

CUT DOWN In Its

Arguably America's Best Service Rifle, the
Never Had the Chance to Prove Itself.

BY PHILIP SCHREIER



T44E4 COURTESY OF THE
NATIONAL FIREARMS MUSEUM.
PHOTO BY LLOYD HILL.

Youth

M14



There should be a saying that goes: Take something that the Brass has spent years developing to perfection and give it to a Marine. He will soon modify it in the field into something that actually works.

The heritage of the M14 dates to the beginning of the end of the Second World War when field modifications to the M1 Garand were undertaken to make it more "combat effective." Gen. George S. Patton said the M1 was "the finest battle implement ever devised," perhaps a small clue as to why the M14 development project seems to have been doomed before it started. No other service arm ever had a more rocky development, nor has one ever been scrapped almost before it was issued.

In the closing acts of World War II, soldiers in the field began to attempt to make the Garand into a light rifle capable of firing in full-auto mode. To do this, they modified the firing mechanism as well as incorporated the magazine from the Browning Automatic Rifle so the gun could fire 20 rounds in full-auto. The hope was that a suitable rifle, much lighter than the venerable BAR, could be used with great effect in combat.

At the same time, the German MP-44 made an appearance in the European Theater. This very effective magazine-fed automatic rifle fired the same 8 mm (7.9 mm Mauser) German service bullet in a shortened case, known as the 7.9 mm Kurz round. It was found that the standard U.S. .30-caliber round,

the .30-06 Springfield, could also be shortened by simply shortening the case to the level of the standard powder charge. This new round would eventually become the 7.62 NATO round, or .308 Winchester, as it's commonly known today.

John C. Garand began to modify the M1 in 1942 to meet the desires of the military at the Springfield Armory in



During a training exercise at Ft. Campbell, KY, a paratrooper from the 101st Airborne advances toward an objective with an M14 rifle. Originally the M14 was supposed to replace the M1 rifle, M1 carbine, Browning Automatic Rifle and the .45-caliber M3A1 submachine gun.

Massachusetts. In May of 1944, the Army made the project one of official priority and named the new rifle the T20. They desired—as today's Army desires an "Army of One"—a "Gun of One." The firearm they desired would incorporate the advantages of all rifles currently in U.S. military use: the gas action of the Garand, the lightness of the M1 carbine, the accuracy and hitting power of the BAR, as well as shortness and the full-auto capability of the M3A1 "grease gun." This would eventually become the M14 we

Fewer than 1.4 million M14 rifles were produced during its 10-year production run. The M14 did see some service in Vietnam, though.

know today, but not before numerous problems and serious setbacks delayed its introduction until 1957, some 13 years later.

Garand's experiments soon found that adopting the rifle to accept BAR magazines and making it full-auto was not as easy or as practical as it would seem. The length of the Garand receiver was too short to allow the cartridges from the BAR magazine to feed properly. Additionally, the intense heat generated from full-auto fire would occasionally cook-off rounds below the bolt, when it was in a closed and locked position. Due to this potential danger, most full-auto sub-machine guns fire from an open bolt to speed cooling and prevent the cook-off of unfired rounds in the feed column.

Accuracy tests also proved that when on full-auto, the gun was miserable to control. The first round invariably found its mark, but those that followed were much less effective. The greater weight of the BAR helped keep muzzle climb to an acceptable level. The desired lightness of the T20 was actually a draw back so designs evolved into a selective-fire rifle.

Following the first field trials of the T20, the improved T20E2 appeared with a selector switch, a bipod and a grooved barrel that dissipated heat more rapidly. In April 1945, with the war in Europe drawing to a halt, the T20E2 was approved for use and 100,000 were ordered. The brakes were applied to the initial order a month later when Germany surrendered. Ten rifles were produced for evaluation. Those 10 showed, among other things, that the wood handguard

would heat up to such a degree it would actually burn. Excessive climb and muzzle flash continued to dog the model and soon remedies were sought to correct those and other minor problems. Of the proposed 100,000 T20E2 rifles, only 100 were ever produced, the receivers of which were repeatedly cannibalized to provide a foundation for further tests and modifications.

Over the next five years, the Ordnance Department of the U.S. Army continued to experiment with different designs and models for a new standard service rifle. Remington Arms produced the T22, T23 and T27 rifles while other companies and the Springfield Armory presented the T25, T28, T31 and T33 rifles for consideration, each employing a different design change to surmount previous inadequacies. The development of the T65 .30-caliber "lightweight" cartridge also continued to develop steam since experiments on a shortened .30-caliber round was begun in 1944. Many of these new rifle models, of particular note the T35, employed the new cartridge design as current conventional thinking was headed in that direction following the lead established by the British and Belgian designers working at Fabrique Nationale on a similar rifle design.

By 1952, the family tree of the M14 began to look like the root system of a giant maple. Each rifle that was designed and tested was given a "T" designation as a test model. There were now more than 47 different "T" models on the books. If you were to try to establish a true bloodline, the M1 Garand was certainly the founding father of the

series of experimental models that offered the most advantages. The T20, T25 and T47 rifles all had design elements that were visible in the T44 model that eventually became the foundation for the eventual adoption of the M14. The design of the rifle had to also change with the times as outside considerations played an important factor in development as well. Garand had to revise his initial M1 design a number of times as the Army changed its ideal cartridge for the new rifle. The gun he started to design in 1919 wasn't finally adopted until 1934. This pattern continued with the M14 development as well. The initial design called for a rifle that



fired the standard .30 M2 cartridge. Eventually the design had to change to accept the latest in ammo technology, resulting in the adoption of the 7.62 NATO round in the early 1950s.


The innumerable delays and redesigns of the desired rifle continued to frustrate those who were involved in the project. However, foreign designers, working outside the U.S. Ordinance system, managed to develop rifle designs and began to overshadow the slow developments of the Springfield Armory. The British, working with FN in Belgium, soon offered their FN FAL rifle to the U.S. for consideration.

A show down over the fate of the new rifles future dawned in July 1953, when tests were ordered to evaluate the T44 and the FN FAL. At first, the FN rifle seemed to command the best results during the evaluation process. This was very disconcerting to the regular army types that still felt that the might and resources of America's "arsenal of democracy" could surely produce a superior weapon to any designed by foreign elements. Not since the adoption of the Krag in 1892 had there been a foreign competitor for the standard U.S. service rifle. Bound by its own testing rules, the Ordinance Board was compelled to accept the findings of the review board and it looked like the FN, with few modifications, would win top honors.

Initial testing began in July of 1953. The T44 did poorly compared to the FN entry. Still, endurance tests needed to be completed and an Arctic test was scheduled in November 1953 and took place beginning on Dec. 8, 1953 in Big Delta, AK. The arctic conditions were very punishing on the rifles as well as their evaluators. However, a minor miracle happened that extended the life span of the T44. The FN rifle began to experience severe problems such as breaking parts due to the extreme temperatures. This major failure temporarily grounded the FN from consideration. The backers of the T44 quickly set about the task of fixing most of the problems identified in the initial tests of July while the FN team was given a chance to modify their rifle for further Arctic testing.

The most bizarre story of the entire M14 development took place in the early months of 1954. The Springfield Armory was unable to produce the modified version of the T44 for further testing due to a lack of personnel and financial resources to complete the task. The Army decided that a private contractor would be needed to complete the task and gave a contract to the Mathewson Tool Co. of New Haven, CT, for 12 test rifles. At this point, a

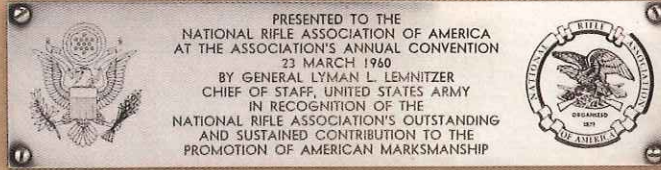
M14 No. 0006



The evening of Mar. 23, 1960, was one for black ties and festivities at the Shoreham Hotel in downtown Washington, D.C. The event was the 89th Annual Meetings of the National Rifle Association of America.

An invited guest, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, rose and addressed the gathered crowd. He explained how the Army's new service rifle, the M14, was faring in production, and attempted to put a positive spin of some of the public rumors about the project. He boasted that nearly every retired General, Colonel, Congressman and Senator that had anything to do with the project had requested that M14, serial number one, be issued to them personally in regard for their patronage of the project. Problem was, no serial number one rifle of the M14 line existed. The number range, he explained, began at number 2000. Some people of great influence would hear nothing of it and demanded that the Armory produce serial number one. A few rifles were so marked, 01, 001, 0001 and so on, but the first real serial number one was actually serial number 2000. A special rifle—serial number DDE 1—was made up for President Eisenhower and presented to him the week he left office in January, 1961.

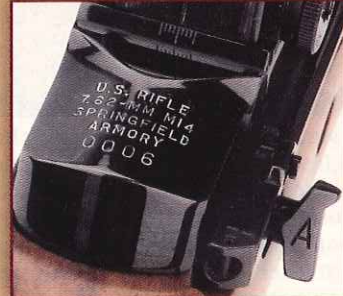
The General then produced a rifle, a beautiful presentation-grade M14 that just glittered in the reflection of the flash bulbs from the press cameras. This rifle bore a silver plaque that read in part: "To



PRESENTED TO THE
NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
AT THE ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL CONVENTION
23 MARCH 1960
BY GENERAL LYMAN L. LEMNITZER
CHIEF OF STAFF, UNITED STATES ARMY
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NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION'S OUTSTANDING
AND SUSTAINED CONTRIBUTION TO THE
PROMOTION OF AMERICAN MARKSMANSHIP

The National Rifle Association of America...for its outstanding and sustained contribution to the promotion of American Marksmanship."

The General then explained how soldiers come to depend on their comrades in battle and on the march how it was no small honor to be trusted with watching your buddies back while on maneuvers. "I've got your six" was an expression of safety and trust. This rifle was serial number 0006, he said, representing the bond between the NRA and the U.S. Army. A bond of trust and comradeship in a mutual effort to make this nation of citizen soldiers the best equipped and finest marksmen the world would ever know. Gun number 0006 is on display at the National Firearms Museum, seven days a week, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., NRA HQ, 11250 Waples Mill Road, Fairfax, VA 22030, call (703) 267-1600 for directions and holiday hours; www.nrahq.org/shooting/museum/index.asp.



mechanical genius was needed to remedy the problems that the board had encountered in the July testing of the year before.

All eyes turned to the "godfather" of rifle design, John C. Garand. However, Garand retired in May 1953 and was hardly interested in leaving retirement to work on a project that had dogged him the last few years at the Springfield Armory. Additionally, as Blake Stevens observed in his book, *U.S. Rifle M14, John Garand to the M21*, Garand was under a consulting contract to the

Armory, a contract that he didn't appreciate much when he found out he would lose his retirement pay for the period of time he went back to work. He was soon, however, able to release himself from the legal entanglements and began consulting with the Mathewson Co. on the redesign of the T44 in preparation for its re-match with the FN FAL.

It would take another three years of testing before the T44 and the FN FAL—a version converted from the European metric system to U.S. standards,

CARLOS HATHCOCK SIGNATURE M25

THE SNIPER IS THE BIG-GAME HUNTER OF THE BATTLEFIELD, AND HE NEEDS ALL OF THE SKILLS OF A WOODSMAN, MARKSMAN, HUNTER, AND POACHER. HE MUST POSSESS THE FIELD CRAFT TO BE ABLE TO POSITION HIMSELF FOR A KILLING SHOT, AND HE MUST BE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY PLACE A SINGLE BULLET INTO HIS INTENDED TARGET.

GUNNERY SERGEANT HATHCOCK WAS ALL OF THESE THINGS...

—FROM *MARINE SNIPER*
BY CHARLES HENDERSON

Carlos' bush hat courtesy Hathcock Family Estate.



THE
LOYD HILL

The late Marine Corps GySgt. Carlos Norman Hathcock II, revered as "perhaps the greatest tactical rifleman of modern times," has been immortalized in steel and fiberglass by Springfield Armory, Inc.

Debuted at the 2001 SHOT Show, the White Feather/Carlos Hathcock M25/M1A utilizes the Springfield Armory rear-lugged receiver, M-14 magazine and a Krieger carbon heavy match barrel with a 1:10 twist. Other features include the Springfield Armory M25 adjustable match trigger and McMillan fiberglass stock.

After winning the 1,000-Yard High Power National Championship at the age of 24, Hathcock went on to become the most effective sniper in Vietnam. As a testament of his effectiveness, the North Vietnamese once put a bounty of \$30,000 on his head. The Viet Cong referred to Hathcock as "Long Tra'ng" (The White Feather), because he often wore one in his bush hat.

When Hathcock died in February, 2000 at the age of 57, the enemy that ultimately claimed him was the slow, unrelenting progression of multiple sclerosis.

Hathcock remains a legend among Marines and modern

tactical shooters. The Carlos Hathcock Award is presented annually to the Marine who does the most to promote marksmanship. In addition, the sniper range at Camp Lejeune, NC, bears his name.

Late in life, Hathcock was awarded a Silver Star for an incident that happened nearly 30 years earlier, when he pulled seven comrades from a burning armored personnel carrier which had struck a mine. That act of bravery left him badly injured and effectively ended his career as a rifleman.

In a special arrangement with the estate and family of Hathcock, each Springfield Armory White Feather/Carlos Hathcock M25 bears the likeness of Hathcock's signature and the White Feather logo.

"This is a very special rifle to honor a Marine and a marksman who defined modern tactical sniping," said Springfield Armory Co-Chairman of the Board, Dennis Reese. "We at Springfield are very proud and humbled to help preserve the memory of a true American hero, GySgt. Carlos N. Hathcock."

For more information on the M25, contact: Springfield Inc., Dept SSUSA, 420 West Main Street, Geneseo, IL 61254; (309) 944-5631; www.springfieldarmory.com.

re-designed and produced by the Springfield Armory as the T48C would finish the established trials. At their conclusion, the evaluators determined that both rifles were suitable for adoption, neither one having the upper hand on performance or function. The decision fell to an evaluation of the basic principals of each rifles design. The similarity of the T44 to the M1 Garand (there were 38 interchangeable parts between the Garand and the T44) and its American pedigree swung the balance in its favor. On May 1, 1957 the Army officially adopted the T44 as the M14 and began to make preparations for its production.

PRODUCTION OF THE M14

In May 1957, the U.S. Army announced to the world that it had selected the M14 rifles as service standard and that it would replace the M1 Garand, M1 Carbine, M3A1 and the BAR. Four guns in one! The army's pro-

jected needs would equal a production of 5 million M14 rifles. Yet, for unknown reasons, the Army delayed issuing any production orders for the M14 for 11 months after the initial announcement of acceptance. A full 21 months went by before the first commercial contract was let to the Winchester-Western Division of Olin. Eventually other contracts were let to Harrington & Richardson and to Thompson-Ramo-Wooldridge (TRW). By the close of fiscal year 1960, only 10,000 M14s had been produced and delivered. At this rate it would be 1,428 years before the Army would have the estimated 5 million rifles that it needed. Then events in Europe

brought home a startling discovery.

In 1960, camera footage showed U.S. troops, armed with M1 Garands, manning the front lines in Berlin, as the cold war threatened to become hot.



M/Sgts. Lawrence Walker (right) and Raymond Barnett demonstrate the firepower of the M14 against the M1 Rifle to trainees at Ft. Knox, KY, in Nov. 1960. The selective fire option was only available on a limited number of M14 rifles.

Replacement and re-enforcement troops were also clearly armed with the venerable M1. "How could this be?" a shocked nation asked in disbelief. It had been 16 years since the project was initiated and three years since it was announced that there was a new service rifle. The public was stunned to see American troops on the front line, of what may have very easily become a shooting war, armed with World War II vintage guns. Comparatively, the M1 Garand was adopted in January 1936, and 42 months later, 23,567 rifles had been produced. The M14 contract had delivered less than half that number in the same period of time.

Soon congressional committees were looking into the matter and found that numerous delays stemmed from a batch of bad receivers from H&R as well as a host of other problems. President John F. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, decried the entire contract production record as miserable and poor. Tests were ordered to compare the M14 to the new AR-15 of the Armalite Co. and resulted in a public squabble between the Executive branch and the Military, as accusations of "rigged" tests to make the M14 look good were discovered to be well-founded and true. On Jan. 23, 1963, McNamara killed the M14 with a stroke of the pen, ending further production orders. In November of that year, Colt was awarded a contract to produce the AR-15/M16 rifle for the U.S. Army; the short and tortured life of the M14 had come to an abrupt end. Only 1,376,031 M14 rifles were ever delivered.

In retrospect, the M14 was a victim of time. It took too long by the antiquated standards of the Army's ordinance board, to approve a new rifle free of design flaws. The development of the .223 service round had made the 7.62 NATO obsolete almost before it had a chance to be used in combat. The Garand of our grandfathers was no match for positive public opinion when compared to the modern styling of the M16. Kennedy's brain trust, the best of the brightest, ushered in this new frontier and with it a modern rifle for modern times. Even before the official death certificate was signed in 1963, General Curtis LeMay of the U.S. Air Force had already accepted the M16 in favor of the M14 for use by U.S. Air Force troops in the spring of 1962.

One saving grace of the M14 was that it was an excellent rifle in the hands of a trained marksman. By glass bedding the stock and hand detailing certain components, the M14, with a

Continued on page 46.

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FIELD HANDGUNS

Continued from page 23.

and total weight of 12.3 ounces make it a prime candidate to be the first thing tossed into one's pocket before hitting the trail. Despite its diminutive size, it carries a full eight rounds of .22 LR in the magazine, and the tip-up barrel makes it extremely easy and safe for anyone to add an additional round without having to cycle the action. The little PT22 may not be the best choice for putting small game in your skillet, but it's fun to shoot and serves as a defensive weapon that's much more effective than all the lumberjack curses one could learn in a lifetime.

Having looked at all the "fun" features that influence the selection of a field gun, it's time to mention the potential self-defense issues of a trip down the unpaved trail where there's no 911 to call for help. Threats can range from poisonous snakes through feral dogs to the largest bears.

Most of the animal threats are best handled by what's in your head rather than what's on your hip. If a handgun is needed, a .22 with shot cartridges will work fine on snakes. For feral dogs, a .22 looks a bit small, and no handgun of any caliber is 100 percent reliable on bears. But loud noises, like the sound of a shot, tend to frighten animals, and there's no evidence that an animal will show more respect for the pop of a .22 than the roar of a .44 Magnum. Any animal that's been hunted or is acquainted with man, particularly feral dogs, know that the sound of gunfire does not bode well for them. If a larger caliber handgun makes you feel more secure, by all means carry one. But recognize the limitations of the caliber you're carrying with regard to its game stopping potential, and be especially aware of your skill limitations.

For potential threats from two legged predators, a .22 may look small, but guns and calibers tend to look much larger when viewed from the muzzle end, particularly when it's pointed with serious intent. If a larger handgun and caliber seems like a good idea, particularly a handgun that you already own for home defense, take it with you. Just carry a little extra ammo for fun on the trail. Choose what you think will work for you, but don't let fear and paranoia ruin your outing. ©

CUT DOWN In Its Youth

Continued from page 29.

non-chrome lined barrel, made an excellent match rifle. In 1962, production began at the Springfield Armory to produce National Match versions of the M14 for use at Camp Perry and at numerous other match venues. Over the next three years, the Springfield Armory and TRW produced nearly 12,000 national match rifles for competition.

of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Not every M14 produced was actually capable of selective-fire, only one rifle in each squad was actually selective-fire; all the rest were semi-automatic only. But the right holes and receiver cuts were present on all the guns so even if it wasn't capable of firing full-auto, the ability to convert it was still there in the government's



Basic trainees received intensive training in the assembly of the new M14 rifle. Just a few years later, they had to do it all over again with the M16 rifle.

In Vietnam, the rifle saw combat use until enough numbers of M16s had made their way to the front lines. However the rifle did serve distinctively as a sniper weapon during the war in Southeast Asia. Accurized National Match rifles made to the standards of the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit were employed with a variety of scopes and used to great effect during the war. Known as the XM-21 Sniper rifle, this modified M14 was the mainstay of many a sniper during the war.

Civilian demand for the M14 rifle as a match rifle created some unique problems. The NRA Service Rifle Match (High Power Rifle) shot at Camp Perry saw the M14 excel in the competition and attract a great deal of positive attention. The rifle was, however, banned from sale to the public. As a selective-fire weapon, it was "Once a machine gun, always a machine gun" in the eyes

of eyes. Soon, private contractors such as Springfield Armory and others began to produce a civilian version—the M1A—that was capable of semi-automatic fire only. There are a few Class III (Registered full-auto) original M14s in private hands, however they represent one of the rarest of all Class III collectibles.

The saga of the M14 is not one of the brightest chapters in the annals of military history, however it provided a transition between the eras of our grandfather's army and a modern military. Changing attitudes, ammunition and the introduction of metals and materials never before used in the manufacturing of firearms together managed to close a chapter on the history of a firearm that was quite remarkable in its effectiveness. Never before had one weapon been selected to do the job of four. It was quite an achievement that hasn't been equaled since. ©