

Backups are just that and almost always nothing more. No backup pistol ever made, if it is truly a minuscule design, can come close to being an acceptable substitute for an M1911 .45ACP pistol. And anyone who leaves his primary carry piece at home because his back hurts or he's tired and stuffs a marginal-caliber handgun in his pocket, either walks in a Utopian environment where no firearm is actually required is living in his own personal La-Land. It's possible that an operative in deep cover may only be able to carry a small pocket pistol in a groin holster. But, outside of Hollywood that's not a realistic scenario.

Backups are designed's secondary weapons. Unless the operation implodes, they will rarely be deployed. They are a form of insurance and as such they should be as reliable as possible, as small as possible and chambered for the largest caliber that will fit into a Lilliputian envelope.

The most comprehensive line of really small backup pistols and revolvers are manufactured and distributed by, North American Arms, Inc. (NAA, Dept. SGN, 2150 South 950 East, Provo, Utah 84606; phone: 800-821-5783; fax: 801-374-9998; website: www.northamericartarms.com).

The Guardian line of pistols comes in two frame sizes. The smallest frame was designed for .32 ACP and the new 25NAA chamberings. Their larger frame is available in .380ACP and the new 32NAA.

Shotgun News was recently sent two specimens of the NAA Guardian series, one in a rather startling new caliber developed in conjunction with Cor-Bon Ammunition (Dept. SGN, 1311 Industrial Road, Sturgis, S. Dak. 57785; phone: 800-626-7266; fax: 605-347-5055; Email: info@corbon.com; website: www.corbon.com).

Our NAA Guardian .380 has an overall length of 4.75 inches (120.65mm), with a height of 3.53 inches (89.66mm) and a width of .93" (23.62mm). The weight, empty is 18.72 ounces (.530kg). When fully loaded with seven rounds, the weight is 20.8 ounces (.590kg). The barrel length is 2.49 inches (63.12mm). The six-groove rifling has a 1:15 right-hand twist.

Even smaller, the 25NM pistol has an overall length of 4.36 inches (110.74mm), with a

height of 3.32 inches (82.04mm) and a width of .850" (21.59mm). The weight, empty is 13.57 ounces (.3865kg). When fully loaded with seven rounds, the weight increases to 14.86 ounces (.420kg). The barrel length is 2.185 inches (55.5mm). The rifling and twist remain as above.

The frames of, these pistols are investment castings of 17-4 stainless steel. The slides are machined from 17-4 stainless steel bar stock. This machining is performed by Kahr Aims (Dept. SGN, One Blue Hill, Plaza, P.O. Box 1518, Pearl River, N.Y. 10965; phone: 845-735-4500; fax: 845-735-4610; website: www.kahr.com).



Representing the very best of the super compact backup pistols, the NAA-380 (top) and the miniscule 25NAA (bottom) are the epitome of the back-up handgun concept.

The hammer, trigger, slide release and magazine catch of the Guardian series are all made by a process known as metal injection molding (MIM). This results in an exact component with no secondary machining required. These small MIM components are supplied by Taurus International Manufacturing, Inc. (Dept. SGN, 16175 Northwest 49th Avenue, Miami, Fla. 33014; phone: 800-327-3776; fax: 305-623-7506; website: www.taurususa.com).

The frame and top of the slide have a satin non-glare finish while each side of the slide features an attractive high polish. The NAA eagle logo and "GUARDIAN .380" or "GUARDIAN .25 NAA" are electro-etched on the right side of the slide, while the NAA eagle logo and "NORTH AMERICAN ARMS PROVO, UTAH" are electro-etched on the left side. There are nine deep cocking serrations on each side of the slide.

The two-piece, polymer grip panels, each retained by a single screw, feature a pebble-grained texture and carry the NAA logo. They are manufactured by Hogue, Inc. (Dept. SGN, P.O. Box 1138, Paso Robles, Calif. 93447; phone: 800-438-4747; fax: 805-239-2553; website: www.getgrip.com).

Principally engineered by the highly regarded Israeli designer, Nehemia Sirkis, these pistols operate by means of unlocked blowback. Thus, the energy for the cycle of operations comes from the effect of gas pressure on the empty cartridge case. The slide is not locked to the barrel.

The trigger mechanism is double-action-only (DAO). Pulling the trigger moves the spring-loaded drawbar to the rear, which rotates the hammer. The hammer cannot be manually

cocked. In its forward position, the hammer lies flush with the slide and frame.

When the hammer has rotated rearward about 3/4-inch, the drawbar releases it to go forward and strike the spring-loaded firing pin. There is no external safety. The trigger pull weights on the NAA .380 and 25NAA were 8.75 and 8.5 pounds, respectively. This is relatively light for DAO pistols. The trigger is smooth, with no sharp edges.

Two nested recoil springs have been utilized with a very short recoil spring guide rod. A serious amount of muscle is required to retract the slide. There are no external, manual safeties.

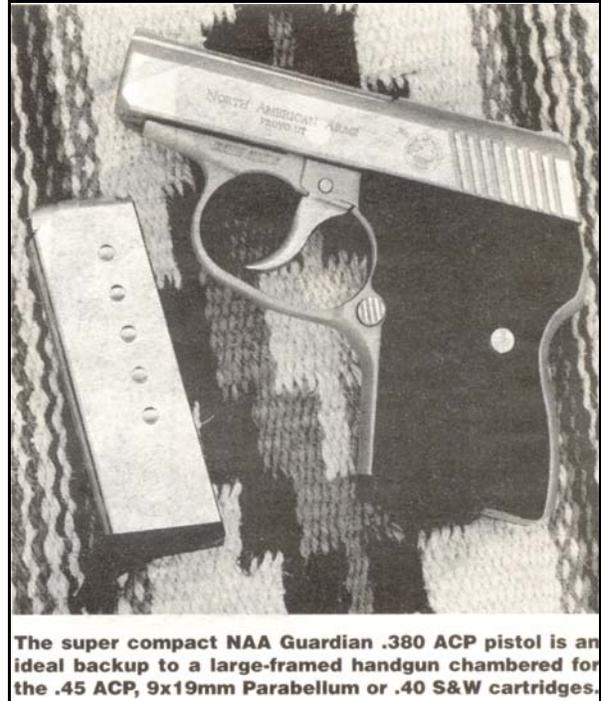
As the magazine follower spring generates a considerable amount of stripping pressure, it's best to first load only two or three rounds in the magazine to prevent a feed jam during the manual loading process. Insert the magazine into the magazine well until you audibly confirm that the magazine catch has engaged and that the magazine has locked in place. Retract the slide fully, and let it fly forward to strip a round from the magazine and chamber it. Remove the magazine and load a full six rounds. Magazines for the .380 and 25NAA Guardian pistols are made by MEC-GAR USA, Inc. (Dept. SGN, Hurley Farms Industrial Park, 115 Hurley Road #6G, Oxford, Conn. 06478; phone: 800-632-4271; fax: 203-262.1719; website: www.mec-gar.com). Located in Italy, MEC-GAR supplies magazines for a substantial number of semiautomatic handguns.

These 6-round, single-column, detachable box magazines have steel bodies and followers and polymer floorplates. There are five indicator holes numbered from "2" to "6" on each side of the .380 ACP magazines. The 25NAA magazine has indicator holes on the right side only. Two magazines are provided with each pistol, one with a floorplate flush to the magazine body, the other with a finger-extension-type floorplate.

The magazine catch/release button is located on the left side of the frame, directly to the rear of the trigger guard. This is exactly where it belongs. When the button is depressed, empty magazines fall freely away.

The sights are small and fixed, but adequate. The blade front sight is integral with the barrel, which in turn, is part of the frame casting. The open square-notch rear sight is integral with the machined slide.

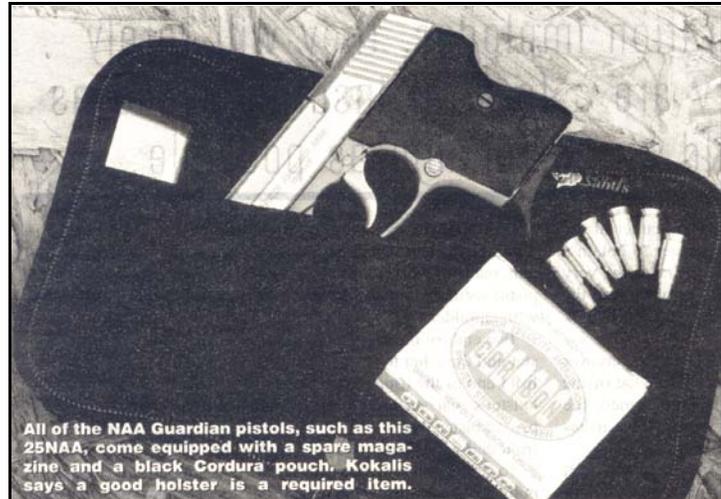
It has become popular to scoff at sights on small pistols of this type. That is a potentially fatal error. While sights are certainly not required at contact distances, the average engagement



range in a gunfight with handguns is 7 yards and under. Precisely how do these self-styled cognoscenti perform at 21 feet without sights? They invariably miss.

It cannot be stressed too much that small, unlocked-blowback-operated pocket pistols must be fired with the firmest possible grip, preferably a two-handed Weaver hold. If you "limp wrist" it, the frame will invariably move rearward with the slide a short distance: Since the total rearward

travel of the slide is very short, if the frame also moves rearward even a bit, the slide's rearward travel in relation to the frame will be incomplete and a "stove-pipe" malfunction (the empty case only partially ejected and thus stuck in the ejection port) will occur with unacceptable frequency.



Although perceived recoil is certainly not a major factor in evaluating handguns in small calibers, please be reminded that the weight of the firearm has a rather direct relationship to recoil. Very light handguns, rifles and shotguns kick more than their lightweight equivalents. Recoil is fairly stout on the NAA Guardian .380. Without doubt, the magazine with the finger extension provides a superior grip, and whenever deep concealment is not required, it should be selected.

What about accuracy? If you bear down and concentrate, you can shoot 2-inch groups with these tiny handguns at 7 yards. However, that's beside the point, isn't it? If you have been boxed into using a backup like these in a tight corner, you will be concentrating on other matters besides the group size.

All of the NAA Guardian pistols come with two magazines, as previously described, a black Cordura zipper pouch with a belt clip, an instruction manual and a trigger lock. The .380 ACP Guardian pistol carries a manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$449. The 25NAA costs \$409. Optional features include melt down and dehorning, high polish finish, four different sight systems, front and rear strap stippling, scalloped texture cocking serrations, and a wide variety of Hogue grips.

Some writers have postulated that backups should be carried without a holster, loose in the pocket of a jacket or trousers. That's pure gibberish. Backups must be in the exact place you have programmed yourself to find them, each and every time you reach for them. That won't happen unless they're stuffed into a holster.

Armed professionals without exception will carry any of the NAA Guardian series in a concealment-type holster. Kenneth L. Null (Dept. SGN, K.L.Null Holsters, 161 School Street

N.W, Resaca, Ga. 30735;
phone: 706-625-5643,
fax: 706-625-9392;
email:
ken@knullholsters.com;
website:
www.knullholsters.com
- catalog \$3) specializes
in concealment rigs, of
the highest possible
quality, for government
operatives and
undercover federal and
local law enforcement
personnel.



The list of employers of those he has provided holsters for is very impressive and includes the CIA, FBI, Secret Service, U.S. Navy and U.S. Army Intelligence, U.S. Coast Guard, Israeli Mossad, West German Police and law enforcement agencies throughout the United States and Latin America. Ken is also one of the CZ-USA designated holster makers.

Ken uses the most impeccable of materials. Although he started with vegetable-tanned (chrome tanning leaves a salt residue in the leather and is almost never used by quality holster makers) steerhide, he has for many years used vegetable-tanned horsehide exclusively. While more expensive than steerhide, horsehide is much denser and the same strength can be obtained with thinner leather.

Although harder to work, horsehide doesn't lose its handmolded configuration as easily as steerhide. Ken emphatically states that horsehide will maintain its retention qualities by a ratio of 6 to 1 over steerhide. For special presentation work, Null also makes holsters with a horsehide inner lining and sharkskin exterior.

Ken refuses to provide suede lining for his holsters. Suede is quite porous and it collects, and holds abrasive debris. Furthermore, because holsters with suede linings have three layers, a laminate and steerhide in addition to the suede, they cannot be molded (or boned as the custom holster makers say) tightly enough to provide the necessary retention and thus almost always require either a tension screw or retaining strap.

Horsehide can be molded more precisely than any other type of leather. In addition, it becomes glossy wherever it's in contact with the pistol's metal surfaces after about 50 draw strokes and will not hold onto abrasive material. Null uses a leather worker's pear shader set into a handle and various other wood and steel tools, some self-designed, for all his rubbing and molding. He uses no aluminum-cast replicas of the handguns; he fits his holsters only to actual specimens to maintain the precision required for maximum retention.

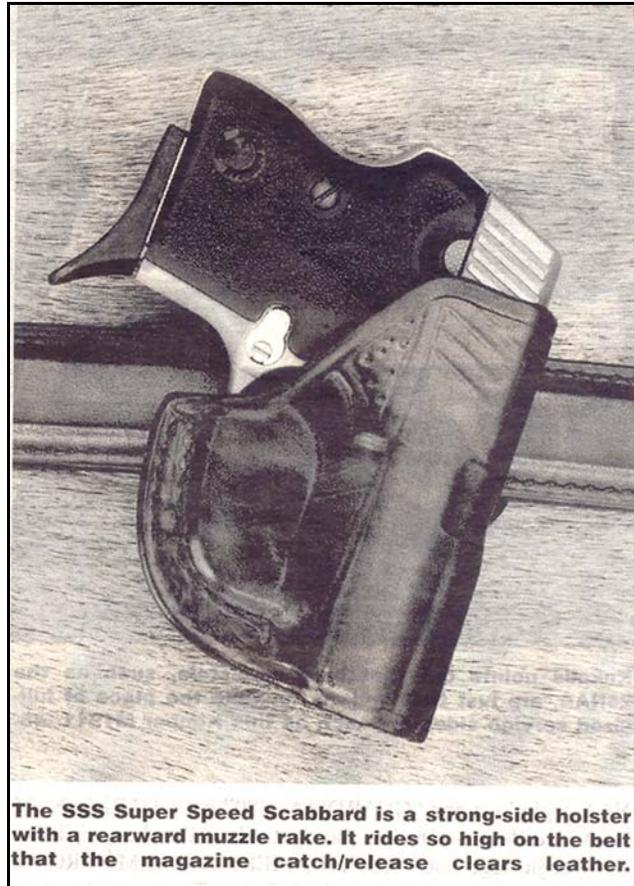
Ken's holsters are stitched with a black nylon, 80-size thread made by Hemingway and

Bartlett and called "Nylabond." All stitching is accomplished on a Union lock stitch machine. .

Null's standard finish on his holsters, pouches and belts is antique cordovan, with black as an option. He uses a spray dye, not a dip dye process. Ken believes that a tan finish has no character. Furthermore, he says a tan finish will turn black wherever it touches metal and that his cordovan finish looks better after use.

When looking through Ken's catalog, the first thing you will notice is that, with one highly specialized exception, none of his leather holsters have retaining straps or tension screws. They all depend upon their precisely hand-molded configuration to securely retain the handgun without impeding the drawstroke.

Ken provides a substantial variety of holsters for the NAA Guardian series. My favorite Null belt holster is his Model SSS Super Speed Scabbard. This strong-side holster with a rearward muzzle rake rides so high on the belt that the magazine catch/release button clears leather.



Another outstanding feature is the absence of leather at the root of the trigger guard, which permits the shooter to obtain a proper grip on the piece while it's still holstered and at the very start of the presentation without ever needing to reposition the grip during the drawstroke. It is a superb piece of leather work by a master craftsman.

Null's inside-the-pants holster, the Model UNS Undercover Special, is as unique as the rest of his product line. One of the most concealable and yet fastest holsters ever designed, the Model UNS is remarkably comfortable for this style as it has flanges that mold to the curvature of the body.

A strong-side type with rearward muzzle rake, its non-shift design keeps the grip of either a semiauto or revolver at a constant "ready" position for maximum speed during the presentation. Its unusually wide rear bearing surface provides comfort over periods of extended wear. This is an ideal holster for any of the NAA Guardian pistols.

The Model SPS Side Pocket Scabbard has a conspicuous flange at the rear of the holster that will catch the inside of the pocket if the pistol is drawn with a slight rearward motion, further aiding the pistol's retention in the pocket..Intended for small handguns only, holsters of

this type are not built for speed draws.

They're designed to 1) modify a pistol's configuration and inhibit it from "printing" through the clothing, and 2) prevent it from rotating about in your pocket so that you cannot reach the grip frame.

Ken Null's shoulder holsters for small frame pistols and revolvers are equally unique. Originally designed for CIA field operatives, the Model SMZ features an open muzzle configuration that will accommodate pistols with sound suppressors attached. Fabricated from a high-density polymer that is .080" thick, the Model SMZ positions either semiautomatics or revolvers with the muzzle up and butt down on the weak-side in the conventional shoulder holster manner.

But, with the exception of its location on the body, there is nothing conventional about this rig. The tri-span suspension system, made of white cloth-backed vinyl straps, holds the holstered pistol securely without the downward shifting usually associated with shoulder rigs.

Two ends of the tri-span harness system are attached to the holster and the other to the belt on the opposite side of the body. The front end of the trigger guard rests on a hooked projection on the holster's rear surface, which contains a female strap. The one-piece holster wraps around the handgun and a male snap on the front end mates with the rear female snap to secure the weapon.

To draw; obtain a firing grip, twist the pistol vigorously and pull it out into the firing position. Incredibly fast, shift-free, lightweight and durable - this is the best small-frame handgun shoulder holster on the market, bar none.

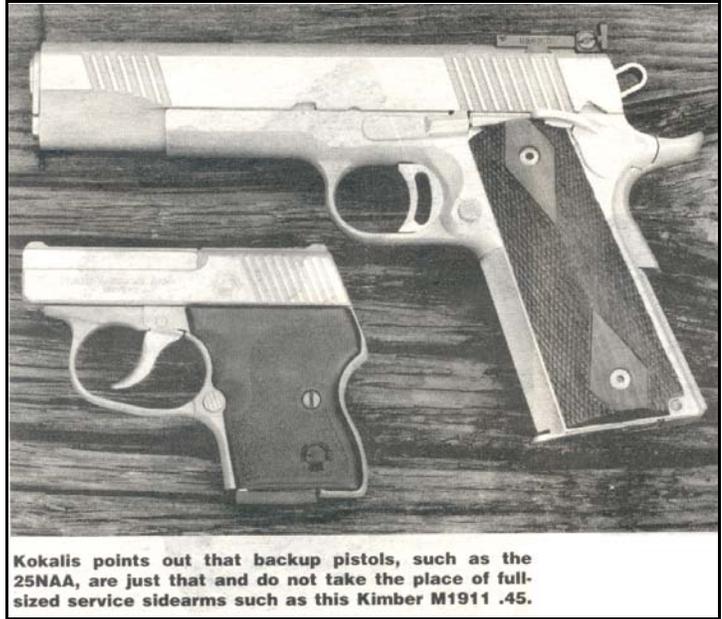
In my opinion, spare magazine pouches for small backups are a complete non sequitur. These pistols are the final option, and if you're forced to fight with one, there will never be time for a magazine change. However, gun belts for concealment holsters are an important, but often-neglected ingredient in the equipment equation for armed professionals.

Handmade from laminated and lock stitched; full-face-lined, dense horsehide, the Model CBT Combat Belt is cut on a contour for either right- or left-hand shooters. Made in either 11/4 inch or 1 1/2 inch widths, the CBT has a stiff, laminated-horsehide reinforcing piece that runs from 3 to 9 o'clock on the shooter's body.

The thickest part of the belt is where the holster will rest, the thinnest section is on the weak-side where the magazine pouch is normally placed. The CBT is complemented by a solid silicone brass buckle of Null's design. It was engineered with rear flanged edges to maintain a buckle Position parallel with the belt at all times.

There are no visible means of fastening the buckle to the belt. There is a hidden fastening tang that is contoured to engage the belt with maximum security and tension. The buckle is available on special order in solid .999 fine sterling silver, 14K or 18K yellow gold in both widths.

Ken Null's work represents the highest level craftsmanship to which a custom holster maker can aspire. Few ever reach this level. Those armed professionals who move in the shadowy world of clandestine operations would be well advised to examine his wares. I use a number of Ken's holsters on an almost daily basis and can recommend his product line without reservations of any kind.



These are slick little backup pistols manufactured by a company justifiably well-known for their superb line of rim fire mini-revolvers, also frequently used as backup pieces. The NAA Guardian series pistols have become the most popular of the super small handguns. While its mission will remain clear to armed professionals, I fear that many may become beguiled and will carry them as primary pieces simply as a matter of convenience. That would be a mistake.

Pocket Pistol Pipsqueaks?

To state the obvious, neither the .380 ACP nor the new 25NAA cartridges are death rays. But, these rounds are not contained within primary carry packages, they're very small backups. They will be used at close ranges only, and only if for some reason your .45 ACP, 9x 19mm Parabellum or .40 S&W has failed. If, whenever possible, you target relatively non-elastic targets, such as the brain (its elasticity contained by the skull) or heart, these small bullets will probably do the job,

The .380 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol) cartridge was introduced in 1908 by the Colt's Patent Fire Arms Mfg. Co. of Hartford, Conn. In 1903 for a modified version of the M1903 Pocket Automatic Pistol, which previously was available only in 32 ACP (7.65mm). The first European pistol to chamber for this round was the M1910 Browning Pocket Automatic. In Europe it is known as the 9mm Kurz or 9x.17mm cartridge. Both the 380 ACP and .32 ACP rounds are invariably encountered in the same envelope. Europeans always favored the 7.65mm cartridge as it always provides one more round in the magazine. In juxtaposition, Americans have rather overwhelmingly selected the .380 ACP as it is marginally more effective than the .32 ACP and is the most powerful (whatever that means) of all the so-called pocket pistol calibers.

Projectiles for the .380 ACP range in weight from 85 to 95 grains, with muzzle velocities ranging from 990 to 7&5 fps. Cor-Bon, PMC, Speer, Federal and Winchester all market Jacketed Hollow Points in this caliber. My personal preference, however, is for round-nose ball in this caliber, as we need all the penetration we can squeeze out this small cartridge. Whatever you choose, test for reliable performance before you step out into the asphalt jungle.

The new 25NAA cartridge was announced at the 2004 SHOT Show. It is chambered in the same envelope as the super-compact .32 ACP Guardian first introduced by NAA five years ago. The ammunition is manufactured by Cor-Bon. Basically, this round uses a semi-rimmed .32 ACP case necked down to .25 cal.

The 35-grain Hornady XTP bullet leaves the 2.185-inch barrel of the pistol at 1275 fps. Expanding to .40 cal., the bullet penetrates 6 inches of tissue simulant. This is about the performance one would predict from lightweight, expanding bullets in the .22 to .25 caliber range.

If you need more penetration, you must use a solid, non-expanding bullet. And, in fact, when this bullet's cavity is plugged by clothing, such as several layers of denim, it expands to only .36 cal., but penetration increases to 10 inches.

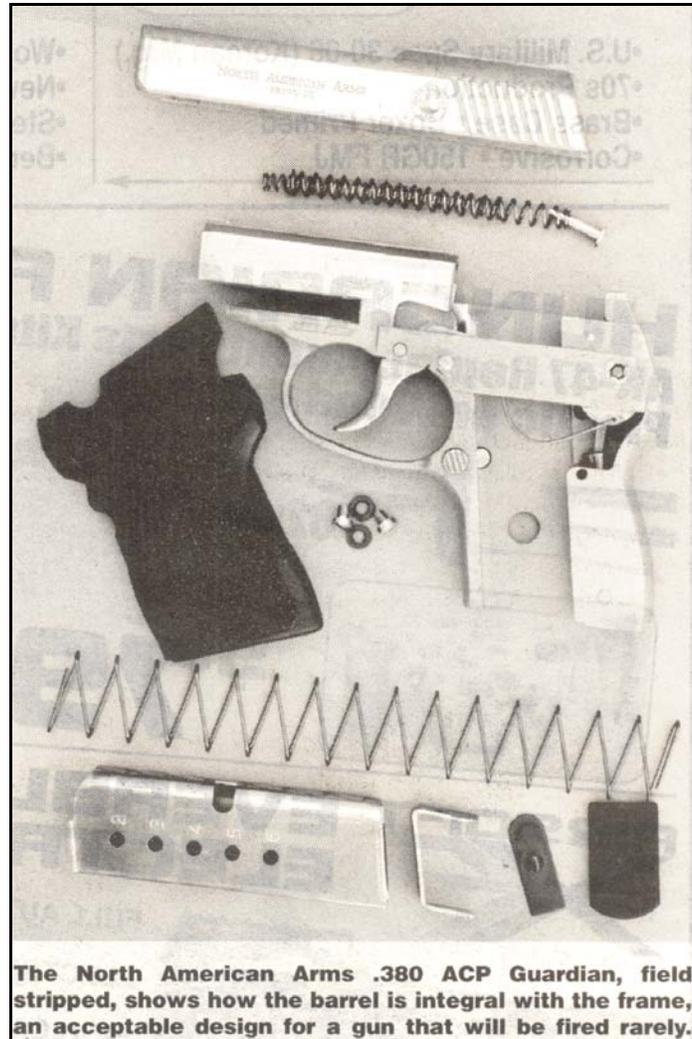
The bottom line? About all the wound ballistics performance we can expect from a .25 caliber projectile in an incredibly small envelope. I would not hesitate to carry this pistol, but only as a : backup, the precise mission for which it was designed.

Disassembly Procedures

Disassembly procedures are fairly clear cut. Remove the magazine and remove any round in the chamber by retracting the slide sharply and fully to the rear. Depress the slide release button, located on the right side of the frame directly below the slide's cocking serrations.

While continuing to hold down on the slide release button, retract the slide one-half-inch to clear the extractor from the chamber. Then lift the slide up an inch at the rear to clear the barrel. Move the slide forward along the length of the barrel and remove it from the frame assembly. Remove the recoil spring assembly from the frame and separate the components. Remove the grip panels. No further disassembly is advised.

After cleaning and lubrication reassemble the recoil springs and insert the guide rod into the small end of the outer recoil spring. Then install the complete recoil spring assembly into the



grooved, recessed chamber beneath the barrel with the guide rod forward.

Re-install the grip panels and reassemble the magazine. Position the slide assembly on top of the frame, with the forward bridge of the slide positioned in the channel beneath the barrel, capturing the recoil slide assembly behind it. Move the slide a half-inch to the rear and pull the trigger slightly, which will clear the top of the hammer from beneath the firing pin retainer.

Depress the slide release button and simultaneously apply downward pressure on the slide, releasing the button after the slide has seated itself. Retract the slide with vigor to ensure positive seating lockup.

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