

Selecting a Survival Battery of Firearms

By Sergeant

Raise your hand if you would try to adjust your carburetor with a crowbar. How many of you would try to build a cabin with only a saw, or treat a broken arm with epinephrine? These are similar tasks to trying to survive without a proper selection of firearms, and histrionics aside, are a proper analogy - for a firearm is a tool.

Given the societal changes that have occurred in this century, especially since the end of WW2, it is not especially surprising that a vast majority of folks are not well versed in firearms lore and the selection and use of weaponry. Having grown up on a farm in very rural country, I am more the exception than the rule, but a rural background by itself does not instill the knowledge to select a proper variety of firearms any more than living in Detroit makes you a car manufacturer. You have to apply yourself to the study of weapon usage and capability, and to their use in the field to gain insight that keeps you from wasting your money on things that don't appreciably help your chances of surviving.

Before you can make an intelligent choice, it would help if you knew what was out there, don't you think? While there are many hundreds of different firearms offered for sale today, and thousands of variations of barrel length, caliber, finish, sights, and other options, hopefully I can condense that down into a more digestible group that are most pertinent to survivalists today. The table below covers most of the types available:

Shoulder-Fired			Handguns		
Rifles	Shotguns	Special	Revolvers	Pistols	Special
Bolt Action	Pump	Single-Shot	S/A	S/A	Derringers
Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto	Interchangeable barrel	D/A	D/A	Single-shot
Lever Action	Over/Under	.50 Caliber	DAO	DAO	Bolt-Action
Pump	Side by Side	Other		Other	Other

S/A Single Action Hammer must be cocked for each shot

D/A Double Action Squeezing the trigger also cocks the hammer

DAO Double Action Only Trigger-cocking for every shot

While every person has to decide just what role firearms will play in their own plans, I feel that automatically disqualifying any type from your battery for semantic reasons (i.e., "handguns are evil",

or "assault rifles kill babies" or some such drivel) is both silly and dangerous. Without going into Second Amendment rights or discussion, I'd just like to say that if I need a pistol (for example), then I need it badly, and probably *right now*. Not having one because someone arbitrarily said I couldn't is just plain wrong.

I can hear you now - "Will you quit BS-ing and get on with it?" Okay, okay!

Here's my version of the nitty-gritty: I think every would-be survivalist should have the ability to protect themselves in a variety of situations, and have the ability to hunt small game and whatever else is in their area, or the area where they will be (expect to be) in case of emergency. Redundancy is recommended, great variety is not, unless you can afford to do it right. My base line requirements are these:

- Rifle for defense/offense
- Rifle for hunting if fighting rifle is not suitable
- Shotgun for defense/hunting
- .22 Rifle for small game & plinking (informal target practice)
- Handgun for defense
- Handgun for field work
- Handgun for concealment/defense

A couple of these, most notably the fieldwork handgun and the hunting rifle are of lower priority than the others, and if pressed, I could work with less. Obviously you can't carry all of these at the same time, so you may wonder why you need them. The answer is, you won't be fighting all the time, you won't be hunting all the time, you won't be carrying a rifle all the time and you won't need to conceal a handgun all the time. You get the picture. Also there are many other tasks that may need doing which I'll touch on later, but they are more specialized and not, to my mind, as likely to be important.

When considering what type of weapons to purchase, you also have to think about how many to get. While it seems prudent to get the defensive weapons first, at some point, if you accept the basic premise, you'll end up with the entire spectrum. At that point you should probably plan your back-up package. Consider the current Special Forces logistical doctrine, which holds with the PACE concept - Primary, Alternate, Contingency, Extra. While we as individuals do not have the budget of the Federal Government, we should keep this in mind as an excellent method of planning, and build redundancy into our plans. If you've read the late Mel Tappan's definitive (though now somewhat dated) work *Survival Guns*, you are familiar with several precepts that should be nearly gospel. Some of these being have the right firearm (tool) for the job, have enough firearms, and have spare parts and plenty of ammunition. It is not necessary to get carried away with any thoughts of romanticism about weaponry, nor is it necessary to get one of everything, but do consider these thoughts from that signature volume: For every adult, contributing member he recommends you have (as a *minimum*):

- one fighting rifle, plus a spare for every two (people)
- a shotgun for every two
- a fighting handgun each, plus a spare for every two
- everyone should have one .22 and a working handgun
- a concealment handgun for every two

If you think this looks a lot like what I wrote above, you're right on the money. While a lot of new and significantly improved firearms have been introduced since it was written, his words still carry a lot of wisdom.

Personally, I don't think that's enough, at least from a long-term perspective and neither did he. His "ideal" inventory of weapons for two people includes something on the order of 40 weapons, including a deluxe over/under hunting shotgun, and more calibers to stockpile than you're likely to find in your local gun shop!

I prefer a spare fighting rifle and handgun for each person and a shotgun and concealment handgun for each, plus more working weapons - albeit in calibers that, for the most part, are already in your inventory. I like the idea of having a complete battery both at home and at the retreat, and having at least one weapon available in many of the different locations that I may find myself temporarily stranded. If this sounds rather dramatic I apologize, but if I had the bucks, I could plan a pretty intensive war room! (Hello, Walter Mitty)

Enough fluff, let's get on to the subject at hand.

The fighting rifle is where most controversy comes in. The entire family of semi-automatic, magazine fed rifles of suitable caliber (meaning 7.62 NATO, 7.62 x 39, or 5.56 NATO) is overpriced and over-restricted. In truth, however, pretty much all of the available choices are well constructed and serviceable, which makes selection mostly a matter of personal preference. The most commonly available weapons in this category are the AR-15, AK-47, SKS, M1A, FN-FAL, HK's 91 & 93, and Ruger's Mini-14. The M1 Garand is part of this group, but you'll not find a great selection of the more esoteric rifles (such as the Galil, Valmet, Beretta, Sig, etc.) in this country, and spare parts & magazines could prove difficult to find if you didn't stock enough for a protracted emergency.

There are those who hold the view that a magazine-fed semi-auto is not needed...that we are not likely to have to fight an infantry engagement. Regardless of who is right, they have some valuable insights in weaponry choices, and encourage the lever-action .30-30, .44 or .357 Magnum as a worthy alternative. After your initial reaction, listen to some of their arguments: Rapid fire repeater. Greater magazine capacity than most sporters. Much better trigger actions than most any battle rifle you'd care to name. Light weight. Cost is less than 20% of an assault rifle. These are, you have to admit, some pretty significant considerations. Think about it - you can buy two lever guns (at @ \$200 each) and a thousand rounds of ammo (@ \$500, if you shop around) for enough less than a state of the art auto (\$1200 & up) to either get ANOTHER thousand rounds, or a handgun, shotgun, or a couple of .22's. Pretty convincing, especially when you consider it's increased versatility over a .223, better shooting rifles than the .30 Russian Short (7.62x39), and much lighter weight than any .308 battle rifle available.

The hunting rifle is, for most of us, a fairly easy choice - if you live in the lower 48 and don't plan to hunt elk, moose, or grizzly, then anything from the .243 to the .300 Winchester Magnum is suitable, with something in the middle probably most appropriate. I like the .308, mainly for it's universal availability and the wide choice of bullets available, both loaded and separately as components. And of course, for it's ammo interchangeability with a battle rifle.

The hunting rifle is probably a scope-sighted bolt-action job, with limited magazine capacity. It may be able to stand in for a "sniper" rifle, if it is accurate, your ammo and shooting skill are up to the task, and you don't have to drag it around on the ground, beat it against building walls, jump out of airplanes with it, or any of the myriad other tasks that military and law-enforcement professionals routinely encounter.

Some of the most common & popular rifles today are the Remington 700 (choice of the U.S. Army & Marine Corps as the M24 & M40A1), Winchester's M70, and Ruger's M77. Savage sells their M110 & 112, which are super deals, both in price and accuracy, and recently introduced a short action which should be even stiffer & thus more accurate, while ending up lighter and shorter as well. There are lots of surplus Mausers on the market, of various model, manufacturer, and condition, as well as new production ones. As with all the other weapon types we'll discuss, there are many more types for sale than I could ever talk about in one article, so I'm only listing some of the most popular - don't think that your weapon, if it works for you, is somehow unsatisfactory. Just think about spare parts and ammo availability.

If you want to do some varmint hunting (coyote, groundhog, prairie dog, etc.) then you'll want a heavy-barreled .223 or .22-250, or something similar. If you think you can accurately shoot a deer or other large animal at long range, something more potent is called for. Starting at 7 millimeter (.28 caliber) magnums and working up through the .33 calibers, there are quite a few new cartridges that are very capable of taking out whatever you hit at ranges approaching 1000 meters. These cartridges send 160 to 250 grain bullets through the barrel at speeds up to 3600 FPS! Of course, to be able to hit anything at great distance requires immense amounts of practice and skill, but there you are.

If you feel that life doesn't begin until 600 meters, there are several .50 caliber rifles on the market that have been proven in battle in the last dozen years or so. There are several accounts of **2 MILE** shots by Marine Corps snipers in Iraq during Desert Storm, and I personally laid behind a .50 on the Kuwaiti border in November of '90, looking at an Iraqi who, had we been shooting, would have been toast - at about 1200 meters. I was a guest of a Navy SEAL team, charged (later) with imitating a Marine battalion - just the dozen or so SEALs at that one Saudi Customs site. During those pre-shooting days, they were engaged with underwater reconnaissance - what they were originally developed to do.

The point I want to make about working rifles is that, given some realistic evaluations of what you will expect them to do, there are countless rifles out there that will work, and most of them will do everything you want. That is why I recommend sticking with one of the most popular calibers (.270, .30-06, .308, etc.), and spending the money saved for more ammo to practice with and stockpile. There's nothing wrong with having a spare working rifle, along with your spare "fighting" pieces, but have a real good reason if it's not the same model and caliber.

The shotgun, often called the "front door gun" where I come from, is the very picture of versatility. With slugs and a sighted, rifled barrel (is it still a shotgun if you put a rifled barrel on it?) it is deadly out to 125 yards or so. Everyone is familiar with its traditional bird-hunting role. With heavy loads of buckshot it is big medicine during building-clearing ops. With the near-universal availability of replacement barrels, chokes, stocks, and other options, they can be customized to suit your requirements, and rapidly and easily changed to do something else. Remington's 870 is the popular choice in this category, but hard on it's heels are Mossbergs 500 & 590 (choice of the Marine Corps in

recent competition), and Winchester's 1200. These are all pump guns, but some autoloaders that make the cut are the HK/Benelli M1 Super 90, Beretta's 1201, and Remington's 11-87.

Probably the top shotgun accessories today are white light systems, the best of which is Laser Products Sure-Fire line. Available for most of the guns listed above, these units replace the factory forend with a completely self-contained flashlight/switch/forend combo that is extremely bright. It also allows single-hand control, something not possible before its introduction without dangling wires and taped-on switches. Additionally, the Side-Saddle spare ammo carrier that attaches to the side of the receiver and holds six extra rounds right at the balance point - accessible to either hand for tactical reloads while keeping the weapon on target - is virtually a standard addition to the tactical shotgun, and is well worth considering.

If you have ever lived or worked in the country, you'll immediately recognize the need for a .22 rifle. Whether you have rabbits in the garden, gophers in the yard, or starlings in the chicken feed, or simply want a way to spend an enjoyable afternoon, there is no other firearm that you will use as much or enjoy as much as a .22. Scopes are optional - I have several .22 rifles, about half of which are scoped. Marlin's line of bolt and semi-auto rifles have dominated the price wars for years, and are excellent buys, as is the Ruger 10/22 & bolt action 77/22, which is also available in .22 magnum, .22 Hornet, and now, .44 Magnum so strong is its receiver. Ruger recently introduced its 96/22 lever-action rifle, and Winchester and Marlin also sell lever actions. Remington has a fine line (no surprises there) of bolt and semi-auto rifles as well. Don't overlook the variety of rifles that take-down for easier carry. These include Marlin's Papoose, the old Charter Arms AR-7 (now produced by Henry Arms), and Springfield Armoury's M6 combination .22/.410 shotgun. These are all lightweight rifles that are easily carried and offer a great improvement in accuracy for most shooters over trail handguns, while retaining the light weight that encourages their inclusion on your packing list for survival excursions or bug-out bags.

If you have the money, a top-drawer .22 rifle can be an immense joy to own and shoot. These rifles, by such makers as Kimber, Anschutz, and Walther can shoot rings around most anything going. With match ammo, these things go into groups that must be measured with a micrometer. The downfall? The same one I keep bringing up. Call me a miser, but if I can accomplish the mission with a \$200 rifle I don't see why I should pay \$1000 for only marginally improved ability. Unless you are a serious competitor, you probably don't need the difference between a 50 yard, one-inch group, and one that goes into an eighth-inch. Assuming a squirrels-head target, if you can hold on it, you can hit it with either, and I'd rather spend the additional \$800 on ammo and other things.

Nothing spells relief when things go bump in the night like a heavy handgun. The primary requirements are absolute reliability, adequate power and the accuracy to hit your target. The details are as numerous as the choices. The long-time favorite is the M1911A1-style .45. A large, heavy, and powerful handgun, its exploits are legendary. There are vastly more modern pistols, but very few approach the success of its long heritage, and none has the wide base of knowledge, spare parts, or accessories. The Glock line is one that has been fantastically popular. There are those whom the lack of an external locking safety bothers, but the plastic Austrian gun's record doesn't reflect a problem. Its extreme reliability, light weight and accuracy have made converts of countless thousands of happy souls. Available in all the modern, effective calibers, in magazine capacities from 9 to 33 rounds, there is probably a Glock that is right for you. The U.S. Military has purchased the Beretta M92 and the Sig/Sauer P228 for our standard military pistols as the M9 and M11, respectively, and many Federal

and State agencies have followed their lead. Smith & Wesson, Heckler & Koch (HK), Walther, Browning, Ruger and Taurus round out the most popular autos with a variety of models to fill any need.

All this talk about semi-auto's should not lead you to believe that revolvers somehow became ineffective the day everyone started switching to autos - far from it. A properly loaded revolver of quality design and manufacture is still potent medicine, and in the hands of a trained person can stand and deliver the goods. While autos will always have improved reload times and higher capacity, speedloaders and situational awareness, proper use of cover & concealment, and carrying the fastest reload of all - a spare weapon - will negate most of the arguments against them. No other handgun can compare with the .357's stopping record when using 125 grain hollow-points at a nominal 1400 FPS. And no other weapon is as versatile in as many conditions as a good four or six-inch barreled revolver.

The field handgun can double as the defense handgun, if you select carefully, and actually there is a lot to recommend such a course of action. This generally will be a revolver of suitable caliber, meaning either .357 Magnum, .44 Special or Magnum, .45 ACP or .45 Colt. The .38 Special is marginally acceptable, but since you can fire this cartridge in the .357, I see no need to limit yourself by choosing a .38 as your only chambering, at least in this larger revolver. In any case, if the field revolver is going to be your self-defense piece as well, it really must be a double action number with a swing-out cylinder for rapid reloading.

Some of the advantages of having a single weapon perform both missions are: You only have to store one caliber of ammo, You only need to practice with a single weapon to remain proficient, and initial procurement costs are cut in half or so - you'll still need a backup (ideally an identical duplicate), but generally a good revolver costs noticeably less than an equally good semi-auto, and it's ancillary items cost a lot less (speedloaders vs. magazines, anyway). If you opt for this course, I strongly urge you to stick with the .357, although you can get .44 Special (NOT magnum) guns built on medium frames these days, if you prefer big-bore bullet weights. You'll probably get tired of carrying the 50 oz. of a large frame .44 or .45 a lot quicker than a 32 oz. medium frame .357 or .44 Special.

If you do not require it to do double duty - and I recommend against it, if you can afford it - you can get away with a Single-Action revolver, preferably in a heavy caliber. I have a stainless steel Ruger Super Blackhawk in .44 Magnum, with a 5-1/2 inch barrel that I carry in a Bianchi Ranger convertible nylon holster. This holster allows you to carry it crossdraw, allowing easier carry of a slung rifle or backpack, while still permitting conventional carry when it is your only partner.

And finally, the hideout piece. A smaller, lighter, and usually less-powerful firearm than your primary handgun, it is often the one you have with you when the excrement impacts with the rotary oscillator. That being the case, don't neglect your training regimen with this weapon. It is probably more difficult to shoot well than your larger one, and, while marksmanship basics remain the same, they ARE more difficult to apply with grips and sights that are too small for most folks. Especially in dim or no light conditions, when your heart is racing, your hands are slippery and sweating, and you only went out for some milk for tomorrow's breakfast. This is a very important decision, but one that today is easier than ever before.

For most folks this will be a small frame .38 Special, but with the proliferation of sub-compact autos in serious calibers, more people are choosing autos than ever before. Kahr Arms' 9mm, and their new MK-9, are both smaller than just about anything out there, Kel-Tec's P-11, S&W's Sigma 9 & .380, Colt's Pony & Mustang - the list just goes on and on. Also there are scads of .32, .25, and .22 miniature autos, and Freedom Arms' incredibly small .22 single-action revolver 5-shooters are wonders of micro-machining. For the traditionalist, or one who would rather depend on the proven .38, the S&W Centennial line are the ones to beat - concealed hammer, round grip frame, 2 inch barrel; at their best with an aluminum frame - they are also available in stainless and in .22, 9mm and .357 (stainless only) and with 3-inch barrels and adjustable sights. Colt has it's new DS-II .38 6-shot revolver (the Smiths are 5-shooters) and lots of it's old line such as the Agent and Detective Special are available used. Ruger's SP-101 is extremely robust for it's size and is available in the same calibers as the Smith & Wesson offerings, and also in .32 H&R Magnum. Taurus's M85 revolvers are very popular in this role, as well.

Having gone over the basics, let me touch on what I referred to as "Special" weapons in the table at the beginning of this article. There are a lot of firearms available that have a pretty narrow niche to fill. Some of them however - such as T/C's Contender, which, if you're not familiar with it, is a single shot pistol that breaks open like a shotgun, and allows you to change it's barrel with one of a wide-variety of other calibers & lengths - are very versatile. Consider that you can have scoped .223, .30-30 and .22 barrels, and a .45 Colt/.410 shotgun barrel, along with the frame, ammo for each, and cleaning & survival equipment, in a case 16 inches by 8 inches and weighing less than 10 pounds. This is an extremely versatile piece, and one that doesn't fit neatly into a pre-planned category, but rather may be at it's best in a Bug-Out Bag or kept in a vehicle. While there are other single-shots and break-open pistols available, none have the variety of calibers or widespread availability of the Contender. Additionally, if you purchase the optional 16 1/4 barrels, you can install the available buttstock to make a very lightweight, compact carbine that is even easier to shoot accurately.

There are those who live in states which allow civilian ownership of fully-automatic weapons who have or would like to have one. Personally I think this is a mistake - at least, if you are including it in your defense planning. Owning one as a part of your shooting hobby is something else entirely. But, for those who can afford their prodigious ammunition appetite and don't mind the Federal paperwork and giving up their privacy rights (legally possessing - and don't think about having one illegally - an automatic weapon gives the BATF the right to unannounced inspections of your storage of it, and brings in an entire new spectrum of Big Brother). Anyway, if you feel you really need it for your defense planning a sub-machine gun (a compact, fully automatic weapon which shoots a pistol cartridge) is most effective up close (up to 75 meters or so), and a .30 caliber medium machinegun on a tripod is pretty good out to a thousand meters or so - if you can afford to practice enough to get good enough to hit at that distance. Trust me - you can't just yank the trigger and "mow 'em down" - you still have to practice.

A silencer, or more properly a sound suppressor, is a horse of an entirely different color. Being restricted by the same laws as full-automatics, a suppressor is something that is much more user-friendly. It allows the shooter to hunt without giving away his position and to practice without earplugs. They ease the training of new shooters and help them avoid flinching, and in a more sinister context, allow such tasks as "sentry takedown" without alerting other guards. The military recognizes this and has a suppressor kit for the M9 Beretta, and the recent SOCOM (Special Operations

Command) pistol contract specifies a sound suppressor as part of the package. EGW and Jonathan Arthur Ciener are two of the more widely known companies which sell suppressors in the States.

Along with decisions about what firearms to own, come more choices concerning ammunition. The caliber of weapon you have obviously narrows down the choices considerably, but they can still be nearly overwhelming. If you have made the wise choice of purchasing military caliber weapons, then by all means take advantage of the availability of surplus ammo. Round for round you won't find a better deal, and you can't even reload .308 or .223 ammo as cheaply as you can pick up surplus stuff - but. There's always a but in there somewhere, isn't there? In this case it is the sometimes questionable quality or reliability of ammo that may have been (and probably was) stored in very questionable conditions - widely varying temperature and humidity, perhaps contaminated with petroleum products - who knows? It may also be un-reloadable with Berdan primers, and could have corrosive primers as well. None of these are disqualifiers, but you need to know in advance and be prepared to compensate for these factors. In any case, it pays to check out a good sample of whatever lot you may purchase for reliability and accuracy, and make sure it's pressures don't exceed the strength of your rifle.

There is an old axiom that will hold true as long as we have firearms - you can never have too much ammunition. In any case, keep at least 500 rounds per weapon, and if you have battle rifles, I would rather have ten times that much. Or more. And 5,000 rounds would just be a *starting* point for a machinegun. Be sure, however, that your ammunition is stored properly and safely - you don't want to have all you've worked for destroyed because of carelessness.

Don't ignore cleaning supplies or spare parts. Keep large quantities of cleaning solvent, patches, bore brushes, Q-tips, pipe cleaners, and lubricating oil & gun grease on hand so you can keep those valuable investments doing their job. At the same time, wouldn't you hate to have that rifle inoperative because your firing pin broke, or mainspring went soft, and you couldn't replace it? We're talking \$5 or \$10 parts, which could cost you a lot if neglected. In general, purchase firing pins, extractors, ejectors, and all internal and magazine springs, and any other parts with a history of breakage or early replacement. Manufacturer's manuals, disassembly and repair books, and any other reference on your specific type should be gathered as well, for the inevitable necessary repairs down the line.

Please don't take the lack of mention of all the countless other manufacturers or models to mean they are somehow unsuited for use - the best gun in the world is the one you have when you need it. Take heart in the fact that, despite the best efforts of the anti-gunners we still have some of the most liberal gun laws of anyone anywhere in the world. Whatever your feelings are toward the NRA, if you own any firearms at all you should be a member - they are THE voice of law-abiding citizens in Congress's ear, and despite the negativity spread by it's detractors, it has been very effective in keeping our cause foremost in the American legislators mind. Join them and help support the right of all American citizens to keep and bear arms!