911 DS Prodigy from Springfield Armory. With an MSRP of $1,499, this is a double-stack 1911 (that's what the "DS" stands for, by the way) that's about a $1,000 less than you would likely expect.

The Prodigy is an absolutely amazing gun right out of the box, and a remarkable deal for the money. What Springfield has accomplished at this price point is truly impressive.

But, I love to customize my guns, so I thought it might be interesting to see what could be done to it for a total price coming in around the $2,000 mark—and still under the $2,500 price point you usually find for this class of pistol.

THE BASE

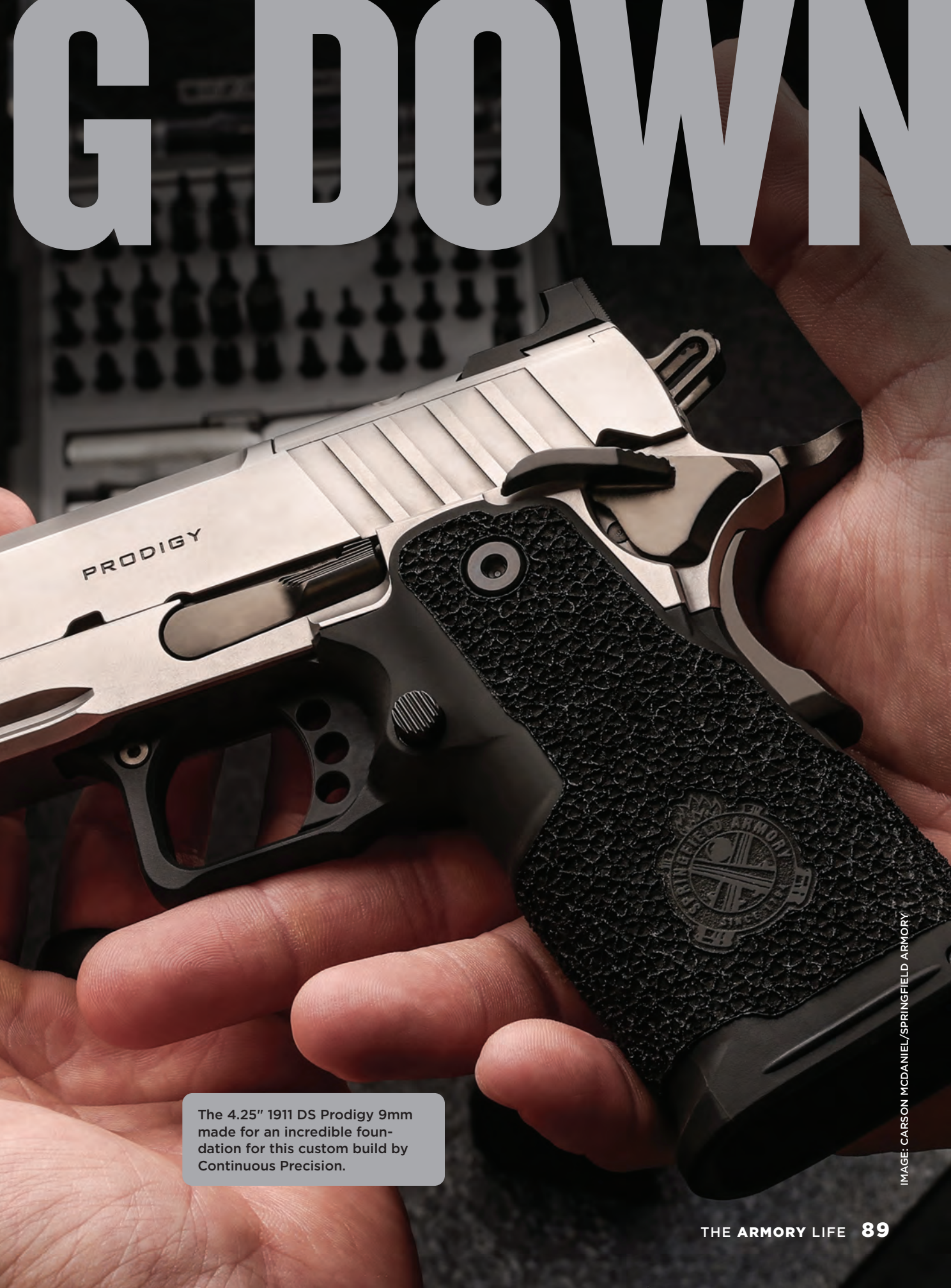
Where this all started was with a 4.25" 1911 DS Prodigy. In case you are not familiar with the platform, this is the shorter barrel length option of the full-size 1911 DS Prodigy (the other is a 5" model).

This is an impressive 9mm pistol with a 17+1 magazine capacity in the flush-fitting magazine, and it comes packed with an extra extended 20-round magazine. Extended 26-rounders are also available for purchase on the Springfield Armory Store.

The pistol features a forged steel slide and frame, along with a 4.25" forged



G DOWN



The 4.25" 1911 DS Prodigy 9mm made for an incredible foundation for this custom build by Continuous Precision.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

bull barrel with an 11-degree crown. Mounted to the steel frame—which features an integral strip of Picatinny rail—is a high-impact polymer grip module. This allows for a slim grip comparable to that of a single-stack 1911, but still with a double-column magazine.

The grip module features wrap-around Adaptive Grip Texture, like you can find on Springfield's Hellcat and Echelon pistols.

In addition, the 1911 DS family are AOS models, which stands for "Agency Optic System". Developed in collaboration with Agency Arms, AOS employs plates machined from billet steel. The plates, designed to allow the pistol to accept a wide range of today's most popular red dot optics, offer co-witnessing of the iron sights with most optics.

Speaking of iron sights, the pistol comes standard with a cover plate with an integrated black serrated rear sight and a fiber optic front. In addition, the pistol comes with one HEX Dragonfly-compatible AOS plate. That plate, like all the AOS plates and the cover plate, features an integral black serrated rear sight.

GETTING TO WORK

For this special project, I reached out to my friends over at Continuous Precision in Milford, Michigan, and tasked them with the challenge. Continuous Precision is a small machine shop that specializes in custom machining slides primarily for law enforcement officers, but additionally machine parts for the civilian world as well. Continuous Precision also manufactures sights, triggers, magazine extensions and basepads.

They have been making a major name for themselves with their 2011-pattern basepads

Continuous Precision transformed the pistol with a tri-cut slide design, lightening cuts at the muzzle, enhanced serrations and a sliver DLC coating.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

and magazine extensions, so I thought I should give them a shot to see what Jeff, the owner, could come up with for this Prodigy. I got him the pistol and some basic parameters of my plan, and then let him go to work. All that was left was for me to be patient and wait for the results. What ultimately came back was amazing.

Let's start with the pistol's frame and then move our way up. Continuous Precision broke the pistol down and sent the grip module off to Brad Adcock, owner and operator of Great Lakes Custom Works.



The pistol's custom stippling, done by Great Lakes Custom Works, offered impressive aesthetics and terrific handling.

Cannons Springfield logo that is now on the grips.

Great Lakes has been doing custom hand-stippling and grip modifications for more than 10 years. They do work for many law enforcement agencies, competitive shooters and trainers all over the country. I have had a few jobs done by Brad and always love his work, so I was excited to see what he had done with this particular pistol.

He went to work with a slight grip reduction off the backstrap and adaptation of the grip texturing. Brad then laid down his signature embossed border that follows and matches the contours of the pistol to ensure a "factory" look.

After the border had been laid, he went in and filled it with a medium texture that would enhance the grip in all conditions without being so aggressive that it would tear your hands apart when shooting.

Brad did an amazing job, and I absolutely love the Crossed-

TOPPING IT OFF

While the grip was being customized, Jeff over at Continuous Precision was in the shop dreaming up a slide package for the pistol. Continuous Precision is all about enhancing the performance of defensive-style pistols, which is one reason I am such a big fan of their work. Their stuff is highly practical and usable, and it looks great—just like it should.

Continuous Precision came up with a slide package that really enhanced and highlighted the existing slide cuts of the Prodigy, while also lightening the slide a bit at the same time.

All the existing serrations on the rear of the slide got deepened a little bit, while the front serrations took on a completely new transformation. In fact, the entire front of the slide got reworked for a much more "aggressive" look.

Jeff took the rounded edges off and gave the slide a tri-cut angle with a flat top. This simple modification is admittedly more for looks, but does offer functionality because of the serrations over all the new angles. This gives the shooter a very aggressive texture up front for performing press checks and manipulating the slide from the forward area.

During this process, Continuous Precision utilized the factory front serrations, but added a few more while deepening them and then continuing them over the top of the slide.

Then, the slide got some lightening windows cut strategically in the front of the slide on the new angled edge located on either side of the front sight. These windows look awesome, match the serrations perfectly, and all while cutting a bit more weight out of the slide.

To top the slide work off, a Continuous Precision logo was machined into the top. Then, the slide and frame were sent off for

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

a silver DLC coating for maximum protection of the metal and to ensure a long life, no matter how much use the pistol might see.

Continuous Precision also makes magazine extensions, basepads and gap fillers for all double-stack 1911 magazines, including those of the Prodigy. Naturally, I added them to each magazine I had on hand to really enhance the overall look and functionality.

These magazine extensions and basepads feature a small lip on the front for easy one-handed manipulation, as well as serrations on the sides.

HANDS-ON

On the range, the customized Prodigy—which I have dubbed my "Prodigy 2.0"—ran incredibly well. I shot the gun when it was stock before all the work was done, and then got to shoot it when it was completely customized.

While the stock gun is incredible, the tweaks and enhancements of the custom Prodigy 2.0 from Continuous Precision add a whole new twist.

The hand-stippled grip offers an amazing feel in the hands and perfect purchase on the pistol in any shooting condition.

The deepened rear serrations are easy to grab to rack the pistol's slide, and the reshaped and heavily serrated front area of the slide makes it completely natural for the shooter to utilize it for press checks and quick slide manipulation during drills.

As expected with a 1911 DS Prodigy, the fit of the slide to the frame felt like it was running on ball bearings. Also, the trigger is crazy smooth and allows for quick follow-up shots. Additionally, the lighter slide made for a great balance to the pistol.

CONCLUSION

Needless to say, this was a really fun project. I have long been a fan of the 1911 DS Prodigy family of pistols due to their impressive combination of exceptional performance and a reasonable price point.

Combine that with my own natural desire to tweak and customize my guns, and you have a gun that proved to be an ideal foundation for a project such as this one.

Also, I couldn't be happier with the work done by Continuous Precision and Great Lakes Custom Works to make this project a reality.

All the work done came to a total of just less than $700 (with a big chunk of this going to the new DLC coating). With an MSRP of $1,499 on the stock Prodigy and adding the $700 worth of work in, I have a custom-grade double-stack 1911 that comes in around $2,200 total.

This is an amazing adaptation of the base pistol at a price that still comes in at a very reasonable amount for what you get. I couldn't be happier with it.

If you want a sound double-stack 1911, look no further than the 1911 DS Prodigy. In addition, it clearly makes for a terrific foundation for custom work at a price you can still afford.

I'm certainly glad I doubled down on this double-stack 1911 Prodigy from Springfield Armory for this custom project, and I think the results clearly speak for themselves!

This customized 1911 DS Prodigy includes Continuous Precision's custom magazine extensions. The pistol is shown topped off with a Vortex Defender-ST optic.

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