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GUN TEST

OSS/CIA HDMS .22 LR

A silenced spy pistol—compare real vs. replica!



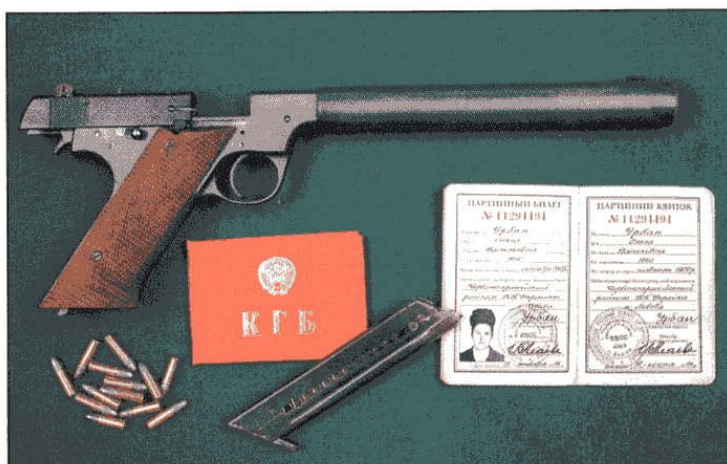
By Al Paulson

Now you can own the pistol U.S. spooks and special operators have been using for 59 years, as of this writing. When certain special and black operators infiltrated Iraq prior to the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom (Gulf War II), some could be expected to carry the .22 LR High Standard Military Silenced pistol for quietly eliminating sentries and other high-value targets at close range. Part of my logic is that Uncle recently contracted to have hundreds of these silenced pistols refurbished, and part of the logic is the unique suite of mission essential needs this weapon has satisfied for more than a half century.

WW II Origins

Developed during World War II for the Office of Strategic Services, the

Arms Tech HDMS pistol (above) with original silk map of northern Iraq labeled "BAGHDAD RESTRICTED" along with Iraqi currency showing Saddam Hussein.



The HDMS saw extensive service throughout the Cold War. Shown here is Arms Tech HDMS with KGB ID (left) and Communist Party membership ID booklet.

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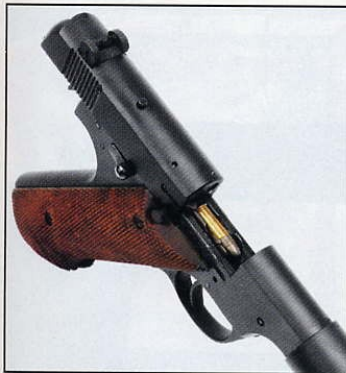
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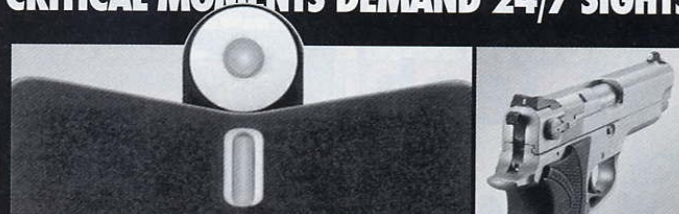
The only way to tell Arms Tech HDMS from original is its adjustable rear sight.

HDMS pistol quickly became the favorite weapon of OSS operatives from Berlin to Burma. Many hundreds of HDMS pistols formed the nucleus of the CIA's armory when the agency was formed from the core OSS cadre following VJ Day. The HDMS served with distinction during the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and with Delta Force at Desert One. After more than a half century, this silenced pistol remains in Uncle's inventory, and the blueprints remain classified to this day. To my knowledge, only five authenticated HDMS pistols are held in private hands. Arms Tech Ltd. has taken one of these originals and reverse engineered the design to the smallest detail. A limited run of a dozen or so museum-grade reproductions of the HDMS pistol is currently available for the advanced collector. The following discussion examines the operational history of the HDMS, and then provides a hands-on evaluation comparing the performance of the Arms Tech HDMS side by side with an original High Standard HDMS.

Two silenced pistols designed for clandestine and covert operations during World War II proved to be immensely popular with Allied operatives, the High Standard .22 Long Rifle HDMS issued to members of the American OSS (Office of Strategic Services), and the .32 ACP and 9x19mm Welrod pistols issued to members of the British SOE (Special Operations Executive). Both the HDMS and Welrod served with distinction in Indochina during the Vietnam War, and as recently as Operation Desert Storm. One can reasonably assume that both saw service in Gulf War II.

The HDMS remained a closely guarded secret for decades, although President Franklin Delano Roosevelt almost let the cat out of the bag right at

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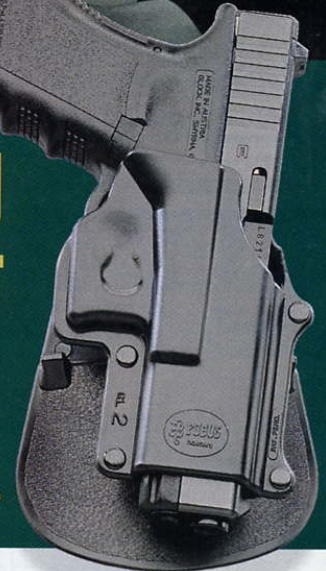
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OSS/CIA HDMS .22 LR



Original OSS HDMS pistol shown with Nazi currency for five countries, plus a German M39 egg grenade which was easier to conceal than the M24 stick grenade.



Arms Tech HDMS pistol field stripped.

the getgo. This part of the story really begins soon after the HDMS went into full-scale production. Major General "Wild Bill" Donovan walked briskly toward the entrance to the White House with a silenced pistol hidden under his coat. The sandbag he carried got a strange look from the guard, but he did not question its contents, for the director of the Office of Strategic Services had long been a confidant of President Roosevelt. Besides, you don't question a white-haired general who wears the ribbon for the Medal of Honor.

Donovan was quietly admitted to the Oval Office, where FDR was dictating to his secretary. With everyone focused upon the dictation, Donovan walked to the far side of the office, laid down the sandbag, drew the HDMS pistol, and emptied it into the sandbag.

General Donovan turned back toward the President, who was still preoccupied with his dictation. Wild Bill

thrust the pistol, butt first, under Roosevelt's nose. That got his attention.

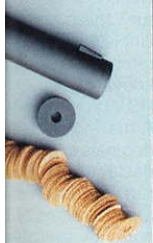
"Mr. President," Donovan said, "I've just fired live bullets from this new OSS silent pistol into that sandbag." As far as I know, that was the first time a pistol had been fired in the President's office since Andrew Jackson shot a would-be assassin off the balcony of the White House more than a century before. In those days before the Pinkertons and Secret Service, Jackson always carried a brace of pistols. If I recall correctly, Jackson had previously caned another would-be assassin to death.

FDR was so impressed with the OSS silenced pistol that he put it on display in Hyde Park. When he was politely reminded that this was a classified weapon that could not be displayed, President Roosevelt not only removed the display, but returned the pistol to the OSS.



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Current Iraqi bill (top) and Alliance propaganda leaflet from Gulf War I airdropped into Iraq. Leaflet is printed to look like currency of 1991 on one side. It reads "There is no difference between your money and this piece of paper. Worthless money is plentiful in the land and the depravation is spreading. No Remedy is present. The suffering is expanding. There is no nourishment, but there is filth. There is no soap or water to be found. The darkness has settled. The electricity is cut. You are in distress; you have needs, but your wife is not with you. You are afraid of Saddam, but you do not disobey. You are in imminent danger of death, but have no plans to change it. O'people of Iraq, you still have the right to do something, yet you are sitting in your house. O'soldiers, O'civilians, O'elders, O'youth, O'women, O'men! The time has come for you to respond to the call of duty. Rise up and flood the streets and alleys for the overthrow of Saddam and his supporters."

Combat Proven

One of the earliest documented missions using the HDMS involved a German-born OSS operative who made his way from Madrid to Berlin to assassinate a double agent who was posing as a friendly German diplomat, but was really a Gestapo agent. The Nazi was

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S5/CIA NDMS 22 EN

The first noteworthy public unveiling of the HDMS pistol came in the closing days of the Eisenhower administration, when Operation Grand Slam literally went down in flames. This was to be the most ambitious U2 spyplane flight yet attempted over the Soviet Union. Grand Slam was to be a 3,790-mile flight (2,920 miles over hostile airspace) completely across the Soviet Union from south to north. The flight would photograph suspected Soviet ICBM sights. Francis Gary Powers was selected for this dangerous mission because he was the most experienced U-2 pilot in Detachment B, with 27 operational missions and about 600 hours in the U-2.

6:26 a.m. on May 1, 1960, in a sub-standard, trouble-prone replacement U-2C that was rebuilt from a crashed aircraft. Powers' regular aircraft was grounded just before the mission due to the number of hours since its last maintenance and the number of times the mission had been delayed due to weather. Powers felt so uncomfortable about using this rebuilt aircraft that he

About halfway through the flight, the 419-pound warhead of a Soviet SA-2 missile fired from Sverdlovsk exploded



The HDMS pistol carried by Francis Gary Powers when his U2-C was shot down over the Soviet Union. Note KGB evidence number 74 stamped in the slide, and the safety was lost during KGB T&E.

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just under the U-2C's cruising altitude of 70,500 feet. Blast overpressure tore off the right stabilizer, causing the plane to turn upside down. Negative Gs on the wings snapped them off, and the fuselage careened earthward. After a desperate struggle, Powers disentangled himself and fell without oxygen from about 25,000 feet until his chute opened automatically at 15,000 feet. He landed near a small village and was immediately surrounded by people, so there was no chance to evade capture.

Khrushchev was outraged by the continuing spyplane overflights, outraged that this one happened on a national holiday, May Day, and outraged that this one happened just two weeks before a scheduled summit between the U.S. and Soviet leaders. Khrushchev set a series of public relations traps designed to embarrass and weaken President Eisenhower. These traps worked beyond all expectation, because the American government tried to use easily disproved disinformation to counter Soviet claims that were subsequently backed by the physical evidence of the pilot, plane wreckage, developed U-2 camera film, poison pin, and the silenced spy pistol in the pilot's kit. The Republicans lost so much face that they lost the next presidential election, in no small measure due to the failure of Operation Grand Slam. This was the only mission over the last 59 years that I've uncovered, where the HDMS pistol did not enhance the overall success of the mission. But the HDMS did play its part in changing the course of history, and it gave the world its first look at the OSS/CIA silenced pistol that had already been operational for 16 years.

While a number of HDMS pistols remained in service with the Company following World War II, a large number were refurbished and stockpiled for a rainy day, that day arrived in the 1960s with increasing U.S. involvement in South Vietnam.

High Standard silenced pistols were never standard-issue military weapons during the Vietnam period, but were issued to CIA operatives, CIA contract agents, and U.S. military personnel tasked with highly sensitive, high-priority missions of interest to the Company. In other words, HDMS pistols were issued where silenced killings, using a compact, accurate instrument with a minimal sound signature, were specific mission requirements. It also appears that some HDMS pistols were transferred to the U.S. Army's newly established Special Forces (Green Berets).

For some people armed with the

silenced High Standard, like pilots working for Air America (CIA's "private" airline that was extremely active throughout Indochina and the Indo-West Pacific), carrying an HDMS in a shoulder holster represented a status symbol. This status symbol also served as a very real insurance policy if a pilot's aircraft was shot down during a covert mission in Laos or Cambodia. For others, such as Special Forces members assigned to Project Phoenix, the silenced .22 pistol was the ideal tool for silently delivering a double tap to the head of an adversary.

Before Project Phoenix officially started in 1968, HDMS pistols were principally used in Vietnam by courier intercept teams who liked the silenced High Standard .22 because the weapon could be used to disable a courier. With more conventional weapons, courier escorts would be killed in the ambush. Hitting the courier with a well-placed, silenced, .22 rimfire round would trigger the ambush. The big dividend of using the HDMS: there was a good chance that the wounded courier could be kept alive (long enough) for interrogation if the shot was placed properly.

In 1970, an eight-man team of CIA and Special Forces personnel used HDMS pistols to take out the security detail guarding an important Viet Cong general staying at a remote plantation. When no one was left alive but the general, South Vietnamese accompanying the American team prodded the incredulous general awake and informed him he was a prisoner. In another operation that year, a Cambodian double agent was handled in a more traditional fashion by a CIA contract player, who used an HDMS to place a silenced single CNS (Central Nervous System) shot into the traitor as he left a hut to urinate.

A more notorious operation was successful but subsequently got blown, with the ultimate result that three Special Forces officers nearly went to jail for murder. A South Vietnamese double agent named Chuyen turned out to be a triple agent, who had been responsible for causing the deaths of many South Vietnamese. Captain Robert Marasco and two other Green Beret officers got the job to "eliminate" the triple agent "with extreme prejudice," which was CIA-speak in those days. Mokrie dela was the term the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti used for the same activity, a term meaning "wet affairs" or "wet work." One of the three Green Berets dispatched the brigand with two silenced shots to the head. The body

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OSS/CIA HDMS .22 LR

was then deep-sixed well out in the South China Sea. The entire episode, including the legal aftermath when the mission became public knowledge, would make a great book.

Clearly, the HDMS has written a lot of history. Can a clone measure up?

Arms Tech Vs Original

Let's see how the Arms Tech reproduction literally measures up to an original OSS HDMS from the first production run. Original HDMS pistols in the first WWII contract were blued, while those in the second contract were parkerized. The right front of the receiver is stamped with the words "PROPERTY OF U.S." and the cartouche of the crossed cannons symbolizing the Ordnance Department. The suppressor tube is parkerized for both contracts. Individual pistols made for R&D or as part of a small group not associated with one of the aforementioned contracts may differ slightly from what I describe as the norm. Furthermore, post-war production for the CIA may differ in some respects.

The Arms Tech pistol is parkerized like second contract OSS pistols. All springs and worn internal parts are replaced as part of the restoration process.

The WWII production model, as well as the Arms Tech variant of the HDMS, weighs 2.94 pounds. Both feature a steel suppressor tube that is 7.75 inches long, including the end cap. The overall length of the pistol is 13.8 inches. The rear of the suppressor tube attaches to a threaded receiver extension, and a spring-loaded detent pin indexes the tube to properly align the front sight. The front of the tube terminates with a threaded cap, which is also indexed by a detent pin. The front of the original tube features a blade-type front sight while the slide had the typical HDM fixed notch rear sight. The Arms Tech rear sight is an adjustable notch from the same period, since original fixed sights were no longer available in quantity. The Arms Tech clone was built on a period-correct pistol that was not issued to the military, so the checkered grips are natural walnut rather than black.

The HDMS barrels on both the High Standard and Arms Tech variants are 6.75 inches long including the chamber. Ports on the Arms Tech barrel are EDMed rather than drilled like the original, eliminating any rough spots that could degrade accuracy. Otherwise, suppressor construction, including internal components and barrel porting,

Performance: High Standard HDMS Silenced Pistol .22LR					
Silencer	SPL	NSR	FRP	MV	Accuracy
HDM None	154	n/a	n/a	934	1.01
HDMS Bell Labs	126	28	-1.0	851	1.04
HDMS Arms Tech	126	28	-0.9	845	0.96

Sound pressure levels (SPLs), net sound reductions (NSRs) and first-round pop (FRP) are reported in decibels, muzzle velocities (MVs) are reported in feet per second, and accuracy with 5-shot groups at 25 yards is reported in inches. The term "n/a" in the table means "not applicable".

are the same, so it would be reasonable to expect similar sound signatures and accuracy.

Shooting Impressions

I compared the performance of the Arms Tech reproduction of the HDMS to that of an early WWII-vintage High Standard HDMS silenced pistol (from the first contract of 1,500 pistols). I used an unsilenced High Standard HD Military pistol with a barrel length of 4 inches as the reference standard, using established equipment and procedures. Remington standard velocity ammunition was employed for the testing since it closely resembles the performance characteristics of ammunition originally employed with the HDMS. The results appear in the accompanying table. Performance of the original and reproduction are almost identical.

Like its predecessor, the Arms Tech HDMS delivers excellent sound reduction and better accuracy than the original with a mint barrel at 25 yards. Like the original HDMS from High Standard, a competent shooter can put all 10 shots into a 3x5 inch file card at 50 yards using the Arms Tech variant. Several folks who have shot the Arms Tech gun at 50 yards over recent weeks independently concluded that they had shot beyond their perceived skill level. One begins to understand why the HDMS remains in service after 59 years. In the real world, the pistol is commonly used by spooks and special operators at very close range from contact distance to no more than several arm spans. Yet, if a sentry must be taken out at 25 yards, the HDMS can deliver sufficient accuracy for a CNS shot.

Such accuracy on top of very good sound suppression is a credit to Arms Tech workmanship. It's also a credit to the design prowess of R.A. Heising of Bell Labs, who also had help from Carl Gustaf (Gus) Swedilius and Mr.

Humestone of High Standard, plus W.P. Mason of Bell Labs, in the creation of the High Standard Military Silenced pistol.

While Arms Tech is best known for its sniper rifles, the company has made a variety of esoteric covert weaponry for government end-users that will never become available in the public domain. This is their first foray into making a reproduction. It is a faithful reproduction down to the smallest detail. Only the sight is atypical of the OSS pattern, but it is historically correct. Sometimes High Standard made two or three pistols at a time for special government projects. In the pencil-written factory ledger, High Standard always noted sales to the OSS. But sales to the CIA, which was formed after WWII by core cadre from the OSS, were simply left blank. It is entirely possible that early production for the Company used the sight employed on the Arms Tech reproduction.

Final Notes

To my mind, the HDMS is one of the three most romantic, effective, and historically important suppressed weapons of the 20th century. In my opinion, the other two are the British Welrod and De Lisle Silent Carbine. More hours go into fabricating each HDMS than a custom sniper rifle, so the price tag of \$2,495 for the Arms Tech suppressed pistol, OSS patch, and handbook is a good value. Note that suppressors are legal to own by qualified U.S. citizens in about two-thirds of the states. The bottom line is that Arms Tech HDMS is a worthy, museum-grade reproduction of one of the most exotic and effective tools in the history of clandestine and covert tradecraft.

For more information contact: Arms Tech Ltd., 5133 N. Central Ave., Dept GW/LE, Phoenix, AZ 85012; 602-272-9045; www.armstechltd.com