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That Was Then, This is Now

**The NRA and the Gun Industry Talk About
Assault Weapons—From Both Sides of Their Mouths**

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Introduction

Semi-automatic assault weapons are civilian versions of military assault rifles (like the AK-47, UZI, and M-16) and pistols (like the MAC-10). Military assault weapons were designed so that soldiers could "spray-fire" a large number of bullets over a broad killing zone, without having to aim at each individual target. Their increased firepower is the result of their ability to accept high-capacity ammunition magazines (also known as "clips") which can hold up to 100 rounds. When one clip is emptied, it can be ejected and replaced by the shooter with a fresh clip in seconds. Their ability to be spray-fired from the hip is the result of a set of features that allow a "point-and-shoot" grip and help control recoil so the shooter can "hose down" a wide area. Civilian assault guns maintain the key design features that make this deadly spray firing easy. These features include:

- pistol grips (including so-called "thumb-hole stocks" and magazines that function like pistol grips); and,
- barrel shrouds, vented tubes surrounding barrels (which can become too hot to hold during rapid fire), which remain cool enough to be directly grasped by the shooter.

Some assault guns also feature folding stocks, which make the gun more concealable and easier to hold in a from-the-hip firing position, grenade launchers, bayonet mounts, and threaded barrels for adding silencers and flash suppressors (to reduce flash from the muzzle at night).

The ability to quickly lay down a high volume of fire makes semi-automatic assault weapons particularly dangerous in civilian use, and explains why terrorists, mass killers, and violent criminals favor them. It also distinguishes them from true hunting or target weapons.

In its efforts to stop restrictions on the production and sale of semi-automatic assault rifles, pistols, and shotguns, the National Rifle Association (NRA) has worked with members of America's gun industry to deceive the American public as to the special threat posed by assault weapons. In this battle, four myths have been posited by the NRA and the industry:

- Gun experts say there is no such thing as a civilian assault weapon.
- Assault weapons merely "look different" than traditional semi-automatic rifles and shotguns and have been singled out for their cosmetic differences.

- A "true" assault weapon is a selective-fire military weapon, capable of full-auto fire.
- Assault weapons pose no threat to America's police.

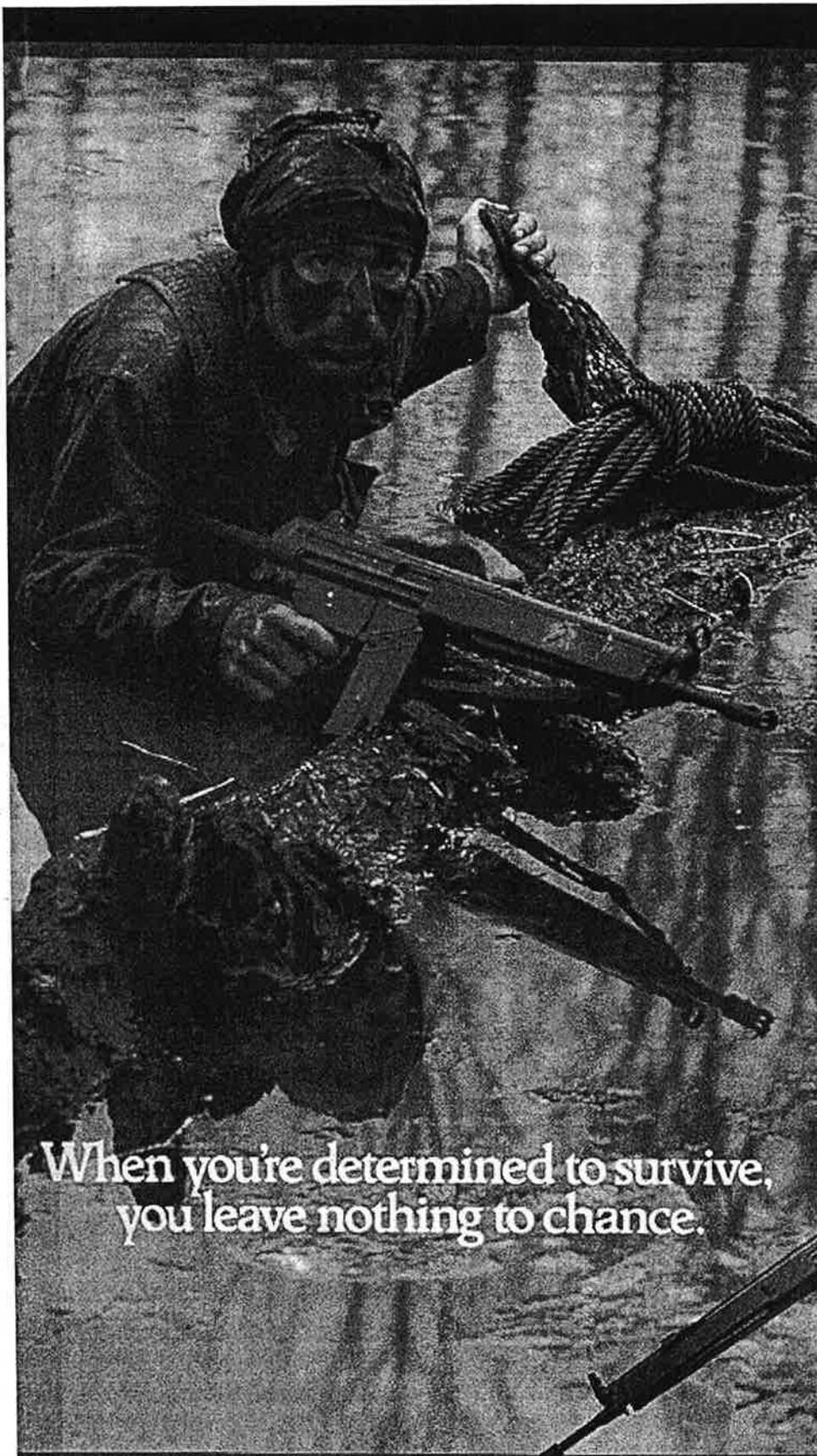
These four myths are easily refuted by the facts surrounding semi-automatic assault weapons and *much of the information debunking these false claims actually comes from the NRA and the gun industry.* Throughout the 1980s, the NRA, the firearms industry, and the gun press talked enthusiastically about "assault rifles" and "assault pistols" and openly acknowledged the guns' differences from traditional sporting weapons. This changed in 1989 when legislative efforts to restrict assault weapons began in the wake of Patrick Purdy's Stockton, California schoolyard massacre. Purdy, armed with a semi-automatic AK-47 assault rifle, killed five schoolchildren. Twenty-nine others, including a schoolteacher, were wounded. Writers and industry members who had proudly pointed to the guns' military heritage and applications now reversed themselves and began portraying these weapons of war as misunderstood ugly ducklings. The reality is that assault weapons are treated differently than other semi-automatic firearms for a simple reason: they are different.

Myth One

Gun Experts Say There is No Such Thing as a Civilian Assault Weapon

The NRA, the gun industry, the gun press, and other pro-gun "experts" today claim that there is no such thing as a civilian assault weapon. But before the guns came under fire, these same experts enthusiastically described these civilian versions of military weapons as "assault rifles," "assault pistols," and "military assault" weapons. For example:

- In 1982, *Guns & Ammo* published a book titled *Assault Rifles*, advertising "Complete Data On The Best Semi-Automatics."¹ In 1988 *Guns & Ammo* handgun expert Jan Libourel defined an "assault pistol" simply as, "A high-capacity semi-automatic firearm styled like a submachine gun but having a pistol-length barrel and lacking a buttstock."²
- Gun magazines also specifically praised the spray fire features of civilian assault weapons. For example, a 1989 *Guns & Ammo* review of the "Partisan Avenger .45 Assault Pistol" noted that when the gun "is fired rapidly from the hip, its swivelling front grip makes for easy and comfortable control of the recoil," and that the "forward pistol grip extension of this powerful assault pistol not only helps point it instinctively at the target but goes a long way to controlling the effects of recoil...."³ *Guns & Ammo* also found point shooting from the hip to be "surprisingly easy" with the HK 94 9mm Carbine.⁴ A 1990 review in the NRA's *American Rifleman* of the Sites Spectre HC Pistol said, "A gun like the Spectre is primarily intended for hip-firing...."⁵ The same magazine's 1993 review of the Steyr Mannlicher SPP Pistol reported, "Where the SPP really shines is in firing from the hip...."⁶
- A cottage industry of accessory suppliers sprang up, all of which targeted ads soliciting owners of civilian "assault weapons."⁷
- The gun industry deliberately used the military character of semi-automatic "assault weapons" and the lethality-enhancing utility of their distinctive characteristics as selling points. The German company Heckler & Koch, for example, published ads in 1984 calling their civilian guns "assault rifles" and stressing their military lineage. "The HK 91 Semi-Automatic Assault Rifle from Heckler & Koch...was derived directly from the G3," a German army weapon, said one ad.⁸ Another ad that year described the HK 94 Carbine as "a direct offspring of HK's renowned family of MP5 submachine guns."⁹ A 1989 Intratec ad said the company's TEC-9 "clearly stands out among high capacity assault-type pistols."¹⁰ And in 1982 Magnum Research advertised that the Galil rifle system to which it had import rights "outperformed every other assault rifle."¹¹



When you're determined to survive,
you leave nothing to chance.

In a survival situation, you want the most uncompromising weapon that money can buy. The HK 91 Semi-Automatic Assault Rifle from Heckler & Koch.

The HK 91 was derived directly from the G3. Its delayed roller-locked bolt system reduces recoil to keep the gun on target. It exceeds the most stringent NATO accuracy requirements—right out of the box. And HK's revolutionary scope mounting system guarantees that you're still zeroed-in every time you mount your scope.

Easy to maintain and take apart, the HK 91 in cal. 308 and the HK 93 in cal. 223 were both designed as parts of an integrated gun system. The HK system of interchangeable parts and accessories enables these precision firearms to adapt quickly to changing tactical situations.

Leading military operations and law enforcement agencies around the world rely on firearms that bear the H&K name. Your choice is equally clear. You can carry an ordinary weapon. Or own the most uncompromising firearm in the world.



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In a world of compromise, some men don't.

Myth Two

Assault Weapons Merely "Look Different"

While it is true that the "actions" or internal mechanisms of all semi-automatic guns are similar, the actions of assault weapons are part of a total design package that promotes "spray fire"—unlike true sporting guns. Assault weapons look different because they are different—*their looks reflect the fact that they are designed to kill people efficiently.*

And while the NRA and the gun industry today put themselves through tortured gyrations in their attempts to justify the "sporting use" of assault guns, early reviews of these weapons noted their limited sporting value:

- In 1987 the NRA's *American Rifleman* magazine reviewed the Calico M-100 rifle and concluded, "The M-100 is certainly not a competition gun, hardly a hunting gun, and is difficult to visualize as a personal defense gun."¹²
- In 1983, *Guns & Ammo* reviewed the Heckler & Koch HK 94 rifle and reported, "You certainly aren't going to enter any serious, formal matches with it...."¹³

During this period, the gun industry also actively promoted the intimidating looks of assault weapons as a sales booster:

- A 1989 *Guns & Ammo* review of the A.A. Arms AP9 praised the appeal of the gun's "wicked looks" to *teenagers*, noting "it is one mean-looking dude, considered cool and Ramboish by the teenage crowd.... Take a look at one. And let your teen-age son tag along. Ask him what *he* thinks. And be sure to carry your checkbook."¹⁴ [emphasis in original]
- In 1985 *Guns & Ammo* expert Garry James noted in his review of Colt's 9mm AR-15 rifle that "the intimidation factor of a black, martial-looking carbine pointing in one's direction cannot be underestimated."¹⁵
- In 1983 *Guns & Ammo* writer Howard French said of the HK 94 9 mm Para Carbine that "you would not get much static from an intruder eyeballing its rather lethal appearance."¹⁶
- 1981 C.A. Inc. advertisements for the Mark 45 and Mark 9 "Tommy-Gun" style carbines explicitly made the point that a "show of force can be stopping power worth having."¹⁷

Notice the big barrel on this carbine. Forty-five caliber to be exact, a size considered ideal for sheer stopping power. Or blowing a can away.

As a sporting rifle, the CA Mark 45 semi-automatic carbine makes a lot of sense. It's light handling, fires with great accuracy, little recoil and little noise. But without the danger

of long range ammo. For plinking, it's a blast.

The Mark 45 was engineered with military practicality for toughness and reliability at low cost. So its appearance is somewhat formidable, an advantageous deterrent if you also need a gun for protection. A show of force can be stopping power worth having.

Write for free brochure CA with details on 45 cal. or 9mm models, grips, cases, clips, sights and slings.

Stopping power

\$195⁰⁰

Horizontal or vertical front grip models,

Legal for private ownership.

MARK 9

9 MM SEMI-AUTOMATIC CARBINE

MARK 45

45 CAL. SEMI-AUTOMATIC CARBINE

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CA Inc.

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Myth Three

A "True" Assault Weapon is a Selective-Fire Military Weapon

The full-auto "issue" is a red herring that was raised by the NRA and the gun industry only *after* public attention began to focus on the increasing death and violence associated with semi-automatic versions of these weapons.

The NRA and the gun industry are correct that military assault weapons often have a "selective fire" feature. This allows the shooter to switch between full-auto fire (fires repeatedly as long as the trigger is held back) or semi-automatic fire (the trigger must be pulled for each round fired). It is also true that civilian assault weapons do *not* have automatic fire capability (federal law severely restricts the sale and possession of machineguns by civilians). But semi-automatic assault weapons are *still* unacceptably dangerous because:

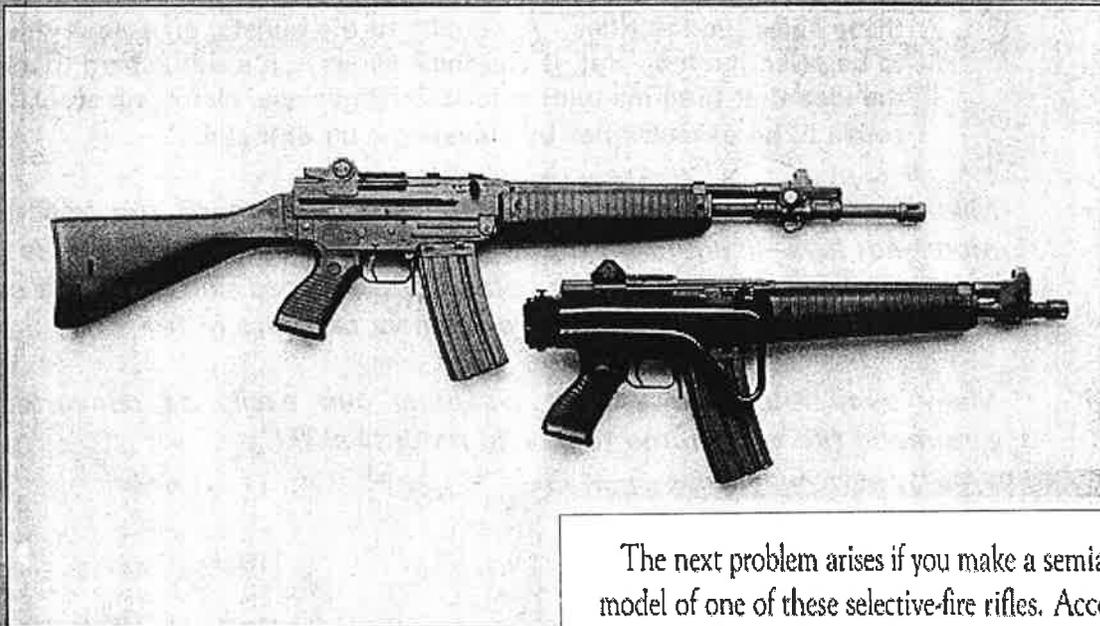
- *They keep the generic features that make them ideal for rapidly laying down a withering field of fire. As the leading pro-assault weapons expert Duncan Long wrote in his 1986 book, *Assault Pistols, Rifles and Submachine Guns*:*

The next problem arises if you make a semiauto-only model of one of these selective-fire rifles. According to the purists, an assault rifle has to be selective fire. Yet, if you think about it, it's a little hard to accept the idea that firearms with extended magazines, pistol grip stock, etc., cease to be assault rifles by changing a bit of metal.¹⁸

- *Military and civilian experts agree that semi-automatic fire is actually more—not less—likely to hit the target than is automatic fire, and is thus more deadly.¹⁹ Regardless, a person of moderate skill can fire a semi-automatic assault weapon at an extremely fast rate of fire.²⁰*
- *Many semi-automatic assault weapons can easily be converted to automatic fire with home tools and modest skill.*

DUNCAN LONG

ASSAULT PISTOLS, RIFLES AND SUBMACHINE GUNS



CITADEL PRESS

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Myth Four

Assault Weapons Pose No Threat to America's Police

A favorite argument made by the NRA and the gun industry in attempting to overturn the federal ban on assault weapons is that such weapons pose little or no threat to our nation's police officers.

In fact, in 1995, one in 10 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty was felled by an assault weapon as defined in the "Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act of 1994."²¹ This grim statistic is consistent with the real-world experience of cops on the beat. As Baltimore City Drug Enforcement Officer Gerald Hensley testified in 1995 before the House Judiciary Committee's Crime Subcommittee:

Since joining the Police Department, I have seen the firepower of criminals, particularly drug dealers, grow from small caliber revolvers to military-style weapons which can shoot 30 bullets in less than ten seconds. In my years of service I have personally encountered assault weapons on several occasions....I participated in the service of a search and seizure warrant at a drug house where we found and confiscated a semi-automatic TEC-9. The weapon, which was fully loaded with 30 rounds, was on the bottom shelf of a closet in a bedroom occupied by children. In May of 1991, I myself was threatened by a semi-automatic TEC-9. While on a routine patrol of a suspected drug area, my two partners and I noticed suspicious activity. While my two partners went in the back way, I went in the front. As I entered the house I noticed a gunman lying in wait for my partners with the TEC-9. I shouted to him and he turned and prepared to shoot me. Before he could, I shot and killed him.²²

Furthermore, The Urban Institute's 1997 evaluation of the federal assault weapons ban found that the number of murders of police officers perpetrated with assault weapons is higher than that for civilian gun murders.²³ When they are available, assault weapons are the preferred weapons of cop killers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, assault weapons constitute a specific class of firearm incorporating design characteristics intended to enhance their utility as killing machines. The veil of obstinance and false argument the NRA and the gun industry attempt to hide behind today is pierced not only by the real-world testimony of law-enforcement personnel, but by their own enthusiastic words as recorded in pro-gun publications since the early 1980s. Nothing about the weapons has changed, only the politics.

Endnotes

1. Advertisement, *Guns & Ammo* (July 1982), p. 20.
2. "Handgunner's Glossary," *Guns & Ammo* (August 1988), p. 42.
3. "Partisan Avenger .45 Assault Pistol," *Guns & Ammo Handgun Annual* (1989), pp. 26-30.
4. "H&K's 9 mm Para Carbine," *Guns & Ammo* (November 1983), p. 44.
5. "Sites Spectre HC Pistol," *American Rifleman* (December 1990), p. 58.
6. "Steyr Mannlicher SPP Pistol," *American Rifleman* (August 1993), p. 72; see also, "Colt's 9mm AR-15," *Guns & Ammo* (July 1985), p. 76 ("fired from the hip.... about as natural a pointer as you can get.").
7. See, e.g., Assault Systems advertisements in *Guns & Ammo* (July 1981), p. 90 ("assault rifle case"), 92 ("lightweight assault bipod"); (November 1983), p. 101 ("assault rifle cases" and "padded assault rifle sling"); Beeman advertisement in *Guns & Ammo* (December 1982), p. 14 ("Beeman Short Scopes...New for Assault Rifles to Airguns...Use on assault rifles...."); Ventech Inc. advertisement for "Assault Weapon Accessories" in *Guns & Ammo* (February 1991), p. 96 ("Mini-14...10/22...AR-7....").
8. Heckler & Koch advertisement, *Guns & Ammo* (July 1984), p. 9.
9. Heckler & Koch advertisement, *Guns & Ammo* (June 1984), back cover.
10. Intratec advertisement, *Guns & Ammo* (January 1989), p. 77.
11. Magnum Research advertisement, *Guns & Ammo* (November 1982), p. 59. See also, e.g., advertisement by Paragon S&S Inc. for AR 10, *Guns & Ammo* (July 1981), p. 90 ("Used world wide by military and LAW ENFORCEMENT officers. This famous assault rifle is now available in a semi-auto form!").
12. "Calico M-100 rifle," *American Rifleman* (January 1987), p. 61.
13. "H&K's 9 mm Para Carbine," *Guns & Ammo* (November 1983), p. 44.
14. "A.A. Arms AP9 Assault Pistol," *Guns & Ammo Handgun Annual* (1989), p. 51.
15. "Colt's 9mm AR-15," *Guns & Ammo* (July 1985), p. 76.
16. "H&K's 9 mm Para Carbine," *Guns & Ammo* (November 1983), p. 42.
17. CA Inc. advertisement, *Guns & Ammo* (March 1981), p. 92.

18. Duncan Long, *Assault Pistols, Rifles and Submachine Guns* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press 1986), p. 1.
19. See, "How Effective is Automatic Fire?," *American Rifleman* (May 1980), pp. 30-31, 80.
20. See, e.g., "Calico M-100 rifle," *American Rifleman* (January 1987), p. 61 ("the full 100 rounds were sent downrange in 14 seconds by one flicker-fingered tester.")
21. Jeffrey A. Roth and Christopher S. Koper, et al., *Impact Evaluation of the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act of 1994: Final Report* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute 1997), p. 107.
22. Kristen Rand, *Cop Killers: Assault Weapon Attacks on America's Police* (Washington, DC: Violence Policy Center 1995), p. 7-8.
23. Jeffrey A. Roth and Christopher S. Koper, et al., *Impact Evaluation of the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act of 1994: Final Report* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute 1997), p. 108.