

# SURVIVAL WEAPONS

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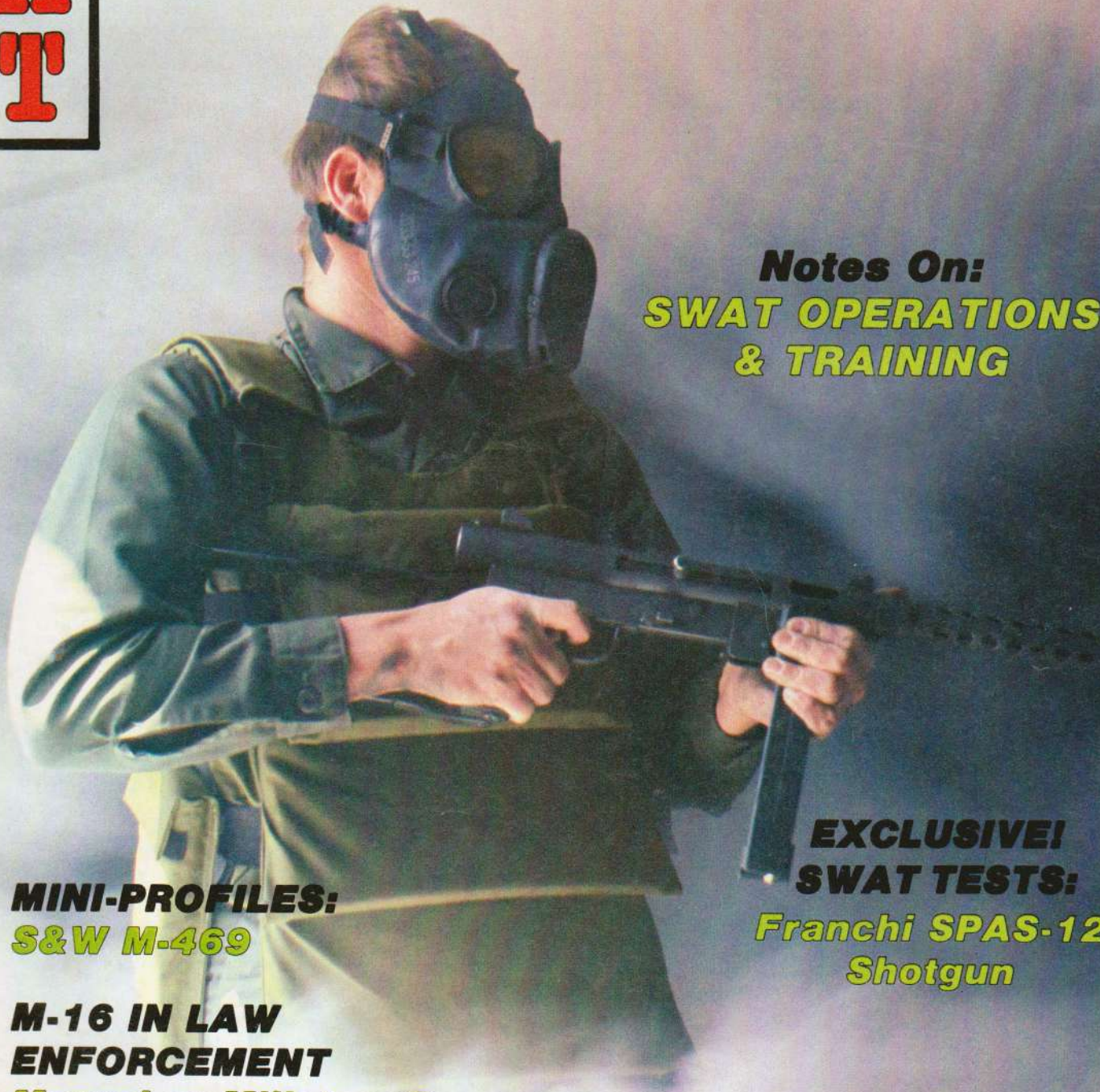
# AND TACTICS

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**Notes On:**  
**SWAT OPERATIONS  
& TRAINING**

**MINI-PROFILES:**  
**S&W M-469**

**M-16 IN LAW  
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**Marvel or Millstone?**

**EXCLUSIVE!**  
**SWAT TESTS:**  
**Franchi SPAS-12**  
**Shotgun**



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From the land of pasta and Lambrusco comes the SPAS-12, a fighting shotgun for the '80s — or is it?

## SWAT EXCLUSIVE! TEST & EVALUATION: FRANCHI SPAS-12 SHOTGUN

Since currently available fighting shotgun designs are derived directly from earlier sporting weapons and since combat-proven examples of these have been on the market for decades, any additions to the line must be examined with a critical eye. SWAT was recently fortunate enough to be able to test the latest of the lot, the Franchi-designed SPAS-12. Thanks to superlative cooperation from the people at Firearms Import & Export Corporation (P.O. Box 4866, Hialeah Lakes, Hialeah, FL 33014), we received a test gun with all pertinent literature with minimum delay for comprehensive evaluation.

Due to U.S. firearms import laws, this shotgun is billed as a "sporting" weapon (the "SPAS" acronym stands for "Sporting Purpose Automatic Shotgun"), although one would have to be well-intoxicated to take it bird hunting! One look at the SPAS (pronounced "spass") will tell any SWAT reader that it is intended exclusively for law enforcement/military purposes.

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By ERIC STRAHL

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Initial impressions: it is *big*, it is *heavy* and it is *black*. Furthermore, it incorporates several unique design features, some of which have potential and some of which will prove tactically disastrous! The SPAS-12 is **not** the "Leader T-2" of shotguns; far from it. But it is also far from perfect. The Franchi designers should go back to the drawing board if they intend to market a weapon which the officer on the street can use to stop a felon and save innocent lives.

The SPAS-12 is not a pump-repeater and not a gas-operated autoloader, but *both*. This is the only shotgun currently available that incorporates a complete change in operating mode via the simple press of a button and movement of the fore end. This change is accomplished without tools, weapon loaded or unloaded, in less than two seconds.

the same mission with a Thompson SMG (the same weight) and a normal combat magazine load. However, the weight of the SPAS also means excellent controllability, as I discovered during rapid-fire buckshot drills. An adjustable feature of the folding stock also provides for *one-handed* operation, with metal support for the strong-side forearm as pictured. The manufacturer claims this as being required for individuals firing from a vehicle or for those armed with both a shotgun and riot shield. Though it does add to support, the forward balance of this weapon made one-handed firing extremely awkward during our tests; much like trying to point a crowbar quickly while grasping it by its near end. Seen from a law enforcement standpoint, admittedly, the weight of the SPAS may not prove to be a problem at all since the gun spends most of its duty shift locked in a car. In addition, recoil will not be felt as severely by slightly-built shooters.

From a human engineering standpoint, the SPAS-12 has several totally unsatisfactory features and, unfortunately, these tend to undermine its positive points. The folding buttstock is an abomination: Too short, slow to lock or unlock by virtue of its spring-loaded detent buttons and having stamped-metal edges with which one could slice bread. I'm not exaggerating by saying that after twenty rounds of test-firing, I experienced bleeding from the gums and a cheek so swollen I could not concentrate on accurate shooting! To be fair, I will also add that the manufacturer produces a plastic-resin fixed buttstock, which anyone seriously considering this gun would do well to obtain. Anything must be better than that metal monstrosity! *Mamma mia!*

A second glaring human-engineering error pertains to the safety. It has *two* of them and *neither one* is designed for ease of manipulation under stress. Although the gun can be made ready as easily as can any other pump or autoloading shotgun, with the magazine loaded and the first round either cycled from the magazine or dropped into the open ejection port, quick manipulation of the safeties requires far too much practice — if only because of their locations. When one compares the SPAS to the other available fighting shotguns, most of which can be made ready for firing with the index finger of *one hand* without shifting one's firing grip, it finishes a distant last place. With equipment like this (and with a lot of other modern mechanical devices) a stronger point should be made of emphasizing proper handling, as opposed to so-called fool-proof engineering. As with the "child-guard" bottle cap, we have evolved a product which is almost impossible to use in a hurry; at least, not without

TABLE I  
PATTERNING EVALUATION

Shot Size	#4B		#1B		#0B		#00B		#000B	
No. Pellets	27		16		12		9		8	
Range m	Hits	%	Hits	%	Hits	%	Hits	%	Hits	%
7	27	100	16	100	12	100	9	100	8	100
15	27	100	16	100	12	100	9	100	6	75
25	16	59	6	38	9	75	6	75	3	38
50	1	4	3	19	3	25	3	33	2	25
Overall	71	66	41	64	36	75	27	77	19	60
To 25m	70	86*	38	79	33	92*	24	92*	17	71
15m & Under	54	100	32	100	24	100	18	100	14	100

85 percent pellet placement in body cavity considered minimum for effective stopping action against personnel.

**Best Load to 50 meters:**

No. 00 Buckshot (27 hits/77%).  
No loads performed satisfactory to 50 meters.

**Best Load(s) to 25 meters:**

No. 4 Buckshot (70 hits/86%).  
No. 0 Buckshot (33 hits/92%)\*  
No. 00 Buckshot (24 hits/92%)\*

Note: \* denotes preferred because of superior penetration ability.

**SLUG PERFORMANCE\***

**Weapon Fired in Manual Mode:**

11.0 in. (28cm).

**Weapon Fired in Auto Mode:**

5.0 in. (12.7cm).

**Comments:**

Gun shot very high above point-of-aim (POA). In Manual Mode: 16.0 in. (40cm); In Automatic Mode: 19.0 in. (47.5cm).

Note: \* denotes fact that all shooting was done at 50 meters.

a lot of rehearsal. Too much, in fact.

Buckshot patterning tests were conducted with the SPAS-12 under the same conditions, using the same parameters, as in our SWAT Weapons Showdown (see the "SWAT SHOWDOWN '83" for particulars). In this it held its own very well against any of the fighting shotguns we've seen of both foreign and domestic manufacture. The exact patterning percentages at various ranges with various projectile loads are shown in Table I. Our test gun clearly performed at its best with No. 00 Buck at 25 yards range still keeping 92 percent of the pellets fired in *vital* areas of the target. This is doing rather well for a cylinder-bored scattergun. Incidentally, Franchi manufactures screw-on choke tubes of various configurations for the SPAS. Though we had none available for test,

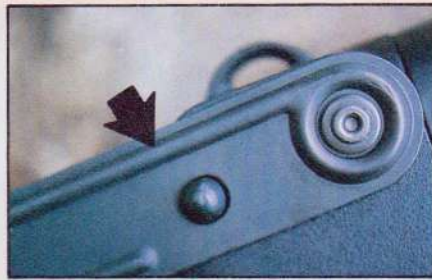
results with these might have been quite interesting.

Slug performance using U.S. loads was, well, variable. When fired in the manual (pump-action) mode, the SPAS printed *wide* groups considerably *above* the point-of-aim. But, when the switch was made to gas-operation, the groups tightened dramatically, yet were *even farther* above the aiming point! If you own a SPAS and want to hit an adversary in the chest with U.S.-made rifled slugs, you'll have to aim somewhere around his crotch! And this was regardless of the fact that the top of the front sight blade measured not less than 1¼" above the axis of the bore; the obvious solution here would be a rugged but

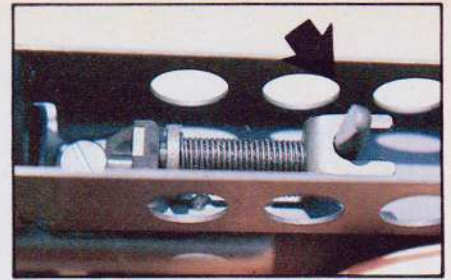
(Continued on page 72)



SPAS-12 with buttstock folded and locked against top of receiver. One-hand firing brace can also serve as a carrying handle.



Folding buttstock at pistol grip, showing detent locking button on right side of weapon (arrow).



Spring-loaded lever (arrow) locks and unlocks buttstock against barrel sleeve when in folded position.

And it *works*. While our SWAT evaluation did not include mud baths, salt-water immersions, sub-zero firing tests and sandblasting, it *did* involve a variety of defensive shotgun loadings fired in both "auto" and "manual" modes. Results: Not a single stoppage. Failure to cycle *was* experienced when using No. 8 birdshot, though this was anticipated in view of the manufacturer's recommendations on minimum loads. Again, this is a fighting shotgun and in no way a sporting weapon, at least by the manufacturer's intent.

In providing for dual-mode operation, the designers have clearly solved the "how" of the problem from a mechanical standpoint, while failing to answer the tactical question of "why". The reader might well quote the original criticism of the double-action auto pistol: An ingenious solution to a non-existent problem! With a little imagination, one *might* conjure up a tactical scenario in which a rapid change in mode would be a benefit; yet, the person staking his life on his shotgun has ample historic reason to shy away from a weapon doubly-

complex in design, while offering no real advantage. The fact that the reason for the dual-mode is not adequately addressed in any of the Franchi literature only serves to underscore the point. And there can be no doubt that it adds greatly to the retail cost of the gun.

As already mentioned, the SPAS-12 is heavy, weighing in at nearly 10½ pounds fully loaded. In my opinion, this is prohibitively heavy from a purely military standpoint; when one adds the weight of spare ammo, he would be far better off for



Adjustable semi-circular metal brace is designed for one-handed firing. Awkwardness of manual safeties, however, precluded using gun in this fashion.



Stamped-metal buttstock caused extreme discomfort when fired from the shoulder. Attachment point for carrying sling can be seen immediately in front of shooter's nose.



Overall size and configuration of SPAS-12 as seen fired from the shoulder. Note extremely short length of pull on folding buttstock.



Pistol grip on the SPAS was comfortable and hand-filling; no problems here.

## FRANCHI

(Continued from page 33)

adjustable rear sight, as the present type has no provisions for either windage or elevation correction. Incidentally, I found the SPAS sight system, with blade front/large-aperture rear, to be especially quick in giving the shooter a center-mass index on the target at all ranges. Too, I have never seen this combination on any other fighting (or sporting) shotgun.

There are other minor points about the SPAS-12, both good and bad, which bear mentioning. When fired in the autoloading mode, the operating handle is inadequate for malfunction clearance; it is sharp enough to be classed as a close-combat weapon, were it any longer! Franchi needs something larger, rounder and easier to get hold of. In contrast, both the fore end (pump slide) and pistol grip are very well configured and fill the shooter's hand comfortably. One-handed firing produced no discomfort to the strong hand. Though we weren't able to find out just how much abuse the plastic parts could take (the F.I.E. folks had gone out of their way to be helpful and didn't deserve their gun back in pieces), the phenolic resin appears in no way brittle, unlike certain often-seen military firearms.

Taken as a sum of its good and bad characteristics, the SPAS-12 is a "mixed bag". At a suggested retail price of \$600.00, I consider the problems with the weapon totally unacceptable. As you have seen written in the pages of SWAT before, the difficulties with currently-available fighting shotguns *have nothing to do with the inherent characteristics of the shotgun as a weapon*. Rather, they arise from the fact that "fighting" shotguns are almost universally little more than *sporting* shotguns with long magazines and a few parkerized gadgets tacked on. When the Franchi designers figure out that fighting for one's life on a stakeout demands somewhat different weapon criteria than gunning for grouse in the Apennines, they'll have a weapon we can *really* shout about. With all due appreciation to F.I.E., Inc., who are nice folks, we feel the SPAS-12 to

be an arm with much potential, consummated without benefit of an understanding of the requirements for a combative weapon. We hope the faults will quickly be rectified and the gun brought to its full potential.

TABLE II  
SWAT EVALUATION  
SPAS-12 SHOTGUN

**Length, Overall:** Stock extended: 41 in. (93cm); Stock folded: 31 $\frac{3}{4}$  in. (71cm).

**Length, Barrel:** 21 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. (46cm).

**Weight, Empty:** 9.6 lb. (3.65 kg.).

**Weight, Loaded:** Varies with ammunition type; average loaded weight (No. 00 Buckshot) 10.3 lb. (4.7 kg.).

**Magazine Capacity:** Eight rounds.

**Sights:** Unprotected blade front, fixed aperture rear. No provision for adjustment of sights. Front sight on test gun canted noticeably to left.

**Recoil Pad:** None.

**Solid or Skeletonized Lifter:** Skeletonized, satisfactory.

**Safety:** Dual: 180-degree rotating lever, excessive in a fighting shotgun, located right side of receiver forward of trigger guard; Metal tab lever, not effectively manipulated by firing hand, located left side of receiver forward of trigger guard.

**Ease of Manipulation:** Both are poor.

**Loading:** Marginal, human engineering/tactical factors ignored.

**Unloading:** Marginal, human engineering/tactical factors ignored.

**Slug Performance:** Poor to Good.

**U.S. Type:** Pump (Manual) Mode: Poor; Autoloading Mode: Good.

**Buckshot Performance:** Above Average.

**Best Load in Test Gun:** No. 00 Buckshot.

**Maximum Effective Range With Buckshot, Best Load:** 25 meters.

**Stock Type:** Folding metal (Test Gun).

**Sturdiness:** Good, for folding stock.

**Human Engineering:** Very Poor. Length of pull excessively short, sharp metal edges cause extreme shooter discomfort. Lock/Unlock button requires excessive manipulation in order to fold or extend stock. One-handed firing feature adds weight, is largely unnecessary. ●

## PICTURE CAPTIONS FOR OPPOSITE PAGE

(1). Buttstock locking button must be fully depressed both to unlock *and* lock the folding stock. This is unnecessarily slow should the shooter need to extend the stock in a hurry. It should be modified if Franchi intends the SPAS to be a true fighting shotgun.

(2). Manufacturer's "carrying safety", forward of trigger guard, right side. Lever shown in half-way position; it must be forward (fire) or backward (safe) for operation. This lever cannot be manipulated with the strong hand in firing position — definitely a tactical design shortcoming!

(3). Once fore end detent button is depressed, the fore end itself slides to settings "A" or "M" indicated on barrel sleeve, for manual or autoloading operation. Change in mode was quick, positive and reliable.

(4). "Carrier Latch Button" (arrow), extreme forward end of receiver, left side. Must be depressed to release bolt (both modes) and to load magazine. Just one more button or lever to manipulate when using this weapon — and for what?

(5). What appeared to be a variable choke device on muzzle proved to be a "thread protector" (manufacturer's description). This must be *unscrewed* to attach chokes or riot-control grenade/launching apparatus.

(6). Large, easily-manipulated detent button on underside of fore end must be depressed in order to change operating mode from manual to auto. This is a nice touch.

(7). Manufacturer's "quick-employment safety", left side of receiver (arrow) forward of trigger guard. This must be pushed forward to fire by the index finger of firing hand (manufacturer's recommendation). It does work, but is an invitation to accidental discharges in a fight. There is only one reason for the firing-hand index finger to enter the trigger guard and that is to press the trigger!

(8). Fixed rear sight on SPAS-12 was large-aperture and of rugged construction. This sight was quick but needs adjustable capability as outlined in text.

(9). Front sight consisted of a *very* high blade. In light of U.S. slug performance, height is still inadequate at shotgun ranges.

(10). Front sling swivel on the SPAS-12 is suited only to snap-hook attachments on carrying sling and rotates freely on barrel.

