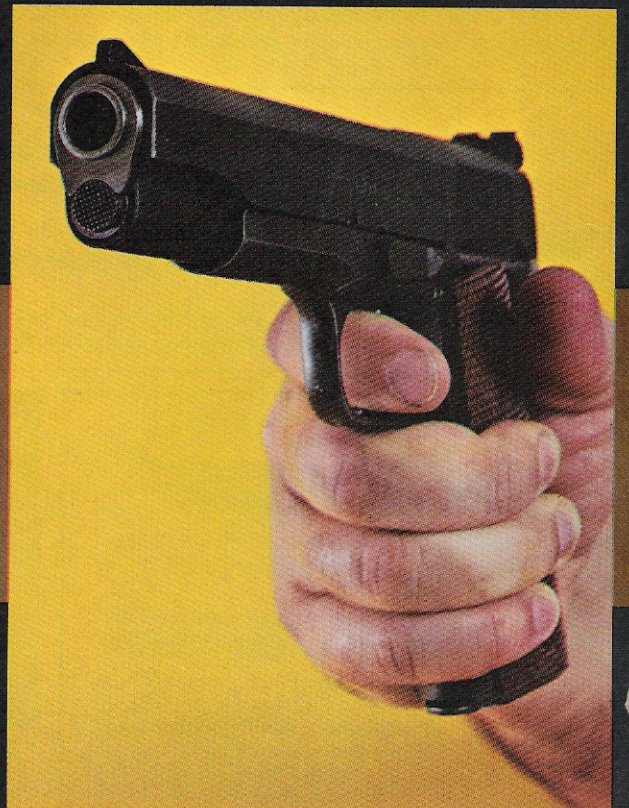
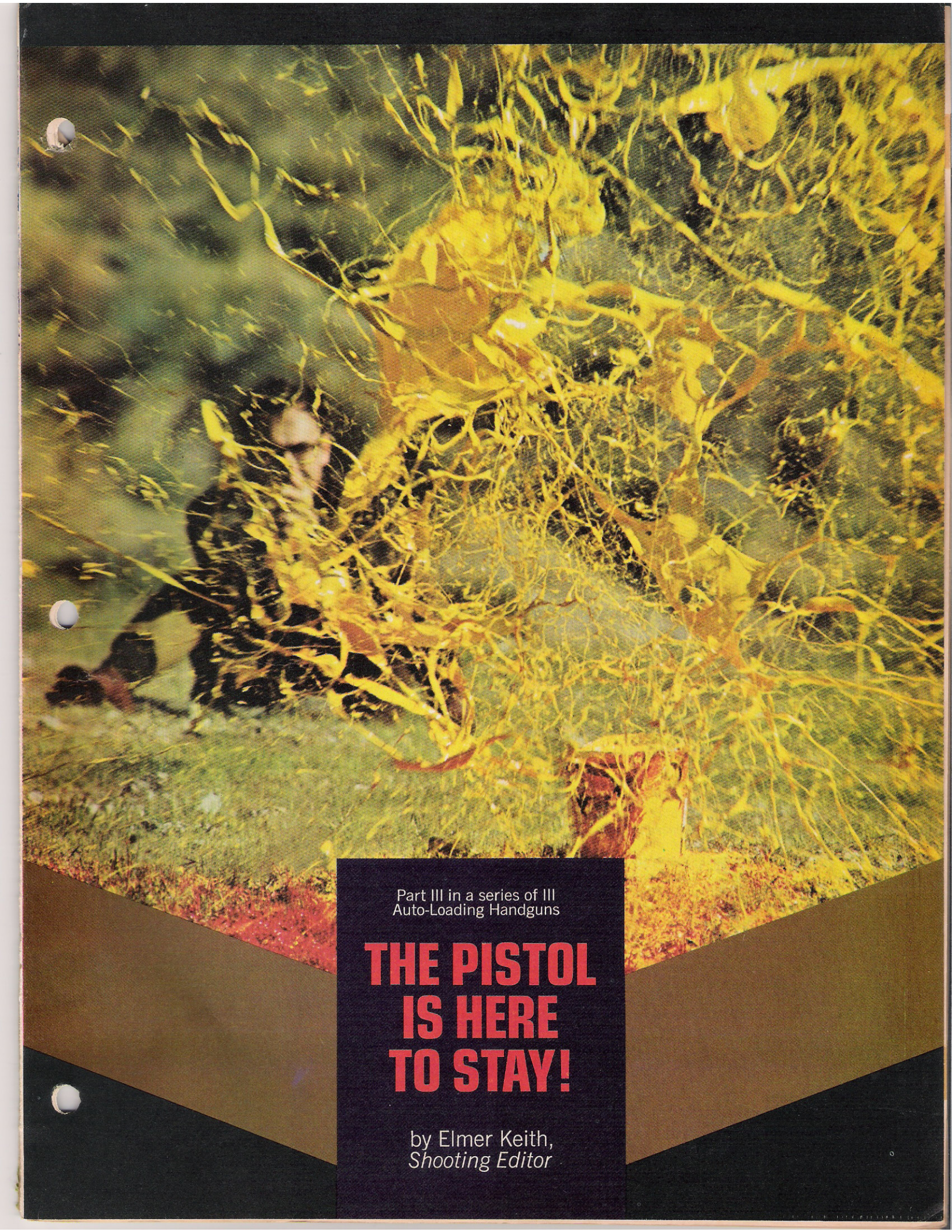


The smashing and potentially brutal power of several popular automatics and loads is graphically demonstrated with these violent designs. New loadings greatly increase the delivered energy of many auto-pistol bullets. However, blasting paint cans is not recommended without a large clean-up crew.





Part III in a series of III
Auto-Loading Handguns

THE PISTOL IS HERE TO STAY!

by Elmer Keith,
Shooting Editor

Space does not permit taking up the myriad of small foreign auto pistols, nor all those of domestic manufacture. So, in this short treatise we will deal only with the best of the lot. Of all the auto pistols, I consider the old Model 1911 Colt and especially its more modern counterparts the 1911-A1 and the National Match and Gold Cup models as the best and most effective of all auto pistols.

The Smith & Wesson Model 39 could well be an even better arm if brought out in .45 ACP caliber, because of its double-action first-shot feature. A very few experimental .45 Auto Lugers were made but I have never been privileged to even see, let alone test one. I do have a pair of very early Colt Model 1905 .45s.

From 1924 on, for some years, when the Idaho docked at San Diego, a case of 2000 rounds and a new .45 barrel regularly came into the ranch. I shot the 1911 an awful lot during those years and became quite efficient with it. It is about the hardest of all handguns to master, however. Later, when I was in charge of final inspection of small arms at Ogden Arsenal during World War II, we received a lot of Colt Model 1911-A1 guns in long cases holding 50 guns each.

Orders came in to adjust trigger pulls and check them out on the range. Some of the armorers started filing sears to correct trigger pulls and a number of these guns machined (went automatic) on me when I tested them. Then, I took over the job of adjusting trigger pulls as Fitzgerald of Colt had taught me at Camp Perry in 1924. Fred N. Barnes, the bullet maker, pulled them down, while I carefully filed the full-cock notch back a bit and corrected the angle of sear bite on it. I then polished this surface with a hard Arkansas stone. I had no trouble in getting trigger pulls from 3¾ to 4 pounds that stood up.

Most of these guns were Colt make, Parkerized and had wide front sights. They were a wonderful bunch of .45 Autos. All of them seemed very accurate and I used to pound a 5-gallon oil tin at 100 yards with them. In spite of the long-spur grip safety, and the arched grip housing, they always tended to eat away the web of my hand between thumb and forefinger. The girls who loaded clips for me used to tape my hand heavily in the web. Just the same, by the time I had tested and driven the rear sights to shoot center on 50 guns, the blood was usually dripping from my right elbow on the ground.

At any rate, I learned the full possibilities of these good Colt .45 Autos. I became very proficient with them, either on game or at bottles tossed in the air. Once I took 24 jackrabbits in one day with a .45 — and three of them running all-out.

It is a great military weapon, to my notion the best of all the military automatics, as well as one of the best guns Colt ever turned out. Properly tuned up, it is also very accurate with good ammunition. However, due to its low velocity, it has a very high trajectory curve for any long-range work.

I also used a 6-inch barrel .38 Colt military model auto for some time on small game. In the early 30s, when the Super .38 Colt Auto came out, I purchased three of them and shot everything from woodchucks and jacks to deer with them. I soon learned that although they were very accurate and much flatter-shooting than the old Pumpkin roller, they sadly lacked shock and killing power. None of them, or the .45 Autos, even remotely compared with a good sixgun for game killing, especially on deer. Shoot a woodchuck with the Super .38 and he would drop, then jump up and run in his hole. Hit him broadside the same way with the .45 Auto and he would drop.

The Lugers, both .30 and 9mm gave me about the same results as the Super .38 Colt Auto. They were very accurate and flat-shooting but lacked shock or killing effect on anything larger than chucks and jacks. The Luger trigger is also located too far forward for my short fingers and trigger pulls were usually terrible, and hard to adjust. The P-38 was such a crude weapon I never could get interested in it, though I liked its double-action pull for the first shot, like the other Walthers.

Of all the small auto pistols, the Model 39 Smith & Wesson double action is the best in my opinion. While the company has made up two or three in .45 caliber and thoroughly tested them, it is problematical if they will ever be brought out in this caliber. When Carl Hellstrom showed me the first pilot model of this gun in his office at Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1953, I asked him to bring it out in .45 ACP caliber. Later, his son Douglas told me they had done so and the guns stood up well under 3000 rounds of hard-ball ammo. This would make a splendid military weapon with its double-action feature on the first shot.

Just as the modern sixgun is the best arm for all peace officers, so the .45 Colt Model 1911 (or an S&W Model 39 in the same caliber) is the best for a military weapon. The fast loading of seven rounds to a magazine is a great asset for the "busy" soldier.

I have Captain W.R. Strong's old Springfield Armory Model 1911 that he bought through the NRA for the sum of \$14.25 before World War I. Bill, a brother of General George V. Strong, head of G-2 during World War II, carried that gun through the Chateau Thierry fight. He told me he used seven clips in that fight and did not think he missed a shot as the Germans were coming over the parapet at point-blank range. I modernized the old gun with better, higher sights, short trigger, arched housing and long grip-safety spur and it is still a very good .45 Auto.



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S&W Model 39 double-action 9mm



Rare S&W .35-cal. auto, Model 2, variation 2



Ruger .22 Standard, "first gun" of many



Early 1900s Co. Pocket Model .380

Colt now offers 1911-style (flat housing) .45s in commemorative finish, honoring Chateau Thierry and other famous battles of World War I. These guns are only made in a limited number, ranging in price to over \$1000. All of them are already collector's items and are the height of the pistolsmith's art. Bluing, engraving and inlay on all are excellent. Actions, as well, (although these are not meant to be duty arms) are honed finely.

The fact the .45 Auto can be taken apart with the fingers and its parts easily replaced, as well as its fast clip-loading make it of prime military use. The 230-grain slug has shock enough for close-range combat. However, I have two friends, still living, who have been shot with .45 Autos, one through the right lung. Both recovered, though the Lieutenant had to take long breaths each morning and pump up his collapsed right lung and then was good for all day.

Just as the .45 Colt and its many limitations are good combat arms, so the 9mm Luger, especially the Navy and Artillery long-barreled models, are the best for any long-range two-handed shooting. They are very accurate and flat shooting, but like all auto pistol loads under the .45 Auto, they are sadly lacking in power.

A good .45 Colt Auto, properly accurized, is about the best auto pistol a man can carry. Frank Pachmayr started this tuning procedure and still turns out excellent accurizing jobs.

So much for the good points of auto pistols. Now, let us look at their shortcomings. In the first place, they are totally dependent on perfect ammunition. Get a snap from a bum primer, or any malfunction and it takes two hands to clear it. I have never seen one that did not sooner or later jam, either from faulty ammunition, dust and dirt in the action or damaged magazines. Either the lips of the magazines had been bent, or the magazine spring failed or dirt or dust built up within the magazine, causing the rounds to fail to feed upward.

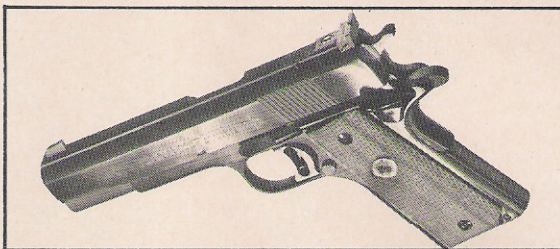
I have a Gold Cup that George Hoenig worked over, giving me a short trigger, an arched grip housing, a stronger, larger pin through the rear sight so it won't fracture from heavy loads, and also a stronger recoil spring to take the powerful hard-ball ammo. I also have a good Model 1911-A1 accurized and with much higher target front and rear sights of the wide variety. They are splendid-shooting guns, but I would never trust one in comparison with a good sixgun. Kept clean and properly lubricated they will, with perfect ammo, function perfectly. But, get them full of dust and they will jam regularly.

I used to carry a .45 Auto in my chaps pocket to kill a daily jackrabbit for my cow-dog. When following a long string of doggies all day in the dust and heat,

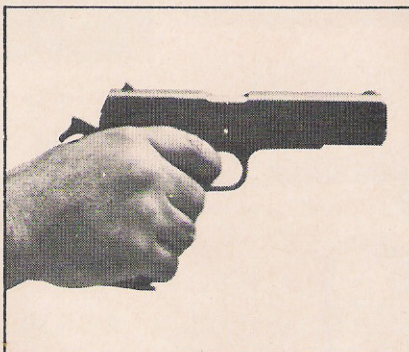
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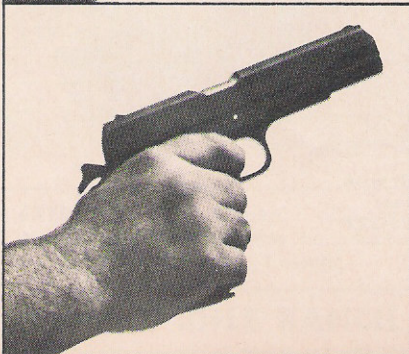
Early-model High Standard .22 target pistol



Colt .38 Midrange target auto, fires revolver ammo so as to qualify for .38 centerfire target matches.

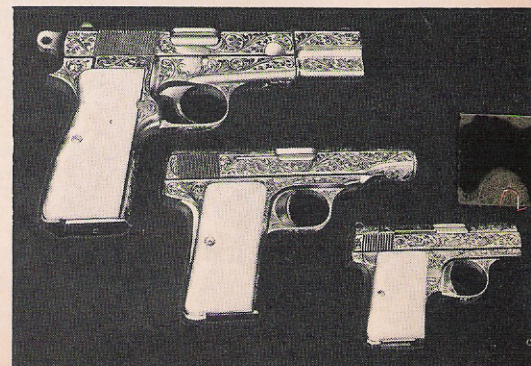


Firing sequence of .45 Auto: Rest; explosion, shell has been ejected, barrel link disengages rear of barrel from slide, hammer is re-cocked as slide continues back. On last 2 frames: slide returns to feed next rd.; pistol goes to battery with barrel re-engaged.



Model 1906 of the Famous Luger

Engraved Brownings: (top) 9mm Hi-Power, (mid.) .380 Standard, (bot.) .25 Std.



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PISTOL HERE TO STAY!

continued from page 37

I had many jams, as the dust seeped into everything including my chaps pocket and the Colt. Carried in Jeep or car pockets on dusty roads the same thing occurred. Auto pistol safeties are usually slow to disengage and with the exception of the Luger and Walther, most auto pistols point too low.

In .22 LR caliber we have many very fine target auto pistols, the Browning, Colt, High Standard, Ruger and others. These are fine understudies for the big gun and very much easier for anyone to shoot accurately. They are wonderfully accurate little guns and ideal for the purpose intended.

The .22s like all auto pistols, are again totally dependent on perfect ammunition. A dud ties them up and both hands are necessary to clear the jam. Clips are slow to load with ammo but fast to load into the gun. They are very easy to learn to shoot accurately while the big .45 Automatic is the hardest of all handguns to master.

These rimfire autos are easy to shoot accurately. I once saw a Colt Woodsman fitted with a long tube over the barrel and a target front sight out near the muzzle of the tube. This pistol was fitted with a shoulder stock. It also had a good peep sight in place of the regular rear sight. That gun, from a rest, would stay in 1 inch at 60 yards all day.

Colt for a time brought out conversion units and also a .22 LR-caliber pistol on the big .45 frame. They were best for learning to handle the .45 correctly.

When it comes to knock-down power, even the .45 Auto is a pipsqueak alongside the .44 Magnum or heavily loaded .44 Special, .45 Colt or the .41 Magnum. But, for those who like and prefer the auto pistol then the good, accurized .45 Colt Autos are still tops.

In these three short articles I have endeavored to show the good and bad points of all three types of handguns and let every man take his choice as to which he prefers. This was a free country and after 70 years of existence in it, I still like to see every man pick the arm of his choice for whatever purpose, so long as it is of adequate caliber for the purpose intended. Those who thoroughly condemn any one of the three types of handguns are usually men of small experience and narrow of mind in my estimation.

When the chips are down, my own preference in handguns would be a Smith & Wesson .41 or .44 Magnum or a Ruger single action in the same calibers and my next choice is a Colt Target single action in .44 Special caliber with my heavy loads. However, as the Frenchman said, many people "Will have to do with what they have to do with."