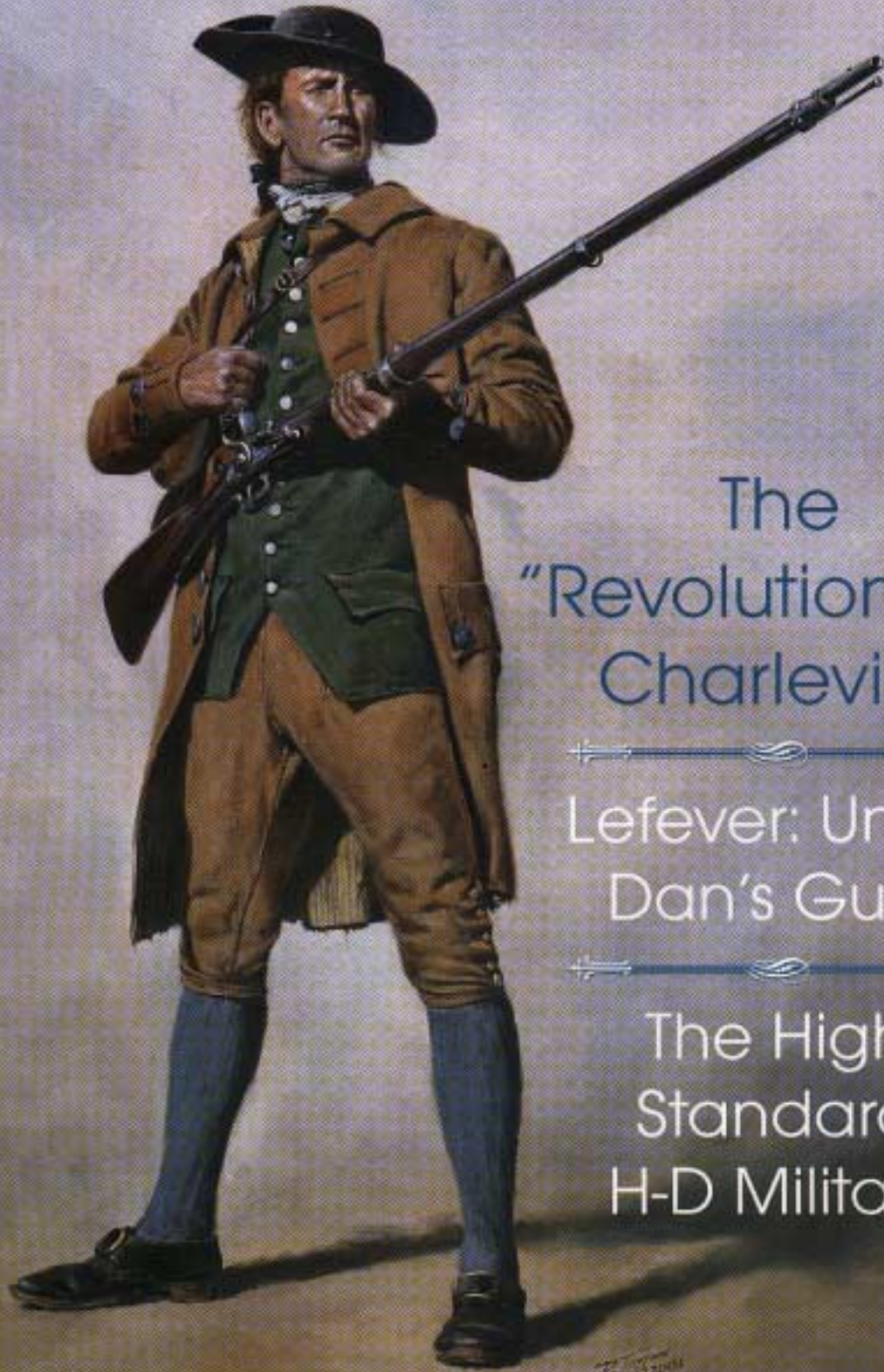


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AMERICAN Riflemans

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The High
Standard
H-D Military

MADE IN U.S.A.
THE HIGH STANDARD MFG. CO.
NEW HAVEN, CONN.
PATENT PENDING
● .22 CAL.
LONG RIFLE

The HI
MODE

The High Standard H-D Military is one of the classic American .22 semi-automatic pistols, and it was very popular in its day. But it's also one of the most misunderstood.

By **Charles E. Petty**, Contributing Editor

HIGH STANDARD H-D MILITARY

Among the so-called early High Standard .22 semi-automatic pistols, the most common—and most misunderstood—is the H-D Military. The name suggests that the pistol is a military gun. That is not so. It is certainly possible that some government entity bought some, but there is no evidence of any large government contract. Very frequently, the system of local purchase was used to procure firearms for recreational use through special services offices. Sometimes these guns were marked with some form of “U.S.” identification that was hand-stamped and easily recognized as such.

The H-D Military has a special meaning for me, for it was the one that launched my career as a collector of these pistols and as student of the company.

At first glance, High Standard’s system of model naming seems to be a straightforward alphabetical order, for it has models A, B, C, D and E, but the pistols with those names did not appear in that order. First, in 1932, was the

Model B, which was a design purchased from the defunct Hartford Arms and Equipment Co. It was followed by the Model C, which was the same pistol chambered for the .22 Short. Both of those pistols had a relatively small frame so, in response to demand from shooters, the company simply lengthened the frame by about 1/2”. That brought a whole new series of models—A, D and E—into the picture. All three appeared in April and May of 1938, and were primarily different in the diameter of their barrels. While the B and C had fixed sights, the new pistols were fitted with a rear sight that was adjustable for both elevation and windage.

The Model A had a slim barrel, the D’s was medium and the E’s was heavy. Then target shooters wanted an exposed hammer, so in 1940 another series began. Those followed the size scheme so there were now additional models: H-B, H-A, H-D and H-E. All were chambered for the .22 Long Rifle cartridge. There was no model H-C.



High-Standard

Model H-D

Military

The H-D Military received its name from the fact that it was based on the World War II military contract pistol produced for the government—the USA H-D. More than 44,000 USA H-D pistols were made. There were in fact three High Standard .22 pistols that had “H-D” in their names. The first was the pre-World War II H-D, the second the 4 1/2”-barreled USA H-D made for the military, and, finally, the H-D Military.

While there are quite a few model variations among the early High Standard pistols, from a mechanical point of view they are remarkably alike. And that is a tribute to the value of the original design from 1932.

World War II curtailed production of civilian pistols and guaranteed that the “H” series pistols would be the scarcest of the early models. There was an immediate demand for a .22 pistol design to be used for training, and the War Department contracted with High Standard to produce the Model B-US, which was basically the same as the commercial Model B. The small size was not

popular, so it enjoyed a brief life with a little more than 11,000 produced.

Then High Standard presented the government with a new model that was called the USA-HD. The company began with the pre-war H-D with a 4 1/2” barrel and added a manual safety and fixed sights. The operation of that gun more closely approximated the M1911A1, and it was widely used. Shipments began in June of 1943, and more than 44,000 guns were made.

The end of the war brought an immediate and large demand for civilian pistols, and High Standard took an expedient course. The USA-HD became the H-D Military. So here we have a third pistol with “H-D” in its name. No wonder it’s confusing, for the differences between the three are really pretty small.

The H-D Military was logically named since it was simply an adaptation of the existing military contract pistol. All High Standard had to do to make it was install an adjustable sight—the same one used before the war—and offer both 4 1/2” and 6 1/2” barrels, install a trig-



Beloved by a generation of Bullseye pistol shooters, the H-D Military was accurate and reliable. Today, you can still find used H-D Military pistols for not much more money than modern-made plinking pistols.

ger stop and resume the blued finish of the pre-war guns.

Shipments of the H-D Military began in early 1946. It has been suggested that the very first pistols had the military finish, and that could well be so, but examination of pistols with serial numbers from the earliest production reveal a deep, well-polished blue. Later pistols had a less highly polished finish, and near the end of production the tops of the slides and grip straps had a matte finish over blue. The factory records do not indicate when those changes came about.

One of the challenges for the researcher is that High Standard used serial numbers in a sequence that began at 500 and continued without regard to model well into the 1960s—reaching something more than 3,000,000. That makes it difficult to come up with precise production counts, but based on serial numbers from the factory records it is obvious that more than 150,000 H-D

Military pistols were produced. The significance of that number to the company cannot be overstated, for it gave the company steady business to make up for the military contract work that ended with the victories over Germany and Japan.

During the war, the pistols were only a tiny fraction of the company's business. High Standard was also a major manufacturer of .50-cal. Browning machine guns, and had a huge contract for barrels for the .45 ACP Model 1911A1 pistol. The original barrels

for Remington-Rand and Ithaca contract pistols were provided by High Standard.

By comparison with many of High Standard's other models, the H-D Military had a very long life. Pre-war production was spread out among several models—none of which were produced in large numbers. For a time after the war, the H-D Military was High Standard's only gun. In fact, production of the H-D Military was only slightly less than the sum of all the guns High Standard made before and during the war. If we take out the military production, the H-D Military's production far exceeds all the other models made up to that time. The reason for that great success is actually pretty simple: The pistol worked. It was accurate and reliable in a time when those attributes were not always easily found.

It is impossible to discuss the H-D Military without also looking at Colt's .22 pistols. Even though Colt had been in the .22 business since 1915 with its Woodsman, which was about the same size as the Model B, it faced stiff competition from the High Standard D and E models. Even when Colt brought out the lovely Match Target Woodsman in 1938, it used fragile "elephant ear" grips to make the frame feel large enough.

The H-D Military became a major player in NRA bullseye competition and, as far as automatics were concerned, did not have too much competition. To be sure, some shooters used the Colt, and even more shot revolvers. But when we move into the 1950s, when bullseye

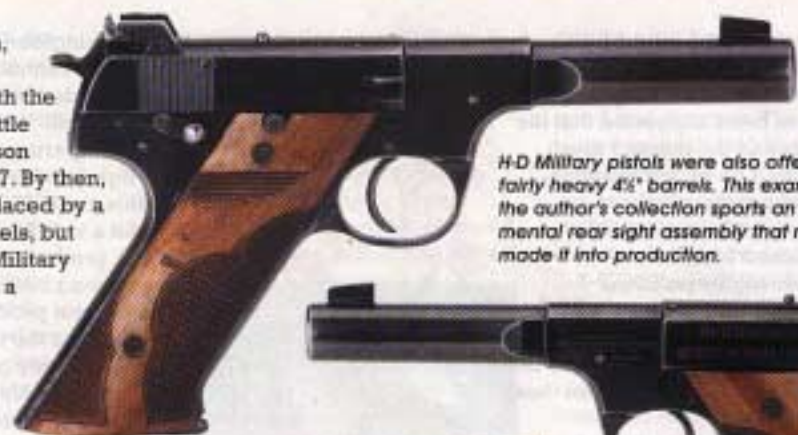


When High Standard brought out the H-D Military in 1946, it was based on the World War II USA-HD, which became H-D Military with the addition of an adjustable rear sight assembly (top for r.), 4½" and 6½" barrels as made before the war, the installation of a trigger stop and a blued finish. The front sight (above r.) was fixed and had a serrated rear face. The gun had a hook extractor on the right side of its reciprocating slide (r.) that contained a single recoil spring.

shooting enjoyed rapid growth, we see a whole series of High Standard pistols that began with the H-D Military serve with very little competition until Smith & Wesson introduced its Model 41 in 1957. By then, the H-D Military had been replaced by a succession of ever-better models, but the precedent set by the H-D Military served to make High Standard a highly respected brand name.

More than 30 years have passed since I began to study High Standard's pistols, and I still see H-D Militaries at gun shows with big tags that read "RARE" and I see way too many that have been harmed by an attempt to fieldstrip the gun by someone who didn't know how.

On the left side of the frame is the takedown lever, but it takes more than just swinging the lever to allow the slide to come off without damage. The High Standard's recoil spring is enclosed entirely within the slide. It surrounds a part called the retracting rod, which serves as a spring guide and also as the means of contact between the frame and slide. On top of the slide is a little button known as the pick-up button. If you hold the slide all the way to the rear and push down on the pick-up button, it captures the recoil spring in a retracted position and allows the slide to move freely. Once that is done, the takedown lever can be pivoted downward and the slide taken off to the rear. To reassemble, the takedown lever is pushed down again, and the slide slipped onto the frame. Sometimes, the hammer may need to be held down a little to let the slide clear. When the slide is back on and the takedown lever in the up position, all that



H-D Military pistols were also offered with fairly heavy 4 1/2" barrels. This example from the author's collection sports an experimental rear sight assembly that never made it into production.



Hi-Standard MAKES HISTORY AT TAMPA AND CORAL GABLES



INDIVIDUAL "WINS" WITH HI-STANDARD .32 CAL.

Melton R. Rogers

of U. S. Treasury Team (left)
Coral Gables, March 18—Nat. Match Course: 299
" 18—Pop. (Spartan) Target: 1949
" Match Course: 276
Coral Gables, March 18—Lee Trophy match: 1 (2) Cal.
Grand Aggregate: 875

Lee Echols

of U. S. Treasury Team (right)
Tampa, March 12—Camp Perry Course: 299
Coral Gables, March 18—Tampa Fire: 199

NEW RECORD for U. S. TREAS. TEAM

Score: 1772 a 1200 in the four-day Team Nat. Match Course—32 cal. used at Coral Gables—16 points over its previous record—14 1/2 hrs. Match, Field High Standard, Super record 267; Silver, 236.



Model H-E VINDICATOR HAMMER THE HIGH STANDARD MFG. CO. New Haven, Conn.



has to be done is to pull the slide to the rear. At that time you'll probably hear a little "click" and feel spring tension return to the slide. What happens is that the pick-up spring disengages from the retracting rod and lets everything go.

Production of the H-D Military ended in the early 1950s at a total production of more than 180,000 guns. So now, more than 80 years

later, there are still plenty of them around. Today, they are no less useful and still plenty of fun to shoot. You will see them in varying degrees of use, but it is fairly unusual to see one that is badly worn. Prices cover a wide range too, and it is certainly possible to find a nice used H-D Military at a price that will be even less than the cost of a new plinker-grade .22 pistol, but you'll get a gun that was once the darling of even the pickiest of bullseye shooters.



The H-D Military was based on earlier High Standard pistols, such as the Model H-E shown above in a 1941 advertisement. The Model USA H-D (1) was another H-D Military progenitor, and they were made primarily for the U.S. government. Most bear military ownership or property markings. Though never ordered in large numbers by the U.S. government in a big contract, the H-D Military was frequently purchased locally for use by military personnel.