

# THE ARMORY

LIFE

SPRING 2025  
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VORTEX  
DEFENDER-ST

## ECHELON 4.0C COMPACT 9MM

P. 10

SAFARILAND/HALEY  
STRATEGIC INCOG X





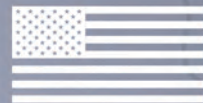
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MODEL  
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.75 MOA  
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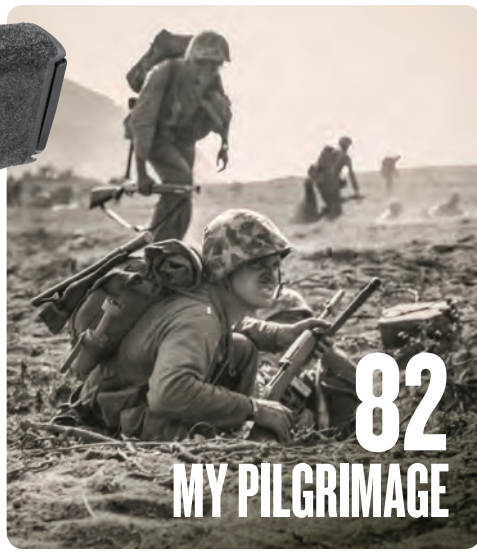


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IMAGE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES (74250555, 127-GR-90-109975)



IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

MIKE HUMPHRIES

**W** E'RE PROUD TO PRESENT to you the Spring 2025 issue of *The Armory Life* print magazine. This issue is packed with great content, from our cover story on the new compact Echelon 4.0C pistol to in-depth product reviews and much more.

Starting on page 10, we have none other than Massad Ayoob review the Echelon 4.0C pistol. Applying his unrivaled experience and expertise, Ayoob gives us his take on this impressive new addition to the Echelon line. From its serialized chassis to its innovative optics mounting system, the author ensures every detail of this compact 9mm is analyzed and assessed.

Immediately following the cover story, Jeremy Tremp interviews Smith Enterprise founder and M1A/M14 maestro, Ron Smith. Renowned and highly respected in both military and civilian

circles for his work on this revered platform, Smith gives us the inside scoop on the ins and outs of this classic rifle. Check out the story, starting on page 16.

In addition, we have Capt. Dale Dye, USMC (Ret.) take us back to the black sands of Iwo Jima to commemorate the 80th anniversary of that brutal battle during World War II. From the first landings on the beach to the iconic flag raising on Mount Suribachi to the final victory, Dye charts the path — and sacrifices — of these American heroes. Turn to page 82 to learn more.

Want to know about the latest

and greatest Springfield Armory firearms as well as exciting new accessories and gear? Then check out our reviews of the 1911 DS Prodigy in Coyote Brown, the Model 2020 Redline 6.5 Creedmoor bolt-action rifle, Stan Chen Custom 1911 EMP parts, Speer's Gold Dot G2 defensive ammunition, and much more.

As always, I'm very interested in hearing your thoughts. Please feel free to reach out to me at [support@thearmorylife.com](mailto:support@thearmorylife.com), and let me know what you think about both the content in the magazine and on the website.

So, welcome to the Spring 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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IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



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# IS .45 POWER A MYTH?



IMAGE: HORNADY



# WWII'S RISKIEST MISSION?



IMAGE: ELMER PANKRATZ



# DON'T MAKE THIS EDC MISTAKE



IMAGE: MAX JACOBSEN/@PNW-PEW



# LOSING AN ARM'S-LENGTH GUNFIGHT





IMAGE: SENIOR AIRMAN SEAN CARNES/U.S. AIR FORCE

# WOULD YOU SURVIVE THIS?



IMAGE: JOHN MCKENZIE/DOWN RANGE PHOTOGRAPHY

# WHAT'S TOO MANY GUNS?

# WHY YOU'LL WANT YOUR EDC TO FAIL



# WHEN CRIMINALS WIN



IMAGE: CLAYTON WALKER



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BF909379

HECKLER & KOCH  
X

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

# S MORE

**THE COMPACT 4.0C 9MM  
DOWNSIZES THE DUTY-GRADE  
ECHELON INTO AN EDC-READY  
PACKAGE.**

MASSAD AYOUB





The author tested the Echelon 4.0C with a Vortex Defender-ST red dot and Safariland/Haley Strategic Incog X IWB holster. Note the extended 18-round magazine and Kore Essentials buffalo leather gun belt.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

**THE SPRINGFIELD ARMORY** Echelon 9mm made a big splash at its original introduction. This was due to its unique approach of interchangeable grip modules, chassis-style Central Operating Group fire control unit, the excellent Variable Interface System mounting system for optics, and many other innovative features. With such a modular-style design, it was inevitable that other variations would follow. Newest is a downsized compact 9mm version dubbed the Echelon 4.0C.

If you've been watching the Echelon line, you have probably noticed the numbering system in the product names. For example, the full-size model is called the Echelon 4.5F, indicating it has a 4.5" barrel and is a "full-size" variant. This new version is the 4.0C, and you can probably follow what that means. It has a 4" barrel and is a "compact" variant. It also features a shortened grip frame that houses a flush-fit, 15-round magazine (compared to the 17-rounder of the full-size Echelon).

While officially dubbed a compact, this type of configuration is often described as a "Goldilocks gun" by many: Not too small and not too big, but "just right."

It gives a full grasp and a good sight radius, but conceals well under a jacket or an untucked shirt. The shortened butt still has an ample 15 rounds in its flush-fit magazine, and the pistol comes packed with an additional extended 18-round magazine.

### SOME DETAILS

In addition to all the design elements that made this chassis-style, striker-fired 9mm pistol a hit, attention has been paid to the fine points. The iron sights are

comprised of a big green tritium/luminescent circle set in the front post and a U-notch rear with white outline, a configuration the company calls its "U-Dot" system. This sight set-up has proven highly effective on the company's

## ECHELON 4.0C



CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4"-4.7"
WEIGHT	24-25 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.25"-8"
SIGHTS	U-Dot/three-dot tritium
GRIPS	Grip module
ACTION	Chassis, striker-fired
FINISH	Black Melonite
CAPACITY	15+1 (one magazine), 18+1 (one magazine)
MSRP	\$679-\$739



hugely popular Hellcat micro-compact series. The Echelon 4.0C is also offered with three-dot tritium sights as an option.

As I mentioned, the Echelon pistol features the Variable Interface System for mounting optics. In case you are not familiar with it, this system features a patent-

pending mounting system that allows you to mount more than 30 of today's most popular optics directly to the slide without adapter plates. This is achieved through a movable self-locking pin system. In most cases, this allows you to mount the optic low enough to co-witness the pistol's iron sights through it.

The pistol is designed to be fully ambidextrous, with not only a fully ambi magazine release but also an ambi slide lock/slide release lever design. While the slide lock levers are small to keep a straight-thumbs hold from over-riding them and preventing the slide from locking open when empty, I still found them faster than tugging the slide to chamber a round on a slide-lock reload.

The takedown lever of the pistol is finely stippled and lines up with a similarly stippled protrusion just ahead of it, which is mirrored on the opposite side. This provides something of a shelf for the support-hand thumb. Some may choose to apply downward pressure to it to help keep the muzzle down. I found it worked better for me with the thumb pressing into the frame.

Specifically, this latter feature has two big advantages. One is that it keeps the support hand thumb the hell away from the slide. Many shooters inadvertently put that thumb on the slide, which causes them to have to re-grip it between shots. It can also add friction to the slide, which could cause a malfunction.

Those built-in "finger pads" also serve as register points so the trigger finger can feel that it's straight on the frame and not in the triggerguard at any time when the gun is drawn but is not actually being fired. This is a definite safety feature that more gunmakers should emulate in this writer's opinion.

# ECHELON 4.0C



## ADDING SOME TEXTURE

I mentioned the stippling. Anyone who has run a Hellcat will recognize this stippling as the company's "Adaptive Grip Texture." They describe it as a "custom pressure-activated grip texture"

featuring tall pyramids with flattened tops and shorter ones that come to a point. The former ensures comfort in the waistband, while the latter enhances your hold as you tighten your grip.

More of this light, comfortable stippling is found on the triggerguard. First, it is at the front for those who like to place their support hand's index finger there. Secondly, it is under the triggerguard. I for one appreciate the latter because my preferred grasp is a "wedge hold" with the support-hand index finger a bit ahead of the others and pulled in tight to

apply upward pressure to the triggerguard.

Our test gun's trigger had a relatively short but still very palpable light "take-up" as it moved rearward, then presenting the trigger finger with a "wall" of firmer resistance which broke cleanly with very little "backlash" or sudden rearward movement after trigger release. Trigger return was "short and sweet," conducive to accurate rapid fire.

## IN ACTION

For testing, the pistol was fitted out with a 3 MOA Vortex Defender-ST red dot optic direct-mounted to the slide, which matched up nicely with the pistol and allowed for co-witnessing the excellent iron sights.

The initial tryout of the pistol involved three testers, two male and one female, and all award-winning shooters. All three gave top marks to the short Echelon's feel and balance, and fit to the hand.

As a note, I want to point out that the Echelon 4.0C — like all Echelon variants — features an interchangeable backstrap system on the grip module. The pistol comes with three backstraps included — small, medium and large — for customizing the grip to your hand. Each of the backstraps also features an integrated armorers tool.

On the range, recoil of the 9mm pistol was mild as expected, with the slide tracking smoothly back on target even during flat-out sustained rapid fire.

Both the 15- and the 18-round magazines were easy to load all the way up. We particularly appreciated the short Echelon's reloading speed. The ambi mag release buttons allowed use of the trigger finger to dump empty magazines, which we found faster and easier than using our thumbs. The built-in flare in the magazine well made insertion easy.

Even when the slide was forward, both magazines easily locked into place when fully loaded. Some other guns require you to practically pound the mag in when it's completely full, which can lead to a failure in a hurried closed-slide reload. Not this one.

## ACCURACY

Considering the oft-quoted standard that a service pistol should be able to put five shots in four inches at 25 yards, this gun passed with everything firing standing and unsupported: 3.40" with 115-gr. Federal 9BPLE +P+ JHP, 3.90" with 124-gr. Blazer Brass FMJ, and 3.80" with Winchester 147-gr. jacketed truncated cone. That's consistent: less than half an inch apart in group size between the three loads, all groups measured to the nearest 0.05".

Next, testing was done hand-held from a Matrix rest on a concrete bench at 25 yards. Testing has shown us that with this method, measuring the best three of the five shots will generally give about the same result as all five from a machine rest. This is useful since most of our readers don't have a machine rest to compare our results with their sample of the same model, but can easily do bench rest testing. "Best three" group measurements were 1.20" with the Federal +P+, 1.30" with



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

the Blazer ball, and 2.35" with the 147-gr. Winchester.

The most important thing is reliability. One-hand with either hand, small shooter or large, hollowpoint or jacketed truncated cone or round nose FMJ, everything we ran through the test pistol worked 100%. There were zero malfunctions of any kind with hundreds of rounds through it so far.

## CONCEALED CARRY


History shows us this size of pistol conceals well, and the new Echelon 4.0C is no exception. I carried it for a day in the excellent Safariland/Haley Strategic Incog X inside-the-waistband (IWB) holster. It was fitted out with the optional "Mag Caddy" for carrying a back-up magazine.

It works well in appendix carry, which is especially suitable for a carry optic-equipped handgun like the compact Echelon, since its greater height rests across the broader surface of the abdomen. During my testing, I found no sharp edges digging into the body with the pistol topped off with the Vortex Defender-ST.

**The compact grip module of the 4.0C pistol comes with three interchangeable backstraps in small, medium and large. Note how each has an integrated armorer's tool.**

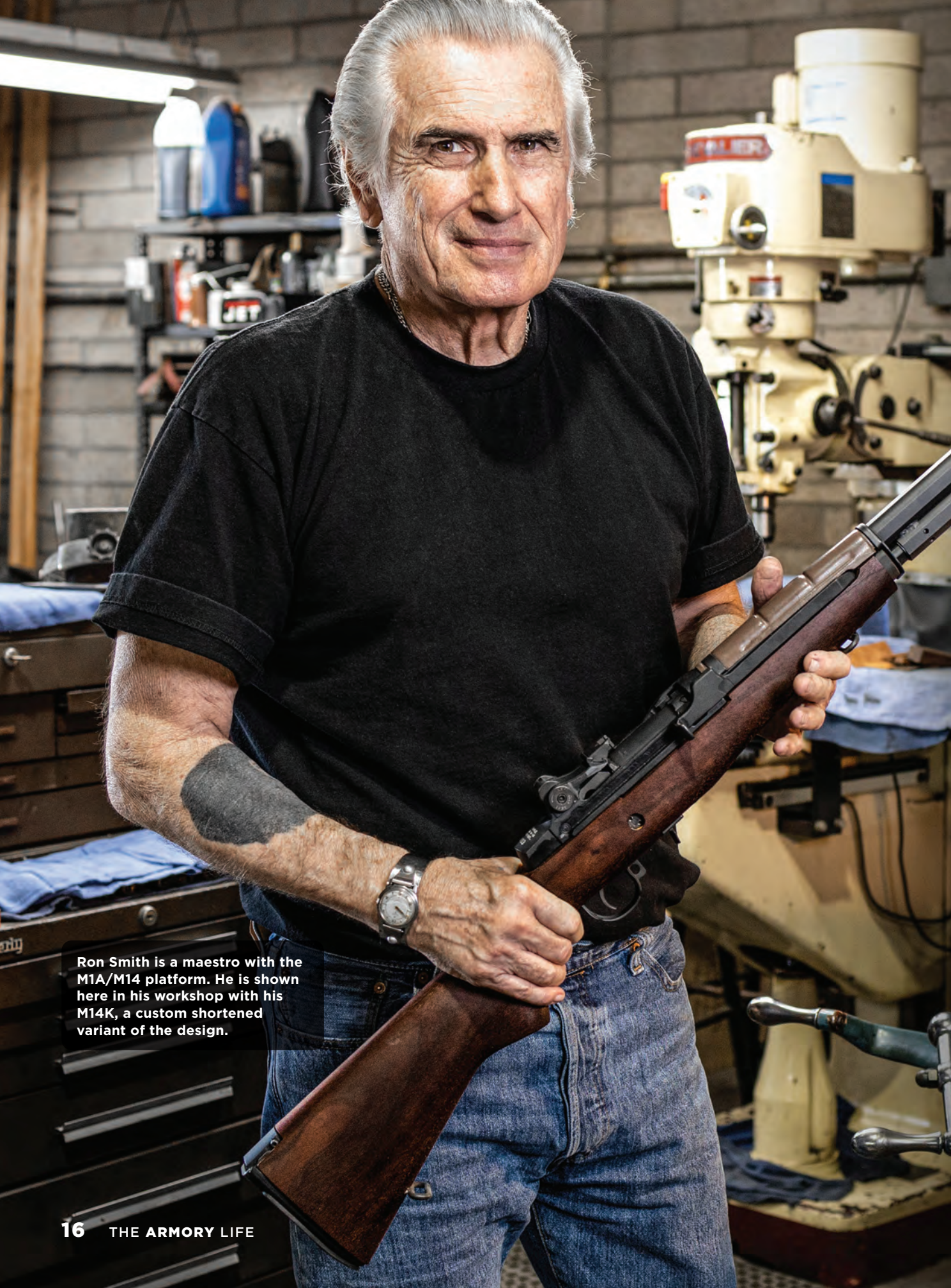
## CONCLUSION

The pistol is offered in both U-Dot and three-dot tritium versions with one 15-round and one 18-round magazine, as well as restricted locale variants in 15-round-only and 10-round-only configurations (all come with two magazines). There is also a threaded version with an extended 4.7" barrel with 1/2x28 threading and three-dot tritium sights. MSRP is from \$679 to \$739.

Considering that the original Echelon has already met with such strong acceptance in its full-size configuration, I won't be surprised if this new compact version becomes even more popular. 

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM  
STORE.SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM  
KOREESSENTIALS.COM  
SAFARILAND.COM  
VORTEXOPTICS.COM



Ron Smith is a maestro with the M1A/M14 platform. He is shown here in his workshop with his M14K, a custom shortened variant of the design.

# RON SMITH

**JEREMY TREMP**

**I RECENTLY HAD** an opportunity to sit down with Ron Smith of Smith Enterprise, Inc. for an exclusive interview for *The Armory Life*. Smith is an unquestioned master of the M1A/M14 family of firearms, and his work is renowned and respected in both military and civilian circles.

Founder of Smith Enterprise, Ron Smith was one of the men brought in during the early years of America's War on Terror to get the M14 rifles back into fighting shape and updated for use.

These rifles would be intended for use by the 2nd Infantry Division, 10th Mountain Division, 25th Infantry Division, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment and more.

These rebuilt M14 rifles needed to be capable of 1 MOA accuracy, and they would be going into the hands of designated marksmen.

The rifle that was ultimately delivered for use to these units was the now fabled M21A5 "Crazy Horse" 7.62mm rifle developed by Ron Smith and Smith Enterprise.

I'd like to thank Mr. Smith for taking the time to do this Q&A session with *The Armory Life*.

**The Armory Life (TAL):** How long have you been working in the firearms industry as a gunsmith?

**Ron Smith (RS):** My family has been in the ordnance business since 1910. I started my apprenticeship in 1964. I'm 73 now and I've been at this ever since. That and the military is all I've ever known. You know, I joined the Marine Corps in '68, spent time in the U.S. Army, National Guard and the Army Reserves, but I always came back to the family business.

**TAL:** Over the time when you were developing products for

the U.S. Military like your remarkable Vortex flash suppressor, did you think of it from the perspective of, "if I were a service member this is what I would want or need" based on your own military experience?

**RS:** If we'd had our Vortex flash suppressor back then, there'd be a lot fewer names on the black wall. In triple canopy jungle, you're shooting at muzzle flashes. I got to thinking, "We can conceal this flash and I think I know how to do it." And we did. Famed firearms expert Peter G. Kokalis tried out our Vortex and he said they made a big difference.

**TAL:** We know you are a fan of the M14. Did you carry one during your time in service?

**RS:** I did. I had an H&R and it was a rattle trap, but the thing was accurate. I mean, it was a wore-out old gun, but it worked, and it worked well. Most of 'em I saw were pretty well worn. When the battalion commanders would rotate out, the new ones would try to tell us we had to swap to the M16. We told them we weren't interested and stuck with our M14 rifles. Sometimes we were even having to de-link M60 belts to get the ammo.

**TAL:** So, you preferred the M14 over the M16 at that time?

**RS:** Oh, hell yeah. Yeah. But the M14, how these guys talk about, "oh, it's not controllable." It is, too. You just gotta get into it, and hold onto it. You know, but if you're 150 pounds, it's a little difficult.

**TAL:** What makes the M14 so special to you?

**RS:** Well, there's a lot of reasons. With that rifle you could be in the worst conditions, and it doesn't matter whether you're in the stand or a rice patty, that thing will run. I mean, it will keep going. The M1 Garand, although as good as it is, it's got that closed-in chamber; you get a bunch of stuff in there, and you can kind of have a problem. With the M14, You just pull the bolt back, stick it in the water, put another mag and start going. You know, rinse all the mud and stuff out of it and you're good. It just never failed.

**TAL:** Do you feel like the M14 got short-changed?

**RS:** Well, yeah, because of politics. [If] they put their resources into making an M14 with a shorter barrel and maybe a different gas system, probably would've been a better deal.

**TAL:** Circling back to the Vortex flash hider, was there anything like it on the market beforehand?

**RS:** Not like that. Not exactly like it. There were some things that were kind of similar, but the flutes were really long. They broke easy. I don't think these guys knew what kind of material to use. So, we kept testing it and testing it, shortening it and shortening it, until we got to where we developed a certain link that we couldn't go any shorter on. We found the optimal link on the flutes, and that's what we went with. We didn't really know how long to do it, so we had to experiment around until we found it. We put a lot of money into that; an enormous amount of money.

**TAL:** How did the opportunity come about for you to breathe new life into the M14 platform for the U.S. Military?

**RS:** When we got involved in Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a general in the Second Infantry Division that really got us started in all of this. Major Zimmerman was tasked by the commanding general to get ahold of us. So, they sent us several hundred M14s. Well, we got 'em in here and, oh my God. They couldn't deploy with those things. I mean, we even have pictures of ones where the stock was broken at the wrist, with two knitting needles and duct tape holding it together. Most of the bores were completely shot out; they were all in various types of bad condition.

We re-barreled every one of 'em. We were working with George Wilson, and with those barrels we could shoot sub-moa. We cryogenically treated all those barrels. Then we salt-bath nitrated them, and we added our War Fighter Gas System. So, we supplied every rifle that we made with our Vortex flash hider. When we got done with them, we had to call it the something really catchy, so we came up with Crazy Horse System. So, they adopted it as the Crazy Horse M14 sniper system.

**TAL:** Did the Crazy Horse come about because they realized that their current platforms were insufficient in the battlefield at that time?

**RS:** They didn't need a new weapons platform developed. They could just take one that was already there, and make it better. They also knew they needed it done within their lifetime and we could make that happen. The general knew if he went through the system, they'd still be waiting. You know, we're in a war — they didn't have time to jack around. So, we came up with it, got it done, delivered it ahead of time.



Smith's family has been in the ordnance business for more than a century. He began his apprenticeship around six decades ago.



**Smith is shown here prepping one of his Crazy Horse M1A custom rifles at the range for testing.**

**TAL:** What accomplishments are you most proud of during your time so far at Smith Enterprise?

**RS:** What we did in the war, what we did for the Second Infantry Division. We're the only civilian company since the Vietnam War to send M14's in combat in any type of quantity. And that was a

pretty big accomplishment for us. A little outfit like us? It's a big deal. But see, I didn't have to go ask anybody, you know. I'm a trained journeyman; I know what I'm doing. We knew what was right and where to go to get it done.

**TAL:** What's the best way for some-

**Smith is one of the most respected M14/M1A custom gunsmiths around, bringing decades of experience to every project.**

one to get their hands on a Crazy Horse rifle from Smith Enterprise?

**RS:** Call us. We've converted a lot of Springfield M1A's to the Crazy Horse. A lot of guys will ask me, what receiver should I use? And I say, go buy yourself a basic M1A and we'll turn it into a Crazy Horse.

**TAL:** What's one thing that you would like people to know about Smith Enterprise that they might not already know?

**RS:** We're the best there is in the business. There's nobody else that can do what we do. They just can't. They don't have the training. A lot of the skilled guys are gone, but we are still here making the best guns we can.

**TAL:** Thank you, Ron, for such an insightful look into your history and company. It's been an honor chatting with you.

**RS:** My pleasure. 🤝

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:**

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# THE RED ZONE

**TRIJICON'S RCR CLOSED-EMITTER  
OPTIC PUSHES RUGGED, RED DOT  
PERFORMANCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL.**

**WILL DABBS, MD**

**NOT THAT LONG AGO**, the thought of having an optic on your pistol would have seemed like a pipe dream. Sure, there were large, bulky ones available for competition-style pistols, but the notion of having one on a defensive-style pistol that would be rugged and reliable — as well as reasonably sized — seemed like a bridge too far.

Fast forward to today, and you will find a broad range of miniaturized optics for pistols ranging in configuration from full-size models all the way down to micro-sized guns. How we got here is an interesting tale indeed.

### TOWARD THE FUTURE

Like most wars, the one in Vietnam saw a great deal of technological advancement. Toward the very end of the war, American special operators began pioneering the sorts of tactical rifle accessories that have become commonplace today. One of the more revolutionary examples was low-light tactical gunsights on individual combat rifles. All that really began back with the Son Tay raid.

The technical appellation of the mission was Operation Ivory Coast. Staged in November of 1970, the objective was to rescue American POWs held in the North Vietnamese prison camp at Son Tay. The shooters were drawn from American special forces operators with extensive combat experience in theater.

The raid was ultimately a flawlessly executed failure. Despite there being thousands of NVA troops stationed within a few miles of the camp, the assault force successfully got in and got out just as planned. It was simply that the POWs had been moved to a different facility immediately prior to the operation. However, the U.S. military still learned a great deal from the experience.

For starters, Son Tay represented a whole lot of jointness.

Troops from various services were forced to work together to synergistically integrate their disparate skills and capabilities. That spirit thrives in the Joint Special Operations Command today. On a micro level, the Green Berets who did the shooting optimized their small arms for night-time operations.

In the case of the M79 grenade launchers they were using, that meant luminous tape affixed to the ladder sights to establish range holdovers in the dark. For the carbines carried by the primary shooters, many of them were equipped with the revolutionary OEG (Occluded Eye Gunsight). These OEG's had first been discovered in the pages of a gun magazine, and I have read that the Son Tay operators had to reinforce the mounts with electrical tape to ensure they were adequately robust.

The OEG's were lyrically successful. By the time the American assault force egressed, they had killed numerous NVA guards while suffering but two minor injuries. A large part of that success was likely attributable to the rarefied gear the assaulters had at their disposal.

Now, fast forward half a century, and the landscape is unrecogniz-



The Trijicon RCR closed-emitter optic, shown here on a Springfield Armory Echelon, delivers rugged and reliable performance.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



able from what it was back at the height of the Vietnam War. If you want to sit at the cool kids' table at your local range, you'd best have something electronic and sparkly mounted atop your favorite firearm.

Today's red dot optics run the gamut from dirt cheap to rarefied, with everything in between. The new Trijicon RCR reflects the current state of the art.

### THE DETAILS

Trijicon has a hard-earned reputation for building duty-grade products. In fact, its Ruggedized Miniature Reflex (RMR) Type 2 was selected by the U.S.

Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) for the Handgun Reflex Sight (HRS)

Employing the common RMR footprint, the RCR features a tough 7075-T6 aluminum housing and multi-coated lenses.

Contract. This, in addition to the U.S. Military's use of the Advanced Combat Optical Gunsight (ACOG), ensured that Trijicon made products for those who demand the best.

Enter the Ruggedized Closed Reflex (RCR) optic. Trijicon's RCR is a closed-emitter red dot sight designed for use on full-sized handguns as well as on carbines. In case you are not familiar with the benefits of an optic like this versus an open-emitter design, a closed-emitter system is even more capable of withstanding difficult environments.

The enclosed design of the RCR prevents debris from blocking the LED-powered emitter, as well as offers greater protection for the internals from damage.

Enclosed within a robust 7075-T6 aluminum chassis, the RCR is arguably the toughest miniature electronic gunsight on the market. An RMR-pattern footprint makes melding the RCR with a superlative pistol like the Springfield Armory Echelon a breeze. This

is due in no small part to that pistol's Variable Interface System,

which allows you to direct mount the optic to the slide.

The RCR is the ultimate result of generations of mechanical evolution. Patented capstan screws allow easy and secure mounting without a separate mounting

## TRIJICON RCR

<b>OPTIC TYPE</b>	Closed-emitter reflex
<b>RETICLE</b>	3.25 MOA, red
<b>MAGNIFICATION</b>	1X
<b>WEIGHT</b>	1.95 oz.
<b>DIMENSIONS</b>	1.8" (L), 1.2" (W), 1.3" (H)
<b>MOUNT</b>	RMR footprint
<b>BODY</b>	7075-T6 aluminum, waterproof to 20 meters
<b>OPERATION</b>	10 brightness settings, including three NV and one "super bright"
<b>BATTERY/LIFE</b>	Single CR2032, six years of use on setting five
<b>MSRP</b>	\$1,019

plate. This bit is really cool. To mount the sight, you get the special screws started and then lock them down by twisting them from the side using the shaft of an included Allen wrench.

The battery mounts from the top, so you can replace it without dismounting the optic from the firearm or upsetting your zero. A standard CR2032 button cell can be expected to run for six years at a

mid-level power setting, so you obviously won't have to fret with that very often. The sight is also designed to co-witness with most iron sights as it has the same "deck height" as the RMR.

Elevation and windage adjustments require nothing more complex than a small coin or cartridge rim. External controls and internal electronics are designed to survive in the harshest of environments. The sight is certified down to 66 feet underwater and temperatures ranging from -40 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

Illumination settings are push-button adjustable through 10 levels of brightness, to include three that are night vision compatible and one "super bright" setting. The reticle is a standard 3.25-MOA red dot. The all-up weight of the sight is less than two ounces. On a superlative chassis like the Echelon, expect no degradation to reliability or performance.

### PRACTICALITIES

If you can set up a computer printer, you are overqualified to mount the Trijicon RCR to your Springfield Armory Echelon. Since the RCR features the RMR footprint, as noted it can directly mount to the slide of the Echelon due to the pistol's Variable Interface System optics mount.

For those not familiar with this system, the Echelon uses sets of self-locking movable pins that can be configured to fit the patterns of an extremely wide range of popular red dots. In all, over 30 different optics can be mounted to the Echelon without having to buy anything extra.

Once installed, beginning the zeroing process for the RCR can be done in your living room without firing a shot. Point the empty gun in a safe direction and adjust the dot until it overlies your iron sights. As the dot co-witnesses, there is no optical offset.



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

# TRIJICON RCR

The RCR works by projecting a red dot aiming point onto a spherical mirror. This mirror sports a partially silvered multi-layer dielectric dichroic coating that only reflects the red spectrum, while allowing most other wavelengths to pass through. With both eyes open, the dot hovers over your target no matter the circumstances or range. The RCR's generous field of view makes dot acquisition fast and easy, even under pressure.

Operation is intuitive and stupid-proof. Practice with the rig until the dot pops up into your field of view of its own accord and you are set to go. The end result will cut your times on the range and enhance your survival everywhere else.

I tried the RCR out at the range on my Echelon pistol and found the two to make a superlative combo. I've spent a good amount of time behind the Echelon and appreciate its ergonomics, so it was a great foundation for trying out this optic.

I was able to quickly pick up the dot as

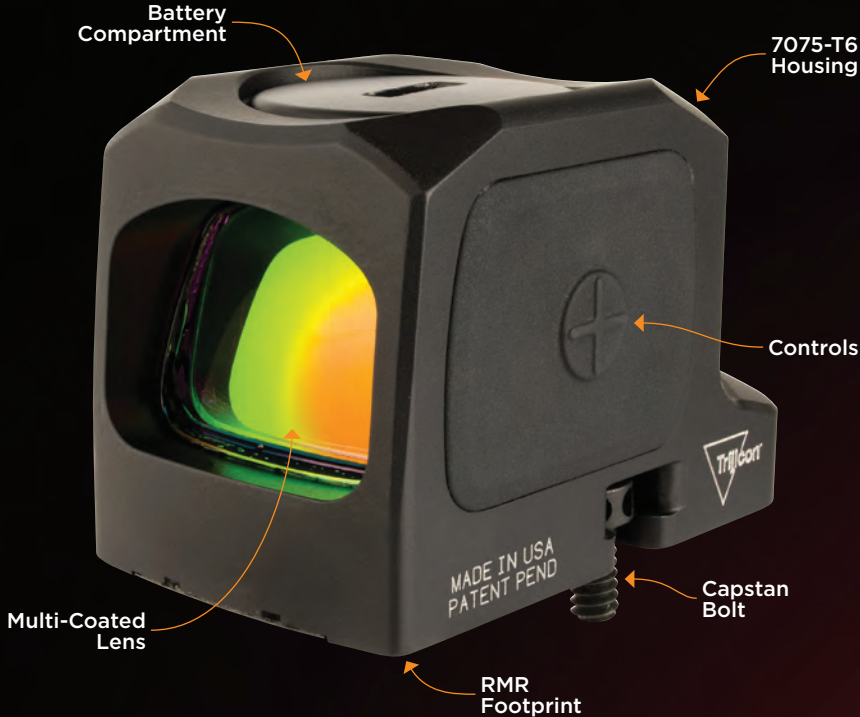


IMAGE: TRIJICON

I raised the pistol to eye level, and my speed on engaging targets was improved over using irons only.

While my testing did not include any environmental or "torture" testing, I will say that the quality and durability of the optics comes through as soon as you use it.

## CONCLUSION

With an MSRP of \$1,019, the new RCR is hardly cheap. However, Trijicon is a foundational name in modern optics. An Army buddy with whom I was visiting recently said they used a couple of different optics in garrison, but standardized with Trijicon ACOGs when they deployed downrange.

Trijicon just makes consistently awesome stuff. Lightweight, precise and tough, the Trijicon RCR represents the cutting edge of hard-use optics. 

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

TRIJICON.COM  
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IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The Springfield Armory Echelon's Variable Interface System allows for mounting the Trijicon RCR, with its RMR footprint, directly to the pistol's slide.



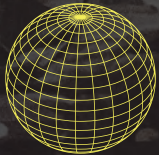
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The Sandman X is the pinnacle of Dead Air's unwavering commitment to performance and an evolution to the venerable Sandman line. The Sandman X incorporates decades of research to give users the most pleasurable shooting experience possible by optimizing sound, balancing backpressure, and eliminating flash to increase performance for semi-automatic and bolt action rifles alike.



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COMPACT



# WITH THE




IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

# THE FLOW

## HAS SUREFIRE'S **SOCOM556-RC3** PERFECTED FLOW-THROUGH SUPPRESSOR TECHNOLOGY?

PAUL CARLSON



**AS A FULL-TIME DEPUTY** and Tactical Response Team member in northeast Ohio, I demand a lot from my equipment. That is particularly true when it comes to my rifle. A suppressed 5.56mm SAINT Victor short-barreled rifle (SBR), it spends more than 200 miles every shift residing in a security drawer in the back of my cruiser — often over some very rough terrain.



direct-gas-impingement rifle knows exactly what I'm talking about here.

When SureFire announced the release of the SOCOM556-RC3 fast-attach/low back-pressure suppressor, I was immediately interested. I reached out to the powers that be, and it wasn't long before I had an RC3 on my SAINT rifle.

### INNOVATIVE BENEFITS

According to SureFire, the RC3 is the result of decades of the company's innovation in materials and manufacturing techniques. In addition, SureFire points out that this has been com-

Despite this consistent abuse, it needs to be ready to go at a moment's notice. I deploy my rifle regularly, and when I do, the stakes are high. The citizens I serve, my colleagues, and I myself depend on the performance of tools like this rifle, so I am always looking to maximize its durability, reliability and performance.

When I first started as a deputy, my agency approved my SBR and its attached suppressor for duty use. While the suppressor I pressed into service at that time wasn't perfect, it performed. I was constantly verifying that the suppressor was properly affixed to my rifle, and I found myself, at times, frustrated with the dirty air I was breathing on the range with my carbon-caked rifle. Anyone who has run a suppressed

bined with an extensive flow dynamics study.

Additionally, the company claims that it offers a 60% reduction to back-pressure in the shooter's face (compared to the RC2).

While SureFire may not have invented the flow-through technology utilized in the SOCOM556-RC3, they very well may have perfected it.

No matter how you cut it, firing a 5.56mm rifle produces a tremendous amount of gas. Traditional suppressors force those gases back through the gas tube, into the bolt and toward the shooter's face. Sustained fire results in a cloud of "smog" and a layer of carbon on the inside of the rifle.

Utilizing accessories like gas-diverting charging handles can

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

help, but a full training session is sure to result in a dirty rifle and what would seem like a potential case of black lung.

Flow-through suppressors such as the RC3 are a different breed. Instead of forcing excess gases back into the rifle, this gas instead flows out of the muzzle end of the suppressor. This design aids immensely with the previously mentioned issues. Gases are forced away from the shooter, resulting in cleaner air and a cleaner rifle.

Possibly even more importantly, the gases are directed away from the operating system during firing. The impact (or lack of impact) on the internals of the rifle are significant.

Right or wrong, I tend to run my rifles with excess gas to ensure that I get full reliability. As a



IMAGE: SUREFIRE

**SureFire suppressors have a long tradition of use by not only law enforcement agencies, but also military units.**

and the SureFire RC3 suppressor definitely delivers on this front.

### SETTING UP THE RC3

Attaching the RC3 requires the use

rotational stopping point of the muzzle device when threaded — is very important. My RC3 lives on my SAINT rifle, so I always ensure the locking lug of the muzzle device is at the six o'clock position so I can always remove and reattach my suppressor without thought.

To achieve proper timing, I turned to Precision Armament's Accu-Washer

result, adding a suppressor means even more gas being pushed through the rifle.

The flow-through design of SureFire's RC3 reduces back-pressure, thereby minimizing the impact on the bolt-carrier group and minimizing the need for an adjustable gas block. This reduces both complexity and potential failure points.

Obviously, anything that reduces complexity and increases reliability is a significant win for a duty rifle that is counted upon,

of a SureFire muzzle device. You can choose between options like a muzzle brake; three or four prong open-tine flash suppressors; or a traditional birdcage-type, closed-tine flash suppressor. Whichever muzzle device you choose to attach, make certain it is compatible with the RC3.

Depending on the muzzle device you select, timing — the

**The RC3 is a flow-through suppressor that reduces the back-pressure to allow the user distraction-free operation.**





The simple exterior of the SureFire RC3 belies the complex engineering it represents.

Muzzle Device Alignment System. Following the directions was simple. After installing the first alignment washer, I referenced the included table, installed the correct washer and torqued down my flash hider in perfect alignment. There was no need to guess and stack shim washers and risk a misalignment of the muzzle device, thereby increasing the risk of damage to the suppressor you are using.

Mounting the RC3 on your rifle is simple and easy. First, ensure that the locking collar release lever set screw of the suppressor is aligned with the mounting slot on the suppressor. Slide the suppressor completely onto the muzzle device then simply turn the locking collar counter clockwise until it stops. You'll hear the ratchet working.

To remove the RC3, depress the release lever, then rotate the locking collar clockwise on the unit

until it stops. You can then slide the RC3 off the muzzle device of your rifle at this point. It's really just that simple.

## PERFORMANCE

Once I had the RC3 set up on my SBR, a proper break-in was the first step. SureFire recommends

a 100-round break-in period to reach optimal flash and sound suppression. I can only assume it's necessary to remove any residues left from the manufacturing process. Obviously, you need to verify proper function and your zero. Also, who doesn't want to take their new suppressor out for a spin?

I found no appreciable difference between the first round I fired compared to the 500th (I decided to really run it that first time out). I'm not recommending you skip your break-in period, I simply found the RC3 to be a performer right out of the box.

One thing to be aware of with a suppressor is potential point-of-impact shift. I had a chance

to speak with some other RC3 users and learned that some did experience a shift while others did not. I personally found that at 50 yards I had a consistent shift of 3" low with the suppressor attached versus when I shot unsuppressed. This isn't an issue, but rather just a fact to know of and understand.

As noted, my suppressor lives on my SAINT, so I simply zero with the suppressor on. If I am forced to shoot unsuppressed, I now know I simply need to hold for 3" at 50.

I found the SureFire RC3 to be a very flat-shooting suppressor. Paired with some Winchester 55-gr. rounds, I was easily able to track my dot between shots with a slight 12 o'clock lift. The rifle settled right back on the point of aim, even off-hand at 50 yards.

## THE IMPACT

Despite what you may see — and not hear — in the movies, suppressed 5.56 isn't totally quiet due to the rounds breaking the sound barrier in flight. However, shooting a rifle suppressed is infinitely more pleasant than running wide open.

The SureFire RC3 certainly does its job of easing the decibels on the shooter. More importantly, the RC3 suppresses the flash wonderfully. I filmed many strings of fire at 120 frames per second hoping to catch some flash. It didn't happen. This was true even in the break-in period. My old suppressor, which is not a flow-through design, exhibited flash on virtually every shot.

Now on to the elephant in the room. Blowback. Quite frankly, the SureFire RC3 is a dream to shoot. I ran some head-to-head tests against my old can, and the difference was night and day. With the old can, I was breathing in tons of gas. After a 20-round

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string of rapid fire, it would make my eyes water. With the RC3, when I shot 20 rounds of rapid-fire, there was simply no gas in my face.

### MY MANTRA

At a recent SWAT school I attended, they taught a beneficial make-ready mantra to help ensure the readiness of the rifle. Sling, stock, sights, light, laser, suppressor. The intent is to work your rifle from the sling to the suppressor, ensuring that each critical system is viable and set properly for mission success.

As I mentioned before, the aspect of my rifle that consistently needed attention was my suppressor. It routinely needed to be turned back onto my rifle. This was an extra step and an additional worry.

The RC3 features a “fast-attach” design that makes installation and removal quick and easily repeatable.

SureFire’s SOCOM suppressors have long addressed this issue. The ratcheting locking ring in the RC3 suppressor locks positively, virtually guaranteeing that the suppressor stays affixed securely to the rifle. This is designed to prevent the

possibility of a baffle strike and ensure your round goes exactly where you send it.

### WELL WORTH IT

The SureFire RC3’s performance speaks for itself, and the price reflects its capabilities. MSRP for the RC3 sits at \$1,799, so this represents a significant investment for the user.

However, the SureFire brand speaks for itself, and I have no doubt this price reflects the company’s significant investment in research and development for this flagship suppressor.

Yes, there are lower-priced suppressors out there. However, I look at things a bit differently on this subject.

At some point, lives will depend on the tools I have in my toolkit. I’m confident there’s not a single person out there who would want me to show up at their home with a

potentially inferior product when there are lives that are on the line.

The SureFire SOCOM556-RC3 will definitely be living on the sharp end of my rifle.

Of course, everything I write here is my own personal opinion. However, I’m not the only one that feels quite strongly about the RC3 and its capabilities, and I greatly


value the opinions of those in possession of relevant experience.

I’m lucky to have lots of folks with varied backgrounds in my personal and professional life, and I remember a specific conversation with one of those folks during training in which I was taking part.

He summed it up perfectly when he outlined his decision-making process for selecting critical tools. “I went to war with SureFire.” When someone with deep experience like this speaks, I feel that it makes sense to listen. I know I did.

I’m not planning on going to war anytime soon, but I prepare daily for a skirmish in my job as a law enforcement officer. Importantly, I know I can rely on my Springfield SAINT Victor

SBR and the SureFire SOCOM556-RC3. I believe the citizens I’ve sworn to protect can as well — and that is something that is very important to me.

If you’re looking for top-tier suppression performance, the SureFire RC3 should be at the top of your list. It’s on mine. 

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

SUREFIRE.COM  
SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM  
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IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

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# OF ANOTHER



Featuring a polymer grip module and a double-column magazine, this Coyote Brown 1911 DS Prodigy 4.25" AOS offers an impressive amount of 9mm on tap.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

# RECOLOR

## THE PRODIGY IN COYOTE BROWN GIVES 1911 DS FANS AN EYE-CATCHING NEW OPTION.

JOE WOOLLEY

**I AM GOING TO VENTURE THAT**, while many of the readers of *The Armory Life* may be truly “tactical” in training and experience, the vast majority of us could be better described as “practical” in our lives and our gear. Whether the intended purpose is competition, hunting or self-defense, firearms are an important part of that gear.

That “practical” thing kicks in as we choose which firearm to use or carry. I teach my students that a good gun must meet four conditions: It must go bang every time, it must hit what I point it at, it must be chambered in a reasonably large cartridge, and it must fit my hand. Let’s go ahead and add a fifth requirement — it must last. This is a sufficiently large investment that I don’t need to rust solid overnight.

There are quite a few finish treatments that can help my firearms survive the Gulf Coast humidity in which I live. Black Oxide (bluing) and Parkerizing

are a couple of finishes most of us are familiar with. Some, like “Melonite,” use methods that bond a finish to the metal. NiB (nickel boron) and DLC (diamond-like carbon) actually penetrate the surface of the metal to bring reduced friction and corrosion resistance.

### THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Perhaps the most user-friendly coating goes by the name of Cerakote. It is a polymer-ceramic compound that can be applied to wood, polymers, plastics and metal. According to those who are in the know, it can also reduce wear

and tear over time. It provides abrasion, corrosion and chemical resistance. It’s water-resistant and stands up well to impact-created scratches and dings, and it is available in a myriad of colors.

Springfield Armory has been using a variety of corrosion-resistant finishes for years, and Cerakote has certainly been a favorite of late. They announced last year that the Springfield Echelon pistol would be available in Coyote Brown and OD Green, and now the Coyote Brown coloring is being made available on their Prodigy DS 1911 pistol as well! It is available in both the 5” and 4.25” models.

Kudos to Springfield, and very cool for us as we now have a new color option on a great multi-use pistol. The Prodigy that I use for home defense and concealed carry is their black Cerakote model. For those jobs, I like colors that hide in the shadows. For use out

The new Coyote Brown variants of the 1911 DS — available in 5" (top) and 4.25" (bottom) variants — offer shooters exciting new options for this popular pistol.



in the open, Coyote Brown may be a much more versatile choice. We use color all the time outdoors.

Since I live on the Gulf Coast of Texas (where a lack of water is not an issue), scenery tends to be pretty green. The last time I drove to the Shooting, Hunting, Outdoor Trade (S.H.O.T.) Show, the Texas countryside turned brown around Dallas and stayed that way all the way to Las Vegas. Face it, for a lot of this nation, especially the mountains and the West, a brown ceramic finish on your firearm is an eminently practical choice.

### THE FOUNDATION

In basic black, the original Springfield Armory Prodigy 1911 DS was already a great choice as

an EDC pistol. It is chambered in 9mm, which offers several advantages over 40 (+) bores. Recoil impulse is lighter, meaning the muzzle will flip less and allow for faster follow-up shots. Then there is the opportunity, in a properly designed pistol, to carry 25% to 100% more ammo in essentially the same space as a single-stack 1911. I'd call that a win/win.

A 1911-style pistol is one of the places where the "properly designed" criteria comes into play. A single-stack 1911 in 9mm can carry one to two more rounds than a 45 ACP. The double-stack Prodigy from Springfield Armory can more than double it.

Introduced in September of 2022, the Prodigy ships with a

17- as well as a 20-round magazine. Both lengths, as well as an available 26-rounder, are available from the Springfield Armory Store.

While the Prodigy may exhibit the classic 1911 lines many of us still admire, it brings a lot of ultra-modern technology to the game. The slide and frame are machined from forged steel for durability — or at least part of the frame is.

While the forward area of the frame is forged steel, the lower part of it is a molded grip module that is well-covered by Springfield's adaptive grip texture. Think of it as a two-layer grip. You can feel the outer layer with a casual grip making sure the pistol doesn't slide around in your

hand. I tend to grip my pistols hard when I shoot them. As I do so, I can feel that second, more aggressive layer lock in on my hand, making sure I can control the Prodigy well in full recoil.

There is a smooth surface immediately under the triggerguard. The frontstrap of the frame is undercut to allow a higher grip (and better recoil control). The bottom of the triggerguard, where it meets the support-hand index finger, also sports the grip texture as does the forward end of the squared guard for those that like to use the support index finger in front. The magazine release is extended enough to be easily activated without inadvertently dropping mags. The magwell has been nicely beveled.

The controls have been well-executed. The ambidextrous manual thumb safety is wide and long enough to operate easily without it being so big that it digs into the hand. Operation was very positive, even on the right side. The grip safety sports a memory bump that released smoothly and quickly as it was depressed. To us that means that the safety performs as required but still forgives a less than absolutely perfect grip. Both sides of the slide stop are countersunk into the side of the frame. Access was still easy, but we certainly weren't worried about moving the slide stop accidentally.

And let's not forget the AOS (Agency Optic System) optics mounting system on the slide, that allows you to fit a wide range of popular red dot optics to the pistol.

## HANDS-ON

My Prodigy sample is the 4.25" barrel version that is my favorite for carry and home defense. The shorter length may flip just a bit more than its 5" big brother, but I like the cycling speed and the

quick transitions of the shorter model. That said, the Springfield mid-length version still manages to put a little weight out front. The slide and frame are an almost slab-sided unit. When added to the bull barrel, the combo does a great job of taming recoil. Big grasping grooves fore and aft make slide manipulation easy while keeping hands away from muzzles and ejection ports.

Sometimes new is better, and sometimes maybe not. If you have

## COYOTE BROWN 1911 DS PRODIGY

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4.25"/5"
WEIGHT	32.5 oz./33 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.8"/8.5"
SIGHTS	Fiber optic front; black, serrated rear
GRIPS	Polymer, integral
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Cerakote Coyote Brown
CAPACITY	17+1/20+1 (one of each included)
MSRP	\$1,549



en't test-fired the trigger on a good 1911, you really need to do yourself a favor. Initial take up is only about 1/8 inch. Required trigger compression on our sample was about 3.7 lbs. Overtravel was almost nonexistent.

While factory iron sights have improved dramatically over early 1911 models, many now prefer reflex red (or green) sights mounted directly to the slide. The large variety of mounting patterns can create an issue, but Springfield Armory solved many of your po-

tential problems with their AOS shipping as standard equipment on the Prodigy. The slide comes milled for adapter plates that will match most of the red dot optic footprints necessary today. Six different plates are available with an integral rear sight, one of which should work for you.

So, enjoy your Prodigy as is with a great rear sight and a fiber optic front sight. Or order the plate of your choice and mount your optic on that plate, which should still allow you to use the iron sights for back up if needed. The pistol also has a standard cover plate with rear iron sight.

I tested this Prodigy with one of the latest red dots from Vortex. Known for their warranty — if you break it, they fix it or replace it for free — they are also well known for their product. Their Gen II and, more recently, their Gen III Razor long-range scopes have done a great job for me for years.

For this test, I used their Defender-ST model reflex sight with the 3 MOA dot. It provides a large 23x20mm lens in a very small package. The window brings more vertical room than what I normally see. It leaves a lot of open glass to help you find the dot. The AOS system also allows for the inclusion of a rear sight that can still view the front sight over the rear deck of the Vortex Defender. Size and construction parameters are impressive. The whole unit is 1.83" long and weighs less than 1.5 oz. The dot is motion activated and will turn off after 10 minutes with no movement. This Defender-ST allows 10 brightness settings — eight for daylight and the two lowest are night vision compatible. The 7075-aluminum body also contains a polymer shell to help protect it from all those recoil G's.

# 5" COYOTE BROWN 1911 DS PRODIGY



The CR2032 battery loads from the top so zero is not affected by a battery change. The front face of the shell is cross-hatched with "Fast Rack Texturing" to allow the shooter to rack the slide using the red dot and still protect the glass. BTW, this Vortex dot is built on the Leupold DeltaPoint Pro footprint and requires the A15B plate.

## RANGE TIME

Over the course of a very hot July morning and several hundred rounds, this Prodigy ran like a champ. I oiled it lightly once and then let it run. It did extremely well with all three loads, with the


overall average group size coming in at just under 1.25".

The single shot drills were fired at a 3"x5" label, and most of the shots were on the paper with a 1.32 second average from the draw. Note that the splits on the multiple shot drills were pretty stable at about .2 seconds. That's not a limitation of the pistol, that's just as fast as this former Master Class shooter can move his finger anymore.

That said, the vast majority of the shots were solid A Zone hits with occasional C's. Muzzle flip

was minimal on this short gun, and the times reflect that.

## CONCLUSION

The new Coyote Brown 1911 DS Prodigy is a great addition to the Prodigy line. Combining impressive performance with eye-catching good looks, the 4.25" and 5" pistols come in at an MSRP of \$1,549. Be sure to check them out. 

## PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.) COYOTE BROWN 1911 DS PRODIGY 4.25" AOS

LOAD	VELOCITY	ENERGY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
HORNADY 115-GR. CRITICAL DEF.	1,125 fps	323 ft.-lb.	1.1"	1.2"
REMINGTON 115-GR. FMJ	1,116 fps	318 ft.-lb.	0.8"	1.1"
FEDERAL 147-GR. FMJ	993 fps	322 ft.-lb.	1.1"	1.4"

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured in feet per second (fps) by a LabRadar Chronograph. Abbreviations: FMJ (full metal jacket), gr. (grain), fps (feet per second), ft.-lb. (foot pounds of energy).

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

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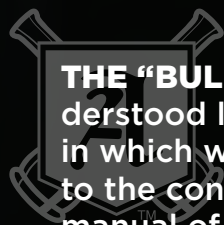
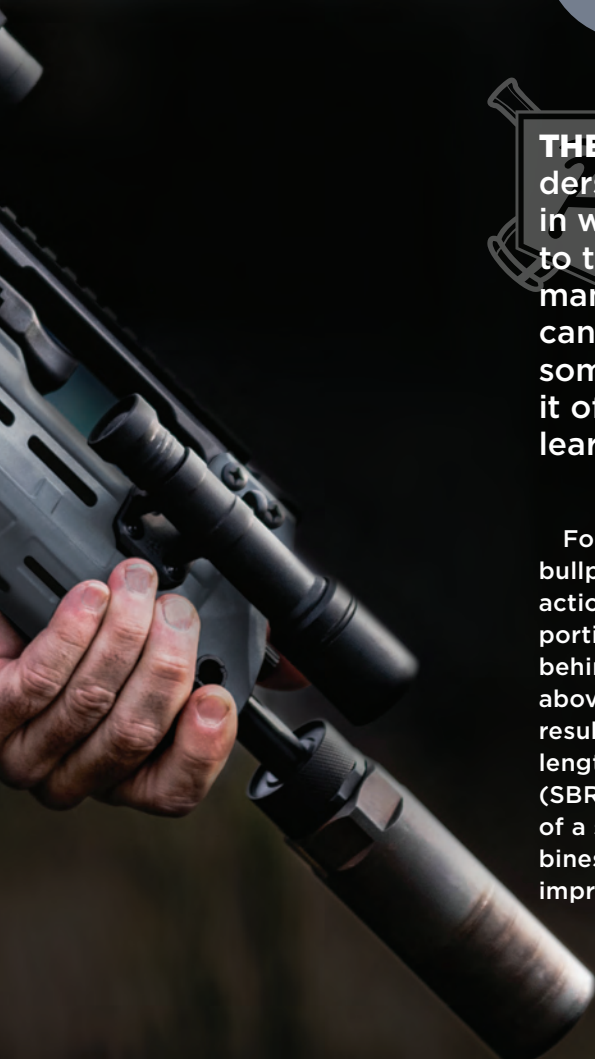
IMAGE: MAX JACOBSEN/PNW-PEW

The Hellion bullpup in gray offers users a 5.56mm that, even with a suppressor installed, is a short and handy defensive firearm.

# ADDES OF GRAY

**THE GRAY HELLION 5.56MM MAY BE SHORT IN LENGTH, BUT IT'S LONG ON PERFORMANCE.**

**WILL DABBS, MD**



**THE “BULLPUP”** might be one of the most misunderstood long guns in the exciting world of firearms in which we live. Yes, there are some loud detractors to the concept, but I’ve always been a fan. While the manual of arms might be different than that AR you can run with your eyes closed and in your sleep, and some can be difficult for southpaws to use, what it offers more than offsets what you might have to learn to use it.

For those not familiar with bullpups, it’s a design where the action is moved back to the rear portion of the rifle, locating it behind the trigger rather than above and forward of it. The result is a rifle with the overall length of a short-barreled rifle (SBR), but with the barrel length of a standard rifle. This combines compact dimensions with impressive performance.

In my humble opinion, the Springfield Armory Hellion is one of the most advanced 5.56mm rifles on Earth, and simply an amazing bullpup design. Featuring impeccable Springfield Armory reliability, unparalleled ergonomics with fully ambidextrous controls and reversible ejection, and an almost unnaturally compact footprint, the Hellion is an ideal choice for home defense,



competition, recreation or self-defense. Oh, and it also looks super awesome just sitting in the gun box as well.

In addition to all that superlative Springfield Armory secret sauce, the standard black Hellion is now offered in three additional colors: OD green, flat dark earth and the one we are talking about here — gray. For me, that latter color in particular looks like something out of a science fiction movie.

### **PARTICULARS**

The Hellion has all the bells and whistles. The gun features a seemingly indestructible polymer shell and feeds from standard STANAG/M16-pattern magazines. It comes with a 30-round Magpul PMAG Gen3.

The chrome moly vanadium and Melonite-coated barrel is a full 16" long and features a 1-in-7" twist rate. The gun eats 5.56x45mm or .223 Remington ammo with comparable enthusiasm and weighs 8 lbs. unloaded. As the center of gravity rests over the centralized

pistol grip (which by the way is a BCM Gunfighter Mod 3 unit, but is interchangeable with any AR-pattern grip), the gun feels lighter than it is.

The short-stroke gas piston-driven action was inspired by that of Gene Stoner's classic AR-180 rifle. This system is recognized for offering shooters an excellent balance between accuracy and reliability.

The gas system is readily adjustable without tools to select between "N" for "normal" and "S" for "suppressed" modes. Even with a suppressor installed at the muzzle, the overall length is still shorter than many unsuppressed AR rifles.

The Hellion sports a full length Picatinny rail up top for optics along with plenty of M-Lok real estate on the forward handguard for accessories. Additionally, the gun comes from the factory with a superb set of integrated flip-up back up iron sights (BUIS) built into the upper rail. The front sight is readily adjustable for elevation, and the rear sight

includes a five-position aperture that is also adjustable for windage. That's a nice touch.

The furniture is rugged environmentally resistant polymer. The handguard is nicely textured and shaped to accommodate the human form. Where most bull-pup buttstocks are fixed, that of the Hellion adjusts through five positions. If you can't optimize the Hellion to fit your particular form, the truth is you might not actually be human.

One of the biggest challenges associated with utilizing bull-pup rifles is managing ejection. When configured for right-hand operation, left-handed shoot-



ers firing a traditional bullpup will get hot brass spit directly into their face. Swapping the gun from right- to left-handed ejection can be undertaken at the user level in minutes without tools. In addition, the Hellion's charging handle is ambidextrous, and the safety is bilateral.

#### ORIGINS

Nobody is completely sure where the term "bullpup" originated.

Early references discovered from the 1930's described firearms with this backwards architecture as "bullpups," purportedly in reference to bulldog puppies. Like the canine, such a beast was compact and homely while remaining powerful. This seemed an appropriate appellation.

Technically, in some ways most all autoloading handguns are bullpup designs. Whether that is a classic 1911 or a Springfield

Armory Echelon, the trigger assembly is oriented ahead of the feeding mechanism. Using that observation as a metric, the bullpup concept has indeed been around for quite some time.

As regards the Hellion, the gun's bullpup design offers full-sized rifle performance in a package more akin to an SBR. The Hellion is compact enough to stash comfortably in a vehicle yet still produces rifle-grade muzzle velocities. It also does not require any extraneous National Firearms Act (NFA) paperwork or an onerous transfer tax to own.

The Hellion bullpup itself is a product-improved version of the VHS used by the Croatian military. The VHS rifle originally spawned from a bullpup design based on the classic and proven Kalashnikov rifle.

Extensive mechanical evolution eventually produced a design that was completely fresh and new. The Hellion we have

here is the civilian-legal, semi-auto version of the VHS-2.

The Hellion has numerous upgrades and improvements — such as the interchangeable AR-pattern pistol grip, M-Lok system, flip-up irons and more — that were the result of work done directly with Springfield Armory on the design.

These efforts were done to adapt the VHS-based design to better suit the needs of American shooters. For example, the ability to fit out the Hellion with the AR pistol grip of your choice

— although I think the one it comes with is an excellent choice — makes the bullpup easily customizable to your preferences. Add to that the M-Lok slots, allowing you to fit out the Hellion with all your favorite accessories, and you have a 5.56mm that can fit many of your favorite SAINT accoutrements.


In addition, the development of the excellent flip-up iron sights — integrated into the long strip of Picatinny rail along the top of the Hellion — added yet another very beneficial and well-designed feature to the 5.56mm bullpup design.

## TRIGGER TIME

If you haven't had the pleasure, running a bullpup rifle is indeed a fresh, new experience. While different, the manual of arms is intuitive and easily mastered. Let's face it, we gun enthusiasts always enjoy trying out something new!

Magazine changes — actuated by the ambidextrous paddle release behind the magazine well, with the bolt release located just to the rear of that — do take a microsecond or two longer than might be the case with your favorite SAINT.

Apply a little bit of practice at the range or with an empty and "safe" gun off the range, and



With fully ambidextrous controls and impeccable performance, the Hellion is an excellent option for the bullpup enthusiast.

you'll have this process mastered in no time.

What you get in return is a rifle that is both compact and maneuverable, while retaining a full-length, 16" barrel.

A common complaint from shooters is that the triggers on lots of bullpup guns are too long and mushy. Given the obligate ample mechanical linkage between your index finger and the fire control unit, this was long viewed as inevitable.

However, the trigger of the Hellion bullpup is exceptionally nice, indeed. You will find there is a lengthy, weightless and predictable take-up followed by a nice, crisp break.

I'm not really sure how they did that, but the Hellion bullpup will easily hold its own with more conventional

al AR-style platforms you might find on the range.

We modern gun geeks have undoubtedly gotten way spoiled to accurate rifles. Back in the day, two or three MOA was typical



## HELLION

CHAMBERING	5.56mm/.223
BARREL	16"
WEIGHT	8 lbs.
OVERALL LENGTH	28.25" - 29.75"
SIGHTS	Flip-up
STOCK	Five-position adjustable
ACTION	Semi-auto
FINISH	Black, Desert FDE, OD Green or Gray
CAPACITY	30 (one magazine included)
MSRP	\$1,999

accuracy. Four MOA (four inch groups at 100 yards) was considered acceptable for the classic M1 Garand. Nowadays, we know we can do better.

The Hellion shoots plenty straight. So long as I took my time, I could keep my groups less than two inches at 100 meters without much wind.

My best ones  
flirted

with half that. The Hellion is truly a nice-shooting rifle, indeed.

## RUMINATIONS

I'll be honest with you, it's tough to capture in prose how truly cool this rifle looks in person.

I know I shouldn't care, but I honestly cannot help it.

This gray Hellion would look right at home in "The Expanse" (a simply magnificent sci-fi watch on Amazon Prime if you haven't had the pleasure) or the latest "Alien" iteration. In addition to looking like the 40-watt phased plasma rifle of the "Terminator," the Hellion offers cutting edge real-world performance as well.

Whether your mission is ringing steel on the weekends, keeping the mean streets safe as a cop, or just securing your hacienda come what may, the new gray Hellion bullpup will certainly fit the bill.

The Springfield Armory Hellion is a splendid example of a superlative rifle at a reasonable price, with its MSRP of \$1,999.

With the Hellion, you get unflinching performance along with an exotic look that will set you apart from your peers. Additionally, should you be unexpectedly called upon to race across the galaxy to defeat the Empire, rescue colonists from the xenomorphs or save the princess, the Hellion will reliably get you there. Or, it's simply just an excellent bullpup! 🤖

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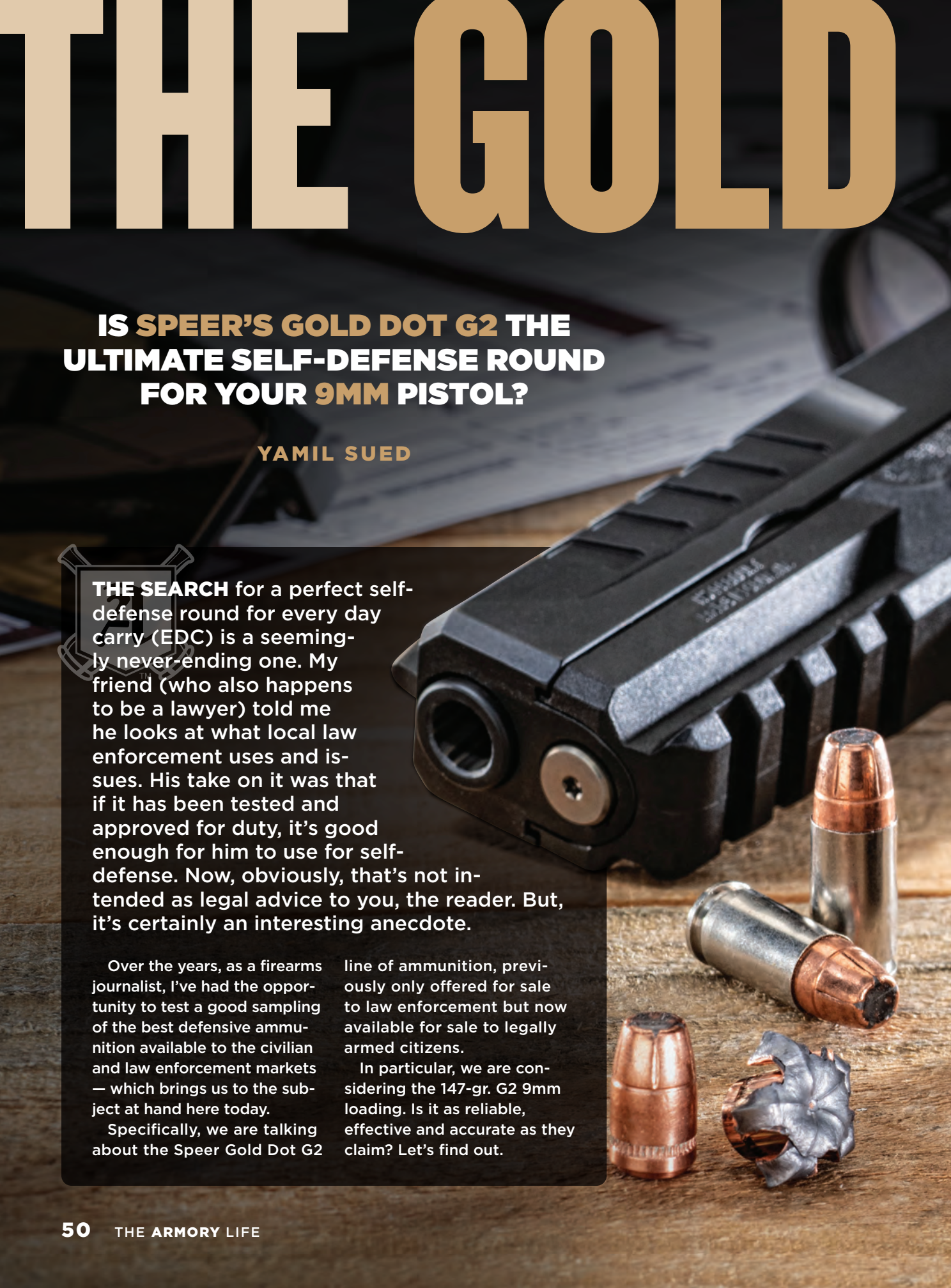
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# THE GOLD

## IS SPEER'S GOLD DOT G2 THE ULTIMATE SELF-DEFENSE ROUND FOR YOUR 9MM PISTOL?

YAMIL SUED



**THE SEARCH** for a perfect self-defense round for every day carry (EDC) is a seemingly never-ending one. My friend (who also happens to be a lawyer) told me he looks at what local law enforcement uses and issues. His take on it was that if it has been tested and approved for duty, it's good enough for him to use for self-defense. Now, obviously, that's not intended as legal advice to you, the reader. But, it's certainly an interesting anecdote.

Over the years, as a firearms journalist, I've had the opportunity to test a good sampling of the best defensive ammunition available to the civilian and law enforcement markets — which brings us to the subject at hand here today.

Specifically, we are talking about the Speer Gold Dot G2

line of ammunition, previously only offered for sale to law enforcement but now available for sale to legally armed citizens.

In particular, we are considering the 147-gr. G2 9mm loading. Is it as reliable, effective and accurate as they claim? Let's find out.

# STANDARD

Speer's Gold Dot G2 ammo delivers duty-grade 9mm performance. Shown here with a customized Echelon 4.5F pistol.



WATCH THE VIDEO:  
TESTING SPEER'S GOLD DOT G2

## A LITTLE BACKGROUND

First things first, what is Speer Gold Dot ammunition? Speer introduced Gold Dot in 1991, hailing it as a revolutionary step forward in bullet design. Up until that point, duty bullets were made of a lead core with a drawn jacket and hollow point nose cavity to initiate expansion.

Speer went in a totally different direction: They would fuse a pressure-formed lead core to a plated jacket. This design created a molecular bond between the jacket and the core, eliminating any risk of bullet separation. Speer named this process “UNICOR” construction. The bonded design also helps Gold Dot bullets retain weight and transfer energy effectively, even when fired through barriers.

With this offering, Speer set a new standard in duty bullet performance and helped usher in the age of bonded bullets.

## MOVING FORWARD

Now, what exactly is the Speer Gold Dot G2? Speer chose a totally different bullet design for these G2 projectiles. The big difference from the traditional hollow point design of the Gold Dot is that the G2 bullet features a shallow cavity in the nose of the bullet filled with durable elastomer material.

Now you might ask, what is elastomer?

According to Britannica, elastomer is any rubbery material composed of long chainlike molecules, or polymers, that can recover their original shape after being stretched to great extent. Hence the name elastomer, from “elastic polymer.”

This elastomer prevents barrier materials from filling the nose cavity of the bullet, which, in turn, may inhibit expansion of the projectile. This provides more consistent performance through tough barriers.

The simplest way to describe this bullet design is that the G2 keeps things like plywood from



filling the hollow cavity. At its simplest, it prevents that hollow point from getting plugged. Also, fissures cut into the bullet cause the G2 to expand reliably and transfer energy effectively while maintaining straight-line penetration once the projectile does begin to open.

This is a very interesting design. In the past, I've seen pro-

## THE TEST

Okay. Enough theory and tech talk. I'd say it's time for us to get on to the testing.

Given that the original purpose of the Speer Gold Dot G2 was as duty ammunition, I selected my favorite duty-sized pistol, the Springfield Armory Echelon 9mm.

If you have read my previous articles on this pistol, you know that I love the Echelon and consider it to be one of the best pistols around. It pretty much fulfills all my handgun needs, and its versatility

is truly unequaled.

ing at C2 Tactical in Scottsdale, Arizona. My first test was to determine the velocity and kinetic energy that this load would provide. In

## PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.) ECHELON 4.5F 9MM

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
SPEER GOLD DOT 147-GR. G2	1,011 fps	0.83"	1.07"

Accuracy results for six, three-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a Ransom International Multi Cal Steady Rest. Velocity is measured in feet per second (fps) by a Garmin Xero C1 Pro Chronograph. Abbreviations: gr. (grain).

jectiles that get plugged up with barrier material prevent the bullet from expanding, resulting in over-penetration. In other cases, I have seen projectiles prematurely expand upon hitting a barrier, causing under-penetration.

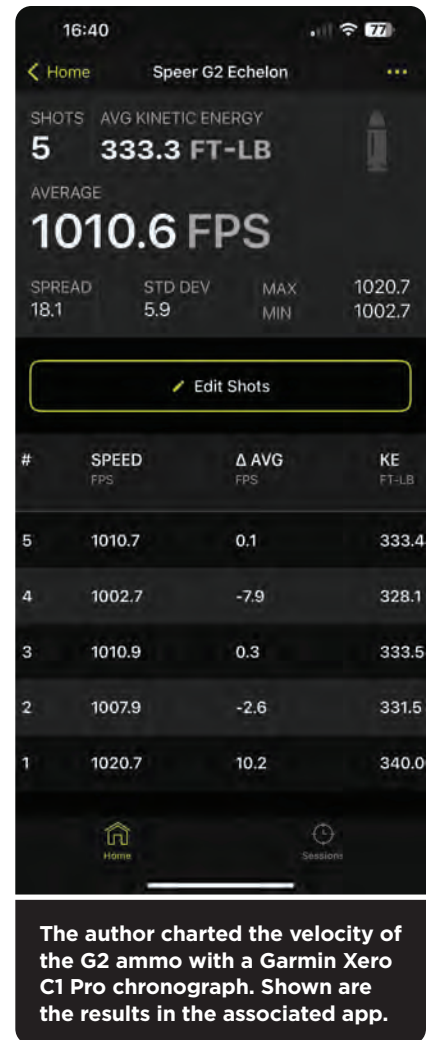
Clearly, this is a tough needle to thread, but it looks like Speer might have cracked the code.

is truly unequaled.

In case you are not familiar with the Echelon, it is a duty-grade pistol that is offered in both full-size 4.5F models, and compact 4.0C models. They have innovative features such as the Central Operating Group (a serialized chassis that makes swapping out grip modules in different sizes and colors a breeze), and the Variable Interface System.

That latter feature allows for the direct mounting of more than 30 popular red dot optics without the need for adapter plates. This is accomplished through the use of configurable self-locking pins that can be moved around to accommodate a wide range of optics.

I like to do my handgun tests in an indoor range as there is no wind, temperature fluctuations and weather issues to deal with, as well as offering stable shooting surfaces, etc. Like always, I did my test-



The author charted the velocity of the G2 ammo with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. Shown are the results in the associated app.

this test, I used a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph, which has quickly become one of if not the most popular chronographs on the market today. Its compact, lightweight design makes it an ideal addition to your range bag.

The chronograph result for the 147-gr. load was 1,010.6 feet per second (fps), with a kinetic energy of 333 ft-lb. Speer advertises the load in their documentation with a velocity of 1,020 fps, with

The author put the Speer ammo to the test on the range, finding it to be both reliable and accurate.



a kinetic energy of 340 ft-lb.

Why is there a minor discrepancy between my results and the factory-provided results? First, no two chronographs will provide the same, exact results on the range. Secondly, the barrel length of the test gun used can affect results. And lastly, several environmental factors will affect chronograph results.

Humidity, elevation, barometric pressure and ambient temperature are all variables that can directly affect results. And let's be frank, my numbers came very, very close to the published ones from Speer.

The next step in the testing process was a gel test. I fired one round into Clear Ballistics gelatin, which is claimed to provide a 90-95% approximation of ordnance gelatin. I use the Clear Ballistics gelatin because I appreciate its ease of use and reusability. Plus, refrigeration of it is not required, greatly simplifying the process.

The first round fired into the gel penetrated approximately 14.5". This falls within the FBI requirements for a duty round. To get a

baseline penetration value, I shot the round at a "bare gel block" without any added barriers like sheetrock, plywood, windshield glass or denim.

My third and final test was for accuracy. I fired six, three-round groups from 15 yards out of a Ransom International Multi Cal Steady Rest, which is a sturdy platform that stabilizes the handgun but still allows for my personal deficiencies to come through. This gives me an idea of how I personally fire the Speer Gold Dot G2 through the Springfield Armory Echelon.

My results were consistent throughout the testing process. The smallest group I got was .825" while the largest group — which included a called flyer — was 1.5". My average overall was 1.073". If it weren't for that pesky flyer, my average would have been under 1".

Clearly, the Speer Gold Dot G2 showed itself to be more than capable of very solid accuracy out of the Echelon 4.5F from Springfield Armory.

## CONCLUSIONS

While accuracy and gel-test results are an important part of any defensive ammo testing, the absolute most important parameter of performance is reliability. This is an absolute "must" for any ammunition intended for a defensive-style firearm.

Over the course of my testing of the Gold Dot G2 9mm ammo, I didn't have a single stoppage. Every

round I fired reliably fed, fired, extracted and ejected, consistently from the Echelon.

The velocity test confirmed how consistent this ammunition is. The extreme spread between the fastest and slowest shots of the G2 ammunition was only 18.1 fps, which is quite impressive. My results were a merely 9.4 fps slower than the factory-advertised velocity.

In the penetration test, 14.5" is a superb result for this kind of duty ammunition. The 147-gr. projectile expanded perfectly and penetrated as expected. I couldn't have asked for better performance from it.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

After performing all the testing, I'm very impressed with this ammunition. It's accurate and reliable with superb performance. The question is, would I use this ammunition to defend my life? I would say, absolutely, and without hesitation.

Speer has a long tradition of producing high-quality, duty-grade ammunition for defensive situations. With superb engineering and in-depth testing, it has developed a process for making some of the best ammunition around. This new G2 version of the Gold Dot line of ammo is certainly no exception — as shown by my results testing it.

In my humble opinion, Speer Gold Dot G2 now resides at the top of my list for high-performance ammunition for self-defense, and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to any other gun owner out there. 🇺🇸

**The Speer G2 round features a shallow cavity in the nose filled with a durable elastomer that prevents clogging. Fissures cut into the projectile are designed to help encourage expansion.**



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# RAMP IN




## **CUSTOMIZING THE EDC-READY SPRINGFIELD ARMORY EMP 9MM MICRO 1911 WITH STAN CHEN CUSTOM PARTS.**

ROY HUNTINGTON

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

# GET UP





While the Springfield EMP is an exceptional EDC pistol from the factory, tweaking it with Stan Chen custom parts provides it with some unique benefits.

**WHEN SPRINGFIELD ARMORY'S** Enhanced Micro Pistol (EMP) exploded onto the market back in the 2000's, it rapidly gained a name for itself among the die-hard 1911 crowd. In the process, this "crossover" concealed carry mini-1911 helped to entice some who were on the fence to explore the delights and effectiveness of the platform.

Admittedly, there are those who carry full-sized, all-steel 1911's daily and have adapted to the challenges — and rewards. But it takes no small amount of dedication to manage it, and I do admire their tenacity.

I am someone who has carried guns for well over 50 years, including my career as a cop. If you're like me, you've found the luster of the idea of carrying soon loses its shine. For many, it can be more of a chore than a delight. However, if you commit to it, there are options.

Personally, I've found over the

years that a combination of light weight, effective caliber and comfortable carrying definitely strikes the right chords. Finding something that can achieve all those disparate goals is no easy task, though.

The EMP checks off a lot of boxes when it comes to being an important contender in the daily carry race. The stock pistol is ready to go right out of the box, with one of the latest editions — the lightweight Ronin 3" — fitting well into what I'd call a "best" category when it comes to 1911-style carry guns.

From the satin aluminum frame, forged steel blued slide, ramped match grade barrel, excellent sights and nine-round 9mm magazine, there's lots to like. Factor in the feathery 24-oz. weight and amazing accuracy, and the Ronin EMP platform nails it all.

The EMP isn't just a cut-down, full-sized 1911, which can often compromise reliability when taken too far. The EMP was engineered specifically for the 9mm cartridge and has been carefully scaled down, with 11 proprietary parts designed specifically for this model. When you wrap your hand around the grip, I promise you'll smile. While I favor the 3" version, the EMP Ronin 9mm is also available as a 4" version with a 10-round capacity.

#### **STAN CHEN'S MAGIC**

Even the most elegantly designed objects can often benefit from

careful customization touches, and the EMP Ronin is no exception. I'll be the first to admit the stock gun does the job handily, and mine has done just that for some time. But when I found Stan Chen — that top-tier custom 'smith — was offering a cross-section of custom touches just for the EMP, I had to try them.

Stan's sheer knowledge of what makes a 1911 run is legendary. His custom builds hold up even when scrutinized with a 20X magnifier. My own tests with his guns have revealed a level of accuracy almost defying belief.

I once shot  
60 rounds  
at 25

FIELD ARMORY

yards into just under 1" from one of his custom guns.

This expertise, when matched with his designer's eye for improvements, has managed almost light-year leaps in comfort, ergonomics and performance for the 1911. Now, Stan brings that skillset and background to the excellent little EMP.

At the moment, Stan Chen Custom offers a Shooter-Installed (SI) Magwell with matching VZ grips designed specifically for the EMP's reduced 9mm-sized grip frame, an enhanced thumb safety design, a custom-designed and enhanced mag release, and sight options. I asked Stan if I could try

them on my personal gun, and the game was afoot.

### SPEEDING THE FEED

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the "Shooter Installed" SI Magwell (for which Chen is famous) has been adapted to the EMP platform and its proprietary, 9mm-sized grip frame. It is priced at \$199.99 and comes packaged with a set of custom VZ Grips in black or black cherry that are cut to match up with the magwell.

If you can detail strip your 1911, you can install this innovative magwell. Stan said he made some specific changes to accommodate the EMP. The first is a redesign of the front contour to specifically work extremely well with Springfield Armory magazines and a wider baseplate profile.

I was surprised by how the round butt profile of the magwell really contributed to comfort and, when combined with the full-profile VZ grips, offered a very secure grip.

The magwell shows the expected Chen attention to detail, too. He's eliminated any sharp edges on it, added precision checkering at 25 LPI on the

mainspring housing, and CNC machined the whole affair from solid, heat-treated steel.

Not only does the new magwell addition offer a huge chute to provide a generous ramp to guide mags in during a fast reload, but in combination with the grips it offers a surprisingly comfortable feel to me. I have always been a big fan of the slim-profile stock grips, but these thicker grips allow a bit more purchase, especially if you're shooting snappy loads.

### IN YOUR SIGHTS

Let's next discuss one of the most obvious parts of any handgun, the sights. The stock Ronin sights have a classic white dot rear with fiber optic front. They are bold, easy to pick-up and easily adjustable for windage with a set screw. The Chen Full Custom Rear Sight is similar, but with a few changes I want to note.

Priced at \$54.99, Stan's "Full Custom" rear offers a simple, black serrated rear face. There's also a bit more area to that face,

The "Shooter Installed" SI Magwell can be fitted to the EMP easily with basic tools.



and I find the all-black sight picture to be comfortable for me and easy to pick up for precise work when needed.

The sight exhibits a sleek profile with hand-finished, rolled edges like you'd find on a true custom sight. The blade is angled slightly to help avoid glare in bright sun and is crafted for one-handed slide manipulation. While not significantly different from the stock sight, it offers a few touches I appreciated.

### SAFETY CHANGE

I'll confess right off I've never been a big fan of extended thumb safeties on 1911 pistols. I think some of that is the fact I cut my teeth on stock guns over the past many decades.

The Chen Thumb Safety, priced at \$74.99 to \$79.99, is offered in blued or stainless steel and in full, mid or short lengths. The latter was the one we fitted the EMP

out with, and I like it. It has a slightly enhanced surface platform, and I'd call it a nice balance between the stock de-

sign and an extended one.

While having the same features of their longer-length safeties, I think this shorter design mates extremely well to the smaller-statured EMP. The slight curve follows the thumb's natural bend, and it's fully dehorned. When correctly fitted, the design allows that crisp "snick" on and off we 1911 shooters like to hear and feel.

### A NEW CATCH

Next up is the Chen Angled Mag Catch, which is priced at \$49.99. The angled serrations are inclined toward the shooter's hand so, when you press, they engage the skin of your thumb without any fuss or slipping. If you have to "flip" the grip a bit to reach the release, it's especially effective.

I also would never have thought of one design element of it. The inside left edge of the release is extensively cleared to prevent the highly unlikely (but still possible) trapping



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The SI Magwell from Stan Chen is designed specifically for the downsized EMP pistol. Note the custom VZ Grips that are included in the package.



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

of a magazine, even if the button is pushed hard during a hectic reload. I had honestly never thought of that before, and it's a clever modification to the design that helps take an absolute worst-case scenario off the table.

### INSTALLATION

I'm blessed because I have the skills and tools to install these parts. The magwell is, honestly, easy to install with just a punch and small hammer; so fear not, you can do it! If you're careful, the rear sight goes on easily, too. If you can detail strip a 1911, then the mag catch won't be too much of an issue. Just use care so you don't bugger up the screw head!

On the other hand, the thumb safety isn't a drop-in affair, and has to be fitted by someone who knows what they're doing. I like to start by using the original part to measure the engagement surfaces for a starting point. Then, by carefully filing the appropriate ledge area to within a few thousandths of an inch on the new safety, you can do test fits, file

a tiny bit, test fit, etc. until you get that satisfying "snick" we all enjoy. But unless you know how to do this, do take your favorite EMP to a gunsmith you trust. It's money well invested.

All of the Chen parts are meticulously manufactured in-house on high-end CNC machinery capable of mold-making precision. Multi-axis machining techniques allow for amazing dimensional consistency, leading to more precise fitting to the pistol. They use the highest quality materials (heat-treated 4140 chrome-moly and 416 stainless steel) for durability, and frankly, it shows in the fit, finish and design of their parts.

### CONCLUSION

The gun shoots as well after the installation of the Chen parts (call it a 1.75" gun at 20 yards, depending on the load) as it did before. But the ability to quickly feed in a spare mag, the change in grip ergonomics, sight picture, the feel of the thumb safety, and even the bit of extra assurance the enhanced mag catch offers, all further con-

The short-length Chen Thumb Safety in stainless steel was a great match for the EDC-centric EMP pistol. Also note the Chen Angled Mag Catch.

tribute to the thorough sense of trust I have in this little gun.

I'll come right out and say Springfield Armory guns are my favorite factory-made guns, and that's not because I'm writing here — it's because it's true.

When I was editor of *American Handgunner*, I often fielded questions from readers. When asked, "Which factory-made 1911 should I buy?" I pointed them in the direction of Springfield.

If they want to take an excellent factory-made 1911 and ramp it up a bit with some thoughtfully designed enhancement parts, then in that case I'd point them at two places ... Springfield and Stan Chen Custom. 🏆

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# SPOTT



A red dot-equipped handgun is now the norm for EDC. Are you ready to maximize its performance?

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

# THE DOT

## GETTING THE INSIDE SCOOP ON MASTERING THE EDC BENEFITS OF PISTOL-MOUNTED OPTICS.

MASSAD AYOOB

**THE EVER-POPULAR** red dot sight — also known as a “carry optic” — on service pistols and concealable self-defense handguns is easily one of the hottest trends today. But trends can create controversy, and new equipment always requires new approaches.

For shooters new to the concept, it's not as easy to learn to run a red dot sight on a pistol as it is on a long gun.

The stabilizing point of buttstock-to-shoulder and the cheekweld on the comb of the stock of a long gun, all in line with the optical sight, are absent with an optic-sighted handgun. Hence, it requires a bit more effort to master.

My primary occupation is that of firearms/deadly force instructor and, like anyone else in the business, I can tell you stories of the new carry optic shooter wiggling his or her head around behind the pistol when they should be shooting because they

haven't been able to find that darn red dot.

In the firearms training world, I feel that carry optics have triggered a controversy on the level of the old “revolver versus autoloader,” “.45” and “Weaver stance versus Isosceles stance” debates. Ego gets invested in one concept or another, and the next thing you know it has all become extremely acrimonious.

The fact is, the revolver and the autopistol each have pros and cons, as does each caliber of firearm, and so does each shooting stance. The same is true of methods for teaching the use of carry optics.


### OLD SCHOOL ADAPTATIONS

When I started shooting optical-sighted handguns in competition in the 1980's, what I found worked best for me was a technique I came to call a Bridge Index. I dubbed it thusly because it was a bridge between the body position index of “point-shooting” and the visual index of aimed fire.

If I brought my head to my arm or shoulder and found a spot where that brought my eye in line with iron sights, it got the draw-to-the-shot just a little bit faster, and worked great with a red dot sight.

For me and my shooting, normally right-handed and right-eye dominant, the side of the lower mandible against the bicep was the index point.

Shooting cross-dominant, right-handed but left master eye or vice-versa, I found chin-to-bicep did the trick.



As shown at left, the Hellcat family of 9mm pistols features the ability to direct-mount an optic, which allows you to co-witness the “U-Dot” iron sights.

These days, with carry optics, I’ve found it to be a very effective quick fix for the new adopter who is having trouble “catching the dot.”

### **CHASING THE IRONS**

Because a defensive firearm is life-saving emergency rescue equipment and red dots are battery-operated and can fail, I think we’d all agree that carry optics demand back-up iron sights (BUIS).

Ideally, these would be ones that can co-witness with the optic such as you will find on several series of pistols from Springfield Armory like the Hellcat, Echelon, 1911 AOS and more. This gives you the advantage of irons in case your optic goes down.

Additionally, simply co-witnessing the irons and the red dot allows the shooter, particularly one who has been shooting iron sights a long time, to take his familiar iron-sight aim.

Employing this system, he or she will be able to find the red dot quickly and simply go on from there.

However, as always, there are “cons” to go with the “pros.” For my Bridge Index, some body shapes you come across (short, thick necks and/or very broad shoulders, for example) simply don’t allow it.

Moreover, it requires at least the gun arm to be locked straight out while shooting, and some gunners can’t do that because of arm injuries — or simply won’t because of their own personal preferences.

A downside of the “find the irons” approach is that one is

really taking two sight indices instead of one, and no matter how fast you can do that it's very slightly slower than the single dot index, assuming that you can, in fact, find the dot by itself very quickly.

### HEAD FORWARD AND DOWN

Most of the time when the shooter can't find the dot, it's hiding above his field of view. Bringing the head forward and down is one way to find it.

Some people fear they'll be struck by lightning from the Shooting Gods if they do so, for in the marksmanship manuals *It Is Written* that thou must never bring thine eyes to the sights, but rather, thou shalt always keep the head erect and raise the sights to thine eyes.

Whatever your feelings on this topic, I suggest giving it a try if you haven't been able to catch the dot. You might just be pleasantly surprised at the results.

As part of the "4P" approach, you use the "pinkie" finger to tighten at the bottom of the grip. This pulls the muzzle (and red dot) down into alignment with the eye.



IMAGE: GAIL PEPIN

Drawing to a high-ready like this can hasten the eye's acquisition of the red dot. Note your range may forbid the muzzle being pointed above the backstop.

### OTHER APPROACHES

Some experienced red dot users not only don't use the BUIS to find the dot, but are actually completely dead-set against this practice.

One who doesn't care for it is a master shooter who has reasons to go by his initials, GJM, even when he wrote a guest chapter for one of my books. Here's his take on teaching new shooters to "find the dot":

"The advice I recently gave to a friend transitioning to the red

dot was to shoot the first 500 or 1,000 rounds with the red dot on a slide that had no back-up iron sights. This forces you to learn the presentation without the crutch of the iron sights. Anytime you present the pistol and the dot is not there, stop and figure out what is wrong with your presentation and fix it.

"Without reserve sights, it is also useful to turn off the dot and shoot with just index and determine what level of accuracy is possible without seeing the dot in case the dot or your index fails."

### THE FOUR P'S

In my opinion, Scott Jedlinski is a leading instructor in pistol shooting in general today, and red dot sights on pistols shooting in particular.

He favors a presentation of the gun that begins with the muzzle in a high-ready where it can catch the eye early. He describes his method as The Four P's: present, prep, pinkie, press."



IMAGE: GAIL PEPIN



**With proper training, a new shooter can effectively develop the skills to bring a red dot mounted atop their pistol into proper alignment with their eye.**

To be specific, the gun comes up a bit muzzle high in the “present” stage. As the target and sight picture are acquired, he “preps” the trigger with about 80% of an intended press. (It is important to remember that this is the draw-to-the-shot moment, not a precautionary draw or a draw-to-gunpoint.)

When Scott says “pinkie”, he means he wants that bottom finger of the hand to tighten up at the bottom of the grip frame, pulling the muzzle down and better guaranteeing the eye finds the dot.

“Press”, in this context, means applying the last few pounds of trigger pressure when shooting to launch the bullet.

### **NOSE BEHIND BACKPLATE**

A grandmaster shooter who goes by the initials JCN gave the following advice I found interesting

on pistol-forum.com.

He wrote, “My favorite shortcut is from Aaron Cowan at Sage Dynamics. His saying is: ‘nose to backplate.’ If you have your nose lined up to the backplate, the height of your eye to nose is about the height of the mid-slide to optic window.”

Another gun expert that I’ve come to respect is writer Tamara Keel. She responded to JCN’s post as follows:

“That was the one that really clicked with me. Since then, if I’ve had to explain it to someone, it’s: ‘Don’t go moving your head around looking for the dot. Look at the target. Now, stick the gun in front of your face so the back of the slide is right in front of your nose. The dot will be there like magic. You can do this because of a 50-cent word called proprioception, which means you know where your hand is because

it’s attached to the rest of you, and the gun is in your hand.”

### **THE CHOICE IS YOURS**

Each of the described techniques for teaching a shooter to find the dot on a carry optics handgun has worked for some people, and may work for you.

A small buffet of these techniques have emerged from modern training with carry optics, and one or more will better suit your needs.

If you keep your mind open, your training will progress faster. Good luck. 🍀

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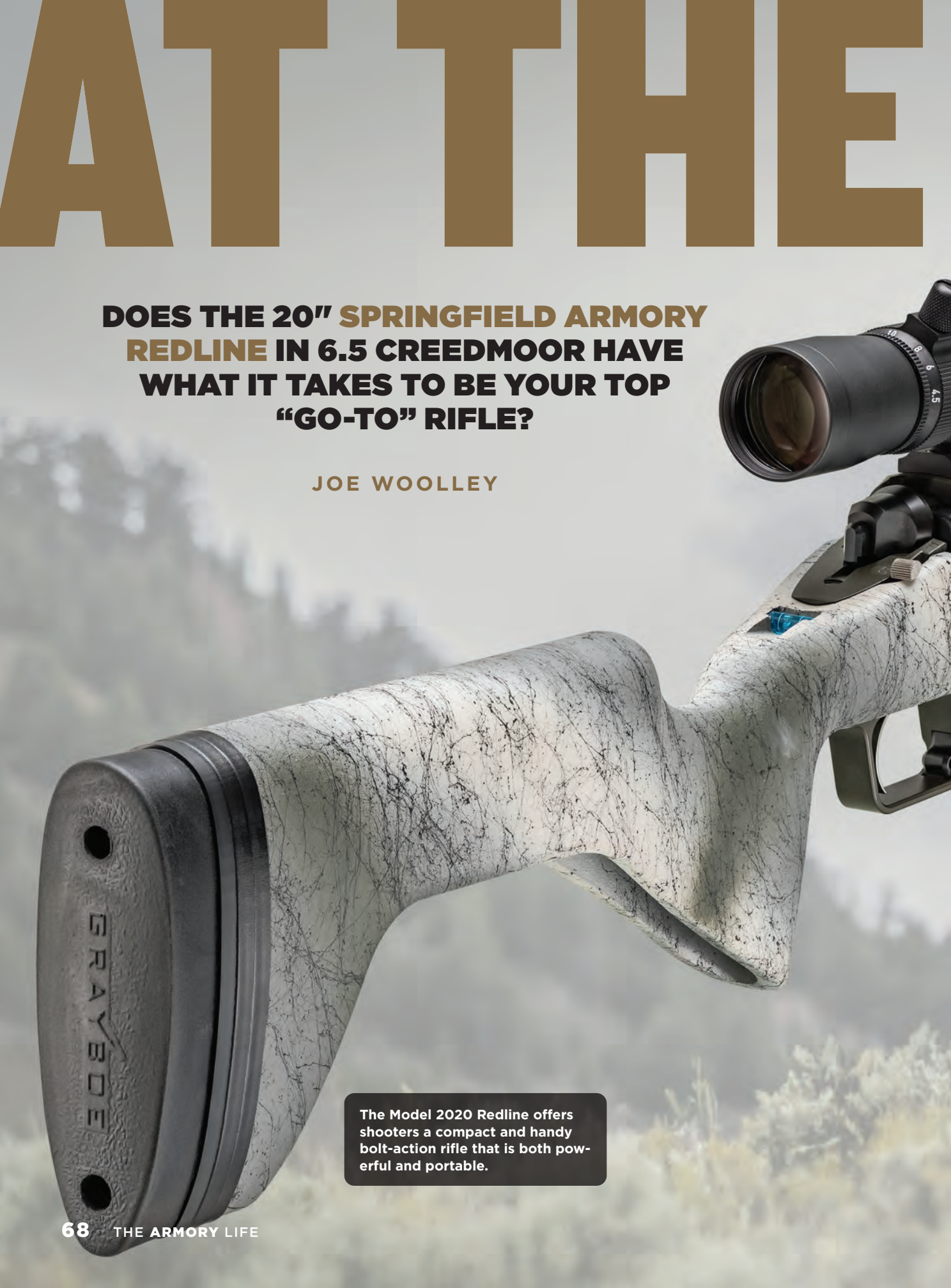
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# ATTITUDE

## DOES THE 20" SPRINGFIELD ARMORY REDLINE IN 6.5 CREEDMOOR HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE YOUR TOP "GO-TO" RIFLE?

JOE WOOLLEY



The Model 2020 Redline offers shooters a compact and handy bolt-action rifle that is both powerful and portable.

# READY



**HOW MANY TIMES** have we watched life turn an interesting intellectual exercise into an actual real-world requirement? You know, those times when subjects speculated upon over countless adult beverages after a local shooting match all of a sudden become reality?

I myself have indulged in numerous “what if” games just to pass the time. One of the most commonly touched on is if I had to get out of the house right now and be able to defend myself, what would I take with me?

Great hypothetical situation, right? That is, until you find yourself in a dangerous and unforeseen situation where you do actually have to make that kind of tough decision.

My personal “Go Bag” would pack food, water, prescription meds, first aid supplies, a few clothes, and at least two guns — a concealable pistol and a capable rifle.

The first one’s self-defense-oriented role and purpose should be obvious. But what about that second one?

In this situation, a rifle could serve two roles. Clearly, it could act as a means of personal defense. But, it also could be used in an equally important hunting role to acquire food.

Through a lot of reading and testing, I settled on a short-action bolt rifle with a detachable magazine for the long gun. I wanted sufficient energy and some extra firepower.

While the most common choice in this type of rifle would be .308 Win. (and admittedly a great option), the 6.5 Creedmoor has recently caught my eye.

Though not perfect for everything (what is?), it does many things very well, leaving it as my pick for an all-around cartridge. Yours may be different and still be just as correct.

The platform is just as important, if not even more so. It needs

to be short enough to handle easily while also long enough to wring out all possible energy, stout enough to be accurate, and light enough to carry.

I may have finally found my answer in a handy bolt-action rifle from Springfield Armory.

## **MY CHOICE**

The Springfield Armory Model 2020 Redline bolt-action rifle is an offshoot of their Model 2020 Waypoint line.

I have had the opportunity to work with two Waypoint rifles in the past, with one of those chambered in 6.5 Precision Rifle Cartridge (PRC) and the other in 7mm PRC. Both rifles were superbly accurate, and were built with a little weight to help hold down recoil a bit.

The Model 2020 Redline contains much the same DNA as the

Waypoint, but does so in a trim and powerful package.

Strictly a short-action rifle, it is offered in either .308 or 6.5 Creedmoor (CM) chamberings with either a 16" or a 20" threaded barrel (topped off with an SA Radial Brake).

I selected a 20" 6.5 CM variant. The result is a rifle that is handy and portable, and weighs in at a light 6 lbs., 4 oz.

Two trends seem to be guiding the design of the latest generation of rifles. The first is a whole new crop of people walking into wherever they are hunting and packing everything on their back.

"Mountain rifles," like those produced by the late Melvin Forbes, have been available for a generation now. They are also usually very expensive and quite difficult to obtain.

The second trend is all about the expansion of the use of suppressors. Add one onto the end of a traditional full-length barrel, and you have a rifle somewhat more difficult to carry and manipulate. Accordingly, many manufacturers are building their rifles with shorter barrels. Yes, there is a slight loss in velocity versus the longer barrel, but what you gain in maneuverability is substantial.

## MODEL 2020 REDLINE 6.5 CM



CHAMBERING	6.5 CM (tested)
BARREL	20" (tested), carbon fiber
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 4 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	40.5"-41.75"
SIGHTS	N/A, Picatinny rail
STOCK	Grayboe Trekker
ACTION	Bolt-action
FINISH	Green Cerakote
CAPACITY	3 (one magazine)
MSRP	\$2,299

## THE DETAILS

Springfield Armory starts its Redline rifle with a stainless-steel receiver. I learned that it is actually machined after hardening, with their engineers explaining to me that, "the receiver itself is machined from a pre-hardened solid bar, so that the dimensional accuracy is not diminished after heat treating."

This is one of the places where Springfield's use of electrical discharge machining (EDM) and its ability to work to incredibly tight tolerances in hard metals comes in handy. The EDM process also leaves the finished metal very smooth — something that obviously contributes to the butter-slick bolt movement in all the Model 2020 rifles. Additionally, the bolt can be easily disassembled without tools for cleaning.

The rifle's two-lugged bolt is fluted, helping to cut weight. It employs a spring-loaded, plunger-style ejector and a sliding plate extractor.

Dual cocking cams lighten the effort required to operate the bolt, as does an oversized bolt handle. The bolt knob is thread-

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



ed and can be changed out as desired. The bolt receives a nitride finish while the receiver — and most of the other metal parts — on the Redline gets an H-264 green Cerakote coating. Topping off the action of the rifle is an included Picatinny rail scope mount.

Springfield then assembled a variety of outstanding parts to complete the rifle. Of note is the fact that the action follows the Model 700 pattern, so there are a ton of aftermarket parts available for the user.

I am always pleased to see a good carbon fiber-wrapped barrel (more about that in a moment), but the unique geometry of the stock of the rifle grabbed my attention most.

The Redline uses a Trekker model stock from Grayboe. If you haven't heard of the company, its immediate corporate roots can be traced back to McMillan. It appears that they learned their craft well. It is a minimalist stock, but then it isn't.

Designed with the backwoods hunter in mind, the Trekker provides a great platform for



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

**The Redline employs AICS-pattern detachable magazines that are flush-fitting and hold three rounds of 6.5 CM.**

the Redline without adding any unnecessary structure. The forend extends 9.5" in front of the receiver. The barrel channel is wide and free-floats the 20" tube of my test gun, leaving plenty of open space.

The bottom of the stock's forend is flat, allowing it to sit correctly on bags or bipod. That is a nice feature that I appreciate.

Speaking of putting the rifle on a bag, there is also a unique bubble level integrated into the stock atop the pistol grip and just behind the

again aiding trigger control.

The comb has a neutral slant to it, leaving a level cheekpiece as high as a removable bolt will allow it to be.

The recoil pad is soft, thick rubber for those slightly more recoil averse.

Length of pull is adjustable via spacers from 13.25" to 14.25" (and out to 16" with additional

spacers). Since I like to square my shoulder up perpendicular to the rifle, I took all the spacers out of the stock and left it with a compact overall length of 40.5".

There are two sling swivel studs located on the forend, making attachment of a Harris bipod a snap.

Oh, and the buttstock is hollow. Really. This Grayboe stock is open at the bottom and made completely of fiberglass, so there is no cheap filler needed in this unique design.

The net result is a lightweight, very strong stock on the rifle, which is easy to maneuver and shoot well.

action. This gives you immediate visual access to whether or not your rifle is situated correctly. This is a really cool feature that I like.

Then there is the buttstock end of the stock. The pistol grip extends almost

vertically, allowing a more proper position for the wrist and thus, potentially, better trigger control. The wrist is thin and promotes a strong-side thumb placement,

**With its lightweight 20" barrel and 6.5 CM chambering, this Model 2020 Redline makes for a great suppressor-ready rifle for the field.**



# MODEL 2020 REDLINE 6.5 CM



The stock is inlet for an AICS-pattern magazine, and the bottom metal actually is metal — and of good aerospace quality.

Since ease of carry is very important for this genre of rifle, a flush-fitting, three-round magazine made by MDT is included

**The author ran three loads through the rifle, with and without a suppressor, and got extremely good results.**

with the rifle.

During testing, I also tried out 10- and 12-round magazines from American Rifle Company, MDT and Accurate-Mag, all of which worked perfectly in the Model 2020 Redline rifle.

The barrel, as we would expect on a lightweight rifle from Springfield Armory, is a carbon-fiber wrapped, 20" tube from BSF.

This barrel, in contrast to most others in the genre, allows very

little contact between the wrap and the stainless-steel core. The end result is a very accurate barrel that heats up more slowly and cools off more quickly than most other methods.

Springfield Armory matched the barrel up with a TriggerTech adjustable trigger. A good trigger does not make a firearm more accurate, but it can certainly make it easier to shoot accurately.

This TriggerTech one is easily adjustable in the field from 2.5 lbs. to 5 lbs. The one on my test rifle started out at 2.45 lbs. as determined by 10 pulls on my Lyman digital trigger gauge.

## RANGE TIME

I would soon discover that the compilation of all of these outstanding components resulted in a very accurate rifle for me.

Springfield guarantees sub-.75 MOA three-shot groups for all their Model 2020 rifles (assuming that the shooter in question is using match-grade ammo and is a skilled shooter).

My initial testing included three different types of ammo and three different weight projectiles. I started off with a bargain-priced offering from Aguila loaded with 129-gr. Interlock bullets from Hornady. Decades-old technology still averaged .73 inch three-shot groups. Next came Hornady 140-gr. ELD Match ammunition and a .66" average. That was duplicated by Norma 143-gr. BondStrike ammo.



## PERFORMANCE (100 YDS.) MODEL 2020 REDLINE 6.5 CM

LOAD	AVERAGE VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
AGUILA 129-GR. INTERLOCK	2,778 fps	.67 in.	.73 in.
HORNADY 140-GR. ELD MATCH	2,638 fps	.61 in.	.66 in.
NORMA 143-GR. BONDSTRIKE	2,651 fps	.44 in.	.66 in.

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 100 yards from a Caldwell Tackdriver rest along with a Large Rear Bag/Heavy from TabGear.com. Velocity is the average of 12 shots measured in feet per second (fps) by a Labrador chronograph as well as the Garmin Zero CI Pro. Abbreviations: gr. (grain), ELD (extremely low drag).



I also tested it with a suppressor mounted and got a slightly tighter grouping overall of the average of all three loads. Clearly, this rifle is a shooter.

The very design of the 6.5 CM cartridge and the tight chamber specs for it seem to produce an inherently accurate combination on the range. But there is more to the 6.5 CM.

Recoil is moderate — which is a great thing in a lightweight rifle like the Redline — yet it still produces sufficient energy for most needs. Our recoil calculator shows that this Redline/ammo combo produces less than 12

ft.-lb. of free recoil energy in a rifle that weighs about 8 lbs. fully kitted out.

I've been using Bryan Litz's Applied Ballistics mobile application in hunting and competition situations for years. When I look up the numbers in his app for the Norma 143-gr. BondStrike ammo I shot in the rifle (and used in the recoil calculations), I see some very encouraging stats. Energy at the muzzle for a 143-gr. bullet


going 2,651 feet per second (fps) was just over 2,200 ft.-lb.

Many "experts" tell us that 1,500 ft.-lb. of energy at the point of impact will do the job on an elk-sized animal, while 1,000 ft.-lb. should suffice on deer or antelope. The Norma cartridge in this Redline generates 1,500 ft.-lb. to about 325 yards and 1,000 ft.-lb. to about 650 yards — ranges that should account for the majority of hunting situations out there. I noted that the same bullet would stay supersonic (something that bodes well for long-range shooting) out to about 1,300 yards.

**The Model 2020 Redline features a TriggerTech adjustable trigger that can be adjusted from 2.5 lbs. up to 5 lbs.**

## CONCLUSION

For the shooter, the right components assembled the right way add up to a rifle that is light enough to carry, short enough to maneuver, powerful enough to take care of most situations, and all while being gentle on the shooter's shoulder.

Now, maybe you see why this is my new all-around rifle and a definite part of my "Go Bag" plan. 

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM  
 AGUILAAMMO.COM  
 HORNADY.COM  
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IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

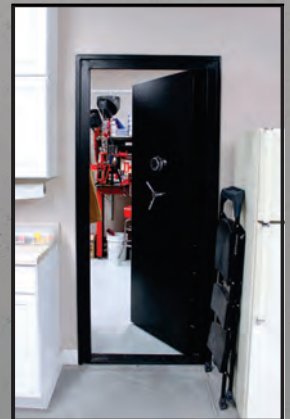
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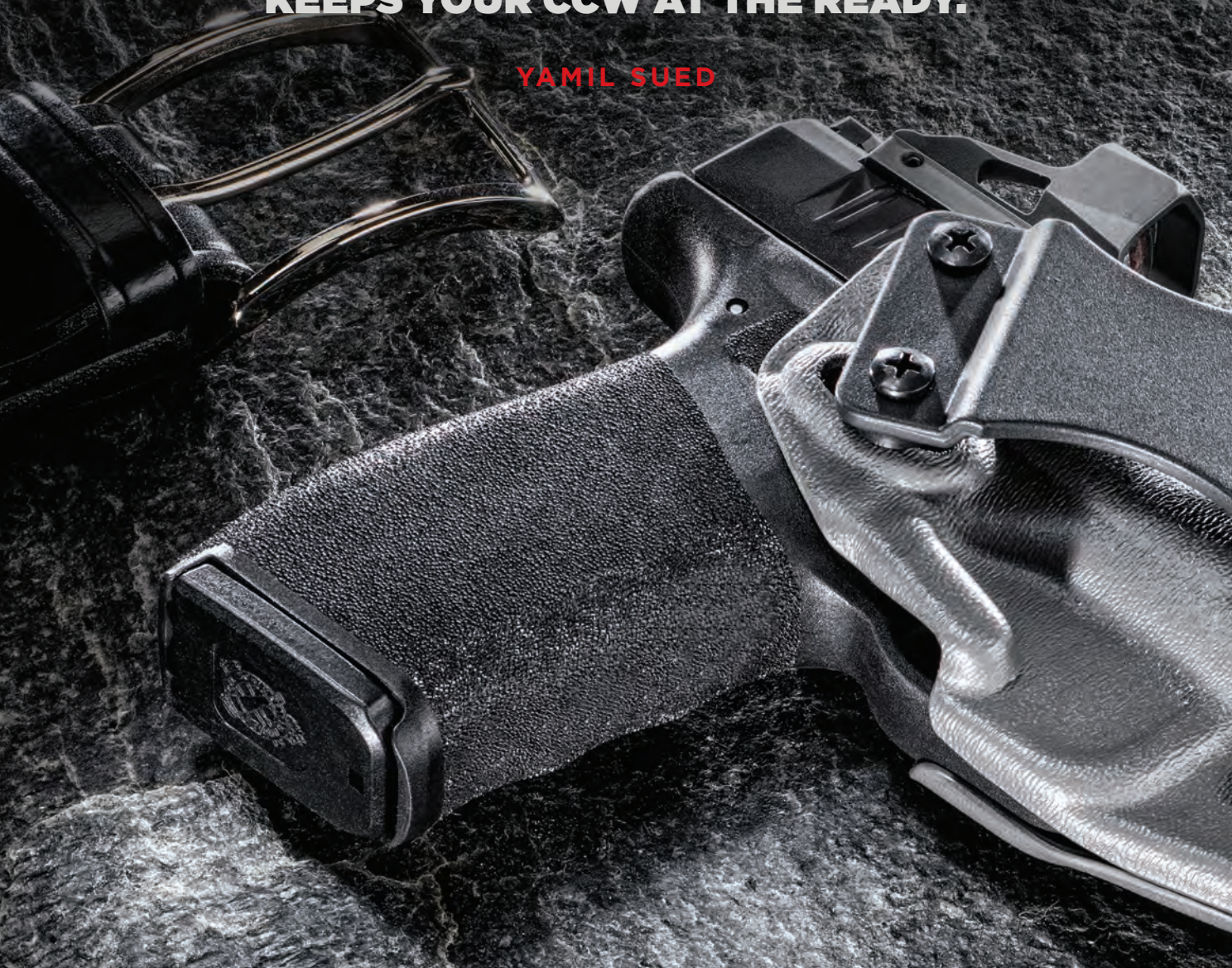
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# STREAK




**WATCH THE VIDEO:**  
REVIEW: DESANTIS MEAN STREAK



The Mean Streak with a customized Hellcat Pro Comp topped off with a Shield RMSx. Also shown is Desantis' Quantico mag pouch and Plain Lined Belt.





**WITH CONSTITUTIONAL CARRY** becoming more and more common throughout the United States, the every day carry (EDC) lifestyle has grown exponentially. Pistols are getting smaller, slimmer and lighter, with increased capacity. The holster industry has equally evolved along with this growth in the EDC market. Holsters are lighter, stronger and much easier to conceal.

One such company is DeSantis Gunhide. Located in Amityville, New York, DeSantis has been a leader in the holster industry for decades. Like most leather companies, while DeSantis started making quality leather holsters, they have since evolved and added a wide variety of Kydex holsters and accessories.

The clientele has evolved, too, and their EDC needs have changed as a result. I must admit I am one of these people. I used to be 100% “Fudd,” carrying heavy guns with strong-side, outside-the-waistband (OWB) leather holsters and mag pouches.

But with age came wisdom, and now I carry a much lighter pistol in a Kydex inside-the-waistband (IWB) holster. Remember I mentioned strong-side only carry? That Kydex holster is in the appendix position, which I have found to be both more comfortable and much easier to conceal.

### **THE PISTOL**

The first step to finding a suitable holster for your EDC is to select your pistol. For me, that was a very easy choice. With the release of the Springfield Armory Hellcat Pro Comp — an integrally compensated variant of the Hellcat Pro — I had a pistol that fit my needs perfectly. It’s easy to conceal while not being “too” small, is lightweight, and is optics-ready.

As for optics, I chose the Shield RMSx. This is one area where I

decided to go a tad bigger. While still a compact optic, the RMSx has a much bigger window — 80% larger, in fact — than the Shield RMS. Although the RMSx was designed for competition shooting, I prefer the much larger lens and my aging eyes appreciate a larger field of view.

### **THE PERFECT HOLSTER**

Next, I needed to pick the right holster for the job. Since I know that DeSantis offers a broad selection of high-quality holsters, I decided to check out their site. After careful examination of the wide variety of holsters available, I landed upon one with a very unique name.

That holster, the Mean Streak, is made of very strong and thick Kydex in a low-profile gray color. The \$65.99 holster is fully adjustable for both height and cant, which is a feature that immediately sold it for me. The holster also features a sweat guard to protect the pistol from your body, and it has an integrated “claw” to push the grip of the pistol closer to your body for easy concealment. It is offered in right- and left-hand versions.

### **PAIRING UP**

When you pick the right holster for your needs, your next pick should be a proper magazine pouch. A further search of the DeSantis site revealed three options that potentially fit my needs: the

IWB Persuader, and two versions of the OWB Quantico.

The Quantico, in particular, caught my eye. It comes in either a single- or double-magazine option. After careful consideration, I went with the Quantico double pouch for \$57.99. I know it adds extra weight to my belt, but I wanted to explore carrying two spare mags.

The Quantico magazine pouches feature a double tensioning device and fit belts up to 1½”. In addition, there’s a 1¾” option should you need it.

### **PREPPING FOR EDC**

After receiving my holster and pouch, I started to set up everything ahead of my first practice session. I like to set up any EDC rig prior to going to the range that first time so I can make sure everything is in the correct spot, is easily accessible, and will allow me to perform a swift, safe and repeatable presentation of my pistol.

The first step is to find the best and most comfortable spot for the holster. The cant and height adjustment options were two of the primary benefits of this holster for me. I adjusted the cant to straight up and down, and I set the belt clip to the lowest possible position. This ensured it would ride as high as possible on my belt, therefore giving me the best grip on my pistol before clearing the holster. That’s a critical benefit for a safe and effective drawstroke.

I wanted to set up this holster in the appendix position, but not centered in front of me. I was looking to position my holster to the right of the first belt loop on my right side. It took just a few minutes to adjust my holster for my preferred retention and the optimal and most comfortable position on my belt.

Given that this is the first time I've ever used a double magazine pouch, I had to experiment to find the most reliable and comfortable spot for it due to the increased size and weight over a single mag pouch. I ended up positioning it right on top of my 9 o'clock belt loop on my left side, as it would be both accessible and out of the way.

## THE BELT

It's a given that one of the most important factors in proper EDC is a sturdy belt. For the past decade or so I've been using a nylon instructor's belt, and it has been effective and comfortable. While I have never had an issue with it, I wanted to test something a little different this time around.

I searched again through the DeSantis website, and I picked a plain and simple lined belt. This belt is leather with a suede liner, and it's available in either black or tan for \$107.99. I selected black. And yes, I realize the irony of me picking a leather belt!

The design of the belt is sturdy and very elegant, without screaming EDC or "TactiCool."

**The OWB Quantico mag pouch is available in double (shown) and single mag versions.**



Another feature I really like is that this belt has an interchangeable buckle, so I can use one of the many belt buckles I've accumulated over the years.

## HANDS-ON

I thought it would be prudent for me to familiarize myself with this holster, pouch and belt and do some dry pre-practice before hitting the range. Safety first, so I divested myself from every single round of live ammunition and locked the door in my garage so I could concentrate on just doing some pistol presentations and some mag changes.

I wanted to get used to the new holster position, holster, mag pouch and belt. I have to admit it did take me quite a while to get used to the whole new set-up, but once I was going everything ran smoothly. Now I was ready for some live fire at the range, which I did the next day. Again, everything ran as planned. My pre-practice time really paid off, as I was able to settle immediately in while drawing and shooting at the range. I think I might have found my perfect EDC carry set-up.




**A large sweat guard is integrated into the Kydex body of the holster for added comfort.**

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

I've carried a pistol in a leather holster on my belt at the 3 o'clock position for many, many years now. Frankly, I thought I would probably always carry one like that. But, it looks like change was on the horizon.

The DeSantis Mean Streak has certainly helped change my opinion regarding both carry style and holster materials. This holster has proven to be extremely comfortable to carry and wear all day long. The built-in claw helps press the grip of the pistol in tightly against your body, reducing the risk of "printing." Finally, the adjustable cant and height allows me to optimally position the holster for a positive grip, which in turn makes my presentation safer and more reliable.

After using this holster, pouch and belt, I would consider it one of the best combinations for EDC available today. If you're looking for a comfortable and reliable IWB holster, the DeSantis Mean Streak should definitely be on your radar. 

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# ARMY PILG



## THE AUTHOR RETURNS TO THE HALLOWED BLACK SANDS OF IWO JIMA.

CAPT. DALE DYE, USMC (RET.)

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Eight decades ago on Feb. 19th, 1945, the battle for the island of Iwo Jima began. Spearheaded by the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, Operation Detachment pitted U.S. Marines against a desperate and deadly defense by the Japanese. Capt. Dale Dye, USMC (Ret.) takes us on a personal tour of the battlefields where these American heroes fought.

Unless you're a Marine, it's likely you don't know that the Corps has its own version of the Haj, the annual pilgrimage

that all Muslims are expected to make once during their lifetime. Devout Muslims make the trek to Mecca. Devout Ma-

rines — if they're lucky enough — make a soul-stirring journey to Iwo Jima.

It's a rare opportunity for most Marines, but I've been blessed to make that trip three times, walking the infamous black sands and standing on the very spot where five men back in 1945 raised the American flag atop Mount Suribachi and created an image so timeless and impactful that it has come to visually define the Marine Corps.

# PRIMAGE



U.S. Marines burrow in the volcanic sand on the beach at Iwo Jima. Heavy enemy fire comes from enemy positions on Mount Suribachi in the background.

IMAGE: USMC/NATIONAL ARCHIVES (74250786, 127-GR-93-109634)

## SETTING MY PATH

My first visit to what is now called Iwo To by the Japanese government was really an accident. I was flying across the Pacific aboard a KC-130 that developed engine trouble and had to land on the sulfur island as a precaution. Say what you will about what that Marine aircrew did back then about flight safety and

NATOPS procedures, I'll always believe they ginned up that detour just so they could say they'd been on Iwo Jima.

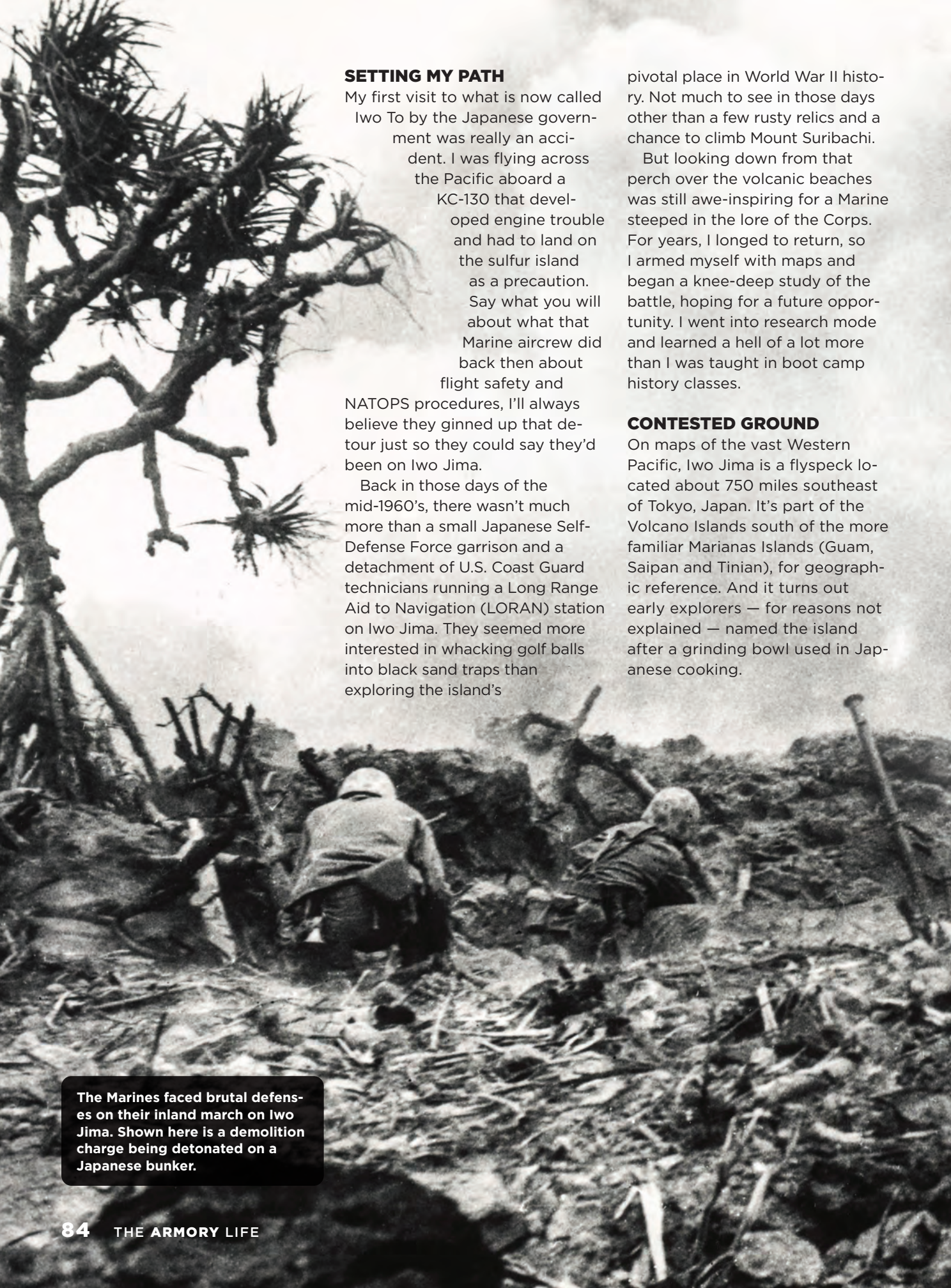
Back in those days of the mid-1960's, there wasn't much more than a small Japanese Self-Defense Force garrison and a detachment of U.S. Coast Guard technicians running a Long Range Aid to Navigation (LORAN) station on Iwo Jima. They seemed more interested in whacking golf balls into black sand traps than exploring the island's

pivotal place in World War II history. Not much to see in those days other than a few rusty relics and a chance to climb Mount Suribachi.

But looking down from that perch over the volcanic beaches was still awe-inspiring for a Marine steeped in the lore of the Corps. For years, I longed to return, so I armed myself with maps and began a knee-deep study of the battle, hoping for a future opportunity. I went into research mode and learned a hell of a lot more than I was taught in boot camp history classes.

## CONTESTED GROUND

On maps of the vast Western Pacific, Iwo Jima is a flyspeck located about 750 miles southeast of Tokyo, Japan. It's part of the Volcano Islands south of the more familiar Marianas Islands (Guam, Saipan and Tinian), for geographic reference. And it turns out early explorers — for reasons not explained — named the island after a grinding bowl used in Japanese cooking.



The Marines faced brutal defenses on their inland march on Iwo Jima. Shown here is a demolition charge being detonated on a Japanese bunker.

Mount Suribachi is the highest point on the island at 554 feet above sea level. Otherwise, the eight square miles of Iwo Jima are relatively flat, featureless and composed mainly of dark volcanic sand. There are two other similar but smaller islands in the Volcano Group, but they were never contested during World War II. Iwo Jima proper — and later Okinawa — were the primary targets of the Allied powers slogging toward the Japanese homeland in early 1945.

As usual in Allied strategy during the island-hopping campaigns of the war in the Pacific, the focus was on airfields. Iwo Jima had three of them (designated Motoyama 1, 2 and 3), making the island an ideal fighter escort base as well as a refuge for bombers damaged during raids on the Japanese mainland. America's new B-29 Super Fortress long-range, heavy-duty bombers had been striking Japanese home island targets since the summer of 1944, and these raids required escort by fighter aircraft that didn't have the legs to reach



IMAGE: USMC ARCHIVES

Japan from more distant bases. Iwo was seemingly also an ideal location for damaged Super Fords to conduct controlled crashes or land for repairs before returning to airbases in the Marianas. Allied planners realized all this. So did the Japanese.

There was also a certain last-ditch, face-saving element involved for the Imperial Japanese Forces reeling from defeat elsewhere in the Pacific. Iwo Jima

was considered a part of Tokyo Prefecture. If Iwo fell, it would be the first part of the traditional homeland to be captured by their enemies. Iwo Jima had to be heavily defended, so they sent a couple of their best to fortify the island and command its defenders. Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi would command the soldiers and Rear Admiral Toshinosuke Ichimaru, a naval aviator, commanded naval forces. Kuribayashi had better than two regiments of infantry, plus artillery and heavy mortar outfits, and a tank battalion on the island. Ichimaru controlled

two large fighter units, a construction battalion and a bunch

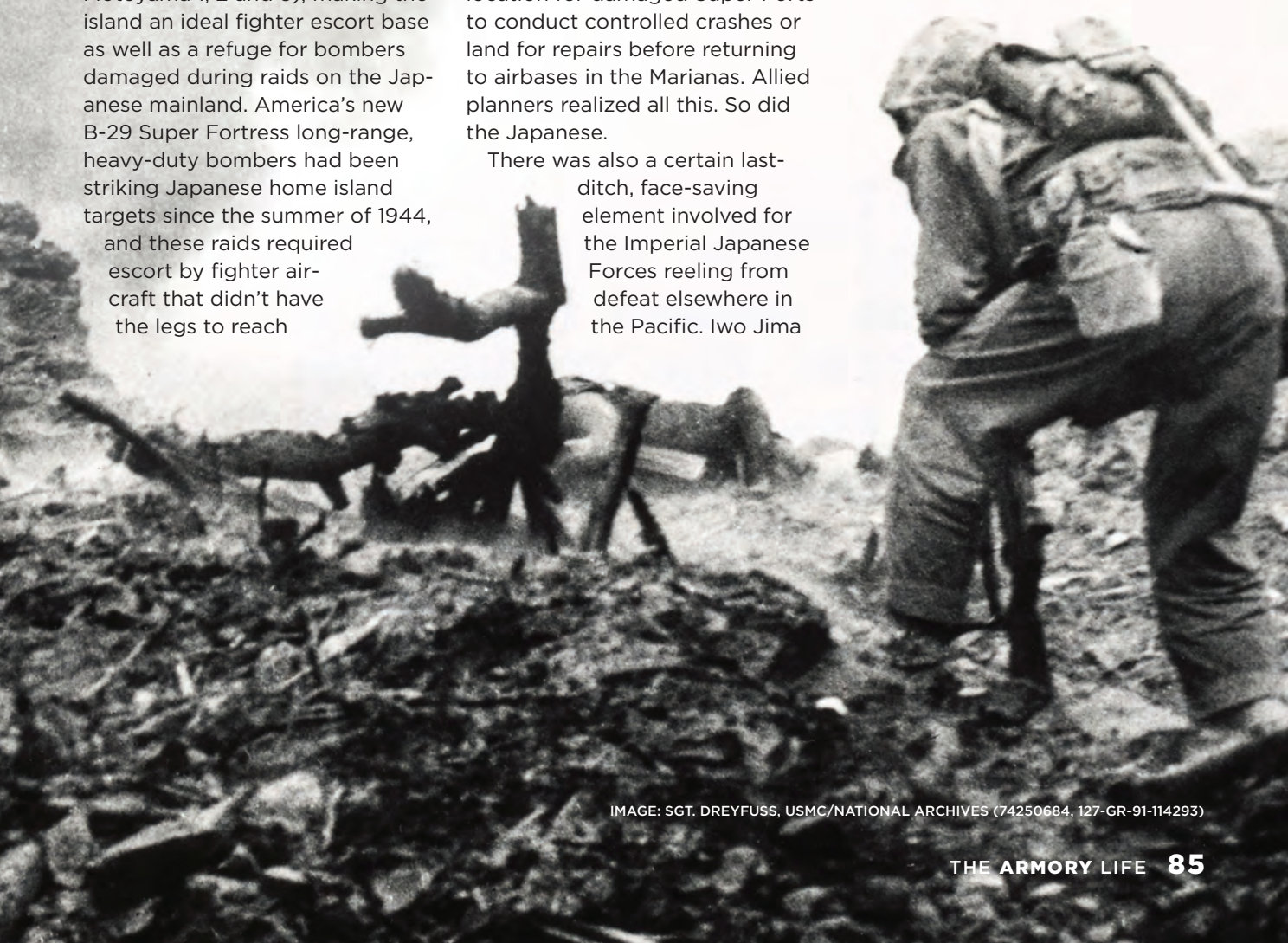


IMAGE: SGT. DREYFUSS, USMC/NATIONAL ARCHIVES (74250684, 127-GR-91-114293)

of coastal defense and AA units. It all amounted to around 20,000 Japanese defenders on the island.

They went to work with tenacious defense as a single-minded purpose. All over Iwo's eight square miles of volcanic ash, Japanese forces found, cleared and reinforced natural caves. They dug in like termites all over Mount Suribachi at the island's southern tip where the high ground dominated both of the island's possible landing beaches. Every inch of those beaches was zeroed in for enfilading fire. Blockhouses and pillboxes flanked the landing areas. Machine guns were sighted for deadly interlocking fire. Rockets, anti-boat and anti-tank guns were emplaced with wide-open fields of fire. When the calendar flipped to 1945, the Japanese were ready.

## A SECOND LOOK

With all this in mind and a set of copious notes, I visited the island for a second time as a Marine Combat Correspondent based in Hawaii. It was coming up on the 45th anniversary of the Iwo Jima fight when I conned my way into a solo visit to the island by promising a feature story based on something nebulous like "the ghosts of Iwo Jima." Call it hubris, but I thought I might somehow channel both defenders and attackers if I could spend a week or so crawling that old, remote and relatively unchanged battlefield.


The first thing I noticed was the

smell.

There's an obvious and odious miasma that hangs over Iwo Jima. It's no wonder Marines and others called it sulfur island. The place reeks of that element and reminds constantly that you're walking around on a dormant volcano. Seeking escape from the heat and odors, I climbed Mount Suribachi and stood on the spot where a patrol from the 28th Marines of the 5th Marine Division, raised the American flag.

There's a monument up there marking that spot where AP correspondent Joe Rosenthal took his immortal still photo of the flag-raisers. Those included Pima Indian Ira Hayes, immortalized much later by a popular Johnny Cash song that could have been the original anthem for PTSD. And I thought about a lesser-known photographer who also captured that drama. Marine Sergeant Bill Genaust shot 16mm color film of the flag-raising. His brief view was eventually shown as a patriotic trailer in theaters all across the nation and later became a standard in early TV signoffs. Genaust was killed on Iwo and his body never recovered.

Picking up a white basalt rock from the flag-raising summit, I stepped down a bit onto a ledge that overlooked the landing beaches and sat thinking about the V (Fifth) Amphibi-



The iconic image of U.S. Marines at Iwo Jima raising the American flag atop Mount Suribachi.

ous Corps (Marine Major General Harry Schmidt) and the units that bobbed around in LVTs on the morning of 19 February 1945.

Below me, stretching from southwest to northeast were beaches Green and Red (5th Marine Division/Major General Keller Rockey), Yellow and Blue (4th Marine Division/Major General Clifton Cates) over which some 70,000 U.S. Marines — including the 3rd Marine Division (Major General Graves Erskine) in Corps reserve — would eventually land on this porkchop-shaped island. Iwo Jima had been blasted and pummeled from air and sea for weeks prior, which tore away at Japanese positions above ground but hardly touched the maze of underground fortifications. That left the assaulting Marines with one tactic — frontal assault.

### AT GREAT COST...

D-Day was nothing short of a bitch-kitty for those men as they struggled for traction over the shifting, slippery black sand of the landing beaches. One step up and three steps back just to reach the beach plateau. Fighting their way

through constant enemy fire and high-explosives raining down on their helmeted heads, plus mass confusion on overcrowded beaches, littered with burning and wrecked landing craft, the assault elements lost nearly 600 killed and some 1,800 wounded that morning while barely getting a toehold on Iwo.

One of those who died on a black sand beach was Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone who had been awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions on Guadalcanal. He didn't have to be there on Iwo, but Manila John wanted to be where he could use his experience to help others survive.

February 19 was just the first of 36 bloody days it took to secure Iwo Jima. Below my perch on Suribachi were other infamous battle sites such as the Quarry, the Amphitheater, Turkey Knob, Hills 362A, B and C, and the Motoyama airstrips. Those were the sites I wanted to explore.

### A LONELY JOURNEY

America had returned Iwo Jima to the Japanese in 1968, but the government in Tokyo didn't show much interest in the restored island at first. Quasi-official visitors

like me were pretty much left on their own to explore. And a military history nerd like me knew where

to do that. I crawled through numerous caves that still contained rusty weapons, ammo and little housekeeping items like teacups, canteens, molding equipment and green IJA-issue sake bottles.

Under some rocks in a cave at the base of Hill 362A I found two blue and white porcelain mess tins marked with the anchor and rising sun symbol of the Rikusentai, or Japanese Special Naval Landing Force. Apparently, Admiral Ichimaru had some of his own Marines on the island to face the American versions.

Practically everywhere in caves and crumbling fortifications, detritus of men at war lay where it had fallen or been discarded more than two decades earlier. Most of it was of Japanese origin, including the rusting hulks of heavy-caliber guns like the ubiquitous Type 92 "woodpecker" and its lighter Nambu cousins. There were many caves too thoroughly blasted or threatening to collapse, which limited exploration.

Much of the work on Iwo Jima to winkle Japanese defenders out of hiding was done by flamethrowers followed by demolitions or a barrage of heavy-caliber direct fire. But there were enough navigable fortifications above and below ground to give an explorer a close-up look at what fighting must have entailed for attackers and defenders.

A map developed by the Marine Corps after the fighting pointed me to a deep cave complex that was presumed to be General Kuribayashi's command post. It had



IMAGE: ASSOCIATED PRESS/JOE ROSENTHAL

been hard hit during the fighting in 1945. Heavy chunks of shrapnel from 16-inch naval shells littered a scorched area around the entrance, but if you were willing to crawl down the tunnels on your belly, you got a close-up look at how the Japanese lived underground.

The cave was full of little nooks, crannies and antechambers, and you always felt like you were headed downward, deeper and deeper into the guts of Iwo Jima. And the deeper you got, the hotter it was. Never mind the shells, bombs and rockets, just breathing in that cave complex was a chore. And in the deepest chamber, a broad rock platform surrounded by shredded wires and remnants of Japanese field phones. This was probably where the general received field reports and studied his maps.

At the end of my second visit to Iwo, following a week of spelunking and study of the battle sites at the infantryman's level, I was in awe of the official butcher's bill. It was staggering even in comparison to other bloody Pacific battles: around 6,000 KIA, and nearly 20,000 WIA on the American side of the ledger. Japanese defenders lost nearly everyone involved in the battle. Less than a thousand of the 20,000 original defenders survived. Most committed suicide or eventually crawled out to surrender after a few weeks of starvation. Some of them held out by raiding Allied positions at night for provisions. The last two surviving Japanese soldiers on Iwo Jima surrendered on the 6th of January, 1949.

### THE FINAL STEP

The third and last time I visited Iwo Jima was to attend something called the Reunion of Honor during which American veterans of that battle were transported to the island to meet with families of Japanese soldiers or sailors



**The entrance to what is believed to be one of General Kuribayashi's command posts on Iwo Jima. It wound deep into Iwo Jima's sweltering interior.**


who died in the fighting. It was a different trip in a lot of ways. No cave-crawling allowed these days.

Now, civilian access to the island



**The author is shown here on Iwo as part of the 2003 "Reunion of Honor" event. Satellite phones were the only reliable means of communication there.**

is restricted to things like the Reunion of Honor and other memorial services for the American and Japanese who fell on the island, visits by construction workers, and the occasional foray by technicians from various meteorological agencies. And sometimes, Marine or Navy squadrons cruising in the Western Pacific are permitted to use the island's expanded and improved airstrips to practice carrier landings. Battlefield exploration, souvenir hunting and cave crawling are strictly forbidden.

But I'd gotten in under that wire at least twice and, as I watched a Battalion Landing Team from Okinawa land in modern AAVs (Amphibious Assault Vehicles) across the black sand, I couldn't help but reflect on what I'd discovered on that reeking sulfur island. Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz had it right. "Among those who served on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue." 

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# TOUCH

**TRUE PRECISION CUSTOM  
PARTS ADD SOME LUSTER  
TO THE PROVEN  
HELLCAT PRO.**

JEREMY TREMP





The author employed a selection of True Precision custom parts for his Hellcat Pro to create this eye-catching and capable 9mm.

**WHEN IT COMES** to aftermarket accessories, the firearms market is full of companies vying for your attention. Some companies pop up overnight and disappear in as much time, while others help define entire categories. When it comes to the latter, True Precision is one of those companies that I consider very influential.

Back in early 2019, I remember seeing True Precision barrels on a number of my buddies' pistols — mostly threaded variants — and I was impressed. Fast forward five years, and True Precision is manufacturing slides, barrels, custom frames, triggers and other parts for a wide array of pistols, including my beloved Hellcat Pro.

#### **ON MY RADAR**

As a fan of the Springfield Armory Hellcat Pro, this obviously caught my attention. While doing

some research for this article, I got the chance to chat with the owner of True Precision, Jimmy Allen, about what helps his company stand the test of time and continue to innovate.

"True Precision was founded in 2016 out of a need for affordable, high-end precision parts — along with a great customer experience," he explained. "Our goal was to reach the everyday carry person, outfitting them with quality in the sub-compact and compact market.

"We are agile in bringing new desirable products to market, and the key for us is listening to our customer base," he continued. "The market is very competitive, so True Precision stands out by consistently producing items while fully backing our products with excellent customer service and an experience that end-users want to share."

I love to hear stuff like this from the owners of companies, because it trickles down into everything they do, and ultimately into the products we purchase. I also think he nailed it on the "shareability" aspect of their products. When you add aftermarket parts to your firearm, you're making very personal choices as to how it's customized. This creates pride in your creation, and usually a desire to let others see how you de-

cided to configure your firearm.

When I saw True Precision was coming out with parts for the Hellcat Pro pistols, I was immediately intrigued. I wanted to see what they could do to transform my Hellcat Pro — already an excellent EDC pistol — into something with even more personality and some unique visual and handling characteristics.

As much as I love the factory Hellcat pistols, there will always be a part of me that wants to customize and create something new. As an artistic person, I look at everything through the lens of what could be, or how I would adjust or change something visually to be unique to me.

To be clear, I also very much value a bone-stock pistol, especially when it comes to my daily carry. There are fun guns, carry guns, range guns and safe ponies, and I fully endorse anyone willing to own or build any number of these. My goal for this Hellcat was to build out a fun range gun that could just as easily be a great carry gun.

## THE DETAILS

One newer product True Precision has been offering is stippled frames. I am a huge fan of custom-stippled frames, both lasered and/or hand-stippled. Remember I mentioned I like to customize my guns? The Hellcat Pro comes from the factory with “Adaptive Grip Texture,” and I’ve found it to be excellent. However, my desire to customize my guns led me to want to try out what

True Precision had to offer.

True Precision will take a factory Hellcat Pro frame and work up a part laser-/part hand-stippled process to create a wonderful-looking frame texture with superb utility. The frame is kept the factory black color, while the hand-stippled portion is an even deeper black, creating a stand-out look. They even laser the True Precision logo into the bottom portion of the grip, which I think is a nice touch. The hand-stippled portion of the frame is at the front and rear of the grip, while the lasered portions are on the left and right side of the grip.

I also decided to try out their Hellcat Pro slide, the Axiom optics-cut slide, in all-black DLC. They offer it in a wide range of

finish options, by the way. The Axiom slide is a sleek design with side-cut windows to reduce weight while also adding some style. The reduced and scalloped front of the slide creates a unique look, and accentuates the view of the True Precision threaded barrel (more on that in a moment).

The Axiom slide features angled rear serrations that are aggressive, allowing you to easily manipulate the slide. The slide is cut for the RMSc footprint (which was perfect for keeping my Shield SMSc on my pistol). I also selected the optional optic-height Night Fision night sights.

The customized pistol proved to be equally ready for both the range as well as everyday carry.



# HELLCAT PRO



## PRICING

BASE HELLCAT PRO	\$649
FRAME STIPLING	\$295
AXIOM SLIDE	\$395
BARREL (GOLD TiN)	\$199.99

fers and a feed ramp designed to perform reliably with all types of ammunition. According to the company, True Precision utilizes a proprietary stainless-steel broach cut rifling to deliver extremely good accuracy.

As far as accuracy is concerned, I easily got some very tight groups offhand at 15 yards. The barrel was reliable, with no feeding issues or malfunctions during my entire range visit. Recoil was manageable, and accuracy was quite good.

Regarding the barrel on the Hellcat Pro, I chose a TiN (for "Titanium Nitride") barrel in a rich gold color. I also chose the threaded barrel option with thread protector so that I could one day add a comp or a suppressor to the pistol. It's always nice to have the option, and there are no downsides for me to the extra length on the barrel, even if I am carrying in a holster (that can accommodate it).

Down the road, I would love to test out the True Precision Micro Compensator on the pistol to squeeze out every bit of performance on the range.

I've always been fond of the True Precision barrels from an aesthetic perspective, from the color options down to the "TRUE" mark on the right side. The barrels are machined with advanced cuts, cham-

## RANGE TIME

I hit the range with the pistol to get a feel for the new parts and see how they performed. I loaded up with some Remington UMC range ammo, which is generally what I use for all my sessions, to keep things consistent.

I immediately noted the laser- and hand-stippled frame. Keeping the pistol firming planted in my hands was easy. Thankfully, the stippling was not so aggressive as to tear up my hands, which I have experienced with other pistols.

I also noted that the slide did have slightly less mass to it due to the lightening cuts, and manipulating/cycling the slide with the rear serrations was easy. Also, with its tough black DLC coating, you can count on this slide looking and performing flawlessly for thousands of rounds.

## CONCLUSION

I started out with the goal of spicing up my Hellcat Pro for some fun range trips. I think I accomplished that goal and more, as the pistol looks great and shoots fantastic.

I think the color scheme is classy with shades of gray and black, and the "pop" of gold of the barrel really catches your eye. I am extremely pleased with this build, and if anyone out there is looking to spice up their Hellcat Pro, I would highly suggest taking a look at the True Precision website to see what they have to offer. They make stellar products sure to last you a lifetime. 🏆

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