

Chapter 14

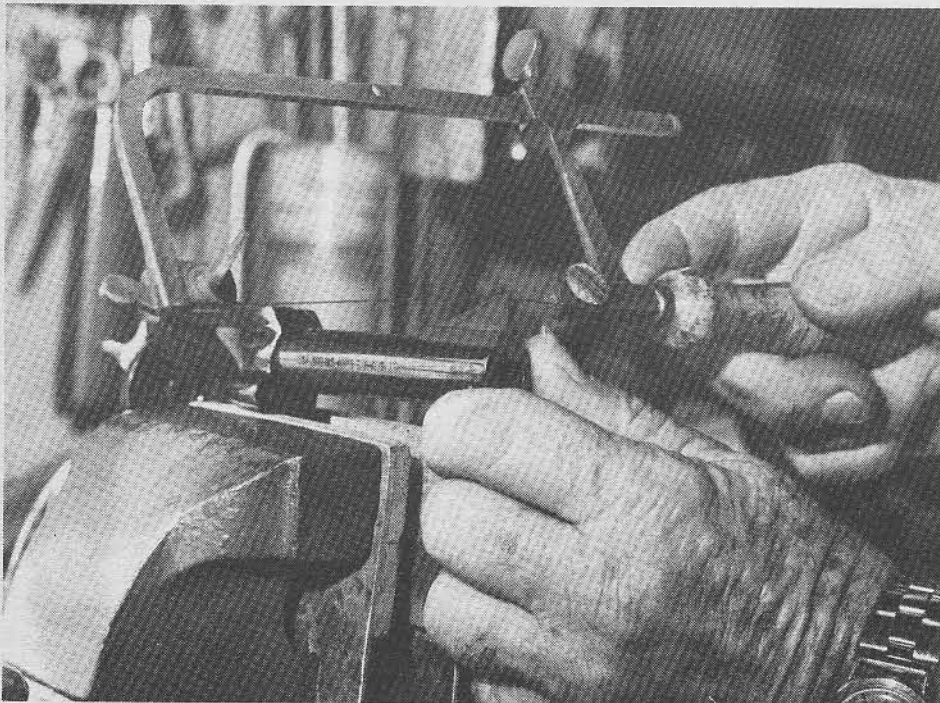
A WELCOME SIGHT

Installation Of A Bright Insert On Your Ramp Front Sight Can Improve Your Shooting!

ALMOST ANYTHING IS possible in the way of converting, altering or general customization of nearly any reasonably modern firearm to turn it into a more worthy sporting or target gun. Some guns aren't worth the trouble or expense due to their age, the materials used in their manufacture or obsolescence of the action itself.

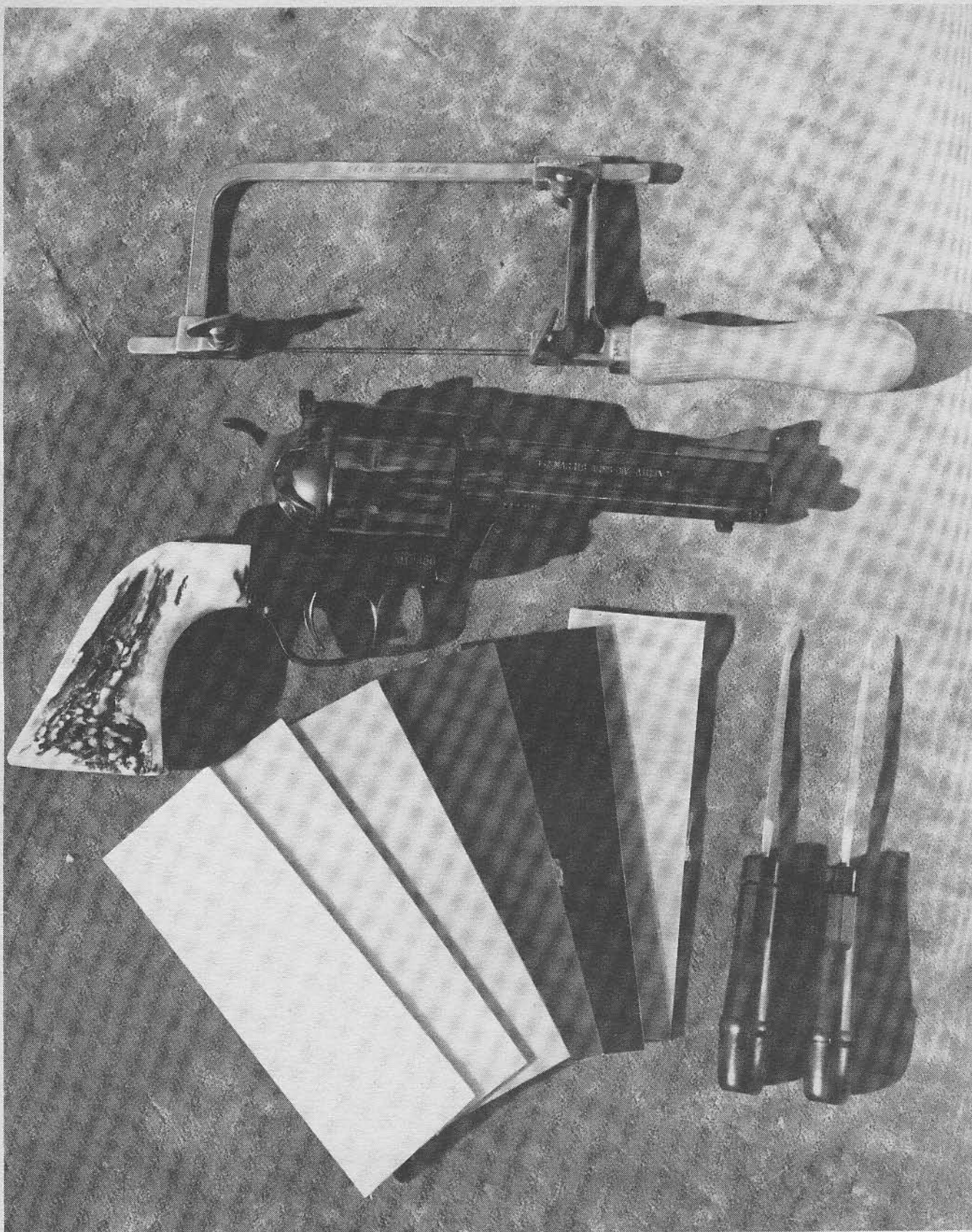
There also are modern, factory-built sporting arms of quality that can be improved to some extent to meet the needs of each individual.

One of the least-attempted improvements to a firearm is the alteration and improvement of sights. The exacting art of correct sight installation on a particular rifle or handgun can be perplexing, but there are several ways in which



Initial cuts in the front sight are made with jeweler's saw or fine-toothed hacksaw. Each cut is made at a 45-degree angle. Keep the top cut as close to the top of the sight blade as it is possible for you to do. (Right) Final chore in project is final finish of the insert. This is done with a 400-grit paper. A high polish may be attained with Simichrome paste, but guard against any glare.





Tools needed for installing the sight insert are minimal. A jeweler's saw, a three-cornered Swiss needle file and a sight base file are required, with parallel action pliers needed to press insert into the newly cut slot.

sights can be improved for target shooting and hunting purposes at little expense.

This narrative won't go into the intricacies of inlaying elephant ivory to outline the aperture of a rear sight nor dwell on such complications as building a folding ivory-beaded night sight of the type used in India for night tiger hunting. Instead we will investigate a fairly simple method of improving an already superlative front sight blade.

The front sight and its prominence when properly aligned in the aperture of the rear sight can make all the difference in whether the hunter goes home with meat or the target shooter places all his shots in small groups in the ten-ring.

Those who have hunted game animals in the early morn-

ing or at dusk, when shadows are long on the hillsides and in the timber, know that without the proper sights hunting is almost impossible. Iron sights, either black or gun metal blue in color, blend so perfectly with hillside and timber shadows that they often become all but invisible against the shaded background. This all too often results in impossible sight pictures and lost game. The same can be true whether hunting with a rifle or handgun.

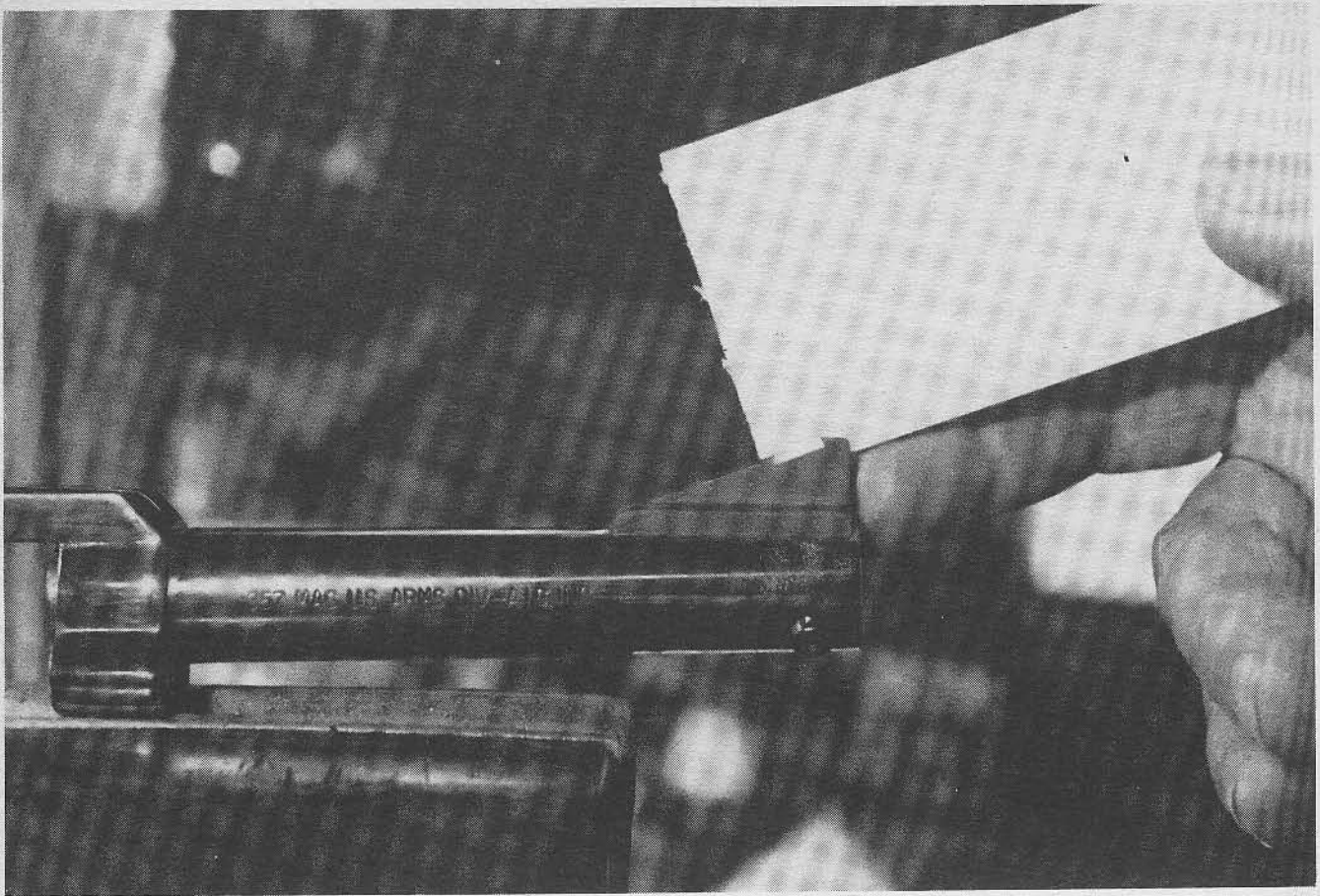
The majority of handguns manufactured today are equipped with sights designed for use under bright, daylight conditions. Under shadows or at night, they can become all but useless. Over the past several years, I have installed any number of sights that could be seen, even at night, on handguns used on night duty by police officers.



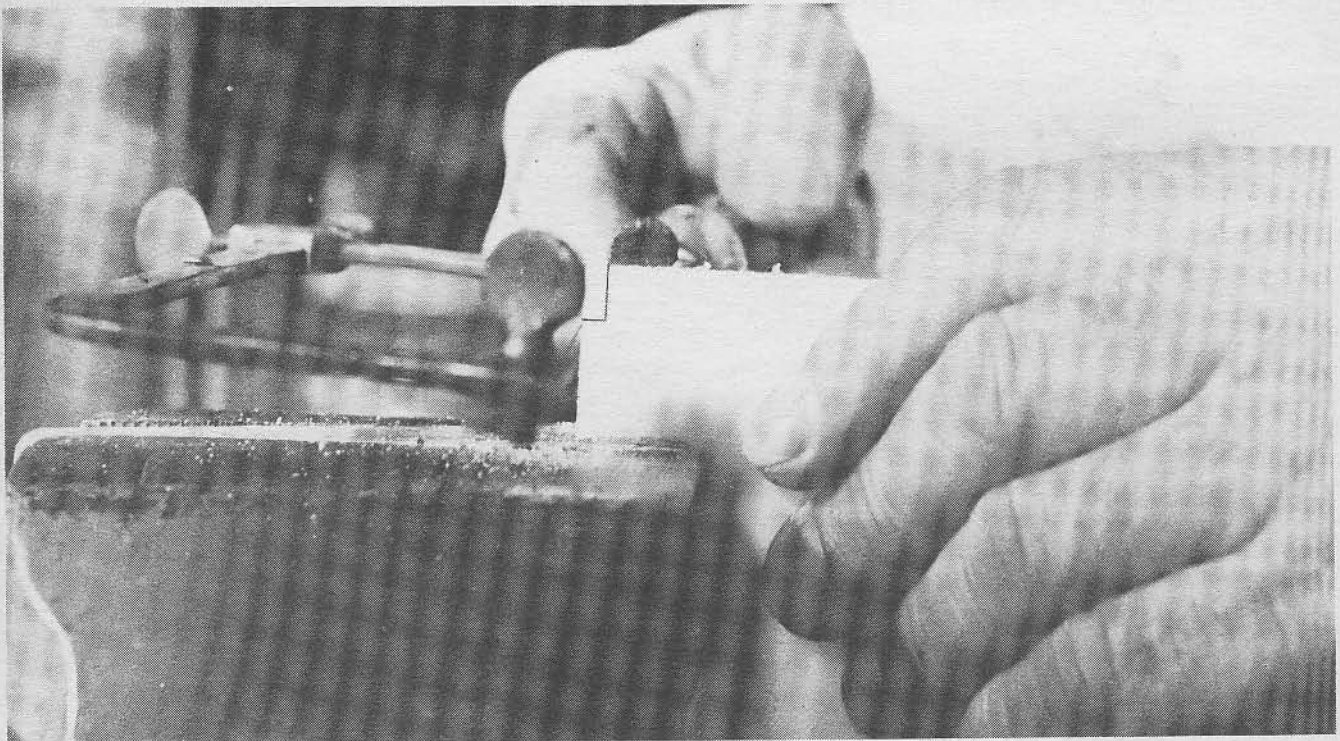
With three-cornered Swiss needle file, slot to accept the insert is filed to depth of about 1/16 inch, then it is under-cut at each end. Make certain the surfaces are filed straight, flat.

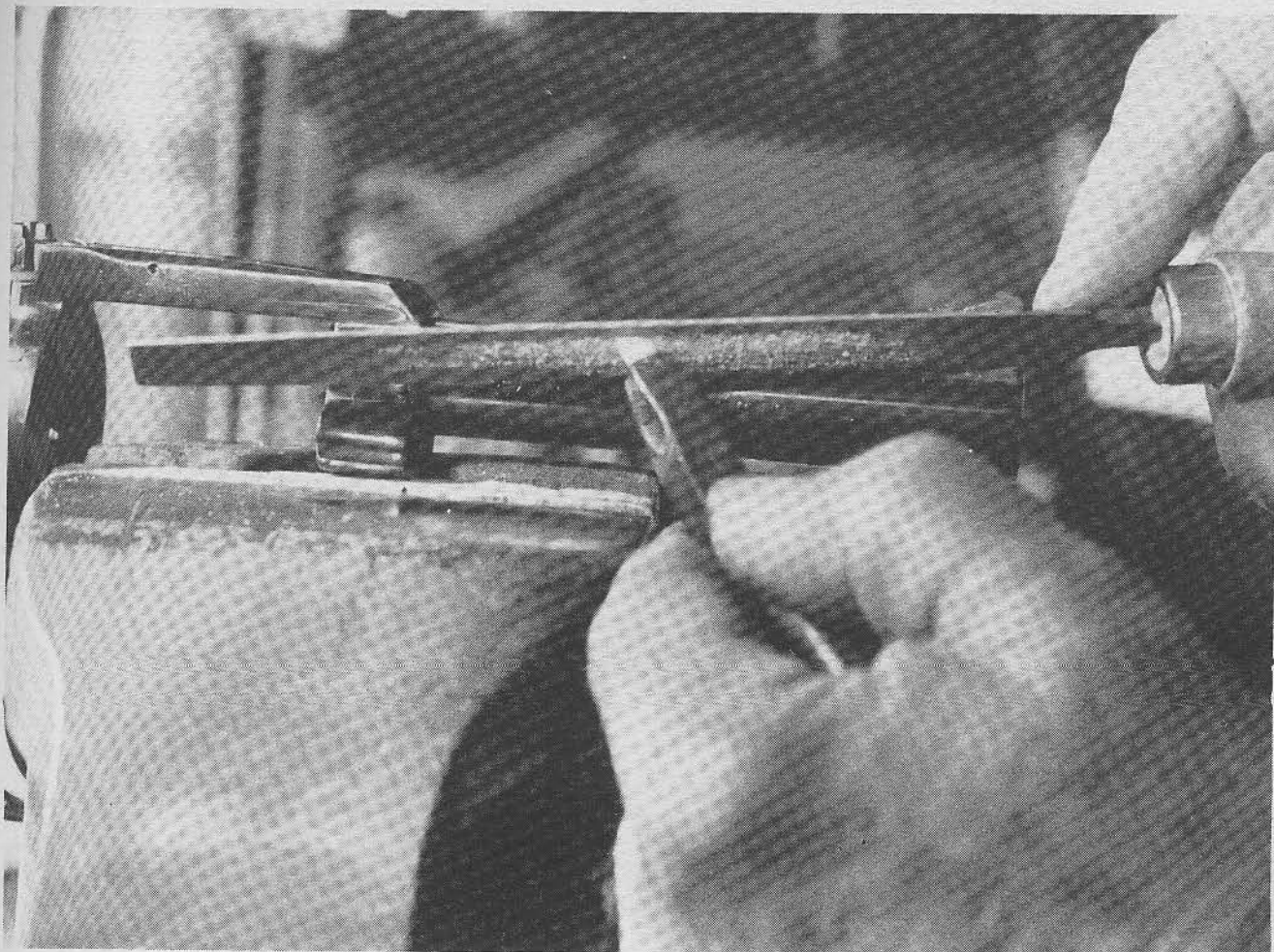


With the use of a sight base file, the area to accept the insert is finished with care to ensure an exacting fit.



*A small section of the insert material is measured, adding a trifle of the length for final fitting in the new slot.
(Below) The insert then is cut from the sheet of material, using great care, with the sharp-toothed jeweler's saw.*





Using a file with fine teeth, file the base of the insert until it is perfectly flat and straight. The ends of the insert are then filed at an angle to match the slot in the sight blade. It is necessary to leave the ends slightly longer in length than the cut in the slot in order to provide a tight slide fit of the insert into the slot.

With a little horse sense and careful workmanship, a handgun can be improved in the sight department. But should shoddy craftsmanship be employed in this otherwise simple operation, it is possible that the barrel of the gun will have to be replaced.

Colors such as blue and green never have been used as beads on gun sights. These colors, like black and gun metal blue, are lost, when one is aiming at a hillside covered with green brush or timber. The most satisfactory colors for front sight beads are white (mostly used on shotgun beads), brass, gold, bright red or orange.

In recent years, a profusion of plastics have appeared on the market having a phosphorescent quality. While plastics of this type may seem difficult to obtain in some areas,

a little basic research shows that this material is available in most drug stores in the form of toothbrush handles. The most appropriate color for gun sight purposes is bright red. One such toothbrush handle is enough material for literally hundreds of the type of front sight bead being explained.

While a complete front sight insert kit is available from Brownell's, we will deal with the possibilities of the home craftsman doing the job with materials readily available. Should he want to do several such insert jobs, then the Brownell's kit might be the answer.

Let's assume that the handgun on which the sight bead is to be installed has a ramp-type front sight holding a sloping blade. First, clamp the handgun securely in cork-lined vise-jaws, preferably by the barrel. Careful measurements

then are made to determine the exact length of the bead inlay. One-quarter inch in length is about right for most handguns, with less, if the slope of the blade is more abrupt.

In this instance, the Mossberg Abilene single-action revolver was chosen as the handgun on which the colored insert would be installed for better sighting.

For those who may not be familiar with this particular model, it is being manufactured in .357 magnum, .44 magnum and .45 Colt calibers. It has a six-round cylinder and is available in barrel lengths of 4½, 6, 7½ and 10 inches. Features include smooth walnut grips in the traditional style, a wide hammer spur and it is available in blue or what's called a Magnaloy finish.

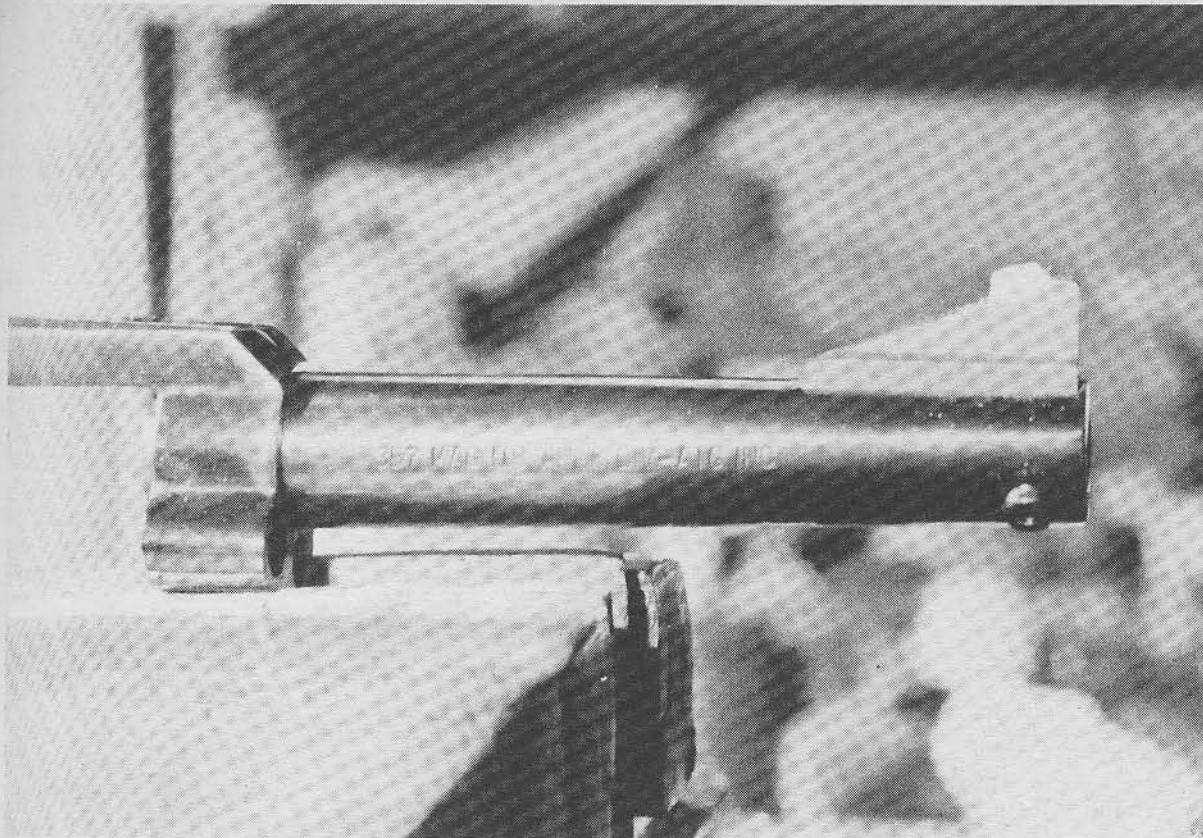
But the parts of interest to us are the sights. The rear sight is click adjustable for windage and elevation. And the front sight on which we will be working is a serrated ramp style.

A small, three-cornered Swiss needle file is used to file a notch one-sixteenth inch deep by one-quarter inch in length. This notch is filed perfectly square with the sides of the sight blade, then is undercut at each end. The uppermost section of the dovetail should be as near the top of the sight blade as possible to retain proper sight alignment of both sights.

To lower the front sight by filing away excess metal above the bead inlay will result in the handgun shooting high, necessitating adjustment of the rear sight to a lower

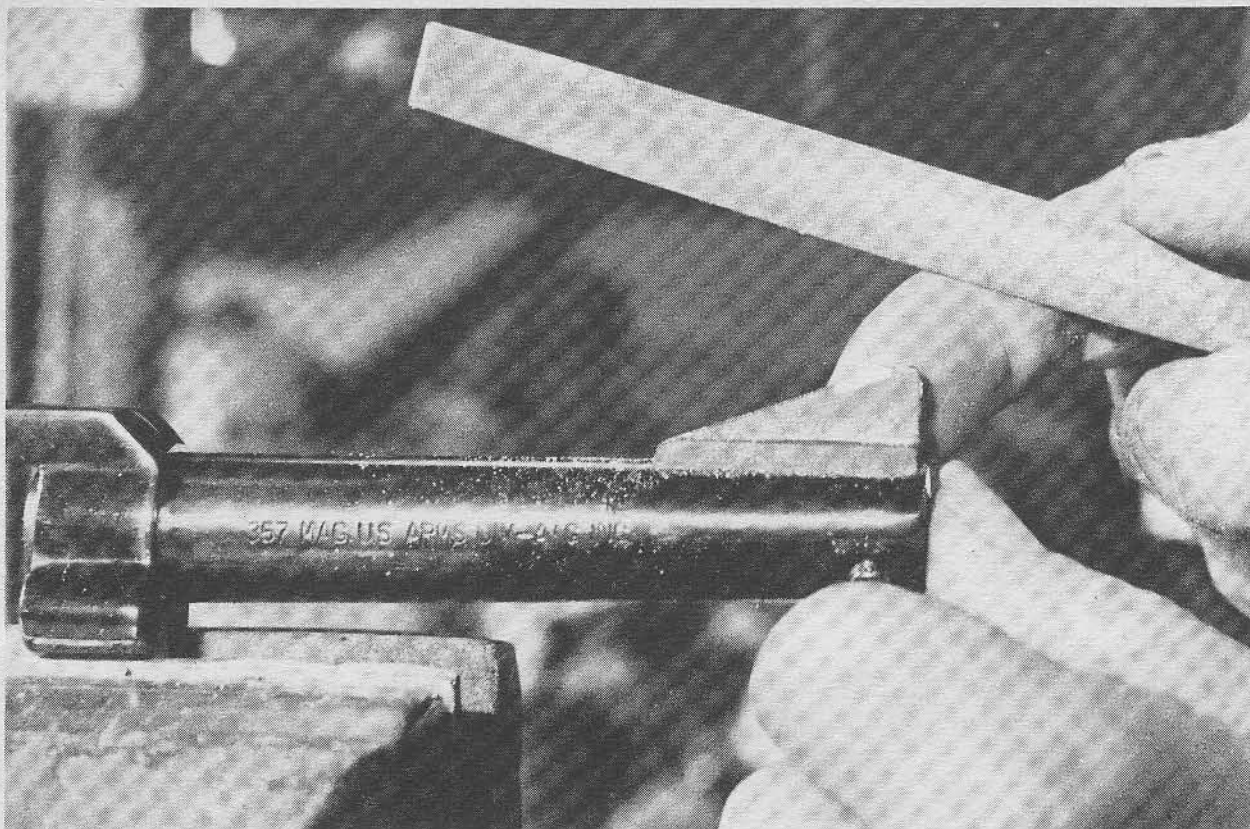
Using the parallel action pliers, carefully squeeze the slightly over-size insert into the sight blade's slot. Make certain it is pushed all the way in and is flush with each side of the blade for its proper seating.



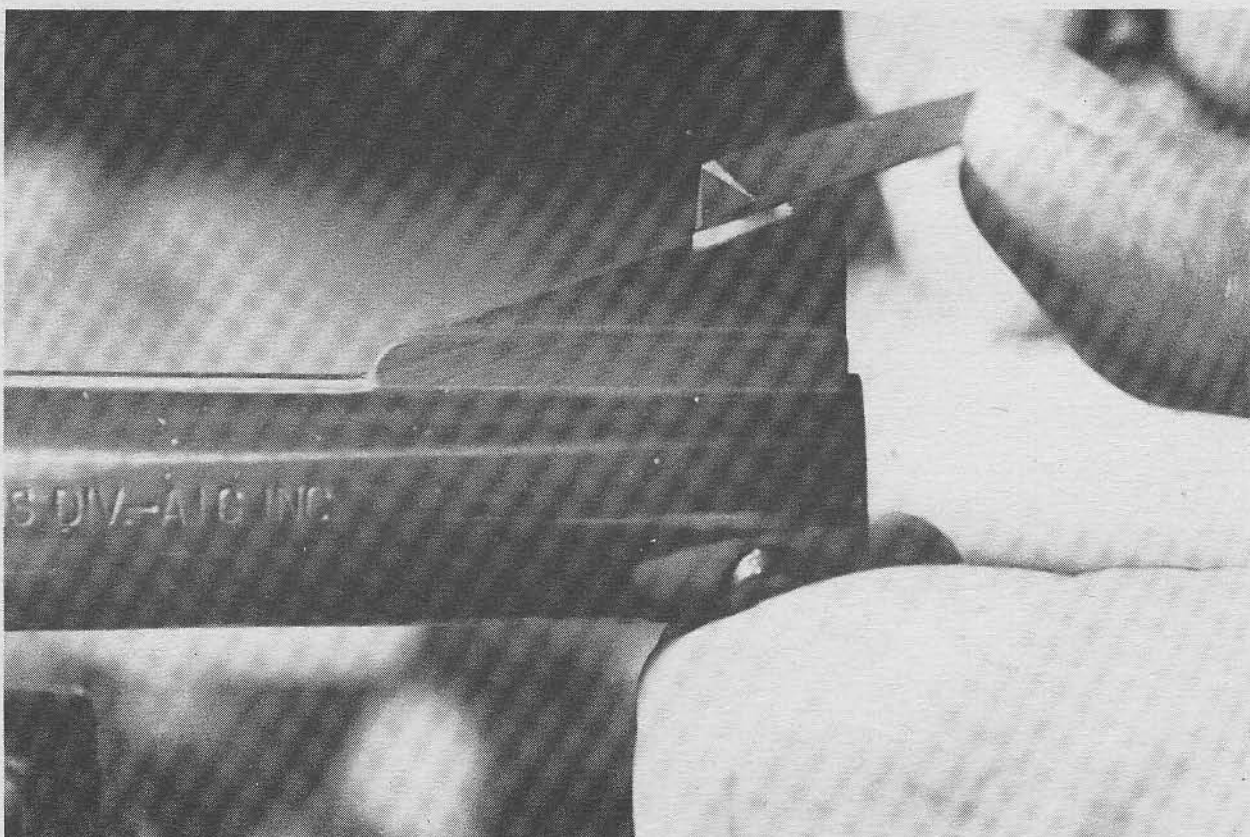


At this point, the insert should be tightly in place in the slot, but extending above the radius of the sight plane. (Below) The excess insert material is filed to the surface of the metal, not filing into the blade itself.





Progress should be checked constantly with the fingers to ensure that the sides of the insert are on a perfect plane with that of the sight blade. Do not round it over. (Below) Smooth the top surface of the insert with a fine-tooth file — in this case, a sight base file — then be sure to finish lightly with 400-grit finishing paper.



elevation. The basic principle in filing out the slot to accept the plastic inlay is to keep the cut as near the top of the sight blade as possible without weakening the undercut that holds the plastic bead.

With the dovetail slot cut into the front sight blade to perfection, the next step is to cut a small section from the red toothbrush handle — or plastic sheet, if you can find one. This is filed and shaped exactly to the contour of the dovetail cut in the front sight blade. The plastic insert should be a tight slide fit into the dovetail.

Make certain that the plastic insert is fitted so that no minute gaps or open spaces are apparent to the eye around the perimeter of the plastic. Should the insert be a poor fit, make another. If you're using the toothbrush handle, you should have plenty of material for experimentation.

Once the insert is pressed into the dovetail in the sight blade, any plastic that overhangs the sides of the blade proper may be filed flush with the metal, using a flat Swiss

needle file and taking care not to scratch the steel of the sight blade. The final touch is to dress the entire surface of the plastic insert lightly with 400-grit wet-or-dry paper, then buff lightly on a loose muslin wheel dressed with white buffing compound.

Properly done, such a plastic bead should enhance overall appearance, in addition to improving the sighting capabilities. When the handgun is pointed into heavy shadows, the red or fluorescent orange front sight literally sticks out, providing a perfect sight picture. For night work, one may replace the insert with a white bead of plastic or ivory.

Plastics of the phosphoresce nature have the capabilities of gathering light where little light is forthcoming. It is the type of material from which such fishing lures as the Glow Worm and others are made.

This project is certain to be appreciated the first time the handgun is taken afield, whether in bright sunlight or when shadows are long.

When completed, the front sight insert should look like the one shown. Any minor wear to the blued surface of the metal surrounding the insert may be touched up with cold gun blue solution to hide any signs of this type damage.

