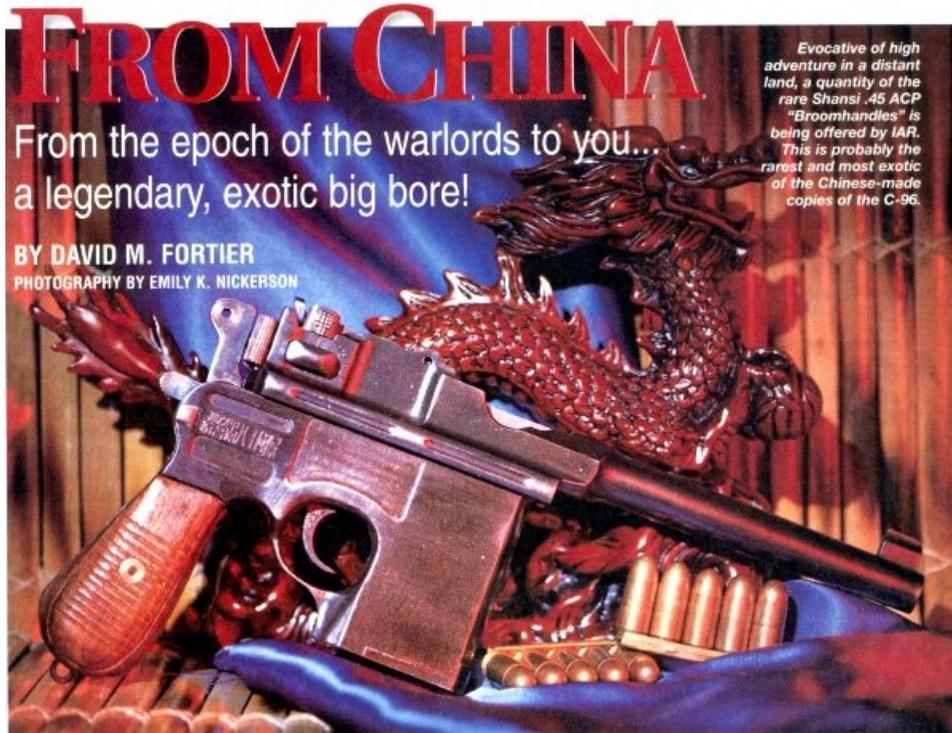


GIANT .45 'BROOMHANDLE'



Thompson submachine gun -- just seeing the name brings to mind visions of gangsters, 50-round drum magazines, endless bursts of full auto, and a host of cinematic heroes facing insurmountable odds with their Tommyguns held jauntily at the hip. It was "the gun that made the '20s roar." It's interesting to note, however, that Chicago wasn't the only place littered with empty .45 brass during the 1920s.



The C-96 "Broomhandle" Mauser pistol was extremely popular in China. One rides in a wooden shoulder stock holster on a Chinese Commando on an armored train of the Manchurian Warlord Marshal Chang Tso-ling (the Mukden Tiger). In addition to his pistol, he is armed with a large beheading sword. The muzzle of a Maxim heavy machinegun protrudes from armored turret above him.



The Mauser Broomhandle is loaded with stripper clips. Since .45 stripper clips for the Shansi pistols are virtually nonexistent, the author utilized five-round clips for the 1903 Springfield.



On the other side of the world, in, of all places, China, the Thompson submachine gun's presence was also felt at this period in time. In the mountainous province of Shansi, the ruling warlord Yen Hsi-Shan's railway was often under attack by bandits and other warlords. Ahead of his time in being able to recognize the military potential of the submachine gun, Yen had his arsenal produce a copy of the Model 1921 Thompson with which to equip his railway troops. While this gave them enormous firepower, it did present an ammunition supply problem since their standard sidearms were 7.63 mm C-96 Mauser Military pistols.

A famous design in its own right, the C-96 Mauser "Broomhandle" was extremely popular with the Chinese. Since the C-96 was considered a highly effective fighting weapon, Yen had no desire to replace it with another design. So instead he offered a cash reward to the workers at his arsenal to produce a C-96 chambered for the same .45 cartridge as their Thompson. And so one of the rarest and most exotic C-96 variations was born, the .45 Shansi Broomhandle.

The first successful self-loading pistol, the C-96 Mauser Military Pistol was not the creation of Paul Mauser. Rather, it was designed by three brothers, Fidel, Fritz, and Josef Feederle who worked at the Mauser plant in Oberndorf. A 10-shot, magazine-fed, recoil-operated self-loading pistol, it was a great leap forward in small arms design in a day when revolvers ruled the field. Its distinctive grip shape quickly earned it the nickname by which it will eternally be known, the "Broomhandle". While Paul Mauser's dreams of the C-96 becoming Germany's official service pistol were never to be fulfilled, the C-96 did serve the Fatherland through two World Wars. It was a popular and useful weapon in the trenches of the Great War. With its stock attached and used as a carbine it was a handy weapon for use by hard pressed machinegun crews to keep enemy infantry out of grenade tossing range. Used as a pistol it held almost twice as much ammunition as the British Webley, French Modele d'Ordonnance 1892, or the Russian Nagant and reloaded more quickly when it did run dry. Even when empty the Mauser was big and heavy enough to use to club a man to death in the savage hand to hand combat that often characterized nocturnal trench raids. However, it was far from Flanders Fields that the Broomhandle was to see its most widespread use.



Part of the appeal of the Mauser C-96 was that it could double as a sidearm or, with the shoulder stock attached, as a carbine. Here the Shansi .45 Broomhandle is shown with a standard C-96 stock installed.



Mauser C-96 pistols are slotted for shoulder stocks that allow them to be used as carbines. Although a proper stock for the Shansi .45 is very hard to find, a standard C-96 stock will snap right on.

The C-96 quickly earned the nickname "Boxed Cannon" in China because it could be stored in its wooden shoulder stock / holster. Because of its size, a special stock was made especially for the Shansi .45 version.

While Imperial Germany passed over the C-96 in favor of the E08 Luger, such were not the feelings of the Chinese. Immediately popular upon its introduction to the Orient at the beginning of the 20th Century, the C-96 saw more combat in the hands of the Chinese than with any other nation. At this period in time revolvers were still standard issue in most of the world's armies, and the Chinese quickly recognized the advantages of the 10 shot Mauser with its ability to be reloaded via stripper clips. This combined with its high velocity and flat shooting 7.63 Mauser cartridge and ability to be used as a carbine led the Chinese to regard it as an ideal offensive pistol. Light, and easy to transport in its wooden stock/holster it not only possessed considerable firepower for its day but was capable of hitting a man sized target out to 150-200 meters. It quickly earned the nickname "Boxed Cannon" by the Chinese for its ability to be stored in its wooden shoulder stock/holster. Even today, the Mauser 712 selective fire variant of the C-96 is still highly regarded in China, and as late as 1979 a modernized version of the 712 Schnellfeuer Pistole was tested by the Chinese military.

While much of the above is common knowledge, such as the Chinese being fascinated with the C-96, what is not well known are any of the details of Chinese production or their use of the C-96. Until I learned differently, my view of Chinese C-96 production was probably similar to what I suspect is the typical Western view. A couple of old men beating worn out horseshoes into crude Mauser knockoffs. And while I'm sure some were made this way by blacksmiths, the true picture is significantly different.

As early as 1918, the Sichuan Arsenal began manufacturing a copy of the C-96 pistol. The Hanyan Arsenal began production of a good quality C96 copy in 1921 with a monthly production output of 200 pistols. This arsenal had originally been set up under the Manchu dynasty to take over the production of the Mauser Model 1888 rifle when Imperial Germany adopted the M1898. The Taiyuan Arsenal in Shansi province also began production of the C-96 in the late 1920's. All in all, there were a total of 11 government arsenals manufacturing C-96 pistols from 1918 until the 1940s. There were also at least five arsenals that produced selective-fire 712 pistols from the late 1930s until the 1940s. In addition to the government arsenals there were many private factories making C-96 and 712s during this period. This was due to the fact that the demand for these weapons was so great that the quantity imported from Europe could not satisfy the demand. From the fierce Chinese high sea pirates that infested the South China coast to the mounted bandits in Manchuria, the various feuding warlords and even the Communist and Nationalist forces, all were armed with the C-96 and later the selective fire variants during the tumultuous period from the early 1920s to the Communist victory in 1949.

Special commando units were armed entirely with the C-96, and later the selective fire variants, as well as a large beheading sword carried in a leather scabbard on their back. Recognizing the Mauser's weak and strong points, the Chinese developed the following technique for using the C-96 and later the 712. They would hold it sideways (what we would today refer to as "Gangbanger style"), with the index finger lying on the magazine well pointing at the target, and pull the trigger with the middle finger. In doing so they found that they could throw the weapon up very quickly and be instinctively pointing it at the target. There were also two side benefits from shooting the pistol in this manner. As the Mauser ejects straight up, fired cases can fall back into the weapon and jam it, or fall on the operator's head and distract him. These problems were eliminated. There was one additional side benefit when the selective fire weapons came into service. They found they could master the pistol fired on full auto to produce a deadly horizontal traversing fire instead of its simply climbing uncontrollably. Having fired a Mauser 712 on full auto, I can attest that the muzzle climbs very fast! They are adamant that their method allows the 712 to be used quite effectively regardless of traditional Western thinking. They felt this method was particularly effective for room clearing during house to house fighting. They generally only used full auto fire at close range in ambush, surprise attacks, house clearing or for night fighting. When the enemy came information (as was normally done at this period in time), they would engage them from hidden positions at a range of up to 300 meters using aimed semiauto fire with the stock attached. If the enemy did not come in formation they

would hold their fire until they were within 100 meters and then use rapid aimed semi-auto fire from the shoulder. Deployed in this manner they felt the Mauser to be a deadly effective weapon.

Among all the Chinese variants of the C-96 Mauser, the most exotic is the big .45 caliber Broomhandle. Referred to as the "Yen" type pistol in China it was made by the Shansi warlord, Yen Hsi-Shan. He had become the Governor-General of the Shansi province in 1912. From the outset he was very interested in building an arsenal for manufacturing weapons to equip his Army. His motto was, "Armed force is the backing of justice". Construction on his plant was begun in 1912, and it was originally named Shansi Machinery Bureau. As it expanded, it later became known as the Shansi Military Technology Practice Factory. By 1930, it had 3,800 pieces of machinery and 15,000 workers and technicians. The plant was fully capable of producing not only pistols, rifles, and submachine guns, but also heavy machine guns, mortars, cannons, grenades, etc.

Quick to recognize the value of automatic weapons, Yen Hsi-Shan had his arsenal produce a copy of the M1921 Thompson submachine gun during the late 1920s. Because Shansi is a mountainous province, the main method of military transport was by rail. As his military train convoys came under attack by bandits and other warlords' forces from time to time, he wished to equip them with the most effective weapons available. So with his arsenal producing 900 (!!) a month, he issued Thompsons to his special railway troops. While it certainly gave them impressive firepower, it did lead to one small problem: Their Thompsons were .45's, but their sidearms were chambered for 7.63 Mauser. So to rectify this inconvenience, he offered a cash reward to his arsenal workers to produce a Broomhandle chambering the same cartridge as their Thompsons. This they did, and production began in 1929. The formal designation of the pistol was Type 17. This is marked on the weapon's left side panel. On the right side of the weapon is the marking "Nationalist Year Eighteen Made in Shansi". The first Nationalist year of the Chinese Republic being 1911 (1911 + 18 = 1929). Both of these inscriptions were made in ancient Chinese script.

Today, these big pistols are extremely scarce. After the Communists took over, they were placed into storage due to their oddball caliber and weight. Then, during the "Great Leap Forward" movement, most of these rare pistols were melted down to boost steel production. The small quantity left were exported to Europe and the U.S. during the 1980s. Sadly today, the only places these rare pistols may be found in the Peoples Republic of China are in military museums.

Luckily though for the U.S. collector, IAR, Inc. has a quantity of these rare and fascinating pistols. I was sent one of their standard-grade pistols for evaluation and was quite impressed by it. I have always liked Broomhandles, just something about them. So I was interested in having a chance to handle one chambered for .45. I was just curious as to how big the pistol would be. After all, the C-96 in its standard 7.63 mm chambering is a large pistol. I soon found out, though, that it wasn't as huge as I anticipated. While certainly large, the Shansi is by no means ungainly, and I felt it handled surprisingly well. Other than being slightly larger, the Shansi looks like a normal C-96, except for the magazine well extending below the trigger guard. The first thing one notices is the diameter of the bore. Big. There is a reason the .45 cartridge has earned the reputation that

it has.

The pistols offered by IAR, Inc. range in condition from good to select. Because of the age of the pistols and the locale that they came from, the original wooden grips deteriorated in storage, and the pistols wear replacement grips. All have been inspected by a German trained gunsmith, which is not true of examples offered elsewhere. Workmanship on the example I received was quite good, especially for a service pistol manufactured in 1930s China. The action operated smoothly, and the bolt locks smartly to the rear. The safety engages and disengages easily, and the trigger pull was light, although with quite a bit of creep.



The Shansi.45 operates just like a standard C-98. A rising block engages in two cutouts at the bottom of the bolt. Like all C-98 pistols, the Shansi utilizes no screws in its construction, except to retain the stocks. Here the lockwork is partially exposed, revealing the detailed machining necessitated by this design. The weapon is inscribed type 17 on its left side, while the right side is marked "Nationalist Year Eighteen Made in Shansi." Both left and right side markings are written in ancient Chinese characters.



Sighting equipment consisted of a front blade and a tangent rear, optimistically calibrated out to 1000 meters! The Mauser "barleycorn" sights gave a poor sight picture.

The sights are typical Mauser... and the only thing to gripe about. The front sight consists of a substantial inverted "V" The rear is a tangent sight with a tiny "V" notch. The rear is good for a chuckle as you note that it is graduated out to 1000 meters.

Magazine capacity remains the same as the 7.63 version at 10 rounds. Loading was originally by 10-round stripper clips; however, these appear to have faded

into history and are now probably rarer than the pistols themselves. Luckily run of the mill Mauser rifle clips will work, although only five rounds at a time. To load, simply lock the bolt to the rear, insert the stripper clip into the cut outs, and thumb the rounds straight down into the magazine. When you remove the clip the bolt will automatically run forward and load a round into the chamber. The weapon is now cocked and ready to fire. Single rounds can be loaded but care must be taken to hold the bolt to the rear. The safety is located to the left of the hammer. Forward is SAFE, to the rear is FIRE. It is easily manipulated and can be quickly thumbed off while bringing the pistol to bear on a target.

The backstrap of the Shansi is slotted for a shoulder stock/holster. While similar to a normal C-96 stock, the one designed specifically for the Shansi is substantially larger in girth. This is required due to the increased size of the pistol it is required to house. While I have never actually handle d an original Shansi stock, a friend, Bob Bartley, was kind enough to send me some photos of one mounted on his Shansi. Like the pistol, it looks big. They were originally equipped with a leather scabbard with a shoulder strap to allow it to be hung over the shoulder when being used as a holster. Bob was kind enough to supply me with a stock/holster for my Type 43 pistol pictured in this article. While it of course won't house the Shansi, it did snap right on to act as a shoulder stock. So equipped the Shansi felt quite good.

Shooting Accuracy



With a stock attached the Shansi proved surprisingly accurate at moderate ranges. Hitting a stand ard IPSC target was easy out to 100 yards. At more distant ranges, the sights made hitting more uncertain.

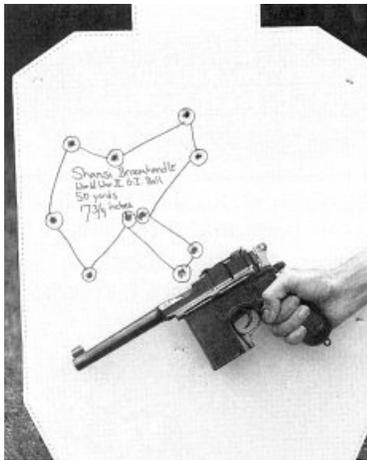


Although it is a large pistol, the Shansi Broomhandle handles surprisingly well. It is by no means as unwieldy as might be supposed.

While more of a collector's piece than a shooter, we decided to flog it at the range anyways. Some World War II vintage U.S. G.I. ball was supplied by Centerfire Systems for testing purposes. We also made use of some new production Wolf Performance Ammunition from Sporting Supplies Int. Inc. I felt that this would give us a reasonable idea of what one could actually have expected for accuracy from a Shansi. The bore on our test pistol was in excellent shape so we were interested in seeing what it was capable of. Loading the big, thumb size rounds through the top, I filled the Broom to capacity, let the bolt run forward, and wondered what to expect. Just to get a feel for the pistol, I aimed at a rock on the dirt bank and squeezed around off. The old Mauser jumped in my hands and dirt kicked up a little high. Readjusting my hold I smacked the rock with my subsequent shots. I quickly noticed that the recoil was quite a bit heavier

than my Type 43s, although nothing to complain about. As the bore sits very high above the hand, muzzle jump is more pronounced than with a 1911 Government Model. Recoil is still quite comfortable, the gun simply jumps in the hand.

To see just how well it actually shot, five round groups were fired off the bench at 15 yards. At this range, we noticed the Shansi to be hitting about four inches high and a couple inches to the left. Accuracy though was surprising. Four out of five rounds consistently went into an inch or less, with one flier opening the group to 2 inches. With what the sights are, I'll take the blame for that flier. Taking a standard IPSC silhouette, I posted it at 50 yards to see just what one could expect for practical accuracy at some distance. I then fired ten rounds from off sandbags (cursing the sights between shots) and walked down. The group was off center to the left, but even so five rounds were still in the "A" zone. Five rounds were in 5 inches, with all ten coming in at 7 3/4 inches. Not bad for 1941 vintage Winchester ball ammunition and a 65-plus-year-old Chinese Broomhandle.



At the range, the Shansi .45 proved surprisingly accurate. To the right is a five round group fired at 15 yards with 1941 vintage .45 ball ammunition provided by Centerfire Systems. Ten rounds from the bench on an IPSC silhouette at 50 yards resulted in all rounds on target with half in the A-zone.



An exotic and interesting piece of history from a distant land, the Shansi .45 is a fascinating pistol. I was impressed by both its workmanship and accuracy. For the Mauser collector or .45 buff, this would be an interesting addition to the collection. Anyone interested in one of these C-96's from the age of high adventure in China should contact IAR, Inc.

Acknowledgments: Much thanks to my translator for his interest in this project, his hard work, and for his patience with my many questions to make this article possible.