

Colt in the Great War
by
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The United States Armed Forces entered the First World War with undisputedly the world's best military pistol, the Colt US Model 1911 .45 Auto. It has remained in service and production continuously since that time. And it is still the standard against which all other military and police sidearms are measured.

However, the US Army and the other services were woefully unprepared to expand rapidly and at the same time equip its troops with adequate numbers of modern or standardized weapons. In 1915 US Army strength stood at 140,000 men. In 1916 the Army called up National Guard and Reserves for the Pershing Expedition chasing Pancho Villa, and increased strength to 210,000 men. By the end of World War I in November 1918 there were more than four million men under arms, and two million of those were posted overseas.

To arm its rapidly expanding forces the US adopted foreign weapons, especially artillery and tanks, took over US-based production of foreign arms, such as British orders of their P14 rifle which became our Model 1917 "Enfield." The US also dug out and reissued obsolete arms from storage. This was especially true of Colt handguns. Colt had been the main supplier of American military handguns since the Civil War.

There were some 25,000 Colt .38 DA revolver Models 1892, 1894, 1895, 1901 and 1903 purchased and many of these saw service with the US Navy, rear area and state troops.

In 1909 the Army purchased more than 18,000 Model 1909 Colts in .45 Colt Army caliber as an interim handgun until a suitable semi-automatic would enter service. These were probably retained in the US and did not go to France.

In 1911 the Colt US Model of 1911 .45 Automatic was adopted as the new standard sidearm. At the end of 1916 there were approximately 120,000 on hand. Another nearly 270,000 would be produced by the end of the War.

Additionally, Colt received an order for 150,000 modified Model 1909s that became the US Model 1917 Colt Revolver adapted to use the .45 ACP cartridge. (Smith & Wesson received a similar order for their Hand Ejector model, which became the US Model 1917 Smith & Wesson Revolver.)