Fun with Numbers;
or, How Many Handguns Does the Army Need?
by Martin Miller, Jr.

The answer lies in how you count. The US Army grew in manpower by 28 times between 1915 and 1918, from **140,000** to **4,000,000** men. So, did the equipment and weapons ratios grow at the same rate? No, the total number of possible handguns only increased by 4.6 times[1].

In 1915, Army strength was **140,000**. The total number of possible handguns was **159,000**. This included **25,000** Colt .38 DAs, **18,000** Colt Model 1909 Revolvers, and **116,000** Colt Model 1911 Automatics[2].
The ratio of men per handgun: **1.13**
The ratio of men per Colt Model 1911, then standard issue: **1.2**

In 1916, Army strength was **210,000**, which included call-up of National Guard and Reserve troops. The total number of handguns available was **163,000**.
The ratio of men per handgun: **1.28**

In 1918, Army strength was approximately **4,000,000**. The total number of possible handguns was **733,000**.
The ratio of men per handgun: **5.45**

For the sake of argument, assume that handgun losses over the years and those held in reserve were 50% of the total available; then the above numbers would be doubled to, respectively: **2.26, 2.56, 10.9**.

At a ratio of 25% loss and reserve, the ratios would be, respectively: **1.97, 2.1, 2.24, 9.53**.

That still leaves a lot of handguns available to the troops. However, it is clear that the Army made no serious attempt to field the same ratio of handguns per man during 1917-18 than it did during the prior peacetime.

Does this playing with numbers mean anything? Probably not much, but it does make one curious as to why the Army, before the War, thought it needed at least one handgun for every man in the Army.

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[1] Manpower strength figures are only for the Army, but handgun figures include those issued to the Navy, except in the case of the Colt Model 1911.

[2] Number does not include Navy and Marine Corps purchase of Model 1911s.