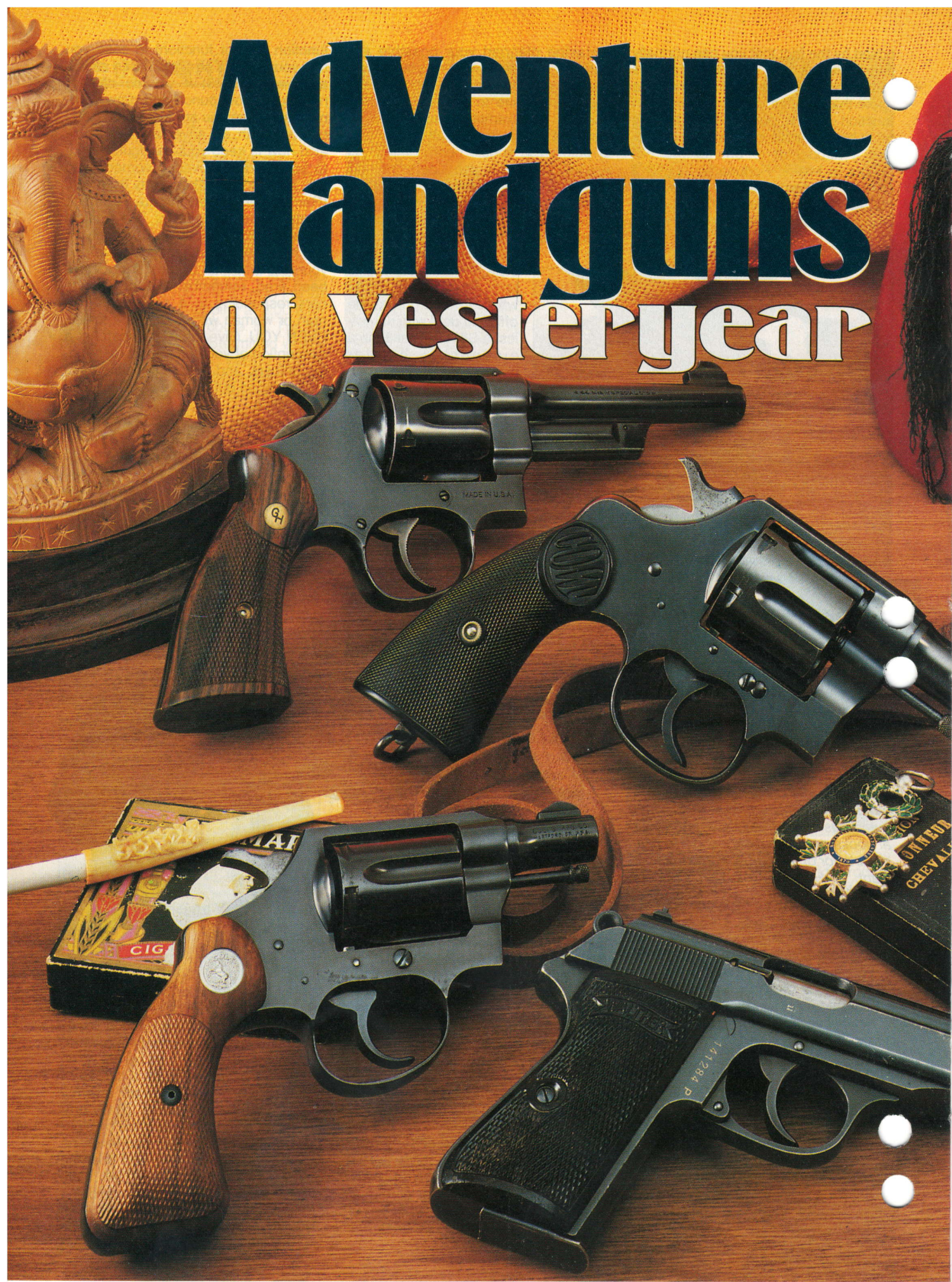
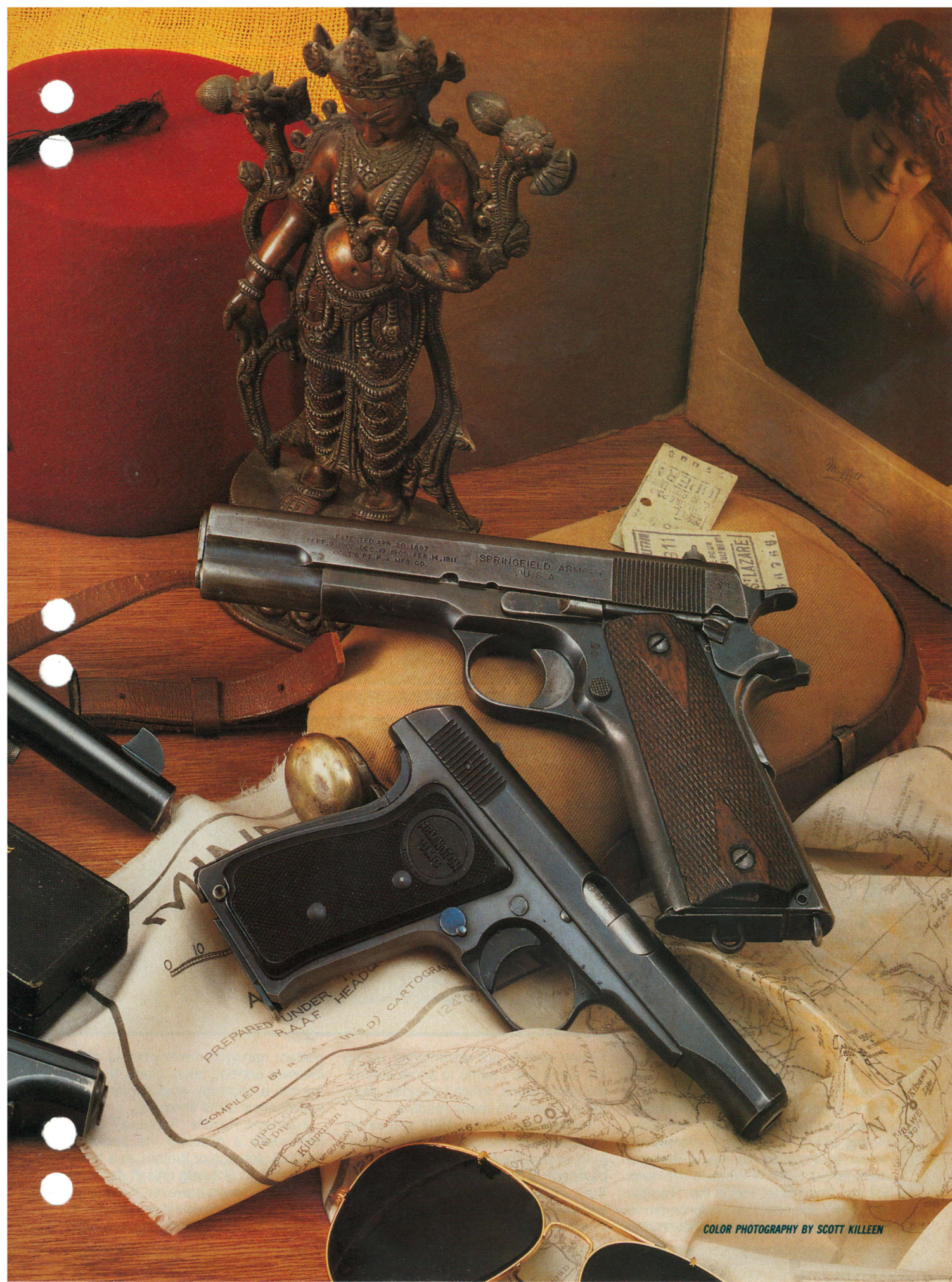


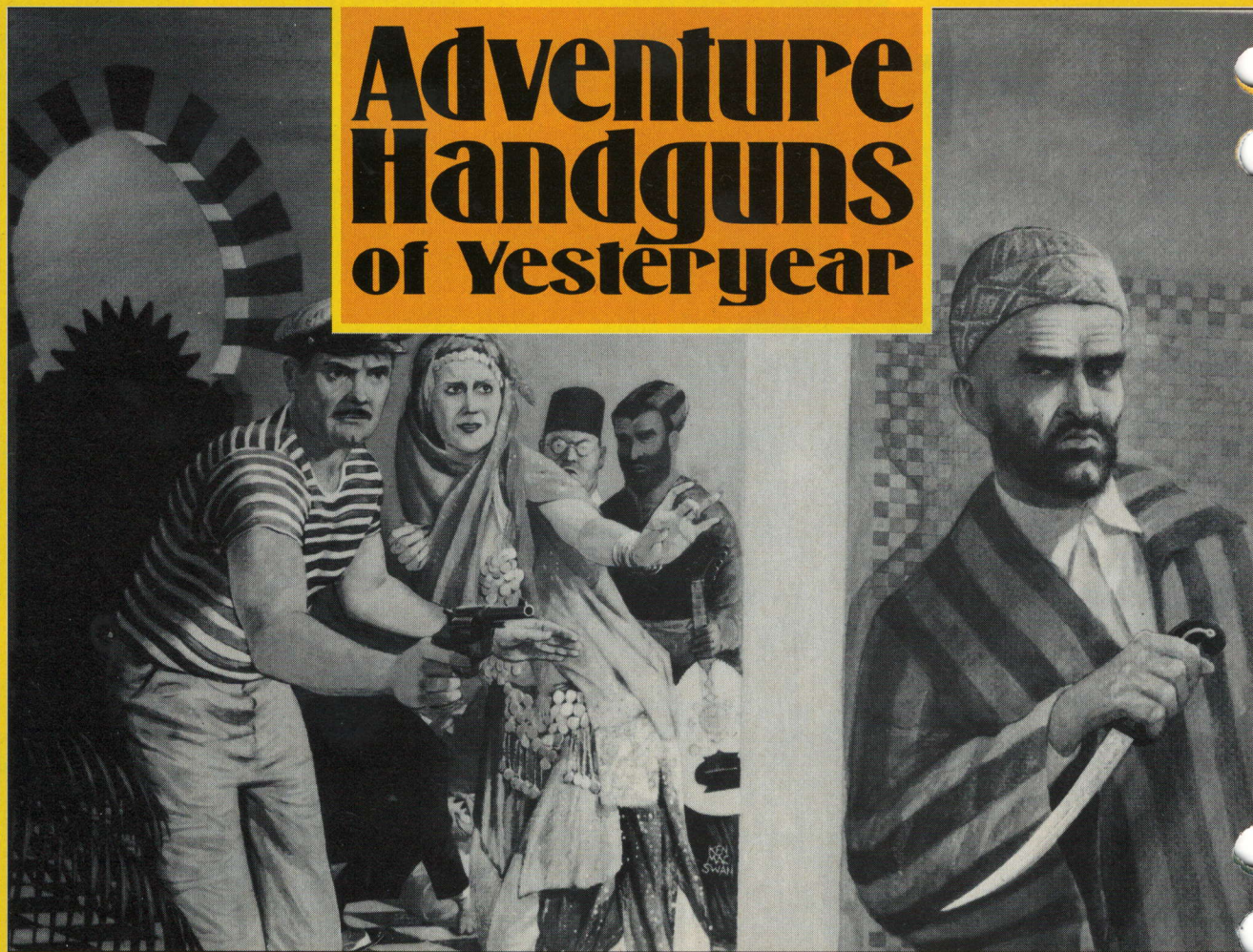
Adventure: Handguns of Yesteryear





COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT KILLEEN

Adventure Handguns of Yesteryear



One traveler's personal arsenal.

BY LEROY THOMPSON

A shooting companion and I have an intellectual gun-lover's game we often play on our way to an afternoon's shooting. We speculate about what guns we'd have with us if we were our fathers, grandfathers, or great grandfathers. Such speculation passes the hour drive to the range we use and makes for discussions such as the merits of the 1896 Mauser versus the Model 1907 Roth-Steyr or 1900 Swiss Luger as a combat auto for the first decade of the 20th century. Then, a few months ago, I returned from a day's shooting and watched *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* on cable. Noting Indy's choice of a Webley revolver to strap on his hip, a replacement for his Smith & Wesson .44 Hand Ejector, 2nd Model, lost in the "Temple of Doom" episode, I naturally began to ponder what I would have chosen had

The author's first choice as a powerful utility revolver is the Colt New Service in .45 Colt.



I been setting out adventuring during the same era. I came to some surprising conclusions, which I decided might be of interest to many readers.

I chose as my year 1938 and as my persona a professional adventurer likely to search for fame and fortune from ballroom to Bali, from cabaret to Cathay. The year 1938 was not only the last year of "peace" prior to World War II, it was a year in which all of the im-

portant handgun developments of the interwar era had taken place, thus giving me a relatively wide scope for my hypothetical arms shopping.

Harrison Ford's "Indiana" Jones isn't really a pistolero; he packs a Smith & Wesson or Webley as a tool of the trade. In picturing myself as a circa 1938 adventurer, however, I'm going to assume that I would have retained my interest in and enthusiasm for hand-

guns. Thus, in making my choice of adventuring pistols, I'll assume I would have kept up with the latest developments of the time period and would have cultivated sources to get the latest models.

Okay, so it's 1938 and I'm getting ready to set out on months of adventuring where I'll likely encounter bullet-headed Nazis, duplicitous Armenians, bloodthirsty Turks, Malay pirates, Egyptian belly dancers, British soldiers

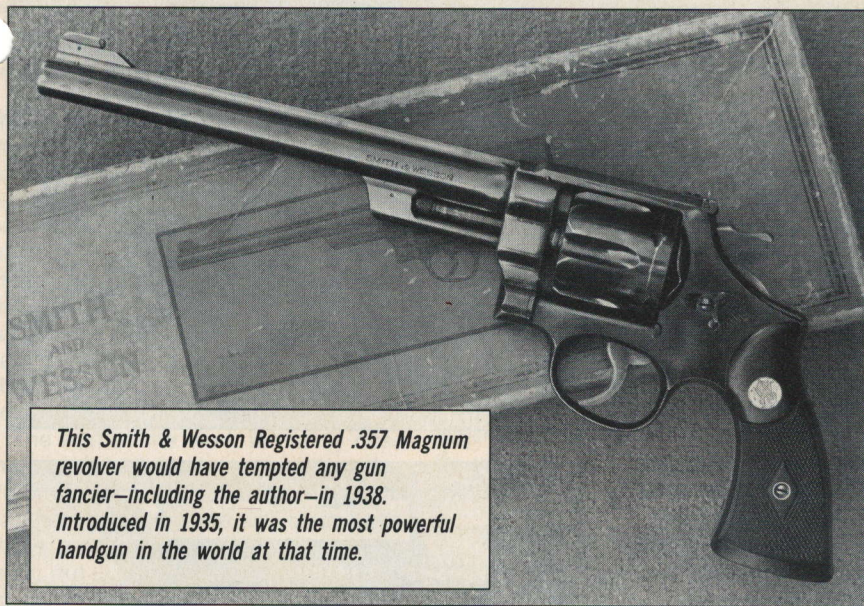
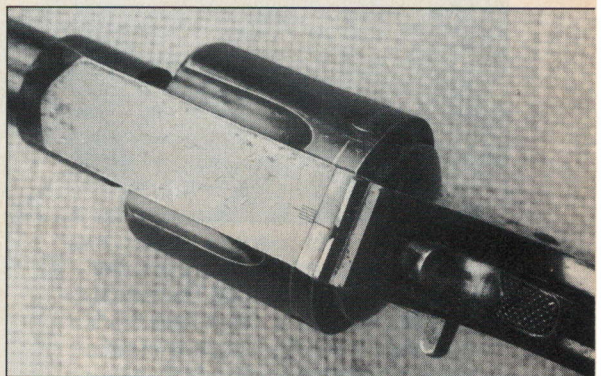
same staircase at Oxford!

For such societal duties, two of my possible choices are American and two German. Colt's Detective Special had been around since 1927 and offered .38 Special capability in a two-inch-barreled revolver weighing 21 ounces. The favorite police concealment arm of its time, the "Dick Special" was very reliable and was chambered for one of the world's most popular cartridges. My only objection is to its bulk, its 1.375-

Author would have ordered this King sight option on his S&W .357 Magnum.



Above: One "dark horse" pocket gun would have been this bobbed and streamlined "Fitz" Colt New Service revolver. Right: New Service Target model revolvers offered this rudimentary adjustable rear sight.



This Smith & Wesson Registered .357 Magnum revolver would have tempted any gun fancier—including the author—in 1938. Introduced in 1935, it was the most powerful handgun in the world at that time.

its .32 ACP and .380 chamberings. Though somewhat large at 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches overall and 21 ounces, the Model 51 conceals quite well due to its extremely flat profile (maximum width is only .75 inch). Its streamlined Art Deco grip—with a highly usable grip safety, I might note—also made it an excellent pistol for instinctive firing. In .380 ACP, this was an excellent pistol, though still somewhat large for the purpose.

Being a gun fancier, I would no doubt receive the German firm WUM's mail-order catalog and from it might have ordered either of two excellent products of the resurgent Reich. The first, the Sauer Model 1930 "Behorden Modell," was produced between 1930 and 1937 only in .32 ACP. Its greatest appeal lay in its compactness, being only 5.75 inches in overall length. The Sauer had another appeal for a pistol carried in a pocket, too, since it incorporated both a thumb safety and a trigger safety. There is also a loaded chamber indicator. As with other prewar German pistols, the Model 30 is of extremely high quality, and as with many .32 autos was very accurate. My only real objection to the Model 30 is its anemic chambering. Still, it slips nicely into a pocket, even today with our much less voluminous pockets.

Finally, available since 1931 was the Walther PPK, basically the same pistol

of fortune, imperious Hungarian courtesesses, and others of that ilk. What handgun am I likely to pack as my personal ordnance?

My first choice must be of a compact pocket pistol to slip behind my cummerbund or into my trousers pocket when dining aboard the Orient Express, nightclubbing in Shanghai, or being entertained by maharajas—probably former fellow residents of the

inch-diameter cylinder making it rather chubby for real pocket carry, even in the more voluminous pockets of the late '30s.

Another candidate for my pocket would be the Remington Model 51, arguably the best small auto ever made in the USA. Produced between 1919 and 1927, the Model 51 used a Pedersen-designed delayed-blowback system, which was over-complicated for

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as our contemporary PPK. At 6.25 inches overall and 19 ounces in weight, the double-action PPK was and is an excellent pocket pistol: compact, very accurate, safe, and reliable. Available

num or Colt's New Service revolvers. Introduced in 1935 as the most powerful handgun in the world, Smith & Wesson's .357 Magnum was a shooter's dream. Available with the purchaser's choice of barrel length between 3½ and 8¾ inches and with a choice of sights, it was almost like ordering a custom revolver. Add recesses in the

cylinder for the case heads and Smith & Wesson's renowned trigger pull and one had a truly excellent revolver. The .357 Magnum cartridge in those days really was a powerhouse, too, generating 1,515 feet per second and 812 foot-pounds from the 8¾-inch barrel. At 41 to 47 ounces, depending on barrel length, the .357 was heavy, but it was intended as a powerful belt gun. Had I been ordering my .357 circa 1938, I'd have opted either for the very carryable five-inch barrel or gone with the long 8¾-inch tube and considered my .357 a compromise between a revolver and a rifle. For my sight option I think I'd have chosen the King red dot front sight with mirror for additional light-gathering power in low-visibility conditions; dense rain forests and Caracas waterfront dives rarely have bright sunlight! My only objection to the big Smith & Wesson would have been that its rather new .357 Mag cartridge wouldn't have made it to the faraway parts of the world by 1938, while as a professional adventurer I would be likely to. Admittedly, I could have fired .38 Spe-

Author/adventurer felt the best all-around combat auto was the Colt Model 1911A1 National Match.



in .22, .25, .32, and .380 calibers, the PPK was most useful in .380 but most reliable at that time in .32. It held 6+1 rounds of .380 and 7+1 rounds of .32. Despite a preference for .380, however, there might have been one situation in which I would have opted for a .32 PPK. In 1938, Walther introduced a Dural (alloy-framed) version of the PPK in .32 ACP. At only 15.5 ounces this would have been an even better pocket pistol, and as a firearms enthusiast I would, I'm sure, have kept up with the latest developments and tried to acquire one. Tactically, to compensate for its weak round I would have practiced multiple rapid head or torso shots with it at combat ranges. Whether in a steel-framed .380 or Dural-framed .32, though, the PPK would have been my choice of pocket pistol.

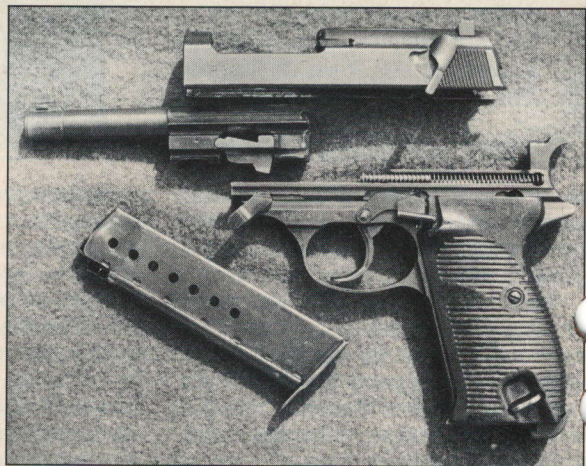
My pocket pistol selected, purchased, and fired for accuracy and reliability, I would next have turned to choosing a heavy-duty utility pistol for use against ravaging beasts or rampaging headhunters in the rain forests of the Amazon or jungles of Borneo. Stopping power would, therefore, be my primary requirement in this handgun. For this niche, I really would only consider three handguns, all revolvers. Smith & Wesson's .44 Special Hand Ejector would be an excellent choice were it not so dependent on handloads for its performance. Reloading components are not often available, however, in faraway places with strange-sounding names.

Therefore, I can quickly narrow my choice to Smith & Wesson's .357 Mag-



Two other hot contenders would be the Browning Hi-Power (left) and the newcomer Walther P-38. The Walther was DA, the Browning SA. Author favors the Hi-Power for its 13-round mag capacity, comfortable grip and slide-enclosed barrel.

In 1938, the double-action Walther P-38 (or more properly, the Heeres Pistole) would have been a difficult item to obtain, as it had just been adopted by the German Army as its issue sidearm.



cial in it, but why carry a 47-ounce .38 Special?

My other contender for heavy-duty adventuring would be Colt's New Service revolver. This massive wheelgun had been in production since 1898 and had established an enviable record for reliability. In target form, it had also won numerous accuracy accolades. Although offered in many chamberings, my choice would have been .45 Colt, a proven stopper, available in most places where firearms were sold. Although barrel lengths from two (in "Fitz" models) to 7½ inches were available, I would probably have gone with the most common 5½-inch length.

Both the S&W .357 Mag and the Colt New Service .45 had a lot to offer, but for far-flung adventuring I think I would have chosen the New Service because of the .45 Colt chambering. If I'd had the funds, though, I'm certain I would have had both in my arsenal.

My final choice would have been a pure fighting handgun, one to pack when running guns to Chinese warlords, fighting in Latin American revolu-

tions, or visiting exotic dancers in Chicago. Two recent innovations in auto pistols would have no doubt tempted me. FN had introduced the Browning Hi-Power—according to his own lights, John Browning's final and best design—in 1935, and this 13-shot 9mm would have been a tempting combat arm for me, one, in fact, I carried 40 years later while "adventuring" in the Persian Gulf. Walther's HP/P-38 would have also tempted me with its double action and 9mm chambering. Of the two, I'm sure I would have favored the Hi-Power for its large magazine capacity, comfortable grip, and slide-en-

closed barrel since my experience has been that for concealed carry nonen-closed auto barrels are more easily spotted and dig into one's side more. My enthusiasm would, however, have been tempered by the lack of effective 9mm Parabellum cartridges at the time, full-metal-cased rounds being all that were available.

My other possibility would have been the Colt Government Model, especially the National Match, which had been introduced in 1933. More accurate and with better sights, this highly precise auto had a silky trigger pull and would have delivered eight rounds of 230-



As a pocket pistol, the Colt Detective Special would have been appealing for its .38 Special chambering, but not necessarily for its bulky cylinder. By 1938 this reliable double-action revolver had been around for over 10 years.



Choosing the proper pocket gun is a serious bit of business. The author had three top contenders (above, T-B): the Sauer Model 1930 Behorden, the Remington Model 51, and (right) the Walther PPK. Of the three, our intrepid adventurer favored the Walther, though the other two were very close contenders.



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grain hardball very accurately in close encounters of the violent kind. Although I actually find the Browning Hi-Power a more ergonomic pistol for me, in 1938 I would have chosen the Colt for its more effective chambering; the .45 National Match would have been my fighting pistol.

To recap, I would have chosen the Walther PPK as my deep concealment pocket pistol, in .32 ACP if the Dural model, in .380 if the all-steel model; the Colt New Service .45 Colt with 5½-inch barrel as my heavy-duty utility arm; if adventuring had paid off recently with the discovery of a fabled city of gold or the ruby eyes of a pagan death mask, the S&W .357 Magnum with 5-inch or 8¾-inch barrel as a second heavy-duty utility arm; and the Colt National Match .45 auto as my pure fighting pistol. In 1938 dollars, these four would have

cost about \$175. The S&W .357 was definitely the most expensive at \$60, and, if eliminated, would have brought total cost down to less than two-thirds that amount.

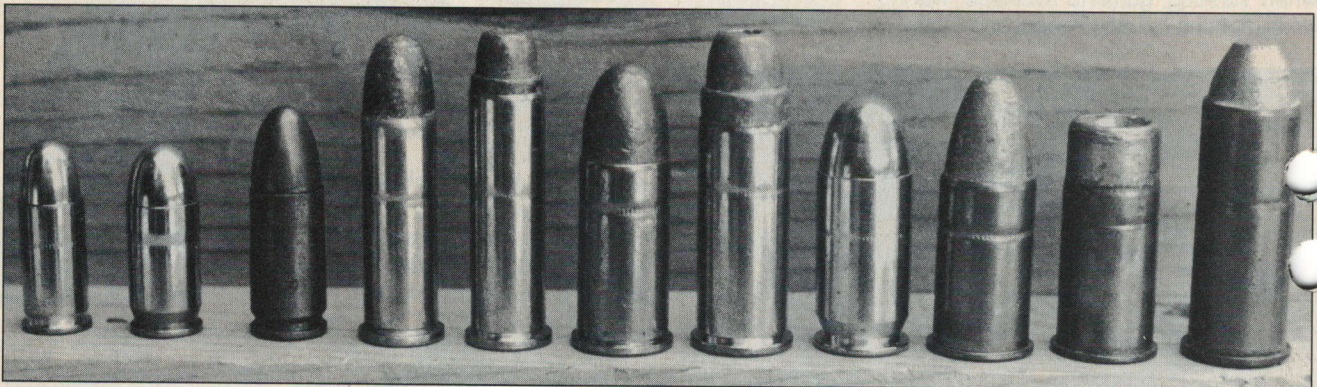
Were I limited to just one pistol for my adventuring, I would have probably chosen the Colt .45 auto, it being the best compromise between hitting pow-



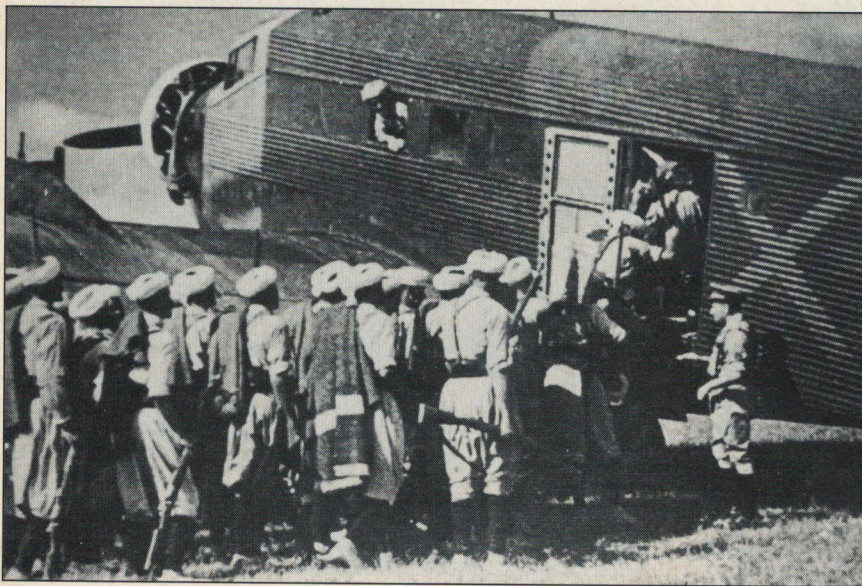
Back in the late '30s, the adventurer would have to contend with a number of tough customers, such as this Afridi tribesman. Choice of the proper sidearm was paramount.

er, firepower, and concealment. The exception would, of course, be situations when I knew virtually all of the time would be spent in jungle, forest, or mountains when the S&W .357 or Colt New Service would have been the arm of choice. I like to think, however, that I would have built up a network of tribal chieftains, colonial police officers, and all-powerful potentates who would have been so happy to be regaled with my latest adventures that they would gladly have trimmed any red tape to allow me to import my basic three-gun armory.

For holsters to carry the PPK and Colt National Match I would have approached H.H. Heiser of Denver, the Thad Rybka or Ken Null of the day, known for producing the best combat leather. To get a side pocket holster for the PPK from Heiser might have taken a bit of coaxing, but I think it could have been done. For my S&W .357 or Colt New Service I might have ordered a Heiser custom rig as well or might have



Above: Ammunition possibilities for 1938 handguns included (L-R) .32 ACP, .380 ACP, 9mm Parabellum, .38 Special, .357 Magnum, .44 Russian, .44 Special, .45 ACP, .455 Webley, .455 Webley "Manstopper," .45 Colt. Below: In 1938, the professional adventurer might have been caught up in any number of conflicts, such as the Spanish Civil War. Here Moroccan native militia embark on their journey to the front lines in southern Spain.



been satisfied with a production flap holster from the S.D. Myres Company of El Paso.

My handguns chosen, I would pack them along with my Swaine, Adeney, Brigg & Sons sword cane; my William Scagel knife (the inspiration for Bo Randall's knives) and my Swiss Army knife; my adventuring attire from Abercrombie and Fitch and Cordings; my "survival rations" from Fortnam and Mason; and the manuscript of my latest book, titled something such like *Lost Tribes of Bolivia: Adventures as a Mercenary Soldier on Both Sides in the Gran Chaco War*, into my Asprey steamer trunk and boarded the Pan Am Clipper bound for...?

Such intellectual games as choosing my handguns for 1938 are most fun if shared, so I'd like to hear from readers about what their choices would have been. The only rules are that the pistol or pistols must have been available in 1938. Send your choices to me care Editor Libourel.