A New Personal Defense Weapon?

Actually, we already have one… And it's in the inventory

by Captain John S. Wilson

Editor's Note: *Captain Wilson wrote this article to answer the Stanley C. Crist article in the November-December 2001 issue of ARMOR, entitled, "Do Armor Crewmen Need a More Effective Personal Defense Weapon?"*

With all the changes and compromises being forced down the throats of the armor community by well-intentioned defense consultants, one thing we should not compromise on is the Personal Defense Weapon (PDW) our armored vehicle crewmen will carry in the future. Mr. Crist proposes we "develop" some new hybrid pistol/carbine based on the M9 Beretta pistol.[1] While a better, more accurate, more lethal replacement is necessary, Mr. Crist neglects to point out that we already have a suitable PDW in the DOD system, the Heckler & Koch MP5 Submachine Gun. Also in the system is a more powerful compact weapon, the G3KA4, a shortened derivative of the HK G3 7.62mm rifle that provides the penetration and range of the 7.62 NATO round in a compact carbine.

Heckler & Koch USA pitches the MP5K as "the ultimate close quarters weapon."[2] The MP5 family is renowned as the most accurate, most reliable submachine gun system in the world. It is the most widely selected submachine gun used by military and police special units worldwide. When the U.S. Navy SEALs fielded their first counterterror unit, SEAL Team 6, they selected and fought for the MP5 as their primary weapon.[3] Thus began the long tradition of the MP5 with the U.S. Military's Special Operations Command (SOCOM).

The MP5 is derived from the highly successful H&K series (HK G3, PSG-9, etc.) common around the world. They all use the same roller-locked delayed blowback system and share a number of components (such as the pistol grip and trigger unit) with the firm's bigger main battle rifles. The MP5's closed bolt, roller-locking, delayed blowback system provides the accuracy of a bolt action rifle (such as the M24 sniper system) with the rapid self-loading function of any other automatic weapon. This type of action, coupled with a free-floating barrel (nothing touches the barrel beyond the action) makes the MP5 far more accurate than the average submachine gun.

The MP5 is constructed mostly of stamped metal with plastic grips. It is a solid, well-built, and reliable weapon. I have had occasion to fire several variants of the MP5. They are simple, accurate, and easy to manage.

H&K offers three K-versions (the "K" stands for "*Kurz*," the German word for "*short*") all of which are suitable for use as PDWs: the standard MP5K**,** the MP5KA4 and the MP5K-PDW. These are all classified as "machine pistols."

MP5K/MP5KA4. The MP5K is H&K's smallest sub-gun offering. The MP5K was originally developed in 1976 at request of an HK South American sales representative who saw a market for its use in protecting dignitaries.[4] It weighs 4.4 pounds[5] and is less than 13 inches long.[6] The MP5K is easy for armored crewmen to carry tucked out of the way. Using any of a myriad of after-market holsters or slings, a vehicle crewmen could wear this lethal package almost anywhere on his person, ready to fire in seconds, yet out of the way of their primary duty to crew and fight their tank or IFV. An optional folding buttstock fits ALL MP5Ks, allowing soldiers to increase their accuracy at extended ranges.[7]

The Heckler & Koch MP5KA4

MP5K-PDW. According to Heckler & Koch USA, the MP5K-PDW is a compact submachine gun designed specifically for vehicle crewmen who require a small, but powerful weapon.[8] It is comparable in performance to full-size MP5s. The MP5K-PDW would be an ideal choice where a rifle or full-sized submachine gun is unmanageable and a handgun is a poor compromise.[9] With its sturdy folding buttstock and

MP5K Specifications

	Caliber	Weight	Barrel Length	Overall Length stock in/out
MP5KA4	9mmx19	4.40 lb	4.50 in.	12.80 in.
MP5K	9mmx19	4.40 lb	4.50 in.	12.80 in.
MP5K-PDW	9mmx19	6.14 lb	5.50 in.	14.50/23.75 in.
Magazine		15- or 30-shot detachable box		
Cyclic Rate		900 rds/min		

threaded barrel, the MP5K-PDW is an exceptionally flexible weapon.[10] While both the MP5KA4 and the MP5K-PDW are suitable, the MP5K-PDW is the weapon best suited to replace the M9 as the Armor community's new PDW.

Development and Acquisition. Mr. Crist mentioned the Beretta M93R, a larger framed version of the M9 capable of firing three-round bursts and feeding from M9-style magazines.[11] This may provide a more valuable basis from which to "develop" a new PDW than the current M9. However, the MP5 is a proven design currently in the DOD system. There is NO need for the excessive cost and time required to "develop" Mr. Crist's brainchild. The inordinate cost to develop and field his new design would easily pay for the rapid implementation of the HK5K-PDW.

The H&K MP5K-PDW

Compatibility. Mr. Crist claims that the M9 should be the basis for the new PDW based on "commonality and interchangeability."[12] Invariably, his design would require reverse engineering to meet the demands he requires (not mentioning further demands made by others along the acquisition food chain). Such changes would adversely affect compatibility with components of the current M9 pistol desired by Mr. Crist and nullify the purpose of using the M9 chassis in the first place. If close compatibility is such a grave issue, it would be better to completely replace the M9 on unit MTOEs. If MP5Ks are made standard to armor and cavalry MTOEs (replacing the M9 altogether) there is no problem with logistical compatibility. The cost to replace the M9s is offset by the savings realized by not pursuing the Crist PDW design.

Increased Firepower, Accuracy and Penetration. The robust pattern of the MP5 also allows for "hotter" 9mm submachine gun ammunition (which caused premature maintenance problems in the M9 resulting in service member deaths). Such ammunition would increase the possibility of penetrating body armor. The MP5 would even handle experimental "sabot" submachine gun ammunition to increase its sting. The MP5K-PDW has a 5.5-inch free-floating barrel. This meets the intent of Mr. Crist's requirement for a 6-inch barrel on any new PDW.[13] The inherent accuracy of the free-floated barrel would likely overcome any performance lost by the missing half-inch. A "Grenade" grip and finger guard prevents the soldier's hand from straying in front of the muzzle (another concern expressed by Mr. Crist). Further, his PDW is based on an already admittedly inaccurate design[14] (indeed, match shooters I have spoken with state that the M9 is all but impossible to "accurize" compared to its predecessor, the M1911A1). Adding to the length of a barrel in the new PDW would do little to fix this. Why build a new weapon from a less accurate design?

Full-Auto Versus Semi-Auto and the Issue of Controllability. Mr. Crist's dream PDW is a semiautomatic-only model because he is concerned with ammunition consumption and controllability.[15] The 30-round magazines available for the MP5K-PDW would allow for full-automatic or three-round burst fire that a crewman bailing out of a burning LAV might need to suppress the foe while moving to safety. The shoulder stock and/or the "grenade" grip of the MP5K-PDW would allow the crewman to fire the weapon single or double handed with infinitely greater accuracy, even when fired fully automatic. MP5Ks possess a threaded barrel. This allows for the addition of a flash compensator or muzzle brake to reduce the signature of the weapon and increase controllability. The MP5K-PDW comes standard with a folding stock rather than the older, less comfortable HK telescoping stock. Full auto is also more desirable in a MOUT environment.

Target Acquisition Hardware. Mr. Crist mentions no additional Target Acquisition Hardware aside from the standard iron sights present on the M9. A new PDW based on the M9, as Mr. Crist proposes, would require a great deal of reverse engineering to allow such devices. The top of the MP5, however, allows for a "claw" mount system that allows the soldier to quickly attach or detach a wide array of sights that improve target acquisition and accuracy.

Double-Action Versus Single-Action. Mr. Crist seems enamored with the idea that the PDW be double-action for rapid target engagement.[16] The MP5K is a single-action with a function selector switch similar to (if not easier than) the selector switch on the M16A2/M4.

Holsters Versus Slings. An after-market shoulder sling allows soldiers to strap the weapon, draped under the armpit, out of the way. Such a rig would forgo the necessity of a cumbersome holster. The soldier can rapidly "grab" the weapon and put it into action and then "drop" the weapon without losing accessibility to it later on. This is extremely important for a crew entering/exiting or climbing onto an armored vehicle.

Training. Mr. Crist placed some importance on compatibility with the M9 to ease "transitional" training.[17] Again, the changes necessary to convert the M9 into the PDW he proposes would still require "transitional" training due to the extreme amount of reengineering required. His shoulder stock and forearm grip alone changes the whole scheme of training away from traditional M9 marksmanship training. The MP5K-PDW, especially when complemented by the M68 Reflex Sight, operates in much the same way as the M16 Rifle/M4 Carbine that all soldiers qualify with at basic training. From personal experience with the MP5 family, I can safely say that the transition would be remarkably easy.

The G3KA4. The G3KA4 is a select-fire, short-barreled (12.4-inch) 7.62 NATO rifle with retractable stock.[18] The G3 rifle was the first HK firearm developed with the delayed blowback roller-locked operation common to most current Heckler and Koch submachine guns, rifles, and machine guns.[19] This would make an excellent companion to the MP5K-PDW. While certainly not quite as accurate as the G3, the G3KA4 would have far greater range and penetrating power than the M16A2 or M4. Because it chambers the 7.62

NATO cartridge, the G3KA4 would be far more compatible logistically than they are with the current issue M16A2. Some components and accessories that fit the MP5K will also fit the G3KA4. Common throughout each weapon group is the ability to use many interchangeable assembly groups and components. This allows the unit to train personnel within one weapons group and have them competent with both weapons.[20] If forced to dismount, the crew could unlink belted ammunition taken from the M240 Machine Gun and feed it into the G3KA4. This increases the crew's dismounted firepower. A dismounted armored crew with four MP5Ks, one or two M240s (with dismount kits) and one G3KA4 would prove a dangerous fire team. At the very least, if armored and cavalry units are further called upon to provide dismounted patrols (either in combat or as peacekeepers), they will possess the appropriate means to defend themselves.

Mr. Crist is correct in calling for a better PDW for our armored crewmen, but his approach will prove too costly in terms of time, energy, treasure and, ultimately, blood. It is a neat concept sketch drawn in a Fantasyland future when a far superior PDW exists in the real world right now. We should not delay fielding the HK MP5K-PDW and G3KA4 and giving our transitional Armor Force a personal defense weapon that works.

The H&K G3KA4 7.62mm Carbine

Notes

[1]Crist, Stanley C., "Do Armor Crewmen Need a More Effective Personal Defense Weapon?" *ARMOR,* Nov-Dec 2001, pp. 27-28.

[2]*www.hecklerkoch-usa.com*

[3]Marcinko, Richard and Weisman, John (Contributor), *Rogue Warrior,* Simon and Schuster, 1992, pp. 221, 228.

[4]*www.hkpro.com*

[5]*www.hecklerkoch-usa.com*

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Crist, pp. 27-28.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

[18]*www.hkweaponsystems.com*

[19]*www.hecklerkoch-usa.com*

[20]Ibid.

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