

Ready for Battle: The Personal Equipment of a World War II Soldier

Adapted from “Survey of U.S. Army Uniforms, Weapons and Accoutrements”, courtesy of the US Army Center of Military History: http://www.history.army.mil/html/museums/uniforms/survey_uwa.pdf

The United States Army in World War II had a distinct advantage over the Axis when it came to equipment. Both in terms of quality and quantity the power of American industry kept the GI’s well supplied.

For a Soldier, equipment is a matter of survival. Even something as simple as a button can make the difference between victory and defeat if it fails to function properly at the wrong time. For this reason Soldiers have a strong tendency to become attached to equipment they like, and to modify or discard equipment they find unreliable or useless. Among the Infantry, who have to carry their equipment wherever they go, this tendency is even stronger.

Individual Load Carrying Equipment

Soldiers must carry everything they need for combat operations with them at all times. Individual load carrying equipment is designed to allow the Soldier to carry a basic load of ammunition, food, water, and first-aid gear. The exact make-up of this load varies from conflict to conflict. In more modern times the load has grown to include additional equipment such as gas masks, maps, compasses, and radios. Because of the cost of replacing equipment for Soldiers is high, equipment is usually replaced in phases, with front-line troops receiving the new equipment first. Support units typically receive equipment later as older equipment wears out or becomes obsolete. Because of this, Soldiers in World War II went to war using several different versions of the basic load bearing gear.



Above: The World War II version of the M1910 Infantry Equipment used with the M1 Rifle. Seen here are the M1923 Cartridge Belt, M1928 Haversack, M1943 Entrenching Tool, M1942 First Aid Pouch for the Carlisle Dressing, and the M1 Bayonet in an M7 Scabbard. Included also is the M6 Carrier for the M3-10A1-6 Light Weight Service Gas Mask; two six-pocket bandoleers to hold ammunition for either the M1 or M1903 rifle.



Equipment set in Olive Drab shade 7, including the M1945 Combat and Cargo Packs. Introduced near the end of World War II, this is the equipment used by the American Soldier during the Korean War.

Individual Weapons



M1903 Rifle with the M1905 Bayonet



M1903A3 Rifle

Initially issued starting in 1905, the **M1903 Rifle** remained in Army service throughout World War II with only minor changes. Manufactured by the Remington Arms Company and the Smith-Corona Typewriter Company, the new rifle was designated the M1903A3.

The **M1903** and the **M1903A3** rifle were used in both training and combat during World War II and saw extensive use in North Africa, Europe and the Pacific. Ranger units in particular preferred the bolt action weapon for commando-type missions.



A World War II M1 Rifle with M1 Bayonet

The **United States Rifle, Caliber .30, M1** (also known as the Garand Rifle in honor of its designer John Garand), was the first semi-automatic rifle in the world to be generally issued to infantry. The M1 was a gas-operated, semi-automatic rifle with an eight-round clip that gave US Soldiers a significant advantage over enemy infantrymen in battle. US Soldiers could fire faster and did not have to take their hand off the trigger to cycle the bolt, allowing them to re-aim faster as well. The weapon was the principle infantry weapon used in both World War II and Korea.

In 1938, the Chief of Infantry requested that the Ordnance Department develop a lightweight carbine. After competitive testing the Army selected a design for a new carbine that had been

submitted by the Winchester Repeating Arms that was standardized as the **M1 Carbine** on October 22, 1941.

The new carbine was designed primarily to offer non-combat and line-of-communications troops a better defensive weapon than a pistol or submachine gun—one with greater accuracy and range, but without the recoil, cost, or weight of a full-power infantry rifle. The carbine was more convenient to carry for officers, non-commissioned officers, or specialists carrying radios or other gear. Tank crews, drivers, artillery crews, mortar crews, and other personnel were issued the M1 Carbine. Airborne troops received a version with a folding stock.



World War II versions of the M1 carbine (top), and the M1A1 Paratrooper Carbine (bottom)

During World War II about 1.9 million **M1911A1** (aka the Colt .45) .45 caliber pistols were procured by the U.S. Government for all the armed forces. Contractors included Remington Rand Typewriter Company (900,000 produced), Colt (400,000), Ithaca Gun Company (400,000), Union Switch & Signal (50,000), the Singer Sewing Machine Company, (500), Springfield Armory and Rock Island Arsenal.



The Caliber .45, Colt, Model 1911
Automatic Pistol

Due to the high demand for pistols at the beginning of World War II the Army reissued **M1917 Colt** and Smith and Wesson Revolvers to rear echelon troops including prison guards and military police. Revolvers were replaced by the M1911 automatic pistol as they became available.



The Caliber .45, Model 1917 Revolver



The Caliber .38 Smith & Wesson
Victory Model

The **Smith & Wesson Model 10** revolver was produced for the government from 1940 to 1945 with a "V" prefix in front of the serial number, primarily for use by aircraft crews.

The Thompson Submachine Gun was designed by General John T. Thompson for trench warfare in World War I. Developed too late for use in that war, the weapon was officially named the "Thompson Submachine Gun" in 1919 and was the first "submachine gun."

In 1938, the Army adopted the Thompson as the M1928A1. The M1928A1 used a 20 or a 30-round box magazine and a 50 or a 100-round drum magazine. It had cooling fins on the barrel and its cocking handle was on the top of the receiver. Beginning in 1942, a simplified version of the weapon was produced and designated as the M1 and later M1A1 submachine gun. This version had a plain barrel without cooling fins, a simplified rear sight, a 20 or a 30-round box magazine and the cocking handle on the side of the receiver. During the war, the Thompson was a special-purpose weapon carried by officers and non-commissioned officers, armor crews, scouts, paratroopers, commandos and rangers, particularly for patrols, ambushes, and fighting in built up areas. In the Pacific Theater, Army jungle patrols were originally equipped with Thompsons in the early phases of the New Guinea and Guadalcanal. But their weight, lack of penetration power, the Thompson proved to be unpopular. By early 1944 the M3 submachine gun began replacing the Thompson and the Thompson became obsolete.



The caliber .45 ACP, M1928A1
Thompson Submachine Gun



The caliber .45 ACP, M1 Thompson
Submachine Gun

The **M3 submachine gun** (known as the “Grease Gun”) entered Army service on December 12, 1942. Produced by the Guide Lamp Division of General Motors Corporation, the weapon’s design focused on simplified production employing metal stamping, pressing and welding. The M3 was an automatic only, blowback operated weapon that fired from an open bolt fed from a 30-round detachable box magazine. The weapon had a crank-type cocking mechanism on the right side and a telescoping metal wire stock with threads at both ends used to attach a bore brush so that it could be used as a cleaning rod. Later in the war the Army introduced an updated version designated as the M3A1. This version carried simplicity to a new level. The new design included a hole cut into the bolt that allowed it to be cocked with the user’s finger.



The caliber .45 ACP M3A1
Submachine Gun

The **Browning Automatic Rifle** (commonly known as the BAR), was designed in 1917 by John M. Browning, as a replacement for French-made light automatic rifles. The BAR was a .30 caliber, gas-operated, select-fire, air-cooled, automatic rifle that fired from an open bolt fed from a 20-round detachable box magazine.



M1818A2 Browning Automatic Rifle

The BAR saw little action in WWI, its first action being in September of 1918. In 1922, the M1922 BAR was introduced. This version was equipped with a flanged or finned barrel and side-mounted sling swivel and was intended for use by the cavalry. In June 1937, a small number of M1918s were modified to include a spiked bipod attached to the gas cylinder and a hinged butt plate. These weapons were designated as the M1918A1 Automatic Rifle. In 1940, the M1918A2 was introduced. This model was fully automatic fire only—the rate of fire being adjustable with a choice between "fast-auto" (500–650 rounds per minute) and "slow-auto" (300–450 rounds per minute). The bipod was now attached to the barrel and a flash hider was added, a rear monopod was hinged to the butt, and the weapon's role was changed to that of a squad automatic weapon. In 1942, a fiberglass butt stock replaced the wood version, and late in the war, a barrel-mounted carrying handle was added. The BAR continued in use until the late 1950s.

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