

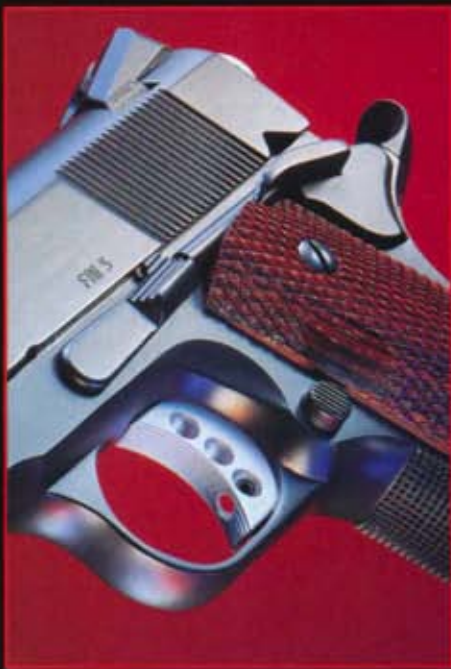
# MOST WANTED

BY CAMERON HOPKINS  
PHOTOS BY ICHIRO NAGATA

The **FBI** went after the best pistol for its SWAT-trained agents.

The result was a highly customized

**1911A1** from  
Springfield Armory's Custom Shop.



*With Novak sights, an ambi safety, match trigger and beavertail, the FBI's new 1911 could easily pass for an IPSC Limited Class pistol.*





**F**ollowing a controversial test that pitted Colt, Kimber and Springfield Armory against the country's foremost custom gunsmiths, the Federal Bureau of Investigation selected a customized 1911 pistol for its SWAT-certified field agents. America's most wanted handgun is a Springfield Armory Model 1911A1 customized by the Springfield Custom Shop to exacting specifications enumerated by the FBI.

The FBI is currently issuing these accurized and hand-fitted 1911A1s to

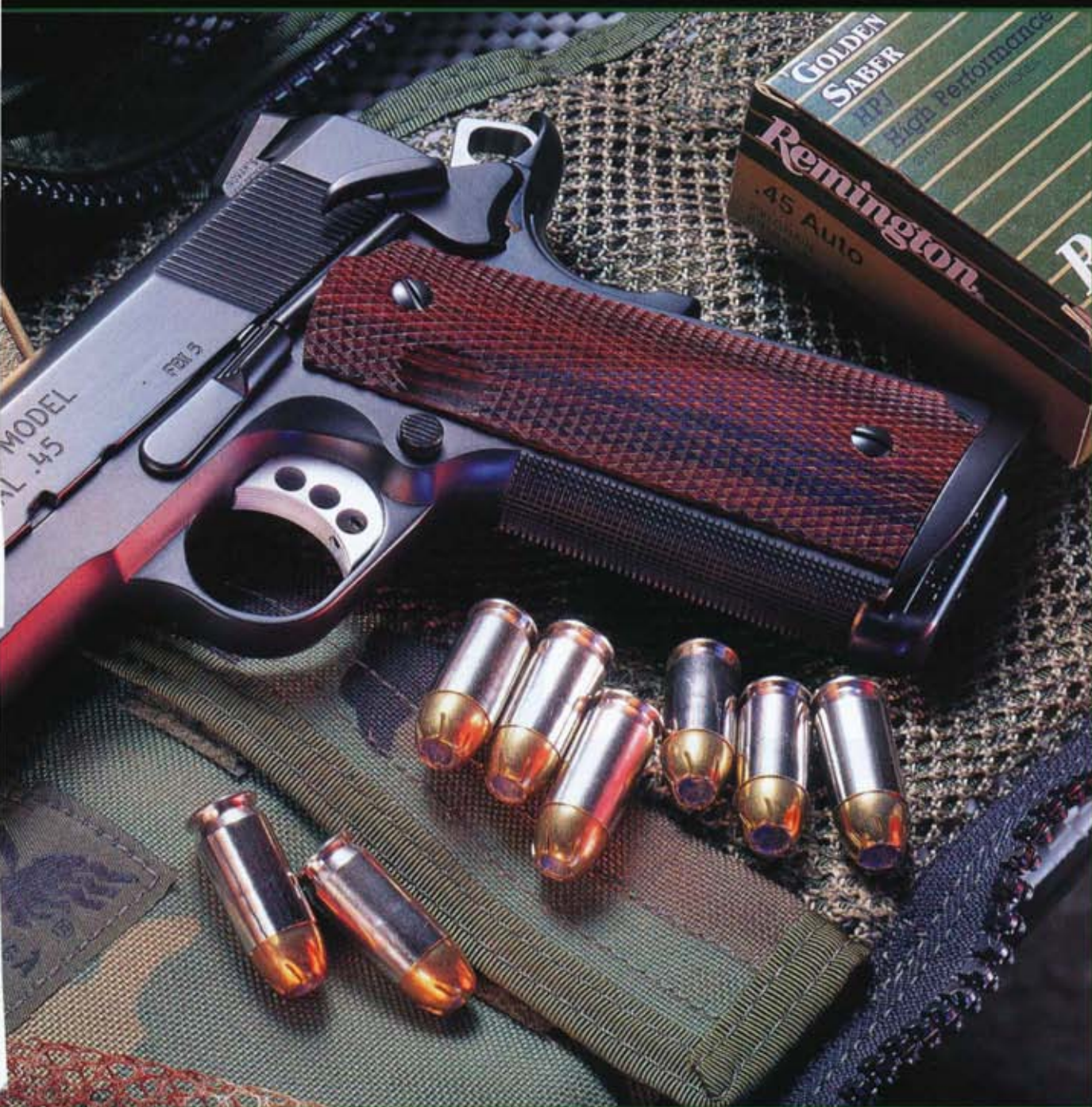
selected agents who, in addition to their regular duties, are specially trained as SWAT team members. Previously, the issue gun for FBI SWAT was the Browning Hi-Power.

Not to be confused with the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team (HRT), the SWAT agents are spread throughout the country in regional FBI field offices. The HRT had already acquired a new pistol, a Les Baer customized Para-Ordnance .45 ACP in 1995, replacing their Hi-Powers. However, the regional SWAT teams did

not receive the Para-Ordnance.

The impetus to rearm the SWAT teams with a Government Model pistol came as a result of the "Branch-Davidian Incident," as the FBI euphemistically refers to their immolation of 90 followers of David Koresh, including 25 children. We quote from a confidential FBI document obtained by *American Handgunner*:

"After the Branch Davidian incident in Waco, Texas (1993), the Heymann Report recommended that the SWAT





tactical elements become standardized throughout the FBI. Based upon the Heymann recommendation, the SWAT Training Unit began to develop specifications to standardize all SWAT team pistols. It was determined that *accuracy* would be the number one factor in developing a SWAT pistol." (Emphasis is in the original FBI report.)

## A Call To Arms

The subsequent solicitation and testing was fraught with controversy from the start. The Bureau issued a Request For Proposal (RFP) #6990 on Oct. 25, 1996. (An RFP is essentially a purchase order from the government in which bids and samples are solicited.) Eight companies responded: Colt's Mfg. Co., Kimber Of America, Springfield Armory, Wilson's Gun Shop, Les Baer Custom, Pro Gun, Cylinder & Slide Shop and C-More Systems.

C-More, a manufacturer of optical sights, has a contract with Colt's to manufacture and sell aftermarket accessories for the 1911 under the trademarked name "Colt Competition." C-More's submission of five customized Colt pistols was, according to company president Ira Kay, essentially a method of entering Colt guns twice, doubling their chance to win.

There was a rumor—never officially verified, but nonetheless widely believed—that Smith & Wesson wanted to submit pistols, and attempted to assemble a 1911 made from Caspian Arms slides and frames. A day late and a dollar short, S&W missed the deadline. They went on to develop the single-action Model 945—which would have met the FBI's specs—only after the test was completed.

Following several questions from the candidates to clarify nebulous specifications, a succession of five amendments were issued to RFP #6990, the last one coming on April 22, 1997. The most significant amendment was the deletion of a controversial requirement for a firing pin safety because Colt's Mfg. Co. holds a patent on the Series 80 firing pin safety. No other manufacturer could submit a gun with a firing pin safety without a

license from Colt, a rather significant advantage for the Hartford gunmaker.

Once the firing pin requirement was dropped, testing began with each contender entering five pistols. The initial phase consisted of simply examining the pistols to see if they met the basic requirements. For instance, the specifications did not include a recoil spring guide rod. Wilson submitted guns with guide rods, so his pistols were returned for correction. Wilson removed the guide rods and resubmitted his guns.

Les Baer submitted pistols with adjustable sights, but the specification called for Novak fixed sights. The guns were returned to Baer to correct the sights; however, Baer had a change of heart and decided not to resubmit. He dropped out of the test at that stage, citing concerns over the service and warranty requirements.

Bill Laughridge of the Cylinder & Slide Shop also decided to withdraw from the testing. Laughridge also cited the RFP's provision for follow-on servicing and warranty requirements as the reason for withdrawing.

## Controversial Ammo

There were now six candidates remaining, most of whom promptly started to bitch about the ammo requirement. Their chorus of complaints continued right through the testing and eventually led to formal protests being filed against the Bureau. The object of the controversy was the Remington Golden Saber ammunition specified in the RFP.

The RFP stipulated that all testing would be conducted with Remington 230 gr. Golden Saber ammunition and that the maximum acceptable accuracy would be 1.5" at 25 yards for three consecutive 10-shot groups fired from a Ransom Rest.



*The CIRG unit that drew up the specs on the FBI's 1911 obviously wanted all the bells and whistles (top). They specifically named the S&A mag (middle) funnel as a desired accessory.*

*The FBI 1911 is a full-house custom made gun. The slide won't even fit on the frame as they're specially manufactured to "gunsmith fit" tolerances. Each slide is hand fitted to its frame.*



**No one from the FBI would go on record to explain why the Bureau specified a .45 caliber pistol. Could it be that the true reason is too politically incorrect for Reichsmarshal Reno?**

Golden Saber is an excellent performer in the FBI's terminal ballistic protocol; however, Federal Match it is not. To wring 1.5" groups from Golden Saber would be, as one candidate told me, "a miracle."

One of the candidates, Bill Wilson, conducted tests on Golden Saber in a special fixed barrel fixture. He determined that the ammunition was inherently capable of 1.25" groups at 25 yards. From a barrel fixture! To expect an actual gun, with moving parts and their necessary tolerances, to hold only a quarter-inch over a non-moving barrel fixture was, according to Wilson, impossible.

However, others disputed Wilson's findings, countering that Golden Saber has far better intrinsic accuracy than Wilson found. The worthiness of his barrel fixture was also questioned.

Even so, the same wariness of the ammunition was shared by the other candidates. "Let's put it this way, Golden Saber is not the most accurate ammo out there," one of the contenders said.

Indeed, four of the six candidates failed the accuracy portion of the FBI's test: the only two to emerge as finalists were Springfield Armory and a former employee of Springfield Armory named Matt Gish, who operates a small two-man custom shop in Iowa called Pro Gun.

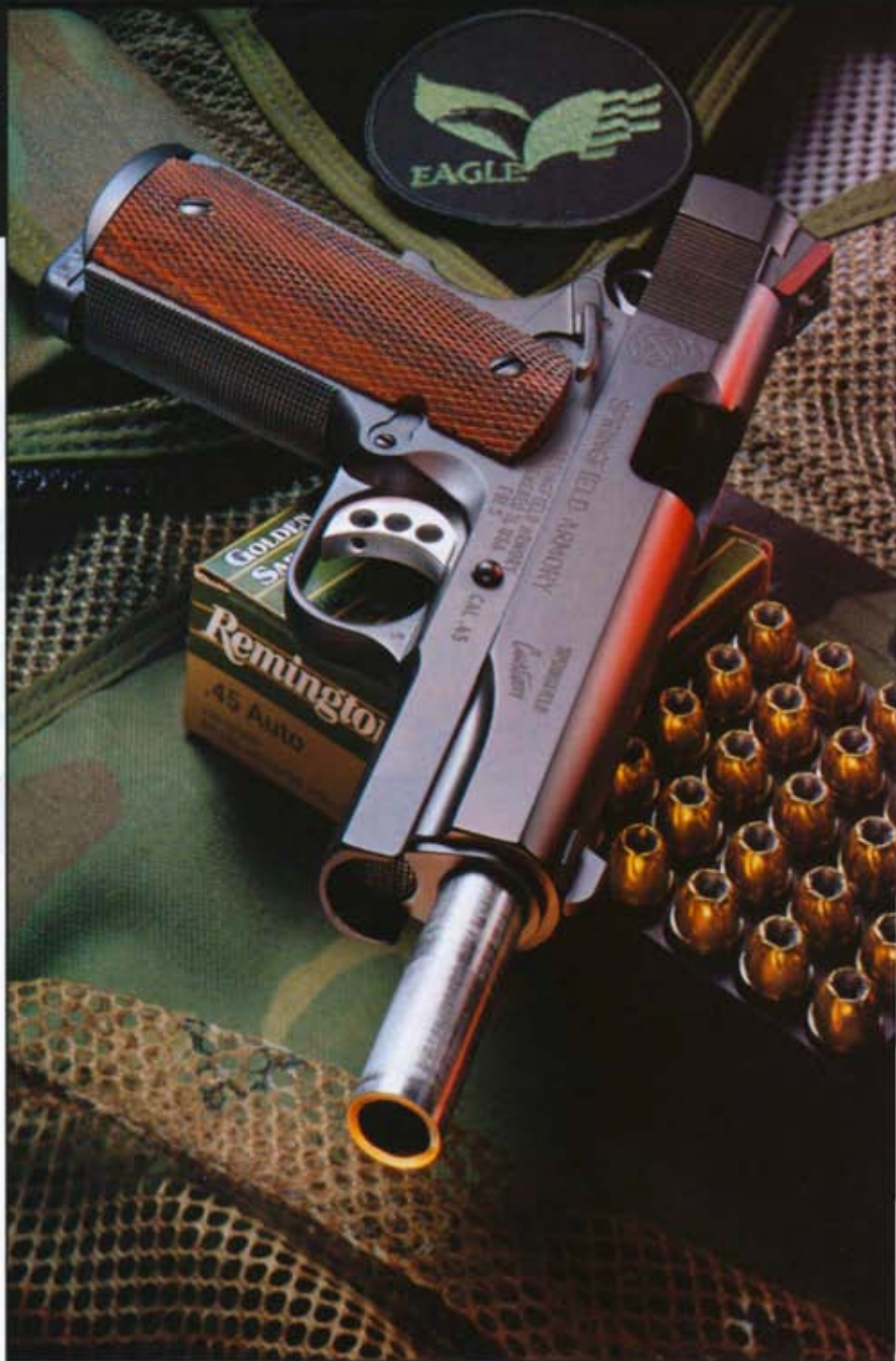
Colt's Mfg. Co. formally protested the use of Golden Saber in an appeal filed with the General Accounting Office (GAO). Colt's protest was rejected.

### "Favorite" Pistol

Gunsmith Gish, a former Springfield Armory employee, also protested the FBI's decision, but not over the ammo. He claimed the FBI "favored" Springfield Armory because a consultant to the Bureau, pistolsmith Steve Nastoff, "influenced" the decision in favor of the Brazilian importer.

Nastoff, who recently lost a lawsuit over trademark infringement against, among others, Springfield Armory, had been hired by the FBI to diagnose malfunctions during the function portion of the test.

"Nastoff was there to make sure everything worked and to fix anything that went wrong. That was all he did. But [Gish] got the idea that he [Nastoff] had a say in what gun was chosen, but he didn't. [Gish's] reasoning was that somewhere along the way Nastoff was suing us, but how he could figure that was a plus for us, I don't know," said Springfield Custom



Shop director David Williams.

The GAO agreed and rejected Gish's protest. With the last of the protests dismissed, the contract was awarded to Springfield Armory. It called for a minimum of 500 guns and a maximum of 5,000 over the life of the contract.

### A True Custom 1911

The specifications for the SWAT pistol were enumerated by the Critical Incident Response Group (CIRG), an oversight group that coordinates the HRT with the regional SWAT teams. While it didn't exactly spell it out, CIRG's wording, as listed in RFP #6990, all but said, "We

want a customized 1911."

For instance, the specification called for a ".45 caliber semiautomatic single-action pistol," preferably made of steel, with a grip safety, disconnect safety and an ambidextrous frame-mounted manual thumb safety. Additionally, the weapon can only accept a single-column magazine holding no less than eight rounds.

If there was any doubt the FBI wanted a 1911, it was removed in Section 10.1 on magazines: "Magazines shall be sturdily constructed of material which has a minimum capacity of eight rounds. (A magazine known to be acceptable is Bill

*Continued on page 86*



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Continued from page 51

Wilson's #47DE.) Wilson's #47DE is a stainless steel 1911 magazine.

It is not surprising that the RFP specified a single-column magazine. The HRT had adopted a customized Para-Ordnance double-column .45 several years previously, but the guns had given the operators nothing but trouble, according to an FBI insider. "As long as it's a Para, it's not going to be reliable. It goes back to the magazine. It's just not reliable," said the highly placed source familiar with the HRT's pistols.

Without boring you with a laundry list of specs—RFP #6990 runs on for 64 pages—the FBI was looking for a customized 1911 like an IPSC Limited Class pistol. Not surprisingly, several HRT members regularly compete in IPSC matches. *American Handgunner* has learned. Furthermore, IPSC national champion Jerry Barnhart has long been an independent trainer working for the FBI.

The IPSC influence on their pistol criteria is, in my opinion, fairly obvious—their specified S&A mag funnel is Exhibit A. In no reasonable scenario would a SWAT operator need to perform a speed reload, yet a mag funnel is *de rigeur* in IPSC matches with El Presidente drills requiring lightning-fast mag changes.

Consider the features on the winning pistol and see if it doesn't read like a standard IPSC pistol's pedigree: Novak tritium sights, Nowlin match barrel, Wilson extractor, Kings combat trigger, Wilson ambi thumb safety, Wolff springs, S&A mag funnel hand checkered and custom blended to the frame, Springfield Custom "Delta" hammer, McCormick sear, 20 lpi front strap checkering, lowered and flared ejection port, polished feedramp, Springfield Custom beavertail grip safety and Black T finish.

## Cocked-And-Locked

What with the FBI's seemingly endless array of embarrassing embroglios—open fire, she's got a baby!—one would think that the last pistol the G-men would want is a cocked-and-locked .45. Sure, savvy shooters appreciate the fine points of John Browning's legendary autoloader, but since when are decisions on sidearms made by savvy shooters? Isn't the FBI's hierarchy a bunch of Ivy League empty suits—Mr. E. Suits as they're called by street-savvy agents—with absolutely no knowledge of guns or shooting?

An informed source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said, "The decision was reached that in the hands of an average police officer, a single-action pistol may not be the safest tool. But if



you take a guy who is, by his job definition, a shooter, who's to be out in a shooting situation, when they gave these guys a DA pistol, they just didn't shoot as well. You can shoot far more proficiently with a single-action pistol. The guns that these guys shot the best was—guess what?—the 1911 pistol."

So expediency won out over political correctness. I would have lost money if there'd been a bet on what .45 pistol the FBI would adopt, a SIG P-220 or a 1911.

Springfield Armory, like all the contenders, sent five pistols to the Bureau. The guns were all prefixed "FBI" and the serial numbers were single digits: 2, 4, 5, 6 and 9. (Trivia time: Of the first 10 serial numbers, Springfield Armory kept five and the FBI has five. The Armory's founder, Bob Reese, owns FBI-1.)

### Multi-Part Test

The test consisted of several parts: first came an inspection for compliance to the specifications, followed by a safety check, an abuse test, a firing test, a "field suitability" test, an accuracy test, an endurance test and, finally, a second accuracy test.

"If you failed on anything, they just quit testing and sent the gun back for you to fix it. You had a chance to fix anything. If you failed again, that was it. They were pretty fair on that," said Williams, director of the Springfield Custom Shop.

While all of the FBI's requirements were demanding, the most rigorous was accuracy. Chosen at random, two of the five guns had to shoot no more than 1.5" at 25 yards for three 10-shot groups from a Ransom Rest. Then the guns would be shot for 20,000 rounds in an endurance test, after which a second accuracy test would be conducted with no more than 15 percent degradation in accuracy being acceptable.

Wilson's, Colt's and Kimber's guns all failed the accuracy test. Kimber's guns were the worst, shooting 3.5", according to FBI records. The only two candidates to pass were Springfield Armory and Pro Gun. As noted previously, Colt filed a protest over the ammunition required for the accuracy test, which was rejected.

### Abusive Behavior

Meanwhile, the guns that were not randomly chosen for accuracy testing were relegated to the abuse test. The abuse test had two parts: a drop test and a throw test. During both, the guns could not discharge and the magazines could not dislodge from the weapons. Finally, the guns had to fire a full magazine after being dropped or thrown.

During the drop test, guns were dropped onto concrete from a height of 4 feet, landing three times on the muzzle and three times on the butt. The throw test was conducted at 15 feet with the guns heaved onto concrete, twice on the left side and twice on the right. "The guns were pretty beat up after that,"

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Williams deadpanned. However, none of the primed empty cases in the chambers popped and none of the magazines came loose, so it was on to the "field suitability" test.

The FBI brought in SWAT-certified agents from all over the country to shoot the guns to "see if Mikey likes it." The agents shot a specified course of fire consisting of 250 rounds, 150 of which were freestyle in different positions, strong and weak hand, over barricades, prone, kneeling, whatever. The last 100 rounds were shot in two repetitions of a 50 round course similar to an IPSC standard exercise.

At the end of the day, the five guns had shot a total of nearly 50,000 rounds between them, been dropped, thrown, examined under a microscope and passed through innumerable hands. "The original military test was only 6,000 rounds when they adopted the 1911. No one has ever tested a 1911 like this. This is the toughest test the government has probably ever conducted for any gun, other than maybe a machinegun," Williams commented.

### Whither The .45

No one in the FBI, in an official capacity, would answer one simple question: why did the Bureau specify the .45 ACP cartridge? American Handgunner sent written requests to the FBI Press Office in Washington, DC, attempted to interview Special Agent David Shellenberger of the HRT, who was one of the testers, and also attempted to contact Special Agent In Charge Rick Entellini of the SWAT Training Unit (STU).

The Press Office said they couldn't comment on an RFP's specifications. Shellenberger said, "No comment." We were unable to reach Entellini.

The closest we could get to an official answer was from a CIRG report which stated, "The weapon must be chambered for a .45 caliber cartridge. This is because of the superior performance of the .45 caliber round over the 9mm in FBI ballistic testing."

We contacted several agents familiar with the pistol selection and, after promising them anonymity, they agreed to comment:

"When John Hall was in charge of the 10mm program, he told me, 'I love the .45, I carry a .45, but I couldn't go before Congress and ask for \$3.5 million for a .45 when the army had just spent millions to replace the .45.' So we came up with a cartridge that ballistically was identical to it—the downloaded 10mm," an FBI source said.

"The FBI has been conducting an ongoing study on ballistics since Miami [the 1986 massacre in which two agents died in a bloody gunfight with bank robbers]. They found the .45 is a pretty good round. In a tradeoff between controllability and knockdown power, the .45 is it.

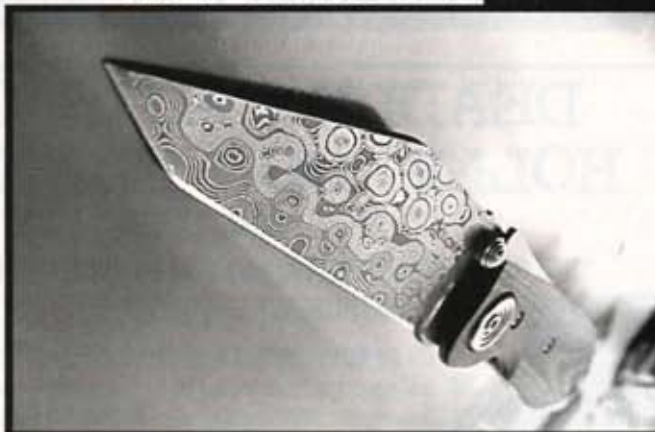


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Confidence level is also a part of it [the decision to adopt the caliber]," said another informed source.

There! The words no one wants to admit officially: "knockdown power." You know that was the reason for the .45 specification; I know that; and surely the FBI knows that. But they aren't about to admit it. The assorted liberals in the alphabet soup— HCL, ACLU, NAACP— would have a field day with such an admission. You can just imagine the headlines: "FBI Shoots To Kill," "FBI Picks Deadliest Weapon."

## Transition Training

The Bureau is currently in the process of transition training the SWAT agents. Each SWAT agent goes through an intensive four-day school with a heavy emphasis on "IPSC type shooting," according to one agent who took the course.

"There's a lot of Jerry Barnhart's influence in the transition course. He's done a lot of teaching back at Quantico and it's influenced the training. I don't think a lot of it's relevant to what we do, but it's a heck of a lot better than what we had before," said a knowledgeable agent.

All shooting starts with the gun in a holster. This alone is a great improvement over the PPC style training that the FBI used to employ.

Additionally, the start position is realistic: "hands on MP-5" or, more precisely, holding one's hands in front of the body as if one were holding an HK MP-5 sub-machinegun, the SWAT agents' primary weapon. At the signal, the shooter "drops" his MP-5— to simulate either a malfunction or running out of ammo— and then draws his pistol from a Safariland Model 6004 tactical thigh holster.

The shooter's pistol is "locked" in the Safariland holster with the thumb-operated keeper in place. This ain't no low-cut IPSC speed rig. The target is the FBI-QIT99 silhouette.

Starting at the 25 yard line, the shooter has 45 seconds to draw and fire six rounds prone, six rounds standing and six rounds weak-hand kneeling for a total of 18 rounds and two reloads.

From there, the shooter moves to the 15 yard line and has three seconds to draw and fire two rounds, repeated four times for eight rounds total. "This is where you lose your points," an agent told me. "If you fumble your draw or don't give a secure grip, you're hosed."

Continuing on the 15 yard line, the next string is a modified "Bill Drill," seven rounds in six seconds.

Moving to the 7 yard line, the shooter again empties a magazine, seven rounds in five seconds. This drill is repeated once for a total of 14 rounds. Staying at the 7 yard line, the final drill is to draw and fire five rounds strong-hand, reload and fire five rounds weak-hand in 13 seconds.

The total number of rounds expended

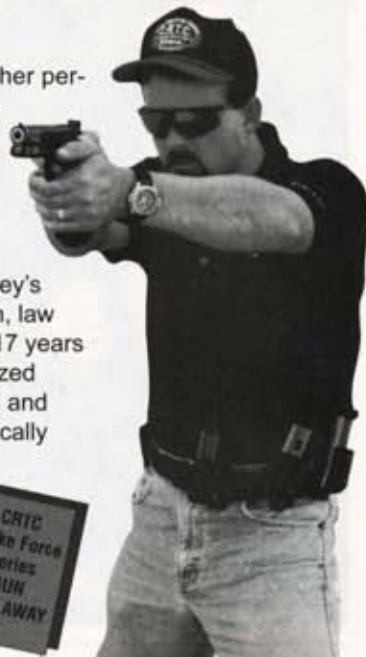
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According to an agent who took the transition training, agents fire about 800 rounds a day for four days. He said he did not have any malfunctions during the course, and neither did the two shooters on either side of him. The agents cleaned their pistols daily with Shooter's Choice solvent and Gun Scrubber, and lubed them with Lubriplate.

Pistolsmith Steve Nastoff and an FBI armorer were present to diagnose any jams or rectify any problems on the spot. Like the Maytag repairman, the pistolsmiths had the loneliest job at the transition class.

The guns are issued with five Wilson/Roger magazines. The agents are instructed to replace the magazine springs every 2,500 rounds, or twice a year, whichever comes first. The guns come with 18 lb. Wolff recoil springs, which need to be replaced every 5,000 rounds.

## The .45 Is King

The FBI's decision to equip first its HRT and then its regional SWAT teams with single-action .45 ACP pistols will reverberate throughout the law enforcement community for many years to come. Departments whose SWAT officers have begged and pleaded for the 1911, "the world's best fighting pistol," now have ammunition to take to their administrators.

The fact that the Bureau recognized the need for a custom 1911 is equally significant. Again, other departments will find it easier to issue fine-tuned Government Models now that the FBI set this precedent.

The Springfield Armory Custom Shop, under the direction of master pistolsmith David Williams, has received a tremendous stamp of legitimacy. Mostly known for its IPSC competition guns shot by Rob Leatham and others on Team Springfield, now the Custom Shop has a whole new set of laurels.

The prestige of the Custom Shop's FBI contract is trickling down to Springfield's production guns too. The Illinois-based importer first came out with a "Bureau Model" spec'd identically in every respect to the FBI's gun; however, lawyers at the Justice Dept. informed the company that it could not commercialize the name "Bureau Model," and asked them to stop. The same gun, priced at \$1,895, is now known as the Professional Model.

The serial number prefix on the "Bureau Model" was FBI-xxx; the Professional's prefix is CRG-xxx. There were only 258 guns made with the FBI prefix.

Despite the controversy of the test, the decision to equip agents with a cocked-and-locked .45 ACP pistol is to be applauded by all serious students of combat weaponscraft. Given an unlimited budget and total freedom to buy any handgun for a SWAT team, the FBI made an outstanding choice.



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