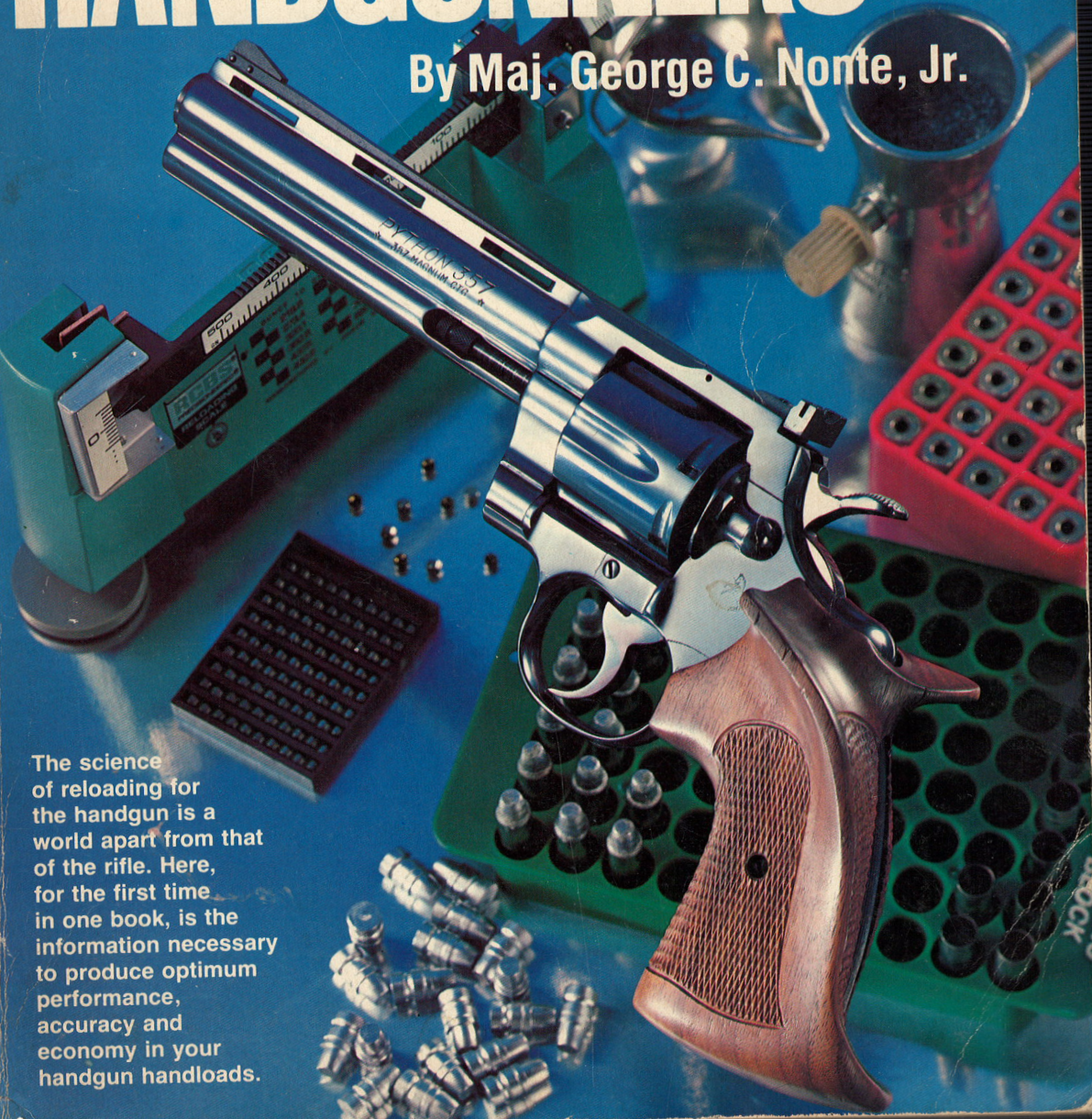


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HANDLOADING for HANDGUNNERS

By Maj. George C. Nonte, Jr.



The science of reloading for the handgun is a world apart from that of the rifle. Here, for the first time in one book, is the information necessary to produce optimum performance, accuracy and economy in your handgun handloads.

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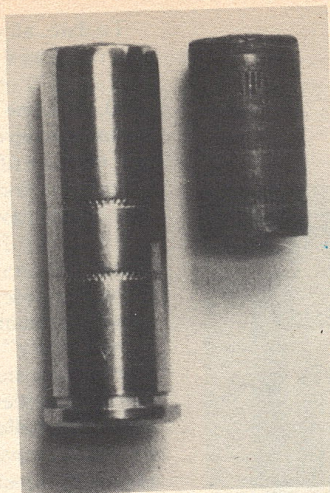
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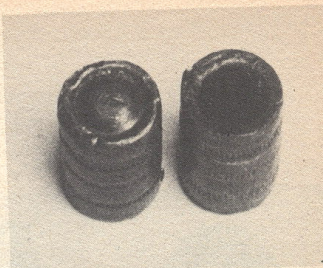
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Right — The .38 Special, mid-range, full wadcutter target load alongside the bullet from an identical cartridge. Note the three very shallow, knurled grooves for lubricant, and the unusually long bearing surface. While it appears that this bullet takes up more than one-half of the internal volume of the case, it actually does not because of the substantial cavity in its base.



Above — Probably no handgun cartridge has earned a better reputation for superb accuracy than the mid-range, full wadcutter, .38 Special factory load. Here the bullet is seen from the nose (left) and from the base; in the latter, the deep cavity in the base, which shifts the bullet's center of gravity well forward, can be clearly seen.



smaller .38 size guns. Coupled with this, S&W very carefully chose materials and heat treatment to insure that the high pressures would be safely confined. The gun was also improved cosmetically and in the sighting department; and, every effort commensurate with the times was made to produce a genuinely elite gun. It was priced accordingly, too, selling for \$60 at a time when the standard N-frame guns were priced at \$37.50. In short, it cost 60 percent more.

Thus, it was not *cartridge* development that made the .357 Magnum possible. Similar techniques had already been used to upgrade the performance of small rifle cartridges (.32-20, .44-40, etc), and were well known. It was *gun* improvement that made the whole thing possible. Thus I stand by my statement that the introduction of the magnum revolver cartridge did not result from ammunition improvement.

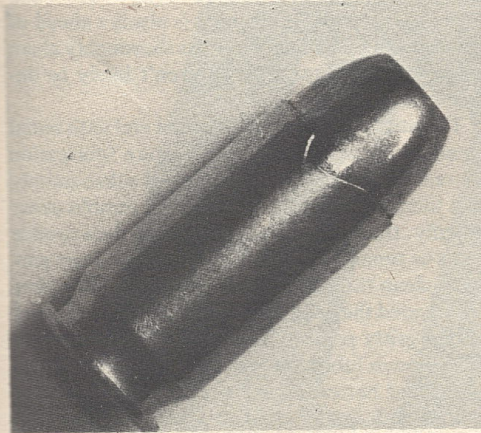
Reading contemporary literature and the recollections of pistoleros of the 1930's, one might come to the conclusion that the .357 Magnum revolver-cartridge combination was tremendously popular. Not really. From the presentation of the first .357 Magnum to J. Edgar Hoover (even then, Director of the F.B.I.) on April 8, 1935, up until temporary cessation of manufacture at the beginning of World War II, a total of 6,642 revolvers were produced. Even so, this exceeded S&W's expectations, for at the beginning of the period they were only able to finish (and remember, this was a hand-finished, deluxe

gun) only about 120 pieces per month. Today, S&W or any other revolver manufacturer wouldn't give the slightest consideration to a model which couldn't be expected to sell a hell of a lot more than 1,000 pieces *per year*.

The .44 Magnum and .41 Magnum cartridges were developed in essentially the same manner as the .357 in the early 1950's and early 1960's respectively, and that same N-frame revolver was adapted to their use. In both instances it was again simply a question of providing a gun capable of withstanding the higher chamber pressures. The cartridges themselves displayed no new or exciting innovations other than their high level of performance, obtained by vastly exceeding normal revolver chamber pressure limits.

This same "magnum approach" was taken in the early 1960's to develop the Auto Mag series of autoloading pistols and cartridges. The gun and cartridge were developed concurrently, the former to withstand chamber pressures in the 50-55,000 CUP range, and the latter to work at that level. Thus the increased performance (over other autoloading pistol cartridges was obtained simply by employing higher chamber pressures and abnormally long barrels. The cartridges themselves displayed no significant differences from existing designs dating back to the 1890's. More recently, actually as this is being written, the Wildey 9mm and .45 Magnums are being developed in exactly the same manner in companionship with the Wildey gas-operated pistol.

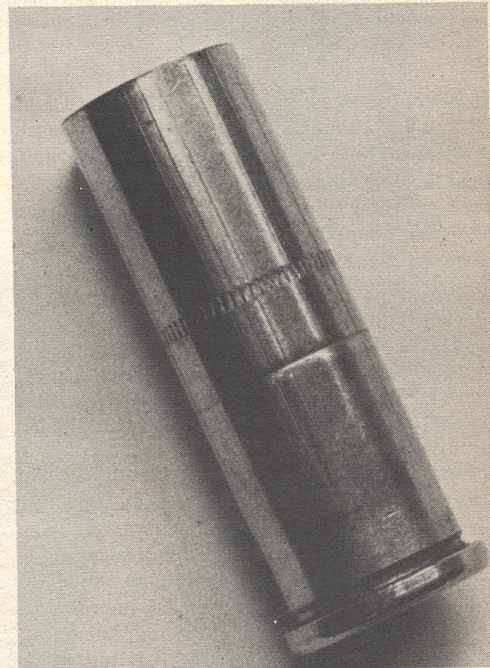
Under no circumstances should either of these cases be used, even though they might be resized in such a manner that the excessive feed-ramp bulges *appear* to be removed. This much expansion over-stresses the brass at the junction of the web and wall and may even have produced an internal crack. Pushing the metal back in place by resizing won't restore the impaired strength, and the case may let go on the next firing, even with a light load.



Even the factories make mistakes that aren't always caught by the inspectors. The case of this high-performance .45 ACP load has been damaged during bullet seating. Note the triangular piece broken out — it is probably inside the case, having been folded inward and torn off by the bullet. This cartridge chambers freely and would doubtless be safe to shoot, but I would be very surprised if it printed within the normal group — the case should probably be discarded after firing.



The head of the case on left shows evidence of high pressures in the "coining" marks produced by irregularities in the slide breech face. These marks are distinct and separate from the impressions made by ejector or extractor — they do not in and of themselves indicate excessive pressure. I would, however, reserve it for moderate or light loads. Case on right has no "coining" marks.



This case is not necessarily defective, however, the large number of striations on its outer surface indicate that it may have been resized and reloaded a number of times and lost some of its strength; and, may have lost even more of its ability to maintain a heavy and consistent crimp. For these reasons, it probably should not be used for heavy or high-performance loads.