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## **An Introduction to SHTF Home Defense, Guns, and Safety**

Posted By [Rick Blaine](#) On October 29, 2009 @ 9:31 am In [Emergency Preparedness](#), [Rick Blaine](#) | [20 Comments](#)

Various thoughts on firearms for a SHTF scenario and/or home defense:

First of all, please be sure to check the pertinent laws in your state, as firearm restrictions do vary. For example, a particular configuration of a firearm that is legal in Arizona may be illegal in California (or Kalifornia, as some refer to it). Keep that in mind when reading the comments below. Such laws are particularly relevant with respect to rifles!

Also, for those new to guns, rule #1:

EVERY TIME you pick up a firearm, you are to ASSUME that IT IS loaded. CHECK THE MAGAZINE **AND** THE CHAMBER! DO THIS EVERY SINGLE TIME!!! I DON'T CARE IF YOUR GRANDMA JUST HANDED YOU THE GUN!!!

A few other safety rules to follow:

- never point a gun at anything you aren't willing to destroy
- check your backdrop
- keep your finger off the trigger until you are ready to shoot

Note that the comments below are intended for people who don't know anything about guns, and although some of the opinions may be debatable, they reflect, at the very least, what are reasonable opinions. For example, anyone who says 'Glocks suck!' is either joking, doesn't know anything about guns, or is a 'gun snob' who drops \$3000 on pistols and thinks that anything that cost less is garbage, regardless of how many cops use them.

For purposes of simplicity, let's break this down into three categories – shotguns, pistols, and rifles.

### **Shotguns:**

#### **What gauge?**

For those who don't know, the 'gauge' refers, for all intents and purposes, to the diameter of the barrel and/or the shell.

During my concealed weapons permit course, the instructor said something to the effect of "for a home defense shotgun, you can pick any gauge you want...as long as it is 12-gauge."

First, 12-gauge shotguns offer a generous spread (i.e., you don't have to be that accurate) and/or stopping power, depending on the type of ammunition of course. Second, 12-gauge shells are BY FAR the most common and the easiest to find (compared to .410, 20-gauge, etc.) and often the least expensive. Wal-Mart (where I buy much of my ammo) usually carries everything in 12-gauge from very light loads for hunting birds and clay shooting to 00 buckshot and slugs.

#### **OK, so 12-gauge it is...but what kind of shells should you use?**

First of all, just stick to 2 ¾ shells (i.e., they sell shells of various lengths). 2 ¾ are the most common, and most shotguns can use them.

For a SHTF scenario, as opposed to home defense, 00 ('double ought') buckshot, which is essentially 7-9 pellets (for a 2 ¾ shell) similar in size to a 9 mm bullet, is probably the way to go, as it offers some spread and SERIOUS stopping power, and decent range (maybe 50

yards or so). If you want more penetration (but no spread), you may want to consider a rifled slug. One look at the single, large bullet at the end of a slug shell will convince you that IT WILL hurt the bad guy very badly, even IF it passes through him. Slugs may be useful up to 100 yards or so...though it may be hard to hit much of anything from that distance with it.

...BUT for home defense, 00 buck and slugs MAY not be the best choice. One of the concerns with firing at an intruder in your house is what happens to the bullet/pellet if you miss the bad guy, or it goes through the bad guy? Some ballistics tests have indicated that various types of buckshot can easily pass through several layers of sheetrock because of the relatively high momentum of the projectiles. Therefore, some experts recommend a lighter load if the shotgun is intended only as a "under the bed" weapon. One commonly recommended load is No. 4 birdshot, which has a higher number of smaller pellets compared to 00 buck. While still offering 'decent' stopping power, it will spread a bit more than buckshot and really cut down the possibility of injuring a family member in another room or a neighbor.

Another thing to keep in mind is that you can load your shotgun with alternating rounds (e.g., #4 bird, slug, 00 buck, #4 bird, etc) just be sure to have the series memorized.

### **OK, so which shotgun should you get?**

First of all, most experts I've talked to HIGHLY recommend pump action shotguns over semi-automatic shotguns. They are generally considered to be more reliable. Even more importantly, during a home invasion, you have the ability to "politely" tell the bad guys to get the hell out by simple actuating the pump to generate what some consider to be the second most recognizable sound in the world – "CHCK – CHCK." (FYI, the first most recognizable sound is supposedly a phone ringing).

The two most common shotguns sold for any self-defense purpose nowadays are probably the Mossberg 500 and the Remington 870 with 18' barrels. They are usually about the same price (\$300-\$400). If you are looking to save money and see a good deal on either, go for it – but if you get a chance, check them both out.

For those looking to save some money, one other possibility is the Maverick 88. Mavericks are made by Mossberg, and the 88 is supposedly very similar to the Mossberg 500, but usually costs \$50-\$100 less. The most noticeable difference between the two is the location of the safety. The Mossberg has a slide-type safety on the top of the receiver, and the Maverick, like the Remington 870, has the traditional push-button safety near the trigger.

Personally, I prefer (and own) a Remington 870. It just feels the most solid to me but you really can't go wrong with any of them.

One other thing to note about 12-gauges (and shotguns in general) – if you've never fired one before, they kick like hell. This is especially true when using a heavy (i.e., weight) and/or fast (i.e., amount of gun powder) load, like 00 buck or a slug. Ten shots of either, from a stock 12-gauge, will leave you sore, and probably give you a bruise.

The good news is that a company called Blackhawk makes recoil absorbing stocks (i.e., not just a pad – these things have springs and stuff in them). I have yet to fire one, but supposedly they are amazing. If you shop around a bit (e.g., Ebay), you can probably pick one up for \$100 or so. They make them in both pistol grip and traditional stock shapes.

Here are two links to Blackhawk's webpage:

<http://www.blackhawk.com/product/CompStock-Shotgun-Stock,1155,165.htm> <sup>[1]</sup>

<http://www.blackhawk.com/product/SpecOps-Adjustable-Shotgun-Stock,1158,165.htm> <sup>[2]</sup>

One final note on shotguns – one other way to minimize recoil, is to use "low recoil shells." They are essentially the same as regular shotgun shells, but have a bit less gun powder behind them...which not only takes it easy on your shoulder, but minimizes the worries about overpenetration into another room or house...BUT stopping power may be reduced.

## Pistols (i.e., handguns that use magazines; not revolvers):

### What caliber?

OK, what I DON'T want to do is start the 'which is the best handgun caliber' debate. So, I'll just limit this to perhaps the three most common nowadays (at least for pistols, as opposed to revolvers, which is another topic I want to avoid): 9 mm, .40 cal, and .45 cal.

A 'defense' type (e.g., hollow point) bullet (as opposed to 'ball' or full metal jacket) in any of these three rounds provides plenty of stopping power, unless you've got Michael Myers (from 'Halloween,' 'So I Married and Axe Murderer') after you.

The only other comments I'll make about pistol caliber:

With all other things being the same " 9 mm recoils the least, so it's generally the easiest of the three to stay on target after pulling the trigger, and usually offers higher capacity magazines than the other two but does have the least stopping power. .40 offers (in a defensive round) more stopping power than 9 mm, but usually 'snaps' (or recoils) more than BOTH 9 mm AND .45. .45 offers the most stopping power but you'll generally have to sacrifice a few rounds of magazine capacity and a bit a penetration (which might be a good thing depending on the situation). There usually isn't THAT MUCH of a price difference between the three, though 9 mm is usually the least expensive and .45 is the most expensive. Note that as of September 2009, .40 cal ammo is probably the easiest to find.

One final comment regarding pistol caliber – overpenetration in a home defense situation, IS a concern, especially with FMJ ammo. For a 'nightstand' pistol, in any of these calibers, a defensive round, such as some sort of hollow point, is STRONGLY recommended, as it increases stopping power significantly and reduces the odds of injuring an innocent party.

### OK, so which pistol?

In my opinion, if the pistol is really ONLY for SHTF, a zombie attack, etc., and you are not planning to become a recreational shooter, just go buy a full size Glock in your choice of caliber. Enough said. (Note the other pistols I mention below are essentially other manufacturers versions of the Glock).

However, if it's your first pistol, and you think you MIGHT want to shoot a bit more for practice (which is a really, really good idea) and/or fun, but you still have the SHTF plan in mind, I'd still keep it simple. If you want a full size pistol (as opposed to something for carrying concealed), the first three I would look at are the Springfield XD, Glock, and Smith and Wesson M&P. All three have polymer frames w/steel slides and are double-action only (i.e., no "hammer" – they have internal firing pins, and the trigger pull is always the same). All three are ABOUT the same price (as of September 2009, the XD is the least expensive at \$459 or so if you shop around...the Glock c. \$500...M&P c. \$550). Some people rip on polymer guns, but they are light, usually relatively inexpensive, easy to care for (all three of these can be stripped down in just a few seconds), and TOUGH (Supposedly, Glocks have been dropped several hundred feet onto concrete and are still able to fire).

My general thoughts/the consensus on these three: In the end, the Glock MAY be the most reliable, and the M&P has the best ergonomics (i.e., it "feels" best in your hand). Overall though, I prefer shooting the XD the best, especially because I think it has the smoothest trigger pull of the three. I own an XD 40 (.40 cal) with a 5" barrel instead of the standard 4". The extra barrel length makes the gun a bit heavier but reduces the snap a bit (which is not as much of an issue with 9 mm or .45).

That being said, all three are rock solid. You can't go wrong with any of them.

You MIGHT be able to save a bit of money buying one of these guns used. However, I still recommend buying from a reputable gun shop, for obvious reasons. Besides, the odds of saving a substantial amount of money from buying from a private seller are actually pretty slim.

Also note that some shops (like my local shop/range) sell used, law enforcement trade-ins – often Glocks. At my local shop, these seem to be a pretty good deal, as although the outside of most of them show holster wear, a quick field strip often reveals that the gun has been fired VERY little. In fact, I've seen Glock trade-ins that still have some of the original copper-colored lubricant that Glock uses when assembling the pistols at their factory. My local shop sells such Glocks for \$320-\$350.

Safety note – like many pistols these days, none of the pistols I mentioned above have actual "safety" switches per se (at least as STANDARD features). However, they do have other mechanisms to help ensure the gun fires only when intended (e.g., if the trigger is actually pulled and/or is being securely held in your palm, as opposed to the gun being dropped or something – but no actual safety levers).

That being said, I'll mention one other full size pistol: the FN Herstal FNP. I just picked up a good deal on a nearly brand new FNP 40 (.40 cal) \$450 out the door). It too is a polymer/steel, BUT it has an external hammer and offers a single action and a double action trigger pull. That is, you can either have the hammer cocked and shoot with a short, quick trigger pull OR have the hammer uncocked for a longer, slower trigger pull. Assuming a round is chambered, the double action trigger pull of the FNP is really it's only 'safety.' It also has a decocker (i.e., a lever that allows you to decock the hammer without firing). If you are OK with (and/or prefer) the single/double action thing, you may want to check them out. Supposedly, quite a few of our service troops carry them now, and I MAY actually prefer it to my XD now.

One final note on pistols – if you want something a bit smaller that you MIGHT want to carry/conceal but still consider SHTF as the primary purpose for having the gun, from what I've seen, Glock is the best band for the buck. The Glock 19 (9 mm) and the Glock 23 (.40 cal) have frames that are one step smaller than 'full size.' My sister has a Glock 19, and I shoot it all the time. It's light and small enough to conceal pretty easily, but big enough that I don't feel uncomfortable shooting it – and I have pretty big hands. The smaller frame handles 9 mm fine, and the 19 is pretty easy to shoot. However, because of the extra 'snap' of .40, the Glock 23 MAY be somewhat difficult to shoot without a decent amount of practice (i.e., because of the smaller frame and shorter barrel, the extra recoil of the .40 is more noticeable). The Glock 19 and 23 usually cost the same as the full size Glocks.

## Rifles:

As I've stated on SHTF Plan before, if we get to the point that I NEED my rifles to defend myself, we are in SERIOUS trouble (e.g., The Road Warrior). As such, for purposes of self defense, a rifle should be the 'last' to add to your collection, in my opinion.

There are a lot of different options when buying a rifle, but keeping this limited to 'semi-auto, assault type' rifles, perhaps the 'most common' for our purposes here, and the easiest to find, seem to be AK-47 variants, an SKS, AR-15 variants, and Ruger 'ranch' rifles (e.g., the Mini-14 and the Mini 30). I'm not saying these are the 'best', that is, I'm not trying to start the 'which semi-auto rifle is the best' debate.

These rifles can be chambered for various rounds, but USUALLY, AK-47s and SKSs fire 7.62 x 39 mm, as does the Mini-30. AR-15s (usually) and the Mini-14 fire .223 Remington (and/or 5.56 x 45 mm NATO). The distinction between .223 and 5.56 NATO IS important. Some rifles can fire both, some CAN NOT. Be sure to check your rifle!

7.62 is usually less expensive than .223, especially when using 'cheap' stuff like Wolf ammo (see below). As of September 2009, 1000 rounds of steel-cased Wolf 7.62 (hollow point, soft point, or FMJ) can be had for \$250-\$300. 1000 rounds of the 'cheapest' RECOMMENDED (see below) .223 will run more like \$350-\$400 but just for FMJ.

It seems to be generally accepted that AKs, and SKSs are built to 'looser' tolerances. Thus, they TEND to be more reliable than AR-15s in that they 'require' less maintenance and are less finicky about the types of ammo they fire. The Wolf ammo I mentioned above usually works just fine for AKs and SKSs. However, they also are generally considered to be less accurate than AR-15s. These days a new, decent AK variant can be picked up for around \$500 if you shop around a bit. From what I understand, SKSs are no longer manufactured,

but with some luck, you can still purchase an 'unfired' SKS for around \$350 (note " ten years ago, such an SKS costs less than \$100). Standard SKSs come with a traditional stock and a 10-round 'box' magazine, which loaded from the top of the gun. However, after market, pistol grip type stocks are available, as are higher capacity magazines (check your state's gun laws!). Between the two, I think it's a coin flip but SKSs tend to be bit less expensive.

AR-15s are usually lighter (depending on the amount of 'toys' you have on it) and more accurate than AKs and SKSs (though only an issue, if at all, well above 100 yards, if not more). ARs DO require more maintenance (and lubrication) than AKs and SKSs, and are a bit trickier to field strip for cleaning. However, if properly maintained, modern AR-15s are considered by most experts to be very reliable. Ammunition selection is one item that can affect the reliability of an AR. The steel-cased Wolf ammo is also made in .223, but MOST enthusiasts do not recommend using it in AR-15s, as there are many reports of jamming, etc., when using Wolf. 'Higher' quality brass-cased ammo is usually recommended for ARs. That being said, I have heard a few accounts of people using Wolf in ARs with no problem. One AR manufacturer, Bushmaster, even claims to test fire their rifles using steel-cased Wolf.

Re using .223 FMJ, as opposed to hollow point or something, for defense opinions vary on this. All I'll say about it is that it appears as though our troops in the Middle East ARE using a TYPE of FMJ .223 (or really the 5.56 NATO). ('Google' it for more info).

ARs are also essentially Lego sets. That is, there are countless accessories than can be added to customize it but that stuff adds up (i.e., \$\$\$) quick. Speaking of which, a 'decent' new AR, as of September 2009, can be purchased for \$800-\$900. 'Decent' is a relative term of course. That being said, I'll go ahead and recommend a couple of manufacturers: Stag Arms, Rock River Arms, Del-ton, Bushmaster, and DPMS. Those manufacturers may not be the "best," but they are certainly not the most expensive either.

Note that most of my comments regarding AR-15s are directed at traditional 'direct impingement' AR-15s, not the more modern gas piston variants, such as those made by LWRC which are much more expensive and somewhat heavier ('Google' it for more info).

Regarding the Ruger Mini-14 (.223) and Mini-30 (7.62) these seem to be considered to fall in between AKs/SKSs and AR-15 on the reliability/ease of care vs. accuracy scale. However, I have never fired either. Based on what I know about them, they are fine rifles, but they to cost basically as much as a decent AR.

### **OK, so after all of that, of the rifles I discussed above, what should you get?**

If it's ONLY for SHTF (or a zombie attack!), you are unlikely to start shooting for fun, and if the S does not HTF, the gun is just going to sit in your closet, just get yourself an AK or SKS (and a case or two of Wolf ammo). In all likelihood, you will not NEED any more accuracy, and either one can essentially be 'maintenance free' (though it is not recommended). Because SKSs are a bit cheaper, I'd probably go that route and maybe add an aftermarket stock and a higher capacity magazine.

Well, let me rephrase the above if you are really concerned about a SHTF scenario to the extent that you want to buy a rifle, you SHOULD get an AK or a SKS, regardless of also buying an AR.

I would only add to your collection with an AR if you are willing to learn how to properly take care it. Don't get me wrong, taking care of an AR is not all that hard, but it is a bit nerve wracking the first time around and they do require proper lubrication, which is supposedly the leading cause of failed operation.

Regarding home defense rifles are generally not preferred in a home defense situation, as they offer only the disadvantages (lack of maneuverability) of a shotgun, without any of the advantages (spread), while obviously being less maneuverable than a pistol.

It should be noted though that some ballistics tests have shown that overpenetration for an AR-15 is not the grave concern that it was once believed to be, even with FMJ ammo. Although a .223 bullet it going very, very fast, it is so light that it is easily stopped and/or deflected. This does not mean you should start target shooting in your living room. It just

means that an AR-15 firing .223 is not like the 'rail gun' in the movie 'Eraser.' However, overpenetration does appear to be more of a concern for 7.62 ammo because of its weight. Therefore, an AK or an SKS may be even less desirable for home defense. ('Google' it for more info).

## Conclusion

So, if you looking to buy a shotgun, a pistol, and a rifle for a SHTF scenario, and don't want to think about it all, and don't plan on shooting for fun, go buy any of those shotguns I mentioned above (+ 100 shells or so), a Glock (+ 1000 rounds or so), and a SKS (+ 1000 rounds or so).

As I mentioned above, if we get to the point where we actually need this stuff to survive, we are in A LOT of trouble and if it gets to the point where those three guns are not enough to defend yourself and/or your family I don't even want to go there.

I hope this helps.

-Rick Blaine

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