

# An Unusual Item for Processing

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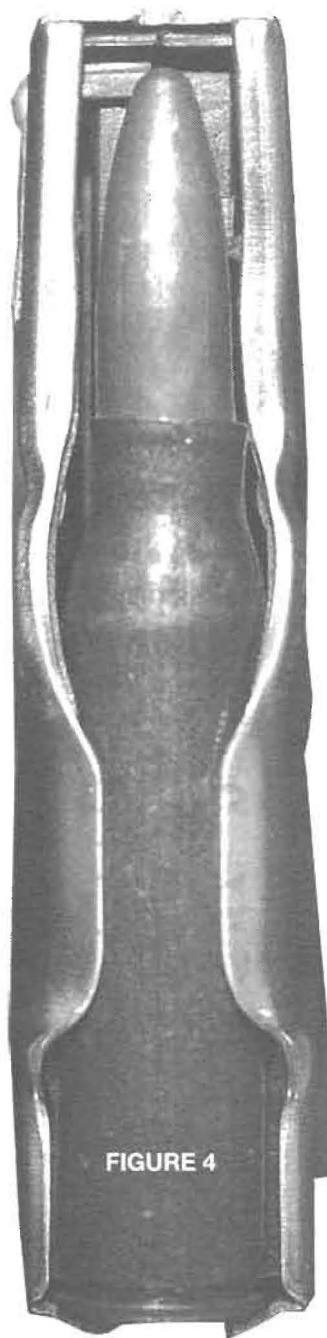


FIGURE 4

Many of us have processed thousands items of evidence during our careers and have come across some very unusual and amusing things. Recently, the Forensic Document Laboratory (FDL) at U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) received a rifle, two pistols, and numerous magazines and ammunition for fingerprint processing and examination.

I opened the sealed evidence packaging in order to inventory and visually examine the evidence prior to any chemical processing. During the inventory, I noticed one peculiar looking magazine (Figure 1). It was very unusual in size and appearance. The magazine was manufactured in China and appeared to be able to hold no more than four 308 caliber cartridges when fully loaded. It had one cartridge that appeared to be "live" sitting on the top and another below that appeared to be missing the primer. One of the odd things about this item was that when looking down from the top, the "live" cartridge looked to be the only one in the magazine (Figures 2 and 3). I asked a few co-workers about it and no one had heard of or seen anything like it before.

I continued to inventory the items and had begun removing cartridges from the magazines. After removing sixty cartridges from the other magazines, I had an issue with the small magazine. Sparks and a hissing noise came from the lower portion of the magazine as I attempted to slide the "live" cartridge out of its place. I immediately ceased inventory and segregated this item from the others since I was unsure of exactly what was occurring.

I contacted the ICE Agent who submitted the evidence for processing and was told that there was nothing unusual about the search warrant and seizure. Since the evidence came from the southern border of the United States, I conducted further inquiries about this unusual item. None of the people that I spoke to had any knowledge of ammunition magazines being booby trapped in the United States. However, there have been some cases of it from overseas, mostly in war zones. They also indicated that they had no knowledge of any 308 caliber magazine of that size.

I contacted the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) and asked if they could take a look at the item before further processing was conducted. A BATF Agent responded and proceeded to examine the item. The item was inspected and photographed, both digitally and by x-ray, for approximately twenty-five minutes (Figure 4). It turned out that the item was actually a novelty cigarette lighter. At this point I felt a little dumb, but the BATF Agent was excited about finding this, stating that it was the first novelty item of this kind that he has seen. There have been other kinds of novelty lighters involving weapons, but this was very unusual. ★

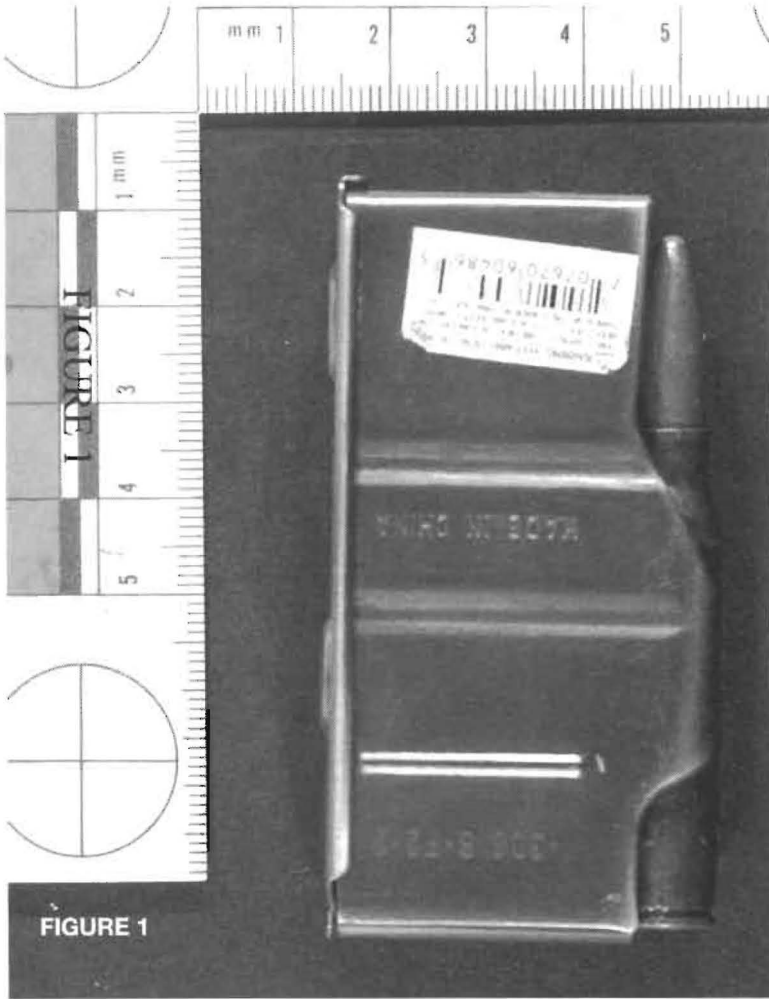


FIGURE 2

