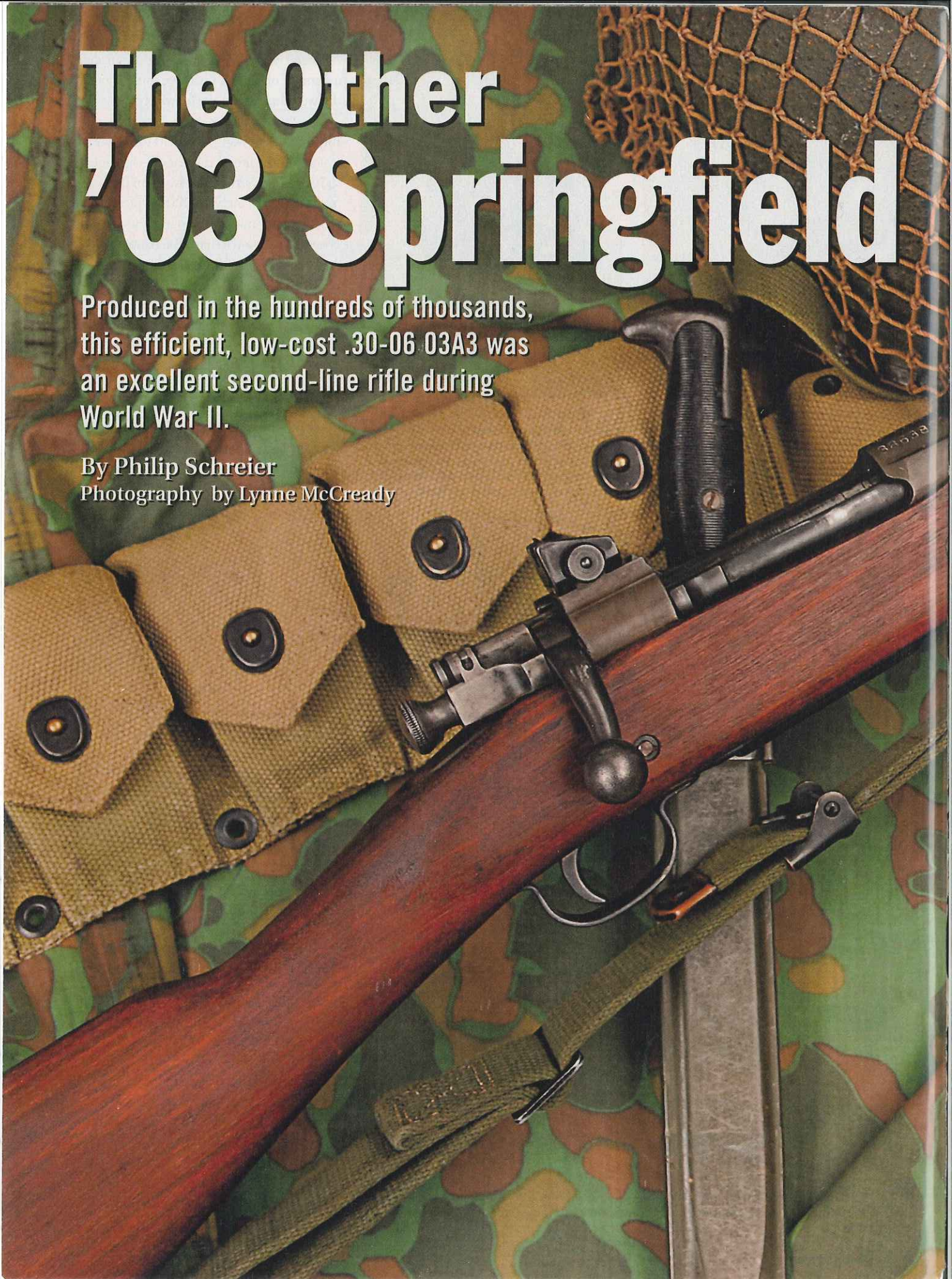


The Other '03 Springfield

Produced in the hundreds of thousands, this efficient, low-cost .30-06 03A3 was an excellent second-line rifle during World War II.

By Philip Schreier
Photography by Lynne McCready





The Other '03 Springfield



The M1903A3 (bottom) was a simplified version of the more expensive Model 1903 Springfield (top). Despite component changes and production short-cuts, the 03A3 was still an excellent, accurate rifle



Probably the 03A3's highest profile role was as the U.S. military's primary sniper rifle during World War II, re-dubbed the M1903A4.



Currently, Navy Arms (Dept. SF, 219 Lawn St., Martinsburg, WV 25405; www.navyarms.com; 304-262-9870) is offering 03A3s that have been converted to drill rifles. Prices are very reasonable.

The adoption of the U.S. Rifle, Caliber .30 M1903A3 by the U.S. Army on May 21, 1942, had its roots in the activity that ended on the beaches of Dunkirk, France, in June 1940. By the 4th of June of that year, some 330,000 British and French soldiers had been evacuated from the beaches by the “miracle of the little ships.” Paris would fall to the German juggernaut just 10 days later. Left behind in the wake of the little ships was a massive amount of war materiel, including tens of thousands of small arms and a vast amount of ammunition. The British Purchasing Commission in the United States immediately began a search for replacement arms.

The quest landed at the Remington Arms Company in Ilion,

New York, in January 1941, where a contract for 500,000 rifles was formally established in June 1941. The rifle agreed upon was a modification of the 1903 Springfield in .303 caliber with a barrel stud that would accept the spike bayonet issued with the British SMLE No. 4, MK I service rifle. Remington lacked the necessary machinery to manufacture the new Springfield rifle, and the time/cost factor to tool up would have made the rifle cost-prohibitive.

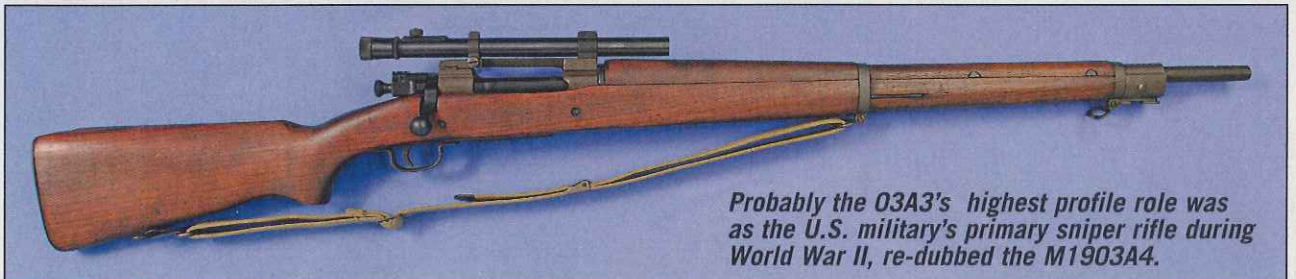
The original 1903 Springfield rifle was previously made at two locations, the Springfield Armory (November 1903–1940: 1½ million rifles) and the Rock Island Arsenal (May 1904–June 1919: 346,779 rifles). The method of manufacturing the '03

Springfield during the World War I years was accomplished with the age-old system of overhead shaft drives that ran the machines with large leather belts from the ceiling. The Springfield Armory continued to make the '03 well into the late 1930s and subsequently upgraded its machinery to do away with that arrangement. The machinery at the Rock Island Arsenal was packed up and placed into storage in mid-1919 when production of the rifle ceased at that facility. As World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939, the Remington Arms Co. was still using the overhead system that was compatible with the stored machinery at the Rock Island Arsenal. The U.S. Board of Ordnance determined

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While perhaps not the best sniper rifle of World War II, the M03A4 acquitted itself well in both the Pacific and European theatres. It was rugged, reliable and accurate.

that there was an insufficient labor force in the region of the Rock Island Arsenal to make production of rifles there practical. Remington negotiated a lease of the stored equipment, and in April 1941 it was installed in its Iliion, New York, factory.

In June 1941, at least four '03 Springfield rifles modified to fire the British .303-caliber service round had been produced and submitted for inspection. The new rifles were unique in the fact that they had a simple rear sight configured in an "L" shape with an aperture for 300 and 600 yards and accepted the British spike bayonet. (These are probably the rarest of all 1903 Springfield rifles ever made.) Rapidly changing world events quickly overtook the nature of existing contracts that had been made prior to the entry

of the U.S. into the war effort. The U.S. Army Ordnance board assumed control of production at Remington Arms in September 1941 and proceeded to reshape the 1903 rifle into a battle-worthy weapon.

U.S. Ordnance directives resulted in the production of rifles unofficially called "U.S. Rifle Caliber .30 Model of 1903 (Modified)." The new rifle was similar to the previous Model 1903 with a few exceptions that included a scant or straight stock made from stores found at the Rock Island Arsenal and the same M1905 rear sight, mounted forward of the breech with a few milling shortcuts. Rifles were marked in the same style as the earlier '03 with U.S./Remington/Model of 1903/(SN) in four lines on the

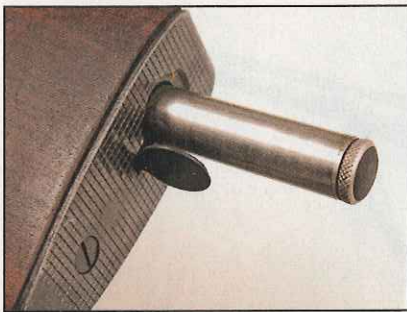
receiver. The serial-number block began at serial number 3,000,000.

The first 4,500 rifles were produced by December 1941 and sent to the U.S. Army for inspection in January 1942. Eventually, 64,000 were sent to the British via Lend Lease, and a total of 348,000 rifles were produced before the change to the '03A3 was made in September 1942. In 17 months Remington made 1,306 more M1903 (Modified) rifles on the old Rock Island Arsenal machinery than had been produced during the entire time the 1903 Springfield was made at Rock Island.

The U.S. Rifle, Cal. .30 Model of 1903A3

Remington found that the machinery that had been stored at the Rock Island Arsenal was in

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Like the M1903 Springfield, the O3A3s had butt traps to hold cleaning kits.



The rear sight of the O3A3 was placed at the rear of the receiver and was considerably simpler than the ladder-style of the earlier m1903. many parts were stamped.



The O3A3s can display several different inspectors' stamps. This particular one has those of Major Frank J. Atwood.



Like the Model 1903, the O3A3's safety was located on the bolt. When the catch is to the left, the gun is ready to fire, and to the right, on safe.



Slight manufacturing differences occurred between manufacturers, such as the more rounded trigger-guard seen on the Remingtons (top) as opposed to the slightly flatter ones on Smith-Coronas.

poor condition, and many tools needed to be remanufactured to keep production within inspection tolerances. As a result, in April 1942 numerous design changes were recommended to facilitate the speedy production of the rifle for immediate use in combat. Advances in manufacturing during the 20-year period between the world wars saw numerous changes that enabled factories to produce parts from stamping presses instead of the method where a part was milled from a solid block of steel.

With steel in high demand, Remington was able to sell the Ordnance Department on the fact that stamping some parts would not only save steel but time and money as well. An average of 6.4 pounds of steel was saved in the production of each rifle by going to the stamped-steel process. Changes to the stock were also made, eliminating

the finger grooves and the pistol grip found on U.S. Rifle, Cal. .30 M1903A1. All rifles would now have the "S" or straight stock with two stock bolts. The major change was the elimination of the M1905 rear sight and its replacement with a rear receiver-mounted aperture sight that was adjustable from 200 to 800 yards. Final modifications were approved on May 21, 1942, and the new rifle was to be known as the "U.S. Rifle, Cal. .30 Model of 1903A3, or, more commonly, the '03A3.

As production changes on the M1903 (Modified) were eventually phased out for the M1903A3 design, formal adjustments in the manufacturing process resulted in the buttplate, barrelbands, magazine floorplate, sling swivels and bayonet lug being made from stamped steel.

Initially, barrels of the M1903 (Modified) and the M1903A3

were of four-groove rifling. The British contract for the No. 4, Mk I rifle being manufactured at the Savage Arms Co. was altered to a two-groove barrel when it was determined that two-groove rifling gave just as much accuracy as a four-groove barrel. The change was made in March 1943.

Once the United States entered World War II in December of 1941, the U.S. Ordnance Department decided that even Remington Arms Co. could not produce the needed number of rifles it would take to arm soldiers on two fronts. The High Standard Manufacturing Co. of New Haven, Connecticut, was approached to pick up the slack with a proposed contract in January 1942. Already busy with numerous war-related manufacturing projects, High Standard notified the Ordnance Department that it could produce barrels but would have to subcontract the fabrication of the rest of the gun to the L.C. Smith & Corona Typewriter Company. Shotgun aficionados recognize the name "L.C. Smith" as that of Lyman Cornelius Smith (1834–1910), founder of L.C. Smith shotguns of Syracuse, New York, in 1881. In 1926 the L.C. Smith & Brothers Co. purchased the Corona Typewriter Co. and became the L.C. Smith & Corona Company of Syracuse.

The Ordnance Department reversed the contract suppliers and instead granted Smith-Corona the

PRODUCTION FIGURES

	Remington Arms Co.	L. C. Smith & Corona Co.	Total
M1903 (Modified)	348,085 (11/41 - 3/43)		348,085
M1903A3	707,629 (12/42 - 2/44)	234,580 (12/42 - 2/44)	942,209
M1903A4	28,365 (1/43 - 6/44)		28,365
Combined Total:			1,318,659

Courtesy "The '03 Springfield Rifles Era" by Clark S. Campbell

rifle contract, with High Standard subcontracting for some of the barrel output. In an effort to supply much-needed rifled barrels for the M1903A3 production run, Smith-Corona relied on the services of the Savage Arms Co. of Utica, New York, to supply barrels as well. The Savage Arms Co. barrels were six-groove, and the High Standard barrels were initially four-groove, eventually turning to two-groove barrels as soon as they could convert their machinery to produce them. (The first 7,000 M1903A4 barrels produced by Remington Arms Co. were also four-groove but then changed to two-groove for the balance of the 28,000 A4s they produced.)

Markings

The two easiest markings to view are the receiver markings and those found on the barrel and the receiver. These will help determine if your rifle is complete as it left the factory or subsequently rebarreled or altered after the war. Remington-made M1903 (Modified) and M1903A3 & M1903A four-barrels are marked with an RA/(Ordnance bomb proof)/(date of manufacture).

Those done at Smith-Corona are marked with an SC/(Ordnance bomb proof)/(date of manufacture) or with an "HS" for barrels manufactured by High Standard. Inspection proofs are found on the left side of the stock behind the cut-off slot. The crossed Ordnance cannons and flaming-bomb stamp are to the left of the Ordnance inspector's stamp. Stamps on M1903A3 and M1903A4 rifles will have the initials of "F.J.A." (Major Frank J.

Atwood), "R.L.B." (Lt. Col. Roy L. Bowlin), "E.N.D." (E.N. Dewey) or "J.B.L." Collectors should consult *The '03 Springfield Rifles' Era* by Clark S. Campbell to read his chart of serial numbers by month to see if barrel and receiver match.

More '03s

The nomenclature of the Springfield 1903A3 leads one to wonder what the models A1, A2 and A4 were all about. Briefly, the M1903A1 was a M1903, manufactured by Springfield Armory, Rock Island Arsenal or Remington Arms Co. and retrofitted with a "C"-type (pistol grip) stock. The M1903A2 was also an M1903 rifle made by any of the aforementioned manufacturers, stripped of its stock and configured to fit into the breech of an artillery piece as a subcaliber aiming device. It was used to conserve expensive artillery ammunition. The M1903A4 is perhaps the most sought-after of the entire series, as it is the scoped sniper version of the M1903A3. It was manufactured entirely by the Remington Arms Co. beginning in January 1943. A total production run of 28,365 rifles were made before production was halted in June 1944. Easily identified by the scope, A1-style "C" stock and missing front sight, these rifles have split receiver markings that read "U.S./Remington/ Model 03-A3" on the far left side of the receiver and then the serial number on the far right side.

None of the "A"-series rifles, with the exception of the A3, are

so marked. Even the A4 rifle is actually marked A3 on the receiver. The A1, A2 and A4 rifles were never stamped in any identifying manner. Only their physical appearance sets them apart.

When the last M1903A4 rifle was completed at the Remington Arms Company factory in June 1944, a chapter was closed on the storied history of one of the world's finest bolt-action rifles. It was the last of the series that had begun in Springfield, Massachusetts, with the submission of a prototype rifle for tests and evaluation in August 1900. Today it is still seen by marksmen and sportsmen the world over as the benchmark by which all other bolt-action rifles are measured.

Today the collector can acquire an M1903, M1903 Mk I, M1903 (Modified), M1903A1 or M1903A3 at various commercial stores or local gun shows for prices ranging from \$600 to \$1,000. For years following World War II they were available from the DCM (Department of Civilian Marksmanship) and recently its successor the CMP (Civilian Marksmanship Program). Prices in the 1950s and '60s fluctuated from \$25 to \$50. More recently, the CMP was selling them for prices under \$500 depending on condition. Even M1903 Mk I rifles were for sale as late as the summer of 2007. As this goes to press the CMP is currently sold out of M1903 and M1903A3 rifles but expects to get some in soon. It is suggested that you check current stock by consulting www.odcmp.com for current availability. To those qualified buyers, M1 Garands and M1 Carbines were still available as of this writing. ©