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# The Bureau and the Handgun

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The .32 caliber Colt Pocket Positive carried by Associate Director Tolson. Director Hoover carried one like it as did much of the Bureau hierarchy during his time.



Displayed is one of the 5,500 Smith and Wesson .357 magnums which were discontinued in 1938.

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On June 18, 1934, following years of dealing with dangerous criminals, Special Agents of the FBI were authorized by Congress to carry firearms and were given power of arrest. Over the many years since then, both their weapons and their training have drastically changed.

The story of the establishment of the model revolver for Agent personnel began when Captain Frank Baughman joined the Bureau in 1919 at the request of J. Edgar Hoover, then Special Assistant to the Attorney General.

Baughman, who had gone to school with Hoover, was just leaving active army service as a lieutenant and was in search of employment. He took a job with the Bureau, and after Hoover was appointed Director, he and Hoover became close companions.

The FBI began to concentrate on firearms training in the 30s, and Baughman was given authority over the firearms department. He did well, and quickly became an expert in the field of firearms and ballistics science. It was on the suggestion of Captain Baughman that Hoover requested that Smith and Wesson build a more powerful handgun for use by the FBI.

At the same time, a well-known arms and ammunition writer, Philip B. Sharpe, had been developing heavy loads that could be used in the Smith and Wesson .38/.44 caliber revolvers. He had been urging the factory to develop a special handgun that would handle greater loads than the .38 Special revolver.

Smith and Wesson responded by asking the Winchester Repeating Arms Com-

pany to develop a special cartridge. They did, and in addition to simply developing the handgun, Smith and Wesson also planned for the new revolver to be custom-built and registered to each of the individual purchasers.

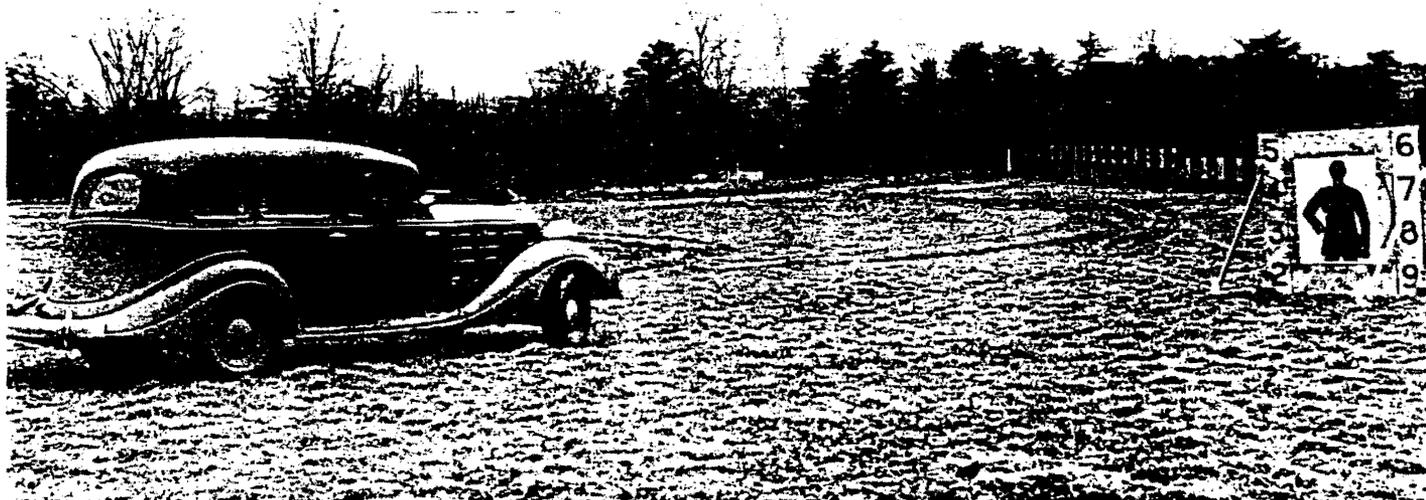
The new .357 magnum was Smith and Wesson's most deluxe revolver, with a retail price, in 1935, of \$60. The gun was built to the purchaser's specifications, and by custom order only. Each owner received a numbered registration certificate in his name listing the handgun's features with a matching registration number stamped in the yoke of the revolver.

The first .357 magnum was completed on April 8, 1935, and was presented to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Overwhelmed by subsequent orders, Smith and Wesson discontinued the speciali-

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by Catherine D. Butrym

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In the past, Agents were required to fire at three Army "E" targets from an automobile traveling 20 miles per hour. Two shots were fired at each silhouette target from the front, right flank, and rear as they drove past, and the Agent had

to hit at least two of the targets to qualify. At night, when the Thompson sub-machine gun was used, tracer ammunition and flares provided illumination.

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zation practice in 1938, after completing approximately 5,500 specialized revolvers.

Thus, the first Smith and Wesson magnum ever produced was intended as a model Bureau revolver and was subsequently distributed to Headquarters and among the field offices. (As yet, Agents were not personally issued a gun since they could not carry it without the permission of the SAC.)

During the 30s, all types of police weapons were used by Agents. These included weapons such as: the automatic pistol; the Colt .38 Special revolver; the Springfield sporter .30 rifle with Lyman No. 48 receiver sight; the Winchester self-loading 10 shot magazine .351 rifle; the pump shotgun; and the auto-loading shotgun.

Agents did not use sawed-off shotguns, but both the pump and auto-loading type had 22-inch barrels. In addition to the list were the Colt .30 monitor (a modified Browning automatic rifle), and the Thompson .45 caliber model 1928 sub-machine gun.

Also called the "Tommy" gun, it fired bursts of 600 shots per minute as well as single shots. For night firing, every fifth bullet was a tracer, and streaks of light would appear to be streaming from the gun. The "Tommy" gun was not officially adopted as an issue weapon by the Bureau until 1933 following the "Kansas City Massacre."

After 1935, the drum type magazine for the Thompson sub-machine gun was no longer used and was replaced by the box type which was easier to load and unload, and could be left loaded when not in use.

Although FBI Agents have had a complete arsenal of weapons available, in the public eye, the "Tommy" gun has been a symbol of the FBI's first line of defense in the war against crime.

In 1969, the Thompson sub-machine gun was phased out completely, and used only for miscellaneous training. It was not replaced until an increase in terrorist activities resulted in a need for a semi-automatic weapon once again. At that time it was replaced by the M16-A1 rifle which is now used as a single shot and semi-automatic weapon by Agent personnel, and in fully automatic mode by the SWAT teams, who also use the M16-A1 Carbine.

The first handgun issued to new Agents as a service revolver was the .38 caliber Colt Police Positive which had a 4-inch barrel and weighed 27 ounces. It was

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followed by the first medium-size service revolver, the .38 caliber Colt \_\_\_\_\_ Official Police, which was replaced in 1951 by the Smith and Wesson Military Police model 10. During this time period, however, Colt revolvers on hand were also reissued.

In 1974, Smith and Wesson worked with the FBI to develop new service revolvers. The Smith and Wesson model 10-6 was then specially designed with a 2 and 1/2-inch barrel and a round butt for concealment. They stopped its issue in September of 1981 and for the first time in the history of the FBI, a new .357 magnum is now being issued to new Agents as a service revolver. Properly called the Smith and Wesson model 13 .357 magnum caliber, it has a 3-inch barrel and a round butt.

Because issue or service weapons are often heavy and bulky, many Agents prefer to carry a personal weapon when off-duty or on undercover assignments. Agents are permitted to carry a personally owned handgun if they have Bureau approval. FBI policy requires the weapon to be a revolver with no more than a 4-inch barrel and of at least a .38 caliber. Automatic handguns are no longer used by the Bureau since integral training with automatics and revolvers is too difficult and automatics have a tendency to jam.

Some of the weapons used by gangsters during their violent careers were: the Smith and Wesson model 1917 .45 ACP revolver (John Dillinger); the Colt .380 Pocket Automatic, used by gangster Alvin ("Old Creepy") Karpis and the "Ma" Barker-Karpis gang who killed 10, wounded four, and stole over a million dollars between 1931 and 1936.



A group of Special Agents during an in-service day at Quantico, Virginia, during the 1930s. Notice how close they are standing to one another. Today Agents stand approximately 10 feet apart during firearms training.

Below, FBI Agents receive training for firing at moving targets with shotguns in February, 1935.



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Firearms expert of the FBI using a Thompson sub-machine gun in the pistol range of the Department of Justice Building during the 1930s.

Lester L. Limerick tries out a new revolver in the gunsmith's testing range at Quantico. Note he is wearing impact resistant glasses and ear protectors.



Gangster Charles "Pretty Boy" Floyd carried a .45 Government Model Colt, modified for fully-automatic fire with a snaildrum magazine. Floyd was a participant in the 1933 "Kansas City Massacre" which took the lives of four lawmen.

The idea of firearms training for FBI Agents at Quantico arose in the fall of 1933 when it was decided that to build a range in the D.C. area would result in it becoming too public. Weapons training there began as an individualized method of instruction. Advantage was constantly taken of improved weapons and teaching was slanted to best suit each group.

The only protective gear provided for use during firearms training at that time was vaseline coated cotton for the ears. Now ear-muff type ear protectors are used as well as wire-framed eyeglasses made of impact-resistant glass.

Today a thorough mastery of firearms is a vital aspect of Agent training, requiring a detailed and thorough program of instruction. The indoor range at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Va., represents a carefully planned and innovative response to this basic training requirement.

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A special thanks to Chief Gunsmith Lester L. Limerick, SA Bob Harmon, and SA Don Gray of the Training Division at Quantico; and retired SA George A. Zeiss, III; all of whom were most helpful in gathering and verifying the information used in this article.