

ARTICLE FOR *HANDGUNS* BY BRUCE GRAY 7-28-03

Service Pistol Maintenance: Six Simple Steps Can Save Your Life

Just six shots away from finishing his quarterly sidearm qualification, Louie got off just one round from his Glock 22, and no amount of pulling on the trigger by that Northern California narcotics officer would make fire again. Far from a catastrophic failure, the problem proved to be as simple as it was preventable: the pistol was bone dry and dirty. The trigger bar had simply galled against the connector, preventing it from releasing the firing pin.

“My academy instructor said not to oil my pistol, since oil gets on everything and attracts dirt,” Louie protested. “Besides, Glock has that ad where they degrease the gun, drive a truck over it and shoot it a hundred rounds. Glocks are indestructible and don’t need oil.” This had me flipping to page 16 of the Glock Armorer’s Manual: “Most important is the drop of oil where the connector and trigger bar meet.” Louie was lucky his pistol went down at the range, not while trading rounds with Uncle Fester in a burning meth lab.

Ever look at how much dirt and debris ends up in your pockets each day? From bits of taco shells, coffee creamer and donut frosting to fibers, mud and blood, these artifacts from your working environment will also find their way into your equipment. Properly maintained, modern service pistols are as reliable as any tool made by man. Just as anyone who carries a defensive handgun requires regular range practice to maintain life-saving shooting skills, duty guns require regular cleaning, lubrication and maintenance to deliver as-designed reliability and service life.

Whether fired or not, your duty pistol must be cleaned at least every month. This includes your magazines, which are natural collectors for all sorts of crud. “Dirty, bent or improperly assembled magazines are the leading cause of malfunctions in modern service pistols, after operator error. It’s estimated that fewer than 5% of officers practice shooting of their own accord, so we can assume even fewer properly maintain their weapons,” according to veteran law enforcement training authority Michael Boyd.

#### COMING CLEAN

Modern service pistols are designed to be easily maintained, so there’s really no excuse not to take thirty minutes a month for a thorough job. Our six-step maintenance regimen is simple: Make safe, disassemble, clean, inspect, reassemble and test. Think of lubricant as a critical component of your pistol which wears out periodically, whether fired or not. Everything you need to remove that “broken lube” and replace it with new protection is readily available at any sporting goods outlet.

Before proceeding, make sure your weapon and magazines are completely clear of ammunition, and that no ammo is anywhere in the vicinity of your cleaning area. Read this again: **Make sure your pistol and magazines are completely unloaded and remove all ammunition from your cleaning area!** Next, prepare a brightly lit, well ventilated area with supplies, and wear eye protection and solvent-resistant gloves. It's a good idea to work over a plastic tub to control the mess and catch loose or broken parts.

Start with your magazines; disassemble, clean and reassemble each one separately per manufacturer's instructions, taking care to note how the springs fit. Springs and followers can vary between mags of the same brand, so avoid the temptation to simply disassemble and clean them all at once.

Brush out the mag body, and use some powder solvent on a patch to remove fouling and gunk from the follower and base plate. Straighten out twisted mag springs one coil at a time by hand until the follower sits squarely, but never stretch a shortened, "dead" spring as this only fatigues it further; replace instead. Magazines do **not** require lubrication, though you may run a silicone gun cloth inside the magazine tube if you work in a high-humidity environment where rust is an issue. Reassemble each cleaned, dry magazine carefully; damage usually results from careless cleaning, disassembly or reassembly, not from normal shooting or handling.

Now, verify clear once more and carefully field strip your pistol, laying each part out in order as you go. In particular, note which way the recoil spring assembly fits in the slide. Some pistols (such as this SIG P-226) use one tight end coil to retain the recoil spring on the guide rod, and the action will bind if it's installed backwards. Using an old toothbrush and a powder solvent such as Hoppe's No. 9 or Shooters Choice, scrub the breech face, feed ramp and other heavily fouled surfaces. While the frame and slide assemblies soak a moment, work the bore with a soft brass brush and solvent to fully clean fouling from chamber and rifling. Don't scrub back and forth, as this will damage the rifling; just make complete passes each way.

When the powder solvent and brushing have done their work, remove the major crud with a paper towel or shop rag, scrubbing with more solvent as required. Then, spray each assembly with Gun Scrubber to remove all traces of solvent, fouling and old lubricant. Once dry, look for obvious parts breakage. One quick check: the extractor should hold an empty case in the slide against moderate shaking.

#### PROPER LUBRICATION

For on-duty use, your pistol should be lubricated with a light film of oil to insure reliable function on demand. Break Free spray foams on contact, efficiently coating interior parts stripped by the Gun Scrubber. Don't overdue it! Just a quick shot to the lockwork is enough. Accessible surfaces can be "painted" using a cotton swab dipped in oil. The bore should be dry, but place an extra drop on locking lug surfaces. Reassemble and hand-cycle the action several times, wiping off any excess lubricant that emerges.

However, if you are going right to the range for a training session, RIG or Shooters Choice grease can be used on slide rails and barrel locking surfaces. Pistols don't wear out as much as they hammer themselves to death, so judicious use of a high-viscosity lubricant *for practice only* will definitely extend service life.

After cleaning your holster and magazine carriers and checking them for positive retention, static test your pistol for safe and reliable function. First, manually cycle the slide with each empty magazine in turn, setting aside any magazines that won't positively lock back the slide every time. Next, make sure the decocking lever or other safety systems operate as designed. Finally, dryfire with a standard lead pencil, eraser towards the firing pin, in both double and single action modes. The pencil will fly vertically a couple feet in most pistols, verifying correct firing pin block timing, mainspring tension and firing pin protrusion.

Get in the habit of reloading your pistol and magazines in a specific place, *not* where you clean, dry-fire or securely store your unloaded weapons.