

# M1 Garand Rifle "438987"

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I was at a gun show recently when I noticed an elderly gentleman in a wheelchair gazing at several Garands and M1 Carbines that I had on my table. He was wearing a WWII veterans cap with a good bit of "fruit salad" on it, and a wind-breaker with additional battle ribbons. As I watched him he reached out and put a feeble hand on the barrel of a Garand and seemed to stroke or pet it. I walked over to him and said, "you look like you are familiar with those". Without looking up he said, "438987". Not sure I heard what he said, I said, "excuse me", he repeated "438987", his gaze still fixed on the rifle, still stroking the front sight; I told him that I understood.

General Patton said of the Garand, "In my opinion, the M1 rifle is the greatest battle implement ever devised" The M1 Garand more formally known as U.S. Rifle, Caliber .30, M1 was the creation of John (born Jean) C. Garand. He was born in Quebec, Canada in 1888, and migrated to the U.S. in 1899. John eventually found himself employed as a young man at the National Armory in Springfield, Massachusetts. It was here that he would design and perfect the WWII icon known as the Garand.

His design for the military's first semi-auto battle rifle was accepted by the army in January of 1936. The M1 Garand saw service not only in WWII and Korea, but also in Vietnam. Depending on what source you believe; there were close to six million rifles made for the U.S. military and over 100,000 more by civilian, and foreign manufacturers after that.

Military rifles were made by Springfield Armory (the national armory, not the current company of the same name), as well as Winchester, Harrington & Richards, and International Harvester. The latter two only made the rifle during the post WWII period. Just to get more confusing, most civilian rifles were made by Springfield Armory (not the national armory but the new, private company).



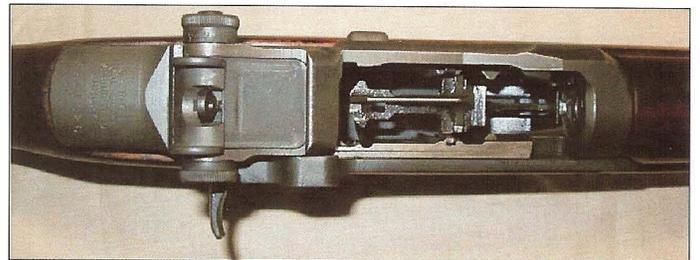
The first production rifles to enter military service came in August of 1937, and by the end of the year there were 1,034 units, all Springfields. Winchester did not start putting rifles into service until January 1941. By December of 1941 and the US entry into WWII, Springfield and Winchester had delivered a total of 567,060. By the end of WWII the total delivered by both had swelled to over five million copies. That folks is a significant production record. At their peak in January, 1944, Springfield and Winchester each delivered over 100,000 units

for the month. In contrast, the total production of Garands from the end of WWII through Korea to the end of production in the late 50's was a little over a million.

The rifle entered WWII during the Tunisian campaign and instantly became a valued piece of equipment, one that could save your life. In the Pacific, the Garand went ashore with the army as they relieved the marines on Guadalcanal. The marines were still using the Springfield 1903, but when they saw the performance and fire power of the semi-auto they began to "appropriate" as many as they could get their hands on. The Garand proved itself as a hard hitting, fast shooting, reliable weapon in the desert sand, or in the steamy jungle. It would prove equally adept at handling the snow, ice, and mud of western Europe.

The M1 was a sturdy, well engineered, and well constructed military rifle. It had relatively few parts, and could easily be field stripped and cleaned. The gas system was a simple and strong design, the receiver and barrel were also strong and tolerant to the changing battlefield conditions. As evidence of its sound design and construction, there were very few design changes once it got into production. Changes made were minor ones, a slight adjustment to the op-rod and rear hand guard by cutting a small relief to prevent binding or splitting of the hand guard was probably the most significant. Some changes were made to the rear sight to keep it from getting loose and losing its zero. Most of the other changes were production changes to speed up production. For a new piece of technology, it was amazing how few problems were encountered. This was a good thing too, because its OJT was World War II.

If there was a knock against the Garand, it was against its en bloc clip. It held eight rounds of 30-06 M2 ball ammunition. It took a little practice to load the clip into the rifle.



The clip was centered over its loading well on top of the receiver, and with the thumb placed in the middle of the clip, it was forced hard straight down into the well. The loading mechanism was spring loaded so enough force had to be applied against the resistance. When that was accomplished, the bolt would release and under spring tension slam shut, stripping the first round from the clip and into battery.

The issue was that all this happened quickly with your thumb occupying the space between the closing bolt and the breech. If one did not do this procedure quickly and smoothly one's thumb was going to be in the wrong place at the

*Continue on page 7*

## M1 Garand 438987 Continued . . .

wrong time, and words for which your momma had once washed your mouth out with soap would gush forth, along with blood and skin tissue. You do tend to learn the procedure rather quickly, since it only takes one "Oops" to greatly increase your attention, focus, and desire to get it right. Once you learn the rhythm, you can re-load pretty quick.

I actually prefer the en bloc to the box magazine of the M1's successor the M14. That big box hanging out the bottom end sometimes worked loose and was pretty good at getting snagged on vines and brush, banging against your knees when trying to maneuver, as well as dragging in the mud and dirt. The Garand en bloc system was all internal and nested safely within the innards of the rifle.

One of the anecdotal reports about the down side to the en bloc was that it made a distinctive "ping" sound when it ejected from the top of the receiver. The story goes that the enemy knew this and would wait to hear the ping, then attack knowing you were empty. Although true enough that the thing makes a metallic sound when ejecting, I have my doubts about the widespread danger of an enemy waiting to hear the ping from some distance away in the noise, and confusion of battle. Not to mention the guy next to you may not be out. If I really thought that it was a problem, I would carry an empty and clang it against something waiting for the bad guys to make a move.



My one and only knock, and it is not a serious one, is the battle weight. The rifle weighed over 10 pounds with bayonet and sling, and carrying its ammo added

a few more pounds. The standard battle load was 10 clips in a cartridge belt, extra bandoleers with another 8 clips could be slung over a shoulder. This is a little heavier than an M14 with the same amount of rounds. With that said, I would rather have the M1 Garand. I would rather shoot a .30-06 at an enemy shooting at me, they don't move around as much afterwards.

The old gentleman stared at the Garand with his hand on the front sight for what seemed like a very long time. I finally asked if he had carried one in WWII, and he nodded. I assumed that the number he uttered was a serial number and, if so, it was an early 1942 rifle number. I asked if he saw Sicily, he nodded, I asked if he went to Italy also, he nodded again. He took neither his hand nor his eyes off the rifle as I asked my questions.

I mentioned a couple of battles that I remembered without any response including Palermo, and Anzio. "Casino"? I asked, again a nod.

*Continue on page 13*

7

## M1 Garand 438987 Continued . . .

This time a change came over his face as if he was there, had been there all this time but now someone found out where he was. He started to tear up, and his hand trembled when it had not been, and I started to feel uneasy about having been noseey.

I was kind of stuck at this point and decided to push on. I asked if it had been rough, he nodded. "The worst that you were in?", I asked, again a nod, still looking at the M1. With a lump in my throat I moved a little closer and asked, "Too many friends left there?"

This time he looked straight at me, eye to eye and nodded, sad but with a bit of defiance in his face. I told him that we all shared his loss, that his service and their sacrifice would not be forgotten. I told him that there would always be those of us who understood our history, and respected those who made it. I told him that one of the reasons that I restored these rifles was to preserve the memories and honor the achievements of those who built them and those who served with them. I told them that next generation also knew something about the soldiers, the battles, and the weapons. There was always a group of kids that would walk by then stop when they noticed what was on the table and ask if that was a Garand, or an M1 carbine, or an "03". They knew.

About that time someone determined to ask me a question, despite the fact I was having a conversation, diverted my attention. When I turned back the man was gone. I could see him motoring on down the aisle in his wheel chair. I wish I could have talked to him some more, maybe even got a name, since all he actually said was "438987".

Next time I will discuss what to look for when buying a Garand. ♦

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A man was driving when he saw the flash of a traffic camera. He figured that his picture had been taken for exceeding the limit, even though he knew that he was not speeding.

Just to be sure, he went around the block and passed the same spot, driving even more slowly, but again the camera flashed. Now he began to think that this was quite funny, so he drove even slower as he passed the area again, but the traffic camera again flashed. He tried a fourth time with the same result. He did this a fifth time and was now laughing when the camera flashed as he rolled past, this time at a snail's pace.

Two weeks later, he got five tickets in the mail for driving without a seat belt . . .  
you just can't fix stupid.

13