



TEXAS RANGER DISPATCH Magazine



Guns of the Texas Rangers:



Colt Model 1911 Automatic

by David Stroud

Automatic pistols (weapons that will reload after firing) are unique to Colt firearms in that they are the only weapons developed for smokeless powder, and all transitions are solely for function improvement.

Automatic pistols were initially manufactured in the late 1890s, but the Colt Model 1900 in .38 caliber was the first American automatic. John M. Browning, a Mormon, is given credit for its creation.

In April 1897, Mr. Browning received patents for an automatic pistol. Several designs in full automatic, without safeties, were tested but proved nearly impossible to control. However, those experiments resulted in the development of the Model 1900 .38 Automatic Pistol, and the first one was sent to the editor of *Shooting and Fishing* magazine for trial.

The editor found the weapon interesting but somewhat surprising. Because he didn't know what to expect, his flinching buried the bullets into the ground some thirty feet in front of him. However, he and his friends soon learned how to handle the pistol and the editor endorsed the automatic features.

The Army ordered 200 of the pistols for testing, the Navy requested 50, and Colt supplied the civil market with another 3,250.

Several more .38, .32, and .380 automatics were produced for civilian sale before the first military model in 1905. Although the cartridge and weapon were new, the Army was enthusiastic. Experiments and tests followed for several years and resulted in the famous Government Model .45 1911 Automatic adopted by the military that year.

The weapon fired the .45 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol) round, was eight and one-half inches in length with a five inch barrel, thirty-nine ounces in weight, and had a five round magazine capacity. Colt added a grip safety and a

manually operated side lock to prevent accidental firing. A slide stop held the barrel back once the last round was fired.

The semi-automatic won instant popularity with the troops, and before the First World War the armed forces had been equipped with the famed pistol. Once the United States entered the war in France, however, requests for the automatic overwhelmed the Colt factory.

Colt Firearms immediately increased production of the M 1911 and the making of the automatic was contracted to other firearms manufacturers. Nevertheless, Colt produced most of the weapons while Remington fashioned approximately 21,000 M 1911's during the war.

The M 1911 proved itself in the trenches as an excellent man-stopper and on November 11, 1918 (Armistice Day), more than 60 percent of American troops were armed with the automatic.

Many of the weapons found their way to small-town America as well as to large cities. They were smuggled in sea bags, in duffle bags, and in any other way that the men could get them past guards. Regardless of the number of automatics missing in action, enough remained behind to supply the needs of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps.

Colt continued to manufacture the automatic for the law enforcement and civilian market. Some 200,000 were sold by 1942.

The M 1911 performed so well in combat, no other weapon was sought by the military during the postwar years. However, as great as the pistol was, it was not perfect.

Colt Super .38

Continuing the Colt tradition of excellence, minor modifications took place between the world wars in the trigger, hammer, and grip. In addition, there was a slight change in the

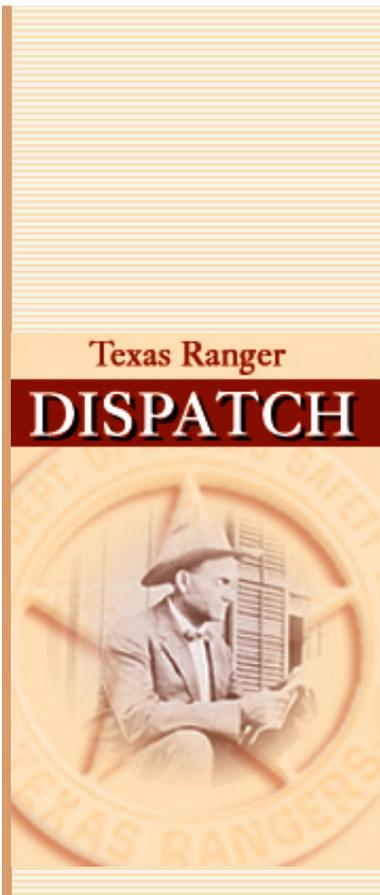
frame. These improvements were incorporated in Colt's new automatic, serial number 7000000, in June 1926. The new weapon was designated as M 1911 A.

Regardless of the improvements, few M 1911 A1 pistols were manufactured before the Second World War because of the number of M 1911's on hand for the military. However, with the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), demand increased virtually overnight.

Colt again increased production but once more was unable to keep up with demand. Contracts were again awarded to other gun makers to produce the M 1911 A1, and Remington Rand manufactured 900,000 to Colt's 400,000 during WWII.

In October 1946, Colt again produced the famous automatic for the civilian and the law enforcement markets.





Throughout their histories, the M 1911 and the M 1911 A1 have been cited for their inaccuracies as well as for their weights. The military automatics were not built for target shooting but for being effective combat weapons at close range. No soldier, civilian or Texas Ranger ever complained about the weapons' stopping abilities, and the pistols proved to be peerless in close combat.

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David Stroud was born in Tyler, Texas, and graduated from Henderson (Texas) High School in 1963. He then enlisted in the Marines and in the following years served a tour in Vietnam and two years as a drill instructor at Parris Island, South Carolina. He earned his B.S. and M.A. degrees in history at Stephen F. Austin State University and is now a history instructor at Kilgore (Texas) College. He has written seven books along with fifteen articles and book reviews.



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