were proof tested by firing 50 standard rounds of ammunition in addition to one normal proof round. After cleaning and oiling, the pistols were bulk shipped to Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia for final packaging. Each gun was packaged in a paraffin-coated cardboard box, together with a wordless comic-book-style instruction sheet, 10 rounds of .45 ACP ammunition, and a wooden dowel for poking out the expended cartridge case after firing (no extractor or ejector was provided in the design). 10 cartridges could be stored in the butt of the gun, which was provided with a tabbed sliding cover. A total quantity of one million guns was completed at a cost of a little over $1.71 each. Deliveries to Frankford Arsenal were completed on August 21, 1942.

In the end, the pistols contributed only sparingly to the war effort. Few were actually delivered to occupied Europe. The Army didn’t find much use for them, and so gave most of them back to the OSS. Some did go to the China-Burma-India theatre, and to the Philippines. After the war, the Philippine Constabulary used some of them as issue sidearms. A large number wound up in Britain, and after the war, the British Steel Corporation in Wales disposed of most of them as scrap. A few escaped being melted down and some British kids played with them as toys until the true nature of the pieces became apparent!

Nicknamed “Liberator” pistols after secrecy was lifted on them, a very few have survived to this day. I guess I’m one of a small number privileged to have fired one. Operation is simple. Pull back the striker knob, rotate it 90 degrees, and lift the loading gate. Insert the cartridge, lower the loading gate, and return the striker knob to vertical. The striker is half-cocked after loading. Then, pulling the trigger fully retracts it and releases it, firing the gun. This is very similar to the modern-day Glock system. The empty case must be poked out with something. A pen or pencil will do. I ventured three shots with the one illustrated here. At very short range, the bullets keyholed through the target. This was not surprising in view of the pistol’s unrifled bore. Still, I don’t doubt that any of the shots would have provided a lethal wound at a close distance. Recoil was brisk.

Because of their uniqueness, scarcity, and clandestine history, the few remaining Liberator pistols are prized and expensive when found. Currently, decent-condition individual specimens will bring multiples of a thousand dollars on the collector’s market. If complete with an original box, ammo, instructions and dowel, a doubling of value is proper. Once a little-known curiosity of the World War II era, the Liberator pistol now ranks very high on any list of classic handguns!