

A Collector's Guide to the M1 Carbine



(Top to bottom) M1A1 carbine with stock in extended position; M1 carbine with all "early" features and 15 round magazine; M1 carbine with later (M2 type) parts, 30 round magazine and M4 bayonet.

by Bruce N. Canfield

All items pictured from the author's collection.

AFTER THE END of the second World War, many U.S. military weapons were disposed of as surplus. Under the auspices of the Director of Civilian Marksmanship (DCM), weapons such as the M1903 Springfield rifle, M1917 Enfield rifle, .45 service pistol, and even some M1 Garand rifles were sold directly to members of the National Rifle Association. Today, one may gaze wistfully through old issues of *American Rifleman* magazine from the late 1940's, 1950's and early 1960's and see original U.S. military arms sold at a small fraction of today's prices. The government sold other such weapons

to a number of commercial arms dealers who, even after marking up the items, were able to sell them to the general public at quite attractive prices.

Many ex-GI's and thousands of other arms fanciers were able to obtain examples of the standard American military weapons of World Wars One and Two. Untold thousands of these weapons were subsequently "sporterized" for hunting use which accounts for the scarcity of many types of military weapons in unaltered, "as issued" condition today. The government eventually halted the sales of these surplus weapons as the

bureaucrats didn't want them to fall into the "wrong hands." Somehow, one has trouble believing that a lot of liquor stores were held up with M1903 Springfields or that radical terrorist groups made much use of the M1917 Enfield! In any event, until the mid-1960's, collectors and anyone else wanting a good, authentic U.S. military rifle had little difficulty obtaining one.

However, one U.S. martial arm which was always very popular, the M1 carbine, was not generally available to the gun buying public. Thousands of ex-servicemen fondly remembered the trim little carbine from their tenure of duty in the military and many wished to some day be able to own one. A few enterprising commercial firms did, in fact, make some copies of the military M1 carbine in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Frankly, the general quality of these early commercial copies was not very high and the prices were relatively steep for such weapons. Production and sales were rather slow as most collectors and ex-servicemen wanted an "honest to goodness" GI carbine.

Meanwhile, Uncle Sam was giving away carbines by the hundreds of thousands through various military foreign aid programs. The carbine proved to be very popular with our sundry "friends" and "allies" around the globe, particularly in the Pacific Rim countries and south of our border. Even after handing out vast quantities of the weapon, there were still large numbers of carbines in the U.S. government's inventory. With the adoption of the multi-purpose M14 rifle in 1957, the carbine's days as an issue U.S. military weapon were numbered.

In 1963, the government made many gun buffs happy. It was announced that the Director of Civilian Marksmanship would release some 240,000 government-owned M1 carbines for sale to NRA members for \$20.00 each. When the ads appeared in the *American Rifleman* the response among the members was overwhelming and the entire allotment was quickly sold out even though there was a limit of one carbine to a purchaser. In a relatively short period of time the carbine became rather commonplace and about anyone who wanted one was able to fulfill their wish. Of course it didn't take long for the original NRA sales price of \$20.00 to triple or quadruple and the "market price" for "GI" carbines leveled out and remained fairly constant for several years. It should be pointed out that this sale of government property brought several million dollars into the treasury's coffers. After the sale of military weapons was discontinued, a policy of destroying most of the surplus firearms still under government control was instituted. Aside from depriving future generations of the possibility of owning such items, the program cost taxpayers millions of dollars simply to have the weapons destroyed.

Many of the above-mentioned ex-GI's and other gun enthusiasts bought carbines and a number of martial

arms collectors added one to their collections as a representative example of the genre. However, few serious martial collectors were specifically interested in the M1 carbine as a collection theme. There seemed to be a prevalent feeling of "You've seen one carbine, you've seen them all." But as the supply of other "traditional" collector arms (Colts, Winchesters, Lugers, etc., etc., etc.) began to dry up and the prices sharply escalated, previously "under collected" guns such as the M1 carbine began to attract more collector interest.

Such collectors have recently become cognizant of the fact that there are actually many interesting and valuable variations of the carbine and it is indeed a fertile field for collecting. Many impressive M1 carbine collections have been assembled over the past few years and the weapon is enjoying ever increasing popularity among collectors.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of accurate and reliable reference material pertaining to the carbine and a good deal of erroneous information is floating around. A popular barnyard euphemism comes to mind when some self-styled carbine "authorities" pontificate at length (usually without being asked) at gun shows and other such gathering places regarding certain "facts" about the carbine. A couple of paperback pamphlets of varying degrees of usefulness have been printed about carbines in the past few years. Only one book specifically aimed at carbine collectors has been published but, regrettably, its actual value is limited due to the fact that it contains many errors and much mis-information. However, the book does give a reasonably accurate history of the development of the carbine including the various competitive trials leading up to the selection of the entry from Winchester Repeating Arms Company.

Hopefully, some day a well-researched and documented book on the carbine will be written which will dispel many of the myths and misconceptions and fill in much of the missing data which has long plagued carbine collectors. This article is intended to serve as a general collector's guide to the M1 carbine, its variants, accessories and accouterments.

The M1 carbine, adopted late in 1941, was designed by Winchester. The firm sold the manufacturing rights for the carbine to the U.S. government for \$886,000 and, eventually, a total of ten prime contractors (including Winchester) produced the carbine during World War II. (See Tables 1-10).

When it became apparent that many carbines would be needed in a relatively short period of time, the "Carbine Industry Integration Committee" was formed to oversee and monitor carbine production. The result was a truly shining example of America's industrial and managerial ability. At the very height of the war, when many sorely needed items were in critically short supply, the carbine manufacturing program was faced with the threat of over

production! The carbine was produced in greater numbers than any other U.S. military weapon in history.

The carbine was composed of some sixty parts. The ten prime contractors actually manufactured very few of these parts and the rest were supplied by a vast network of subcontractors. One of the prime contractors made just one part for the carbine (the receiver) while none produced over 15 of the gun's 60 parts. The prime contractors were responsible for the final assembly of the carbines and their delivery to the government. The receiver of the carbine was marked with the name of the prime contractor, but even some receivers were actually manufactured by subcontractors. Many of the component parts were marked with sometimes cryptic letter codes to identify both the prime and subcontractor. For example, the letter code assigned to Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors was, logically enough, "I". A carbine magazine ordered by Inland from one of its subcontractors, Autotyre Company, would be marked "AI" (Autotyre-Inland). The subcontractor's code letter was usually (but not always) first followed by the prime contractor's code letter.

However, not all carbine parts fit into such neat classifications. Some parts were unmarked while others, intended for depot issue (spare parts for field maintenance), may be marked with just the subcontractor's code. Still others will be found marked with just the prime contractor's code letter. To further confuse the issue, there are some carbine parts which are marked with letter codes of unknown meaning. Today it is not unusual to see carbine collectors intently searching through piles of carbine parts at gun shows attempting to find specifically coded parts in order to "restore" a carbine to all matching configuration. However, as previously stated, not all of these letter codes have been positively identified. At the very least, a collector grade carbine should have a proper barrel for the receiver and mostly matching parts. Only a "purist" would insist that a carbine be 100% matching and, even then, exactly what constitutes "matching parts" may be a matter of some conjecture.

There were many modifications and improvements made to the carbine during its production run. In fact, very few component parts of the carbine remained unchanged. The weapon's sights, magazine catch, safety, barrel band, bolt and most other parts were changed to either a type that was functionally superior or which could be manufactured faster or more efficiently. Since many of these changes were made late in the carbine's production run, most of the M1 carbines actually used during WWII exhibited mainly "early" style features (see Table 11). Unaltered and unmodified early M1 carbines are eagerly sought after by collectors.

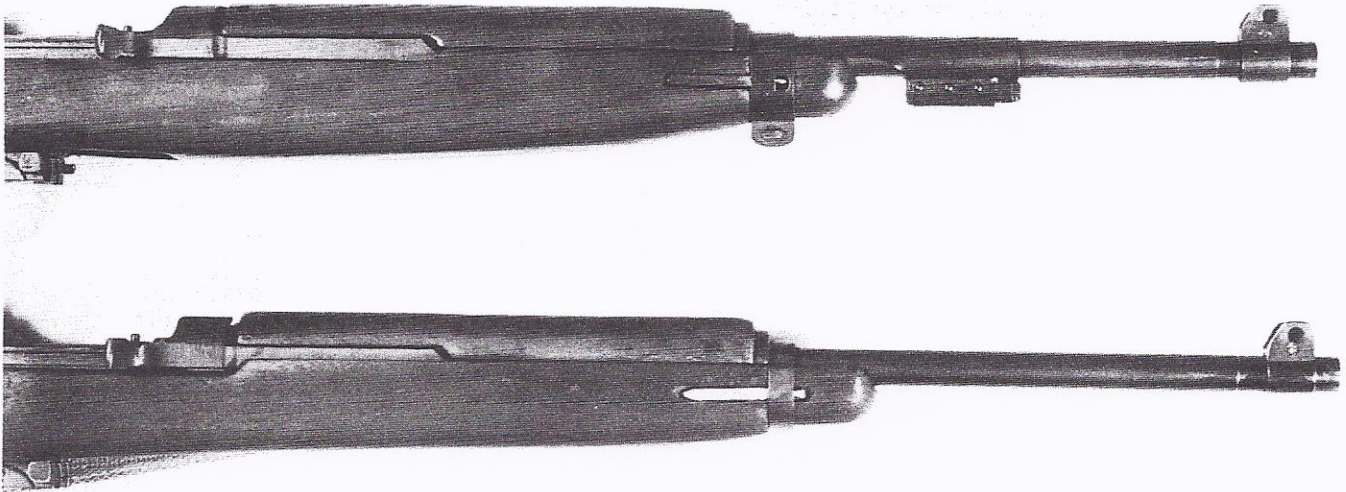
After World War II, a program of overhauling all of the carbines in the military inventory was instituted. The carbines were called in and refurbished as necessary and

fitted with the updated parts. Such government rebuilt carbines were generally stamped on the left side of the stock with the initials of the arsenal performing the work. Other U.S. military weapons, such as the M1 Garand rifle, were subjected to similar refurbishing procedures. Interestingly, there is a rather high percentage of carbines extant which retain their original WWII barrels. The reason is that the carbine's ammunition was of the non-corrosive variety which caused less bore erosion and required less frequent cleaning, both of which contributed greatly to longer bore life. All other U.S. military ammunition of WWII vintage was corrosively primed. Thus, while the majority of carbines around today will have the later parts, many will still retain their original barrels.

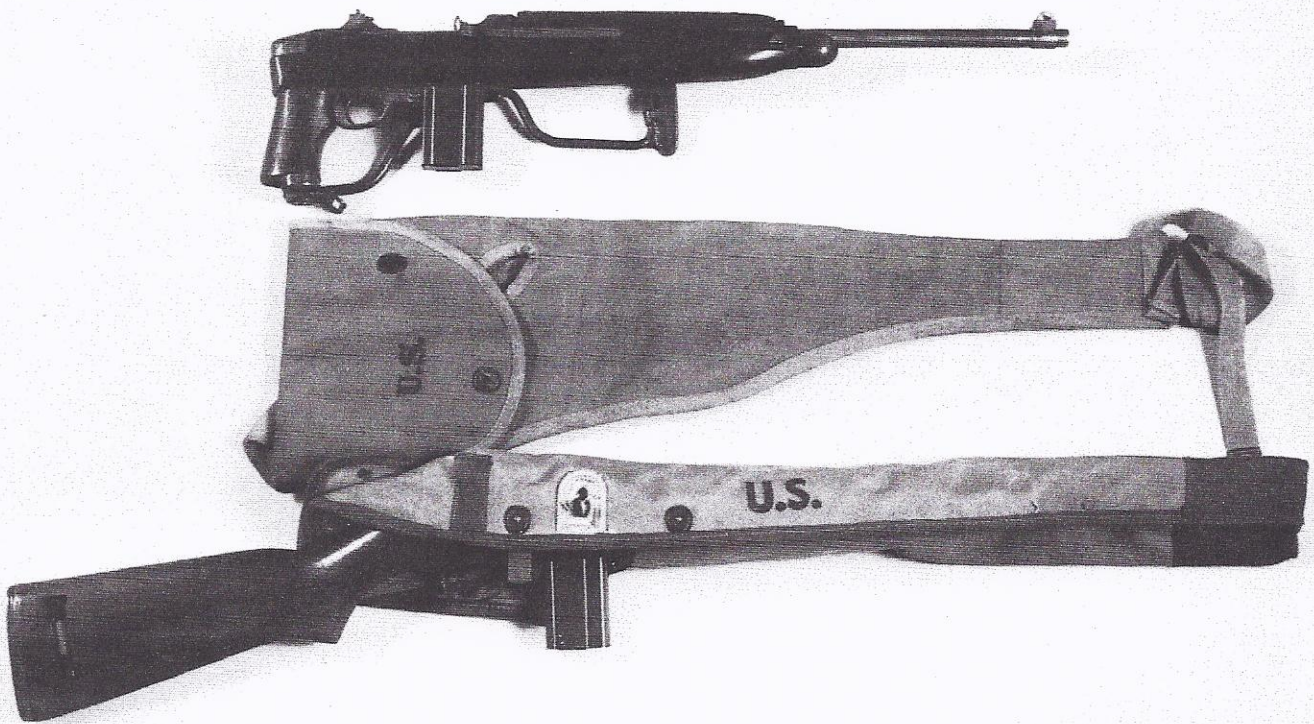
Six different prime contractors (Inland, Winchester, Saginaw, IBM, Underwood and Rock-Ola) and at least two subcontractors (Buffalo Arms and Marlin) manufactured the M1 carbine barrel during WWII. The "Industry Integration Committee" orchestrated the allocation of the barrels to the various contractors so as to avoid production bottlenecks. Several firms were given contracts to produce spare carbine barrels after the war. Since many carbine barrels were marked with the date of manufacture, some confusion has arisen among present day collectors when they encounter a carbine with a post-WWII barrel dated (for example, 1949). Again, no government issue M1 carbines were made after 1945 and the afore-mentioned 1949 date would simply indicate that the carbine in question had been subsequently rebarrelled with a post-WWII replacement when it was overhauled.

As was the case with the M1 rifle, many M1 carbines were destroyed ("demilitarized") in the 1960's by the government and disposed of as scrap metal. A substantial number of these "demils" were salvaged and rebuilt by welding the cut receivers and other parts (including some barrels) and refinishing the weapons. With the abundant supply of spare carbine parts available at the time, rebuilding these "rewelded" carbines was not particularly difficult although the workmanship varied greatly from gun to gun. A potential purchaser of a "GI" carbine should be very careful when examining a carbine to determine if the gun has been "cut." Since practically all government carbines have been refinished one or more times, it may be difficult to detect a commercially reparkerized weapon. A good magnifying glass, a strong light and an experienced eye can usually detect a "reweld." Most collectors disdain such guns and with the possible exception of an ultra-rare variation such as the T3 carbine, a "demilled" weapon has no place in a serious martial collection.

Another problem for a novice to consider is the recent influx of "imported" carbines. Within the past couple of years thousands of M1 carbines and other U.S. military rifles, such as the M1 Garand, M1903 and M1917, have been brought back into the United States from overseas



(Top) Late features including over-size M2-type "pot belly" stock, "low wood" in front of operating slide and T4 front band with bayonet lug. (Bottom) Early features including "high wood" in front of operating slide and plain barrel band without bayonet lug.



(Top) M1A1 carbine with stock in folded position above canvas "holster" intended for paratroop use. (Bottom) Standard full-length carbine with the seldom-used belt "holster".

due to a relaxing of the laws pertaining to the importation of military weapons. These arms were supplied to various foreign governments during and after World War II and were subjected to much use and abuse in addition to suffering from poor storage. Practically without exception, these "imported" weapons will be found in conditions ranging from fair to horrible with little or no original finish, shot-out bores and missing or broken wood. These "imported" carbines have almost flooded the market at

what may appear to be bargain prices. They may not sell appearance, but refinishing cannot usually conceal the worn condition of the guns. Only someone on the most modest budget should consider the purchase of such a gun for collecting purposes. One would be well advised to save a little more and buy one of the "NRA" carbines which will generally be in much better overall condition and a more desirable collectible than these "imported" carbines.

(Text continues on page 18.)

TABLE 1

Winchester Repeating Arms Company
New Haven, Connecticut

Number of Carbines Produced
828,059*

Percentage of Total Production
13½%

Receiver Marking
"WINCHESTER"

Barrel
Very early barrels marked "WRA" and dated.
The vast majority are marked "W" and not dated.

Manufacturer's Code
"W"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
6 - 10
1,000,000 - 1,349,999
4,075,000 - 4,075,009
5,549,922 - 5,834,618
6,449,868 - 6,629,883
7,234,884 - 7,369,660

Number of Component Parts Produced
15

Comments

Winchester was the only prime contractor to have previously manufactured firearms. Many early Winchester carbines had a distinctive black tinted parkerized finish. WRA produced the carbine at the lowest "per unit" cost to the government. Even though Winchester was the second largest producer of the carbine, it is one of the more desirable makes due, no doubt, to the "magic" of the Winchester name and prices are sometimes higher than would otherwise be expected considering the number produced.

*Includes 1,108 T3 carbines and about 17,500 M2 carbines.

TABLE 2

Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors Corporation
Dayton, Ohio

Number of Carbines Produced
2,632,097*

Percentage of Total Production
43%

Receiver Marking
"INLAND DIV."

Barrel
"INLAND MFG. DIV. OF GENERAL MOTORS"
(usually dated)

Manufacturer's Code
"I"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
1 - 5
11 - 30
31 - 99
XA3 - XA50
100 - 699,999
700,000 - 940,000**
940,001 - 999,999
2,912,520 - 3,152,519
3,152,520 - 3,212,519**
4,879,526 - 5,549,821
6,219,689 - 6,449,867
6,664,884 - 7,234,883
7,369,661 - 8,069,660***

Number of Component Parts Produced
5

Comments

Inland was the largest producer of the carbine and is the most commonly found make today. Some Inland receivers were made under subcontract by G.M.'s Saginaw Steering Gear Division (marked "SG" on the left side of the receiver). Inland was the sole producer of the M1A1 carbine but there were no special serial numbers assigned to this weapon.

*Includes approximately 100,000 M1A1, 811 T3 and about 200,000 M2 carbines.

**Saginaw Steering Gear Division subcontract receivers

***M2 carbines

TABLE 3

Underwood-Elliott-Fisher
Hartford, Connecticut

Number of Carbines Produced
545,616

Percentage of Total Production
8.9%

Receiver Marking
"UNDERWOOD"

Barrel
"UNDERWOOD"
(usually dated)

Manufacturer's Code
"U"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
1,350,000 - 1,449,999
2,352,520 - 2,912,519
4,010,000 - 4,074,999
6,099,689 - 6,199,688

Number of Component Parts Produced
7

Comments

Underwood was a well-known maker of typewriters and office equipment. The company furnished barrels to several other carbine contractors.

TABLE 4

Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corporation
Chicago, Illinois

Number of Carbines Produced
228,500

Percentage of Total Production
3.7%

Receiver Marking
"ROCK OLA"

Barrel
"ROCK OLA"
(Some were dated)

Manufacturer's Code
"R"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
1,662,250 - 1,762,519
4,532,100 - 4,632,099
6,071,189 - 6,099,688
6,199,684 - 6,219,688

Number of Component Parts Produced
11

Comments

Rock-Ola was a famous maker of coin-operated juke boxes and related equipment. With less than 4% of the total production, Rock-Ola carbines are somewhat scarce today. The company supplied barrels to several prime contractors.

TABLE 5

Quality Hardward Machine Corporation
Chicago, Illinois

Number of Carbines Produced
359,666

Percentage of Total Production
5.9%

Receiver Marking
"QUALITY HMC"

or

"UN-QUALITY" (sub-contract)

Barrel

"Quality Hardward did not produce carbine barrels.
Most QHMC carbines will be found with Rock-Ola barrels.

Manufacturer's Code
"Q"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
1,550,000 - 1,562,519
1,562,520 - 1,662,519
1,675,040 - 1,907,519
1,907,520 - 1,937,519
4,432,100 - 4,532,099*
4,632,100 - 4,879,525

Number of Component Parts Produced
1 (the receiver)

Comments

The receivers marked "UN-QUALITY" were made under subcontract by Union Switch & Signal Company and are rather scarce today.

*US&S manufactured receivers.

TABLE 6

National Postal Meter
Rochester, New York

Number of Carbines Produced
413,017

Percentage of Total Production
6.8%

Receiver Marking
"NATIONAL POSTAL METER"

Barrel

NPM did not make carbine barrels. National Postal Meter carbines will usually be found with Underwood barrels.

Manufacturer's Code
"N"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
1,450,000 - 1,549,999
1,937,520 - 1,982,519
4,075,010 - 4,079,999
4,080,000 - 4,425,099
4,425,100 - 4,432,099

Number of Component Parts Produced
4

Comments

When National Postal Meter was completing its carbine contract, the name of the company was changed to Commercial Controls Corporation. Supposedly a very few carbines marked "Commercial Controls" instead of "National Postal Meter" were made before production ended. The number of carbines with this marking is unknown but would probably be around 200 or less. A genuine "Commercial Controls" M1 carbine would be a very rare and valuable item.

TABLE 7

Irwin-Pedersen Arms Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Number of Carbines Produced
Exact quantity unknown but quite small
(Several thousand)

Percentage of Total Production
Less than 1/10 of 1%

Receiver Marking
"IRWIN-PEDERSEN"

Barrel

The company did not make barrels and used mainly Underwood barrels.

Manufacturer's Code
"IP"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
1,762,520 - 1,875,039

Number of Component Parts Produced
Reportedly Irwin-Pedersen was to produce all parts except for the barrel.

Comments

By far the rarest of the ten prime contractors, Irwin-Pedersen carbines are much in demand today. The firm was the only contractor unable to successfully fulfill its carbine contract. Saginaw Steering Gear Division of G.M. eventually took over the operation of the Irwin-Pedersen plant and used the unfinished IP receivers and other parts on hand to assemble several thousand carbines. Irwin-Pedersen did not actually deliver any carbines to the government although about 1,000 finished carbines were on hand when Saginaw assumed IP's contract. The "Pedersen" in Irwin-Pedersen was the famous John D. Pedersen, inventor of the Pedersen Device.

TABLE 8

Standard Products
Port Clinton, Ohio

Number of Carbines Produced
247,160

Percentage of Total Production
4%

Receiver Marking
"STD. PRO."

Barrel

Standard Products did not make any carbine barrels. Most SP carbines were fitted with Underwood barrels.

Manufacturer's Code
"S"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
1,982,520 - 2,352,519

Number of Component Parts Produced
4

Comments

Standard Products was originally to have produced the M1903 rifle during World War II. However, the M1 carbine was deemed a higher priority item and the firm accepted a contract for this weapon instead. Standard Product carbines are not rare but can be a little hard to turn up today.

TABLE 9

International Business Machines
Poughkeepsie, New York

Number of Carbines Produced
346,500

Percentage of Total Production
5.7%

Receiver Marking
"IBM"

Barrel
"IBM"

Manufacturer's Code
"B"

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
3,651,520 - 4,009,999

Number of Component Parts Produced
4

Comments

Some of IBM's receivers were manufactured under subcontract by the Auto-Ordnance Company of Thompson sub-machinegun fame. These will be marked with an "AO" just under the "IBM" marking on the receiver. Despite IBM's subsequent success in the personal computer field, there is no evidence that the carbines made by the firm were any more "user friendly" than any other make of carbine!

TABLE 10

Saginaw Steering Gear Division of General Motors Corporation
Saginaw, Michigan

&
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Number of Carbines Produced
517,212

(combined total of both plants)*

Percentage of Total Production
8½%

Receiver Marking
"SAGINAW S.G."

Barrel
"SAGINAW S.G. DIV. GENERAL MOTORS"

Manufacturer's Code
"SG" (Saginaw Plant)
"SG" (Grand Rapids Plant)

Serial Number Blocks Assigned
Grand Rapids Plant (S'G')
1,762,520 - 1,875,039*
3,212,520 - 3,250,019
Saginaw Plant (SG)
3,250,020 - 3,651,519
5,834,619 - 6,071,188

Number of Component Parts Produced
15

Comments

Saginaw was the only prime contractor of the carbine to operate two separate plants. The Grand Rapids manufactured carbines (coded S'G') are much less common than those produced at the Saginaw plant (coded SG). Saginaw also produced some receivers for Inland.

*Includes the Irwin-Pedersen contract.

As previously mentioned, many collectors will attempt to "restore" carbines to their original configuration. Carbine parts have begun to be a little harder to locate but with some effort most needed parts can still be found. Theoretically, a properly restored carbine cannot be told from an original factory specimen. However there are several things to look for when trying to determine whether or not a carbine has been restored. First, when the early "L" type rear sights were replaced by the adjustable variety, the newer sights were usually "staked" in place. This procedure caused one or two small indentions in the receiver just in front of the new sight. When an early sight is installed these staking punch marks are readily apparent. In addition, the serial numbers of some early carbines were hidden from view when the later model adjustable sights were installed during the arsenal rebuilding programs. On some of these, the carbine's serial number was restamped on the receiver in front of the new sight. Thus, when the later sight is replaced by an early type, two separate sets of serial numbers are revealed.

Another thing to watch for are rub marks which may occur on the barrels of carbines fitted with the later barrel bands with attached bayonet lugs. When such bands are replaced by the early type in the restoration process, these rub marks may be noticeable.

One technique for detecting non-original parts on some

types of guns is to observe whether the finish matches on all component parts. This will not work with the carbine because most of the parts were manufactured by various subcontractors. Obviously, a trigger guard supplied by one company and a bolt supplied by another firm hundreds of miles away could hardly be expected to match perfectly in the color and texture of the finish. Also, some of the carbine's parts were originally blued instead of being parkerized. Indeed, one tip-off that a carbine has been reparkerized is that the finish on all external parts matches perfectly.

Some collectors have had carbines commercially refinished. This practice is the subject of some disagreement. It is probably fair to say that a properly reparkerized carbine does not generally carry the stigma of other refinished arms due, no doubt, to the fact that practically all carbines have been refinished at least once while under government control. However, unless the finish of a "GI" carbine is in really poor shape, it is probably best to leave it alone. The military ordnance personnel were quite experienced in reparkerizing the carbines that came in for overhaul but, unfortunately, the quality of work turned out by some present day commercial firms is questionable.

There have been a number of incorrect "restorations" observed which certainly does not add to the desirability or

TABLE 11

Early vs. Late Parts

STOCK

<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>
"High" wood in front of operating slide	"Low" Wood
(a) "I" cut oiler recess (earliest)	(a) M1 type
(b) Oval oiler recess	(b) M2 "pot belly" with selector cut

REAR SIGHT

<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>
"L" type flip sight	Adjustable
	(a) "Milled" type
	(b) Stamped type

BARREL BAND

<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>
Narrow band without bayonet lug	(a) Wide band without bayonet lug
	(b) Wide band with bayonet lug

BOLT

<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>
Flat Top	Rounded Top

SAFETY

<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>
Push Button	Rotary
(a) Checkered (earliest)	
(b) Unmarked	

MAGAZINE CATCH

<i>Early</i>	<i>Late</i>
Unmarked	Marked
	(a) M
	(b) <u>M</u> with magazine support projection

value of the carbine. Generally, these are cases in which early style parts have been installed on carbines that actually left the factory with later parts or when incorrectly coded parts have been used by the "restorer." A collector should be familiar with the various serial number "blocks" assigned to each prime contractor to ascertain whether a particular carbine should have early or late parts. Regrettably, the fakers have not ignored the carbine. Some examples of altered serial numbers or receiver markings have been observed. In any event, if there is any doubt as to what is correct regarding which parts should be used in restoring a carbine, the weapon should be left alone. Any genuine "GI" carbine in decent condition is a good collectible and any incorrect or inept "restoration" may do more harm than good.

Carbine collectors may approach their hobby in several different ways. Usually the first goal of most beginning carbine collectors is to acquire one carbine manufactured by each of the ten prime contractors and, perhaps, an example of the M1A1 carbine. A "basic" ten contractor collection can still be assembled today with a little effort. A few of the scarcer contractors may take some searching and, without question, the hardest of the ten to find (in addition to being the most expensive) is the Irwin-Pedersen.

The next step for many collectors is to obtain an example of the carbines which had receivers built by subcontractors such as the IBM-AO, Inland-SG, Saginaw S'G' (not actually a subcontractor) and Un-Quality. Other variations of the basic M1 carbine are also avidly sought after, such as the Inland and Winchester T3, the various carbines with experimental serial numbers (such as the Inland "X" guns) and factory presentation carbines given to government officials or factory executives.

The "ultimate" carbine collection would probably consist of all of the above plus a carbine from each of the various serial number "blocks" assigned to each prime contractor by the government to disguise production quantities. The selective fire M2 and M3 carbines would certainly make fine additions to a carbine collection, but the restrictive federal laws governing the possession of such weapons limits their availability for the average collector and they are seldom found in carbine collections.

A number of commercial firms made copies of the carbine from the mid-1960's through today. For a military collector, these guns have little interest.

Variations

M1A1

The most commonly encountered variation of the basic M1 carbine is the M1A1. Adopted in May 1942, the M1A1 was a standard M1 carbine equipped with a folding metal buttstock. Developed for airborne troops, the M1A1 was intended to be carried in a canvas "holster" strapped to the leg of a paratrooper during his descent.

Inland Manufacturing Division of General Motors was the sole manufacturer of the M1A1 and the company delivered some 140,591 to the government during WWII. The M1A1 was used in every U.S. Army airborne operation of the war and was the only American small arm designed specifically for paratroopers.

After the war, the M1A1's were subjected to the same arsenal modifications as the standard M1 carbines. Although all M1A1 carbines were made by Inland, other makes were frequently installed by ordnance personnel in the folding stocks during the refurbishing programs.

The M1A1 carbine is quite popular with collectors and they are commonly seen at most gun shows today. However, a genuine "GI" M1A1 stock is actually a pretty scarce item. The vast majority (probably in excess of 90%) of these stocks seen today are really commercially made reproductions or, at best, have "repro" folding metal assemblies. Most of these M1A1 stock copies are very close in configuration to the "real McCoy" and, no doubt, many collectors have unknowingly been duped by sellers of such stocks. It must be quickly added, though, that many of these sellers may well believe they are purveying the genuine article. There are several small but vitally important features which will quickly identify an authentic M1A1 stock. Again, it should be mentioned that the only difference between the M1 carbine and the M1A1 carbine is the stock.

Since Inland was the prime contractor for all M1A1 carbines, the stocks will have the Inland code marking "OI" stamped inside the floor of the slide well. This marking can only be seen with the carbine removed from the stock. Also, the bottom of the pistol grip will be marked either "OI" or "RI/3". This latter marking is believed to represent the subcontractor Royal Typewriters under the contract to Inland (Royal-Inland) rather than the government's Rock Island Arsenal. Some post-WWII M1A1 stocks were made which will be marked "SA" on the bottom of the pistol grip. Apparently these stocks were made by the Springfield Armory during the Korean War years as replacements and are relatively common today.

Many M1A1 stocks have been seen with what appears to be original Inland wood but fitted with reproduction metal folding stocks. Thus, the key to identifying genuine WWII M1A1 stocks is the metal. Original WWII M1A1 stocks have a *cast-in* marking inside of the buttplate "B257614*" followed by either a one or two digit number (which will vary). This feature is key to recognizing an authentic M1A1 stock. Some sharp con artists have recently turned out some very good fake copies of the M1A1 stock with a similar marking *stamped* (not cast) inside of the buttplates. The real cast-in markings are usually somewhat indistinct and may be a little hard to see while the fake ones are quite sharp and clear. A potential purchaser of a "GI" M1A1 should examine it very closely as the workmanship on



(Clockwise) Carbine accessories (starting at top): WWII and Korean War military ammo in original boxes; WWII field manual; Korean War field manual; M4 bayonet with M8A1 scabbard; M8 grenade launcher; WWII belt-type 15 round magazine pouch; WWII "stock type" pouch; 30 round magazine pouch with stripper clips.

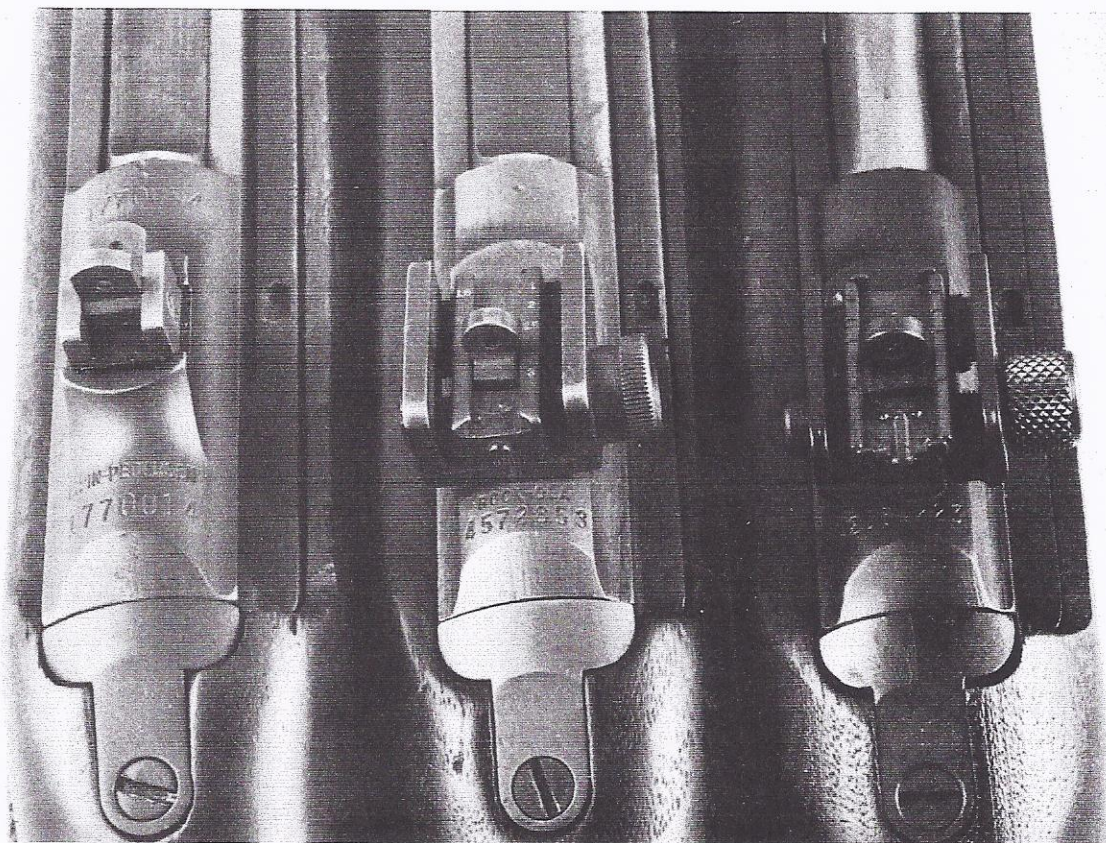
many of the copies is excellent. A reproduction M1A1 may look fine hanging on the wall but has no place in a serious martial collection.

T3

Probably the rarest variation of the carbine is the "T3". Manufactured by Winchester (1,108 produced) and Inland (811 produced) the T3 was a basic M1 carbine with a specially manufactured receiver with integral mounts for the various types of infra-red night vision scopes developed late in WWII for use with the carbine. The carbine was selected for use with these devices instead of the M1 rifle as the scopes were quite bulky and heavy and the full weight of the standard service rifle would have proved too cumbersome. In addition, these night vision devices were intended for short range use which suited the smaller and less powerful carbine cartridge.

It appears that the majority of the T3 carbines were destroyed by the government sometime after the war as most of them seen today are "rewelds" although some are known to have been subjected to the standard arsenal refurbishing programs and fitted with updated parts. The Winchester and Inland T3 carbines have somewhat different receiver configurations but are functionally identical.

During the Korean War many more infra-red night scopes were used and a mounting bar was developed which could easily be attached to a standard carbine receiver, thus eliminating the need for a specially manufactured weapon such as the T3. These late infra-red night vision scopes are relatively common today and are frequently seen mounted on a standard M1 carbine by means of this mounting bar. The earlier WWII era infra-red scopes are scarce.



(Left to right) Early "L type" rear sight; "Milled" type adjustable sight; "Stamped" adjustable rear sight. Note the typical receiver markings indicating the prime contractor and serial number location.

All T3 carbines were semi-automatic weapons. Some misunderstanding has arisen because the T3 carbine is frequently confused with the full-automatic M3 carbine which will be discussed later. An original T3 of either Winchester or Inland manufacture is quite a prize and when one appears on the collector's market it fetches a handsome price.

M2

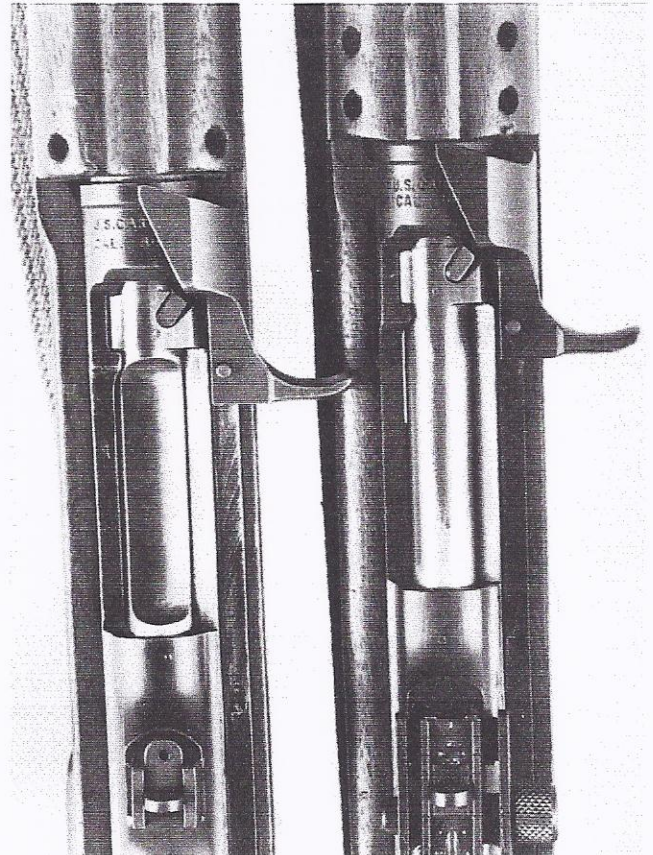
The M2 carbine was developed late in the Second World War. Some American soldiers had performed unofficial field modification of their M1 carbines to render them capable of fully automatic fire. The Ordnance Department recognized the potential value of a selective-fire carbine and the M2 was developed and adopted. The M2 carbine was basically a standard M1 with a selector lever and the necessary parts to allow for either semi- or full-automatic fire. The selector lever was located on the left side of the receiver. Thirty-round magazines were soon developed for

the weapon to provide more firepower capability than was allowed by the standard fifteen-round magazine. Eventually, a stock with a larger and stronger fore-end was adopted which could better stand the rigors and stresses of automatic fire. This type of stock has a distinctive oversized fore-end and has been dubbed the "pot belly" stock by collectors. In addition to being used on M2 carbines, the "pot belly" stock was also installed on many M1 carbines as they were overhauled and rebuilt by the government.

The M2 carbine was made only by Winchester and Inland during WWII. After the war, M2 "kits" consisting of the parts necessary to convert the standard M1 carbine to M2 configuration were installed on many carbines by the military. On some of these converted M1 carbines a "2" was over-stamped on the receiver where the "M1" marking was usually found. The original WWII-made Winchester and Inland M2 carbines are the most desirable ones for collectors, although the pertinent federal and state laws limit their availability.



Barrel markings on early Winchester M1 carbine. The 12-42 indicates that the barrel was manufactured on December, 1942. (Note: dated Winchester carbine barrels are uncommon.)



(Left) Early 2 rivet handguard, flat top bolt and "L type" rear sight. (Right) Later 4 rivet handguard, rounded bolt and adjustable rear sight.

The M2 carbine was widely used by American troops during the Korean War and early in the Viet Nam War. Actually, the M2 carbine would properly be classified as a submachinegun. Due to a quirk in the federal laws, an M2 carbine stripped of the parts which make it capable of fully automatic operation, and which can be only fired semi-automatically is still considered as a machinegun since it was originally manufactured as such. Under the law, "once a machinegun, always a machinegun."

M3

The M3 carbine is a sometime misunderstood weapon. Basically, the M3 is a carbine capable of full-automatic fire and equipped with an infra-red night vision scope. In other words, the M3 is simply a conversion of an existing M2 type carbine equipped with the mounting bar to take an infra-red night vision scope, rather than a specially manufactured weapon as was the T3.

Some confusion has arisen because some writers

mention the T3 and M3 carbines together due to the fact that both were used with infra-red scopes. In fact, it is common to see references to the "T3/M3" carbine. This is totally misleading and should be avoided. Obviously, the same legal restrictions would apply to the M3 carbine as apply to the M2.

Other Variations

There are several minor variations of the standard M1 carbine which are of interest to collectors. The various early carbines with non-standard serial numbers such as the Inland "X numbered" guns are quite popular. However, some of these are known to be fake and great care should be exercised when one is contemplating the purchase of such a weapon.

Some carbine receivers manufactured by one contractor during WWII could have been shipped to another contractor to alleviate or prevent a production slow-down. Some such receivers had the original prime contractor's

name marked through and the name of the contractor which actually used the receiver stamped below it. Some beginning collectors have dismissed such guns as very crude attempts to fake a manufacturer when, in fact, such carbines are actually interesting and desirable variations of the weapon.

Also popular with today's collectors are the carbines given to various dignitaries and officials as "presentation" guns. Such carbines are usually custom made with special finishes, high grades of wood and, frequently, plaques identifying the person receiving the gun. True presentation carbines are quite scarce and some have been faked.

Accessories

Sling and Oiler

The M1 carbine was issued with a web sling and cylindrical metal oil container. The oiler fitted in a slot cut in the carbine's buttstock and was securely held in place by the sling. Many oilers were marked on the bottom with the initials of the maker. As originally issued during WWII, the carbine's sling was a khaki color while later slings were of a darker olive green color.

Bayonet

When adopted, the carbine did not have any provision for the attachment of a bayonet. Soldiers armed with the carbine were usually issued the standard M3 trench knife. In late 1944, the "T4" front band assembly with an integral bayonet lug was adopted for the carbine. Most of the carbines issued during WWII did not have this feature, but the newer bands were added to the carbines during the various arsenal refurbishing programs. The bayonet adopted for use with the carbine was the "M4 Bayonet-Knife" and was very similar to the M3 trench knife. Once very common, original WWII "GI" M4 bayonets are somewhat difficult to find today in untouched condition. Those built during the war will have grips made of grooved leather washers. Some have been observed with rubber or wooden grips, but these are replacement handles fabricated well after World War II. The M4 bayonet was issued with the composition (plastic) M8/M8A1 scabbard.

Ammunition

Government surplus .30 caliber carbine ammunition was once quite plentiful and cheap with retail prices as low as 3¢ or 4¢ per round and rivaled .22 rimfire as economical "plinking" ammo. "GI" carbine ammunition was produced at least as late as the mid-1970's and can still be found. However, the current price for military carbine ammo is at least four or five times higher than the above-mentioned prices.

Government carbine ammo was produced in the standard "ball" cartridge, tracer, proof, grenade launching, incendiary and dummy configurations. Carbine ammo of

WWII vintage in the original boxes is rather scarce today and makes an interesting addition to a carbine collection.

Magazines and pouches

The M1 carbine was issued during WWII with a 15-round detachable box magazine. Most magazines will be marked with the code letter of the subcontractor which produced it and with the code letter of the prime contractor that ordered it.

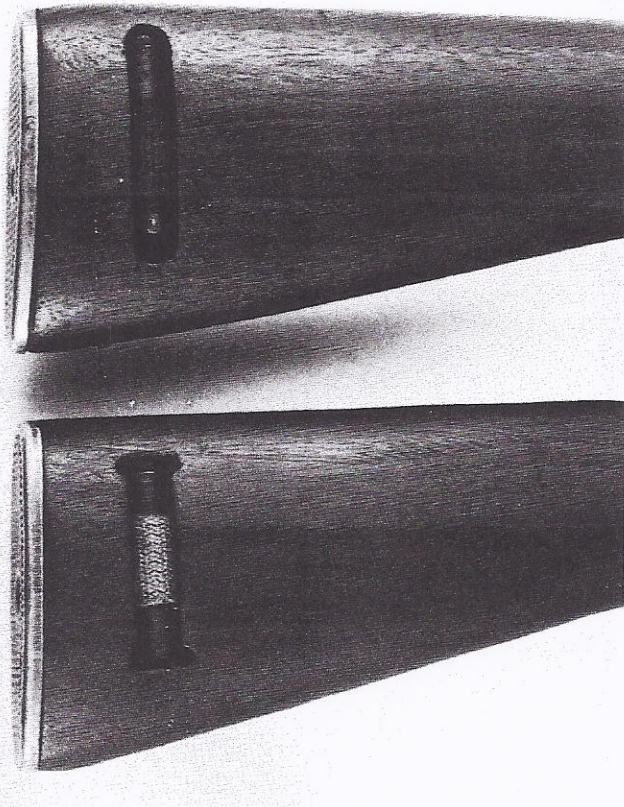
With the advent of the selective-fire M2 carbine, a 30-round magazine was adopted. This larger capacity magazine was issued with the M1 and M2 carbines after WWII. Both the 15- and 30-round magazines were originally blued but some parkerized specimens may be encountered. These have been refinished by various government arsenals.

The 15-round carbine magazines were issued with two pocket web pouches of which several variations exist. The first type had a wide belt loop with a "male" snap fastener inside. This pouch was intended to be carried on the web pistol belt which had a corresponding snap. Early in WWII, however, soldiers discovered that this type of pouch could be slid over the carbine stock (the gun had to be removed from the stock) and the pouch would fit snugly on the buttstock. Thus equipped, the carbine user would always have two magazines handy. Later, 15-round magazine pouches were made with two narrow belt loops. These pouches would not fit over the stock. The early WWII carbine pouches were of a light khaki color rather than the darker olive green of the later pouches.

A carrying pouch was also made for the 30-round carbine magazines. This pouch is usually referred to as being a 4-pocket pouch by many collectors even though four 30-round magazines will not generally fit. Actually, this pouch was intended to hold two 30-round magazines plus extra 10-round stripper clips developed to aid the in-loading of the larger capacity magazines. Most 30-round carbine pouches will bear dates in the early 1950's although a few WWII-dated 30-round pouches may be found. The latter are scarce.

Grenade Launcher

A grenade launcher, adopted as the "M8", was developed for the carbine during WWII. The launcher clamped to the end of the carbine barrel. Although the M8 launcher saw a fair amount of use during WWII, the recoil generated by the rifle grenades was excessive and many carbine stocks were broken or cracked from such use. The M8 grenade launcher was usually used with the M15 grenade launcher sight which was also utilized with the M1903 and M1 rifles. M15 grenade launcher sights are very common and inexpensive today although original M8 carbine launchers are a little difficult to find. Reproduction M8 launchers are around but, with some looking, an original can be found.



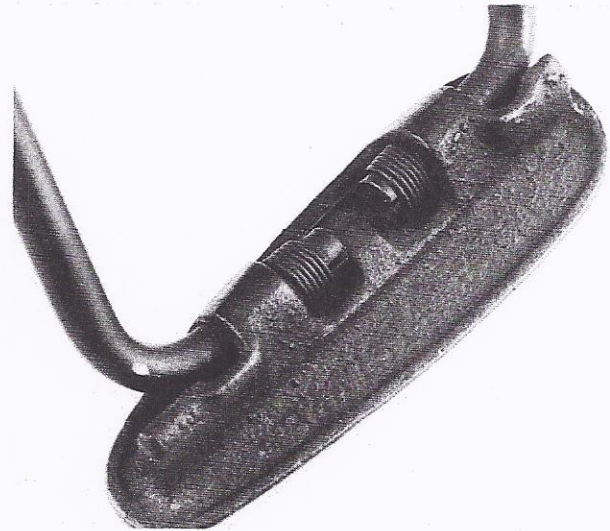
Flash Hider

A funnel-shaped flash hider, the "Hider-Flash, M3", was adopted for use with the M3 carbine. Although the hider will fit any standard carbine, it was intended for use with the various infra-red night vision scopes. The M3 flash hider clamped to the end of the carbine barrel in the same manner as the M8 grenade launcher.

Again, many "repro" M3 flash hidere are to be found. The originals will be marked either "U" (Underwood contract) or "SA" (Springfield Armory).

Carrying Cases

Three types of web/canvas carrying cases were made for the carbine. One type was designed solely for the M1A1 carbine with its stock in the folded position. This case was strapped to the leg of a paratrooper to provide ready access to the weapon. A second type of carrying case was made which was intended to be attached to the pistol belt and held a full stock carbine. This arrangement proved to be cumbersome and the case saw little use. The third type was a full length zippered canvas case. This case was made for the transportation and storage of the carbine. All types of cases (if original government production) make nice additions to a collection.



Cast-in marking inside buttplace of original M1A1 stock. Original markings are generally rather faint.

Left: (Top) Later oval shaped oiler recess. (Bottom) Early "I cut" oiler recess. Note stock cartouches on both.

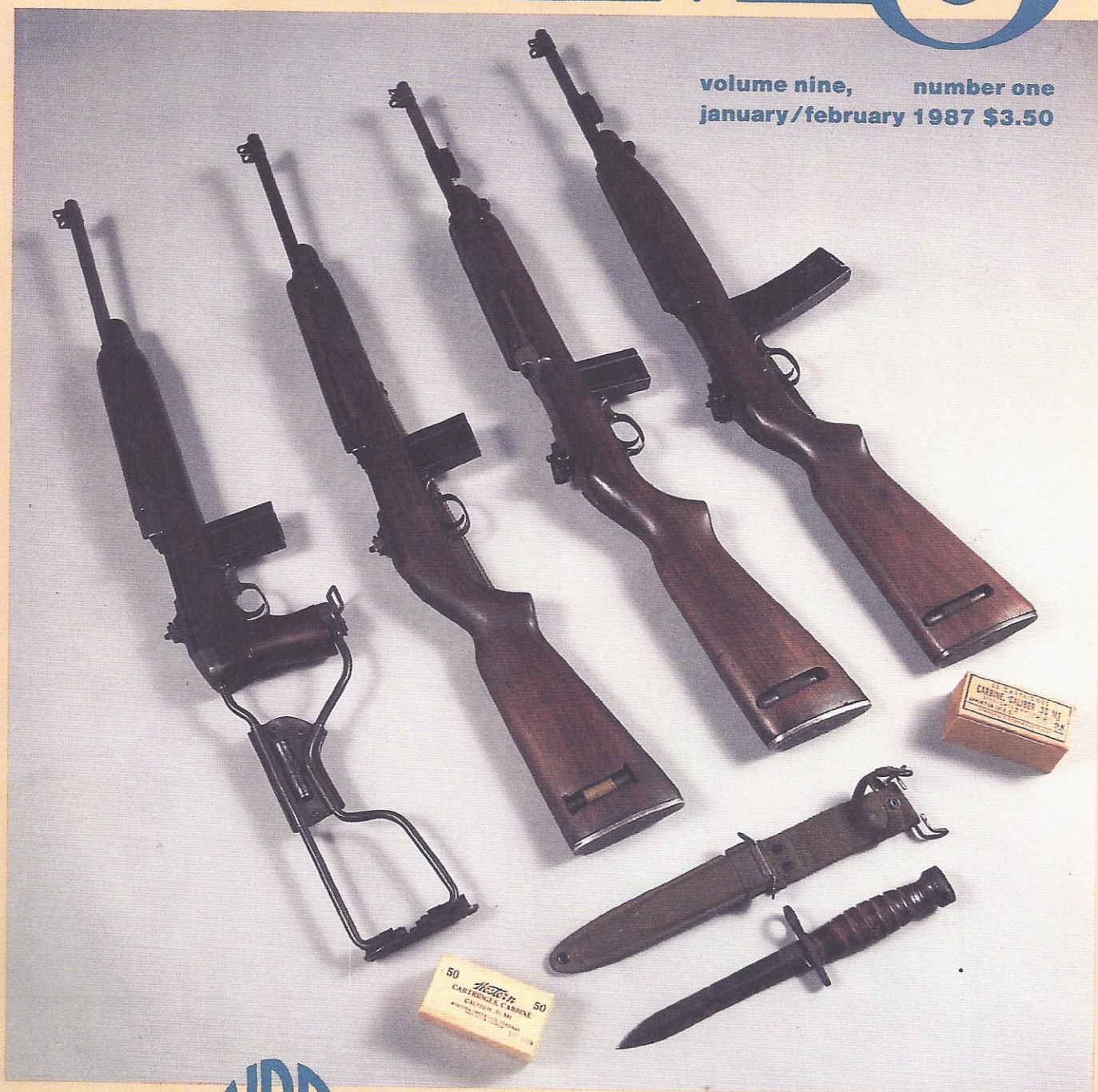
The M1 carbine served the armed forces of the United States for nearly three decades. It was appreciated by its former military users for its light weight, handiness, reliability and firepower. For entirely different reasons, the carbine has retained much popularity with today's collectors who appreciate it for its many interesting variations and accessories. The M1 carbine, often referred to as the soldier's pet weapon, is now beginning to be known as the collector's prize.


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