



## Reviewed by Peter Caroline

The first rule of gunfighting is, of course, Have a gun. In the worst of circumstances, any gun will do, as long as it is capable of firing one effective round. Having fired that one effective round, you may then avail yourself of your opponent's weapon. This was the thinking behind the creation of the FP-45 "Liberator" pistol, one of the most prized items in any collection of World War II weaponry.

In 1942, the U.S. Office of Strategic Services was tasked with stirring up trouble in Axis-occupied Europe. What better way than to supply resistance forces with cheap but effective weapons that would enable an individual resistance fighter to kill an armed enemy soldier and capture his weapon and ammunition? General Motors' Guide Lamp Division was chosen as the manufacturer of a single-shot, smoothbore, .45 caliber "zip gun." To maintain secrecy, it was designated the FP-45, the "FP" standing for "Flare Projector." And it was indeed the quintessential Two-Dollar Pistol, the final cost, including ten rounds of ammo, dowel for extraction/ejection, pictorial instruction sheet and waxed cardboard box amounting to \$2.10.

Although approximately one million of these pistols were cranked out in a period of six months, very few were actually distributed to resistance forces. A number were dropped into the Pacific theatre of operations. A great many were warehoused in England and destroyed after the war. Some were carried, post-war, by the Philippine Constabulary as issue handguns (shades of Mayberry's Barney Fife and "the Bullet"). As a result, an original FP-45 pistol can cost a collector from \$2,000 to nearly \$6,000 for a specimen still in the sealed box.

It became evident that there were more WWII collectors out there than FP-45 pistols on the market, so, in the best tradition of American enterprise, someone stepped up to meet the demand. Vintage Ordnance Company, LLC, of Elizabethtown, KY, is an FFL dealer and Class 7 manufacturer of weapons and ammo. They are also historical scholars who provide professional museum consulting services. When I heard of VOCO's new exact reproduction FP-45 project, I called their head honcho, Frank Jardim, to see if I could get an example to test. He seemed a bit surprised that I wanted to actually fire the FP-45 for my review. Although the reproduction is made with superior quality steels, heat treating and tighter tolerances than the originals, the firing pin hole is deliberately not drilled through the cover slide. Drilling the cover slide to accommodate the fire pin is not recommended. This is because the basic design is, by modern standards, not safe. The FP-45 was an emergency measure, built for partisans who were, by their very resistance to the occupation, putting themselves in harm's way. Legal liability and prod-

uct safety did not enter into the equation. In any case, after warning me that this would not be a pleasant handgun to shoot (and please do not drop it because it WILL go off!), Mr. Jardim agreed to send me a specimen ready for firing.

I was not disappointed when the package arrived. The only perceptible differences from the original gun are a BATF-required serial number, manufacturer's marking (1/16" high) and rifled barrel. The FA-42 G.I. ammo supplied with the WWII original is now as rare as hen's teeth, so I had to make do with 1943-vintage Evansville Ordnance Plant steel-case .45 ACP ammo.

I took the FP-45 out to a favorite shooting spot in the desert, accompanied by a good friend who promised not to laugh if I injured myself.

The loading procedure is simple. You pull back the striker and rotate it to the side. Then lift the loading gate, drop in a cartridge, push the loading gate back down and turn the striker to a straight-up position. I held on with both hands and pulled the trigger. There was a load bang, and a noticeable but not particularly impressive recoil. About what you might expect from a .45 weighing slightly less than 16 ounces. At seven yards, the bullet struck somewhat more than one foot above point of aim, and keyholed. The striker bounced back, turned about 45° to the left. Hmm.

Ejecting the fired case involves retracting and rotating the striker, lifting the loading gate, then poking the spent cartridge case out with the supplied dowel. I loaded a second cartridge, and this time used just one hand to fire, as folks did back in the 1940s. Felt recoil was of course greater, but I suspect that the original users were under too much stress to be concerned with such trivia. I fired one round of 1956 WRA G.I. steel-case ammo. The recoil was much heavier, and the loading gate had to be coaxed up with a soft mallet (won't do *that* again).

I had several targets mounted on my target frame. I aimed at the center of the bottom target, and put the round into the center of the top target. I would imagine that the recommended procedure would be to put the muzzle of the pistol in direct contact with the recipient.

In summation, I've satisfied my curiosity, fired this unusual weapon with genuine vintage WWII ammo, and lived to tell of it. My recommendation: buy this exact reproduction to complete your collection, display it with pride and do try to refrain from firing it. The recommended retail price is \$599.50, which is a fraction of what an original would cost, if you can find one.

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