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## ALL HAIL THE SPARTAN

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FOR EVERYONE

AN invitation to the opening of 14<sup>th</sup> Defense and Sporting Arms Show at the SM Mega Mall got me taking the first flight out of Cebu, Thursday (Nov. 23, 2006), for what was to be a two-day peek at what would be the hottest stuff in the competition and tactical shooting circuits next year.



People came in throngs to see the latest firearm and non-firearm products from Association of Firearm and Ammunition Dealers of the Philippines (Afad)-member shops like Twin Pines Inc., Trust Trade, Nashe Enterprises, Magnificent World Guns and Sports, P.B. Dionisio, True Weight and Strong Hand Inc., all being offered at special rates.

Chief Supt. Augusto Angcanan, the newly installed director of the PNP Civil Security Group, delivered the keynote speech in the ceremony that was also attended by shooter Julie Rose Defensor, wife of executive secretary Mike Defensor, who saw action at last year's World Shoot and is now one of the latest endorsers of the Pro-Gun movement.

But the Arms Corporation of the Philippines (Armcor), considered to be the biggest firearms and ammunition manufacturer in Southeast Asia, was the showstopper, as it held the international unveiling of its latest masterpiece – the STI Spartan – to coincide with the gun show's opening.

The gun is a single-column defense and service-ready forty-five worthy of the Battle of Thermopylae. It was designed by engineers at STI International, a prestigious Texas-based gun company whose products are favored by competitive shooters worldwide, and built at the Armcor plant in Marikina City.

**Joint venture.** Dave and Pauletta Skinner, the owners of STI International, flew in from Georgetown to attend the unveiling and personally entertained questions about the new gun that will hit the international market come December.



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Only 600 units are available worldwide and only 20 are for local sales. Eight Spartans were sold Thursday alone but the production of 500 more are underway.

Over Seattle's Best coffee with Gina Angangco, Armscor's Chief Executive Officer, David said firearms built in accordance to the traditional 1911 platform are experiencing a renaissance. As proof, he said in his relaxed Texan drawl, the Spartan became a hot item almost immediately after word of the design was leaked to the international shooting community a few months earlier. Orders, he said, were almost immediately made over the STI International website that, in turn, got bombarded with regular requests for build updates.

Armscor, meanwhile, became a logical choice when the decision of where to outsource the production was made.

The Spartan is an almost identical version of the Trojan, a high-end pistol made at the STI plant in Georgetown. Both guns are fitted with STI parts though the Spartan has Armscor frames, slides and barrels.

Outsourcing the production allows STI to drive down costs and enables it to offer the Spartan at almost half the cost of the Trojan, which sells for P78,000 excluding license, while giving clients the same performance as far as reliability and accuracy were concerned.

"The original concept was for us to make the parts and Armscor to make the guns and then sell it in the United States. To my mind, the intent was just to satisfy that market. But it just made more sense to also market it here in the Philippines," Skinner said.

"There was just no way to hold this one down," he added.

"Our motto in Armscor is bringing the best of the Philippines to the rest of the world. With STI right now, we can reverse that and say Armscor is bringing the best of the world into the Philippines," Angangco, for her part, said.

**Classic yet chic.** In the image of the Browning classic, the STI Spartan is marketed as a traditional 1911 pistol with "high-end standards at an affordable price."

I spent the better part of one day just looking at a specimen at the Armscor booth, Thursday, captivated by its picture-perfect parkerized finish and speechless with the way the sighting plane curved down into the slab sides of its tough 41-40 steel slide.

The frame is government-length, standard-width and enhanced with an STI single-sided thumb safety, a high-rise beavertail grip safety and a checkered mainspring housing for a secure grip. The panels, in turn, were made of Filipino wood patiently handcrafted by expert grip makers.

The slide, meanwhile, features precision etched front and rear cocking serrations. The sights are composed of a fiber-optic insert front blade and an adjustable LPA low-profile rear. The barrel is five inches long and fitted with

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a match grade bushing.

The gun comes standard with an STI Commander-style hammer, the patented STI trigger system, and STI sear and disconnect assembly.

Mesmerized but feigning skepticism, Armscor Senior Industrial Engineer Delfin Cresido patiently toured me around the Armscor plant in Marikina City for half a day to observe the production process.

All Spartan internal parts are shipped to Armscor from the STI plant in Texas and a special division, personally headed by Armscor's master gunsmith, Arnel Bernardo, does the fitting. Bernardo is the father of Armscor's top-of-the-line Medallion series.

The barrels are milled using CNC (Computer Numerical Control) machines from billets imported abroad.

The frames and slides, said Armscor's Marcelo Cruz Jr., are obtained from the same billets through a process called investment casting, the same method used by trusted firearm brands like Para-Ordnance and Ruger. It is further enhanced through CNC equipment.

Armscor, through the subsidiary firm Precision Foundry of the Philippines, is the only private company capable of investment casting in the entire country. (knrama@gmail.com)

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