

Over There

Celebrating the One Hundredth Anniversary of First Army

“First in Deed”

Small Arms of First Army in World War I

When the United States entered World War I on 6 April 1917 the Army was materially and numerically behind when compared to their Allies and Germany. The Army numbering 308,771 including active and National Guard rosters. Over the course of war, however, the Army would eventually reach a peak strength of 1,971,000 Soldiers in the European theater with an additional 1,663,000 in the United States and its possessions by 1 November 1918.¹ This rapid expansion of the Army meant an equally rapid expansion of materiel and weapons required equip the force. Until the Nation ignited its arsenal “prop” machine guns and broomstick rifles were pressed into service due to a lack of actual weapons.² The Army also borrowed heavily from its Allies in the design and production of the new weapons and equipment needed to fight and win the war. General Pershing later remarked, “We were literally beggars as to every important weapon, except the rifle.”³

RIFLES

In April 1917 the Springfield 1903 served as the main American battle rifle. This model Springfield had replaced the Model 1892 Springfield-manufactured rifle, also known as the Krag-Jorgenson. Described as a five-round (internal) magazine fed, bolt-action rifle and chambered with the .30 caliber cartridge Model 1906 or .30-06 cartridge, the 1903 came equipped with a 16 inch blade bayonet. In 1917, however, the American economy, already busy filling Allied war contracts, possessed very little excess industrial capacity to support its own mobilization and expanded war production. U.S. factories, foundries, mills and shipyards ran at 94 to 96% of capacity as a result of wartime demands from England and France.

Moreover, only two government-owned factories at Springfield, Massachusetts and Rock Island, Illinois, existed to fill the Army’s priority for small arms, although both Arsenals produced the Model 1903 rifles. Army planners correctly judged that production at these arsenals could not be significantly increased, certainly not fast enough to arm the approximate four million men the Army planned to mobilize.⁴ Stock on-hand when America entered the war consisted of 843,239 rifles produced by both arsenals since 1903.⁵ Despite these shortfalls, American Soldiers liked the rifle. In the words of First Lieutenant Samuel Meek the 1903 Springfield “...was a great weapon. Not only was it accurate, but it rarely jammed. Having very few parts, it seemed to be able to absorb the dirt—and we were always living in dirt—and still worked.”⁶ Unfortunately, the combined output of the Springfield and Rock Island Arsenals failed to supply the Army’s emergent small arms requirements.



Model 1903 Springfield and bayonet as well as typical issued equipment.

To fill the gap, the Army could order increased production (which would be limited at best), issue obsolete rifles from current stock (creating an ammunition requirement since the M1892 Krag rifle was chambered for the .30-40 Krag round), or obtain rifles from the Allies. In the end, the Army leveraged all three options while relying heavily on foreign production and supply. The United Kingdom had contracted with American companies such as Winchester, Remington and Eddystone Arsenal (a subsidiary of Remington) to produce a rifle designated as the Pattern 14, chambered for the British .303 cartridge. These contracts had supplied the British Army’s arms since 1914. The US Army’s need for rifles led them to purchase the British interest in U.S.-based rifle production for \$900,000.00, far less than the two million dollars that the United Kingdom had originally spent to acquire and equip these facilities for production. Furthermore, the U.S. decided to only re-tool to re-chamber the Pattern 14 rifles from the British .303 cartridge to the American .30-06 cartridge.

The resulting modification became known as the US Model 1917 or the American Enfield and answered the Army's requirement as the three companies produced almost 2.2 million rifles with production reaching almost 10,000 rifles per day by the end of the war.⁷ Compared with the production of the 1903 rifles from Springfield and Rock Island Arsenal, at 422,266 rifles produced during the course of the war, this was the added production needed to arm the doughboys for the war.⁸ Most of the National Guard and National Army (Army Reserve) Divisions that served under First Army during WWI carried the M1917 rifle as opposed to the Active Divisions typically carrying the M1903 rifles. The M1917 was truly the unsung rifle of WWI for First Army.



Model 1917 US Enfield and bayonet.

Private Loren Danforth Duren Jr., assigned to First Army as a part of the 4th Infantry Division, 58th Infantry Regiment described his relationship with his M1917 during the war, *"Then there was a gun; old '727712' scarred, faithful, much handled and polished. We were real partners and many a night we have slept side by side and the old gun was drier than I, for it slept inside my coat, away from the rain."*⁹ Another example of the M1917 value came from Sergeant Alvin York, assigned to First Army as a part of the 82nd Infantry Division, 328th Infantry Regiment. SGT York used a M1917 and a M1911 during the Meuse Argonne Offensive when he led an attack on a German machine gun nest, taking 35 machine guns, killing at least 25 enemy soldiers, and capturing 132. For this action he received the Medal of Honor.¹⁰

PISTOLS

The U.S. Government Model 1911 pistol, described as a semi-automatic, seven round magazine-fed, recoil-operated pistol chambered for the .45 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol) cartridge was developed prior to the start of WWI. A new service model became necessary when the Army found its previous service pistol, the .38 caliber Colt Model 1892 service revolver, almost useless against the Philippine Moros in the Spanish American War.¹¹ Adopted in 1911, only approximately 60,000 were produced by April 1917, but during WWI more than 380,000 were manufactured by Colt, the Springfield Armory, Remington-UMC, and the North American Arms Co. of Quebec.¹² The 1911's pistol legacy still resonates today due to its large caliber, reliability and stopping power. The 1911 pistol was the second longest serving weapon in Army history surpassed only by the M2 Browning Machine Gun. During one legendary engagement Sergeant Alvin York used a Model 1911 pistol to stop an attack by six German soldiers with as many shots. Lieutenant Frank Luke of the US Army Air Corps, posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his excellent air combat results, fought to the death with a 1911 pistol against a German infantry onslaught after his SPAD biplane was forced down onto a muddy French battlefield.¹³ As an indication of their desirability (and concealability) about 80,000 of the approximate 500,000 pistols bought by the Government disappeared in the years between the first orders and the conclusion of the war.¹⁴

Not all pistols carried by First Army Soldiers were Model 1911 pistols, however. For the same reason it looked for additional resources for its rifles, the Army sought current production solutions to help fill its need for pistols. The Army turned to Colt and Smith & Wesson for an interim solution. The two companies adapted their current heavy-frame civilian revolvers to the standard .45 ACP pistol cartridge used by M1911. Both companies' revolvers utilized half-moon clips to extract the rimless .45 ACP cartridges from the pistols.¹⁵ This production delivered over 300,000 needed pistols to the hands of First Army and the American Expeditionary Forces.



Left: Model 1911 Auto Right: M1917 .45 Service Revolver

SHOTGUNS

The U.S. was the only major nation to employ the use of shotguns. Originally, shotguns were intended to deflect grenades from the trenches and as an effective weapon to sweep a narrow trench of enemy combatants. When the First Army began to take over portions of the front lines it brought with it General Pershing's pre-determined decision to break up the enemy's use of its trenches as take-off points for assaults, to destroy attacking shock troops as they charged, and to compel the open-ground warfare for which was wholly in the character of the American spirit (but not to Europeans' liking).¹⁶ Once the Americans began employing the trench shotgun, as it was now called, it quickly gained favor among the Soldiers using it. At the same time the Germans objected to the use of the shotgun decriing it as too brutal of a weapon. Beginning in July 1918, the Germans captured a few Americans armed with trench shotguns and, after a time, the issue became an international controversy. On 19 September 1918, the U.S. Secretary of State received the following protest by cablegram from the government of Germany: *"The German Government protests against the use of shotguns by the American Army and calls attention to the fact that according to the law of war, every U.S. prisoner of war found to have in his possession such guns or ammunition belonging thereto forfeits his life. This protest is based upon article 23(e) of the Hague convention respecting the laws and customs of war on land. Reply by cable is required before October 1, 1918."*¹⁷



The Winchester M1897 (12 gauge) shotgun showing the WWI conversion to the US Army Model 1917 Trench Shotgun along with the M1917 bayonet and scabbard.

The Acting Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army, Brig. Gen. Samuel T. Ansell, addressed the German protest with a memorandum on Sept. 26, 1918, *"The Government of the United States notes the threat of the German Government to execute every prisoner of war found to have in his possession shotguns or shotgun ammunition. Inasmuch as the weapon is lawful and may be rightfully used, its use will not be abandoned by the American Army. If the German Government should carry out its threat in a single instance, it will be the right and duty of the United States to make such reprisals as will best protect the American forces, and notice is hereby given of the intention of the United States to make such reprisals."*¹⁸ Unofficially these claims were quickly compared to the German invention and use of the flamethrower and poison gas. The most common shotgun model was the M1897 Winchester shotgun, officially known as the Model of 1917 Trench Shotgun. Other versions included the Remington Model 12 shotgun and other "off the shelf" shotguns converted for use in the war. The typical conversions included a shortened barrel, a heat shield cover over the barrel and the addition of a bayonet mount. The following is an account of Americans using the trench shotgun to great effect, *"On 27 September 1918, Sergeant Fred Lloyd, using a Model 97, advanced alone into a German-held village and began methodically clearing it, pumping and firing the shotgun as he moved. He finally collapsed with exhaustion after routing thirty German soldiers."*¹⁹

In conclusion, when the United States entered the war it scrambled to prepare its Soldiers to enter combat in the trenches of Europe. All of the weapons cited here were quality weapons and earned the respect of the Soldiers who used them, helping to create a level playing field for the Soldiers of First Army to fight German forces. These weapons also demonstrate the ingenuity of the American Army to quickly and effectively adapt from a pre-war isolationist standing to arming and training close to four million Soldiers within almost a year.



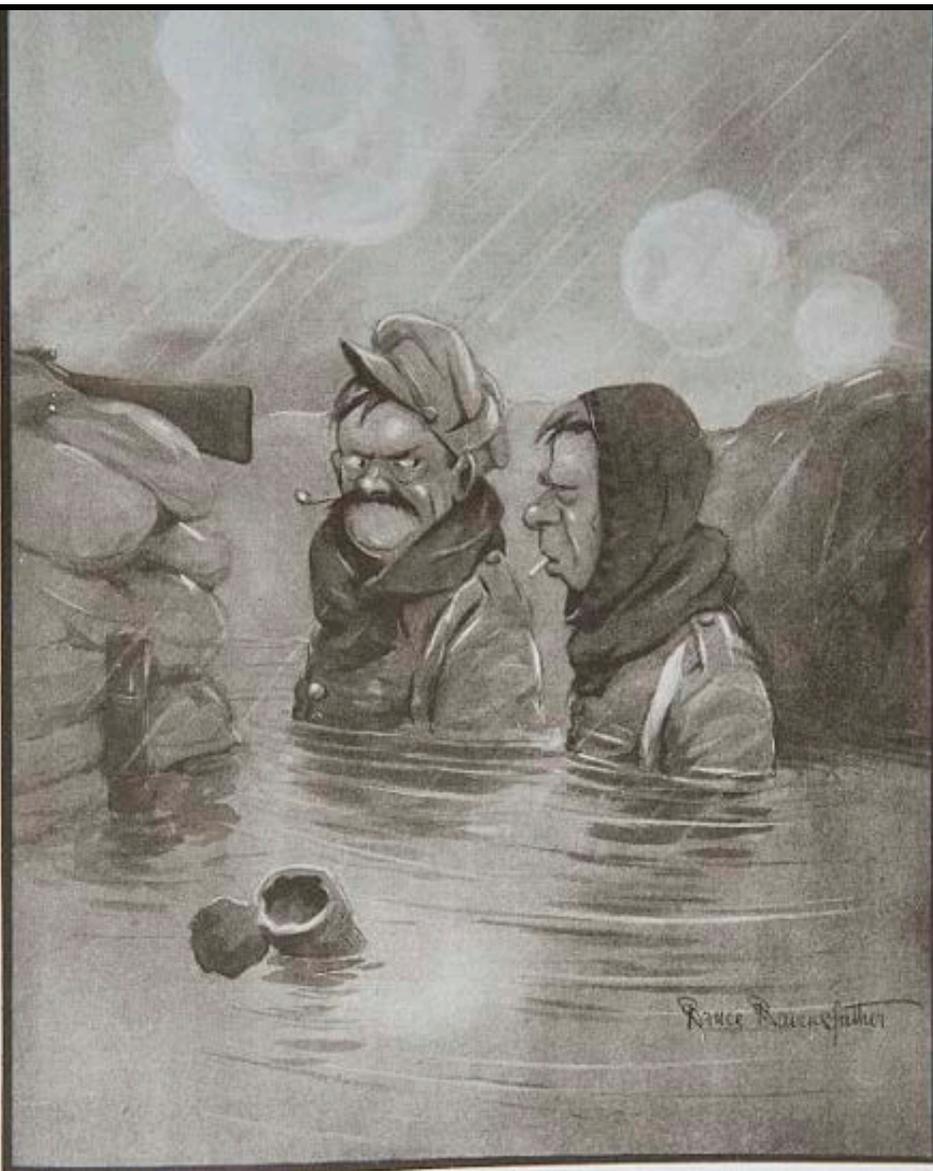
American Soldiers, qualifying with the M1917 Trench Shotgun.



COLT
Automatic Pistol
Caliber .45
**THE MOST POWERFUL SMALL ARM
EVER PRODUCED**
COLT'S PATENT FIRE ARMS MFG. CO.
HARTFORD, CONN., U. S. A.

Original sales advertisement for the 1911 in the Army Navy Register June 1914.

1. Garamone, Jim. "World War I: Building the American military." https://www.army.mil/article/185229/world_war_i_building_the_american_military
2. Setzekorn, Eric. *Joining the Great War*. CMH Pub 77-3. 2017. Pg. 27
3. Woodward, David. *The American Army and the First World War*. Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pg. 143
4. Shurtleff, Leonard. "Doughboy's Rifle: It wasn't necessarily a Springfield." <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/dbrifle.htm>
5. Brophy, William, *The Springfield 1903 Rifles*. Stackpole Books, May 1, 1985
6. Henry Berry, *Make the Kaiser Dance: Living Memoirs of the Doughboy* (New York: Arbor House, 1978), Pg. 92.
7. Ibid Shurtleff
8. "SPRINGFIELD MODEL 1903 MILITARY RIFLES" M1903 Production 1907-1945 https://gun-data.com/springfield_model_1903.html
9. Private Loren D. Duren papers, World War I Veteran's Survey, Carlisle War College Archives, Carlisle, PA. Pg. 4.
10. Mastriano, Col. Douglas. *Alvin York: A New Biography of the Hero of the Argonne*. (University Press of Kentucky, 2014)
11. Linn, Brian McAllister. *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Modern War Studies (Paperback)). University Press of Kansas.
12. Hogg, Ian V., *Walter, John. Pistols of the World (4 ed.)*. David & Charles, 2004. Pg. 89
13. Engen, Scott. "The History of the 1911 Pistol." 2011. <http://www.browning.com/news/articles/history-of-the-1911-pistol.html>
14. Lisker, Sam. "THE AUTOMATIC PISTOL CALIBER .45, MODEL 1911" <http://www.worldwar1.com/dbc/coit45.htm>
15. Hacker, Rick. "Smith & Wesson U.S. Model 1917 Revolver." *The American Rifleman*. 2010 <https://www.americanrifleman.org/articles/2010/5/25/smith-wesson-us-model-1917-revolver>
16. Laemlein, Tom. "The Trouble with Trench Guns." *The American Rifleman*. 2018. <https://www.americanrifleman.org/articles/2018/1/23/the-trouble-with-trench-guns/>
17. Ibid Laemlein
18. Ibid Laemlein
19. "Combat Shotgun" <http://militarythoughts.blogspot.com/2008/03/this-is-coolbert-combat-shotgun.html>



The New Submarine Danger

"They'll be torpedoin' us if we stick 'ere much longer, Bill"

Originally printed in the British magazine *Fragments from France*, the sentiment was echoed by American Soldiers about the miserable living conditions in the trenches.



First Army, 50th Aero Squadron

Editor's Note

As we continue with this series of newsletters reporting on the activities of the First Army in World War One and World War Two we would like to extend the invitation to all First Army friends to invite former First Army members (Soldiers and civilians) to read and contribute to this newsletter as well. You are additionally welcome to request articles that interest you such as the current article on small arms which was requested by a Soldier within First Army.

These newsletters are intended to be a means to educate our First Army family about our own history and to inspire discussion as well as to commemorate the First Army Centennial. We are additionally searching for World War Two First Army veterans. If you know of any please contact us.

If you have a request for additional information or you would like to have a specific topic covered please contact 1st LT. Kevin Braafladt kevin.d.braafladt@mail.mil for story submission requirements. All stories are subject to editing by the First Army Historian.