CUT DOWN IN ITS

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

BY PHILIP SCHREIER
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 M1 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 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 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 barrels 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 produced 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. Ordnance 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 Ordnance 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 plague 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 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, United States Army, John Garard 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—
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

The late Marine Corps GtSgt. 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/MIA 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 2 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, GtSgt. Carlos N. Hathcock.”

For more information on the M25, contact Springfield Inc., Dept SSUSA, 430 West Main Street, Genesee, IL 61234; (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 rifle’s 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 projected 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 Inland. 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/Sgt. 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, decreed 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 ordnance 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 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
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.

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 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.

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