Classic Firearms: The

By John Marshall

Few firearms are iconic and recognizable at a glance. The UZI submachine gun is one of these, placing it right up there with the Thompson submachine gun as a true classic in the world of pistol-caliber automatic weapons. You would be hard pressed to find someone who hasn't heard of it or who hasn't seen one portrayed in the movies or on the evening news.

In 1949, after the war of Israeli independence, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) was seeking an official replacement for the outmoded Sten gun, a bare-bones 9mm submachine gun developed by the British during World War II. An IDF committee developed certain specifications that were considered desirable. What they sought was a 9mm weapon with a rate of fire of 450-500 rounds per minute. The maximum weight was to be 4 kilograms, and it should be capable of firing in both full auto and semiautomatic modes with a selector/safety switch. A wooden or folding stock should be used. Magazine capacity was to be 40 rounds; it should have a wooden pistol grip, and might possibly accept a bayonet. Later suggestions for the ideal subgun were for easy barrel replacement, a recoil spring inside the bolt, and a safety which would prevent accidental discharge when and if the weapon was impacted or dropped.

Two men were working on this project at the time – Major Chaim Kara of the Israeli Ordnance Corps, and 25-year-old Captain Uziel Gal, who had already fashioned a prototype in the preceding year. In initial testing, both early weapons failed to satisfy expectations. Major Kara and Captain Gal both went to work to improve their weapons. In 1950, another committee was created to test the two subguns exhaustively. Following these tests, it was decided to further develop the weapon submitted by Captain Gal for a number of reasons. It would be easier and cheaper to produce, it had fewer parts, and maintenance was easier and cheaper. Accepted in 1951, the 9mm gun was to be named the "UZI" after Captain Gal's first name, which means "God is my might." Despite Gal's objections, the name stuck.

In 1952, Gal's submachine gun was patented in his name, but with the proviso that the production rights would be given to the Israeli Ministry of Defense (MOD). In 1954, the first 100 UZIs were produced and given to the IDF for extensive field-testing. Following these initial trials, the Israeli Ordnance Corps ordered 8,000 of the arms together with 80,000 magazines. Israeli paratroopers were the first to get the new guns, which featured removable wooden stocks (very similar to those used on Thompsons), and somewhat smaller actuating knobs than were used on later versions. The guns could be quickly and easily field stripped for maintenance and proved reliable and durable. In 1956, UZIs were ordered by the Netherlands for its armed forces, kicking off worldwide sales by

Israeli Military Industries (IMI). Shortly thereafter, an agreement was reached with FN Herstal in Belgium to produce the gun there, providing that FN would consult with IMI on each sales contract and that IMI would get 50 percent of all manufacturing for the UZI. Germany also made it as its MP2 under license for the German *Bundeswehr*, beginning in 1959. In the late 1970s, Rhodesia made licensed versions, at first from Israeli components.

Unlicensed copies of the UZI have been made in China and some have been sold in the U.S. Some U.S. firms have also made copies. To date, it's estimated that over 10 million have been produced.

The UZI pioneered no new concepts, but combined existing ones in an effective way. The sheet-metal receiver is easily made from stampings. A portion of the blowback bolt covers the rear of the barrel when in the for-

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