From the steaming jungles of Vietnam to the searing sands of Desert Storm, U.S. Marine Corps M40-series rifles have earned their reputation as robust, precision battlefield instruments in the skillful hands of Marine scout-snipers.

By Brian C. Sheetz and Doug Wicklund

Coined among the many U.S. military small-arms developments that grew out of America's entry into the Vietnam War in the early 1960s are a number of modern-day sniper rifle systems. Both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps eventually developed specific solutions to meet the challenges of the one-shot, long-range war. The Marines' M40, based on the Remington Model 700 sporting rifle, has become a near-legendary icon of that era.

The need for a new sniper rifle system was confirmed in military battlefield planners realized the only sniper rifles available were leftovers from World War II and Korea. That included aging, but highly effective, .30-06 Spc-cal. Winchester Model 70 rifles fitted with 2X Unertl scopes (along with scope-sighted, semi-automatic M14 and M14E1 carbines). Another option involved adapting existing U.S. M14 rifles. In fact, according to, scope-equipped M14s, later fitted with high-vision scopes, provided yeoman service to U.S. Army marksmen. The U.S. Marine Corps, however, elected to pursue a completely different approach.
LONG-RANGE WARRIORS
THE USMC M40 RIFLES

A modern-day U.S. Marine scout-sniper takes aim with his Unical-scope M40A1 rifle. The fixed, 10X Unical replaced the Redfield 4-X scope on the M40A1 and will be retained for the Corps’ new rifle, the M40A3.

M40 (1966-1976)
After testing existing bolt-action rifles for over a year to determine availability, the Marine Corps decided on the Remington Model 700. Some reports indicate that early guns procured from Remington’s Ithaca, N.Y., Custom Shop were built on 40X target model receivers. Nevertheless, that first batch of M40s was assembled with commercial receivers re-rolled to the Military Pattern Rifles, and the M40 designation was applied to the rifle. The “M40” was the spring-loaded, medium-weight, chrome-moly steel barrel, and its actions were factory-hardened to uncheckered wood stocks. The “Rifle, 7.62mm Sniper, M40,” adopted April 7, 1966, was to serve as the foundation for USMC sniper rifles for the following four decades.

NRA Secretary Edward J. Land, who served in the Marines from 1953-77 and was instrumental in developing the Corps’ sniper rifle program, was a key player in the M40’s adoption. It is believed that the M40 was made specifically for the Corps and that the production run was a mere 1000 rifles.

The M40A1 was a more refined version of the M40 with some improvements to the bore and overall design. The M40A1 was adopted by the USMC in 1977 and remained in service until 1980.

The M40A1C was a further refinement of the M40A1 with some additional improvements to the bore and overall design. The M40A1C was adopted by the USMC in 1980 and remained in service until 1985.

U.S. Marine Corps M40-Series Rifle Specifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Caliber</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Magazine Capacity</th>
<th>Barrel Length</th>
<th>Stock Material</th>
<th>Sight Adjustable</th>
<th>Sights</th>
<th>Scope Mount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M40 (c. 1966)</td>
<td>7.62x51 mm NATO</td>
<td>12 lbs.</td>
<td>5-shot detachable magazine</td>
<td>24” (enlarged)</td>
<td>American walnut, or fiberglass</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Redfield 3-5x (Accura Range)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M40A1 (c. 1980)</td>
<td>7.62x51 mm NATO</td>
<td>12 lbs.</td>
<td>5-shot detachable magazine</td>
<td>24”</td>
<td>American walnut, or fiberglass</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Redfield 3-5x (Accura Range)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M40A1C (2001)</td>
<td>7.62x51 mm NATO</td>
<td>12 lbs.</td>
<td>5-shot detachable magazine</td>
<td>24”</td>
<td>American walnut, or fiberglass</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Redfield 3-5x (Accura Range)</td>
<td></td>
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The M40A3: Ultimate Marine Sniper Tool?

The evolution of the U.S. Marine Corps’ Remington Model 700-based rifle began in the late 1960s. In 1969, the Corps’ Precision Weapons Facility, located at the U.S. Marine Corps’ Special Operations School, was established as part of the USMC Weapons Training Battalion at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. In 1972, the Corps signed a contract with Remington Arms to develop a new rifle specifically for the Marine Corps. This new rifle, the M40A3, was designed to be a precision sniper rifle with a 10X scope and a heavier barrel for improved accuracy.

The M40A3 is built on the same platform as the M40A1 and M40A2, but features a number of improvements, including a lightweight carbon fiber barrel, an adjustable stock, and a 10X scope. The M40A3 is the most advanced and accurate sniper rifle in the USMC inventory, and has been used in various conflicts around the world, including in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The M40A3 is a popular choice among USMC snipers, and many have praised its accuracy and reliability. However, the M40A3 is expensive and requires specialized training to use effectively. As a result, the Corps is looking at alternative options, including the development of a new sniper rifle called the M40X.
assembly. Also, the original Model 700 aluminum trigger guard was replaced with a more robust plastic one, and the footplate assemblies were replaced with modified Winchester Model 70 units made of aluminum.

The M40A3’s original wood stock was replaced by a synthetic stock with red cardemount. Also, additional handgrips were added to the forehand. The fiber optic sights were replaced by a single iron sight, and the rifle was shipped with a black oxide coating. Finally, the problem of moisture susceptibility (the rifle would sometimes malfunction when exposed to damp conditions) was eliminated.

The M40A3’s new stock also included a new bolt design, which was stronger and more reliable. The rifle was also equipped with a new trigger mechanism, which was smoother and more consistent.

The M40A3 was fully adjustable and sights were marked "A" for the military use. The rifle was also shipped with a carrying case and a cleaning kit.

The M40A3 was introduced in 1987 and was used by the US Army’s Special Forces and the US Marine Corps. It was also exported to several other countries, including Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

The M40A3 was a popular weapon among law enforcement agencies, particularly in the United States, where it was used by the FBI, the DEA, and several state and local police departments. It was also used by military forces around the world.

In conclusion, the M40A3 was a significant improvement over the M40, with better accuracy, reliability, and performance. It was a successful weapon that served the United States and other countries well for many years.