

STICKUP TEAM

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By James Collins

Do not ever let anyone tell you that thieves are not intelligent. The one thing they do have in common is that they are lazy. However, they can be very innovative when it comes to looking out for their safety and learning methods to prevent arrest and imprisonment. In the Bronx, I witnessed this on several occasions with several low class stickup teams. They spent most of their time planning and executing armed robberies on liquor stores throughout the New York metropolitan area. At that time, which was immediately after the Korean War, the draft was still in effect and many of the residents of New York City joined the National Guard to avoid the draft.

Every week all the members of the various National Guard units would have meetings at their respective armories and they would go through various drills and training exercises. One weekend every other month, they would go to Camp Smith in Peekskill NY and in the summer, they would go to Camp Drum up on the Canadian border for couple of weeks of exercises. They all grew up together, knew each other well and depended on each other. Many of them came from very large families and not all of the family members were straightforward and honest. The black sheep are the lazy people who became smalltime thieves, pickpockets, second-story men, and armed robbers. On the other side of the ledger members of the family became police, firefighters, teachers, engineers, bus drivers and subway motormen. Every weekend all would meet at the local bars and discuss all kinds of information, ideas and opportunities. The thieves listened to all the discussions by the police to learn their rules of how they solved their cases. From this, the rules of ballistics and the evidence extracted from captured weapons that send people to prison got their attention. The thieves went off in little groups discussed the processes and procedures of law-enforcement agencies and developed a process to reduce their chance of arrest for a shooting.

At that time, the Colt 45 automatic was the pistol of choice for the armed services of the United States. Almost every Sergeant or mortar man carried such a weapon on duty at the armory each week. There were always many of these weapons floating around New York City. This pistol has an amazing operating mechanism, which is manually stripped in a matter of seconds. The barrel is a separate entity and can be removed and replaced in under a minute. The thieves decided that they could use this to their advantage. Immediately they all changed their weapon of choice to the Colt 45. Now if they decided to hold up a liquor store in New Jersey and somebody became reluctant to respond, they fired a shot into the ceiling. The noise, the falling plaster, the smell and the flash intimidated anyone in the area. Usually the victims would all hit the floor; the stickup men would grab the cash, get into their running stolen car and leave, heading back to the Bronx.

Once back in the Bronx they would abandon the stolen car, go back to their apartment strip the 45 caliber automatic and remove the barrel. Then the barrel was inserted into a bucket of bleach and within an hour was covered with rust inside and out. The rusty barrel transferred to another family member, preferably a sergeant, who had access to a 45-caliber automatic at the armory. He in turn would go down to the supply office and submit the rusted 45-caliber barrel, which he would claim, was

damaged on the last trip to camp Drum or Camp Smith. After filling out the necessary paper work, he would receive a brand-new barrel in exchange. Thus, the US government was disposing of the evidence from the stickup and supplying the thieves with brand-new gun barrels. About 1992 the Army changed from the Colt automatic to the Beretta 9 mm pistol .If the thieves followed their original plan they would also have changed weapons and to the best of my knowledge the process could still be going on.

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