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I. Historical Background

Although the term carbine is almost as old as shoulder weapons themselves, the concept of a military weapon designed from the start as a carbine is uniquely Twentieth Century, as are the airplane, submarine, missile-armed satellites and neutron bombs.

One of the earliest references to the term carbine and its possible origin appeared in 1548. According to that source, the word derived from the short barreled rifles carried by Spanish cavalry groups which were then called "Carabins". If this is true, the term would be appropriate since the carbine has, until just recently, been uniquely a cavalry weapon. While there has been a trend toward shorter barrels on military rifles for the last century and a half or so, the practice of issuing rifles with barrels as long as 30" was quite common even up through World War I. The M1903A3 Springfield, for example, had the shortest barrel of any standard issue shoulder arm during that conflict. Its 24" tube may be long by today's standards, but it was considerably shorter than the M1891 Mosin-Nagant's 31.6" or the French Lebel M1886's 31.4". Although called a rifle, the M1886 M93R35 was a true carbine with its 17.7" barrel. However, we can't help but wonder just how effective it was in combat, since it had only a three round magazine.

While it is obvious that every war since the invention of the written language has brought its technological advances, the two World Wars probably brought about more changes for the actual length of time of the conflicts than any other wars. Part of the reason for this, of course, is the capabilities for rapid change made possible by the Industrial Revolution.

The internal combustion engine made airplanes for observation, and later for bombing, a reality, as well as tanks and motorized transport. Crude, man-powered submarines had been used as early as the Revolutionary War, but when war raged across Europe in the summer of 1914, powered submarines were already in service. Although mule transport and horse cavalry lasted on into World War II, mechanization had definitely sounded their death knell.



Stock M1 Carbine as manufactured by Winchester, Inland, Rock Ola, etc.

Almost from its inception, the pistol had been considered a last ditch weapon for cavalry, the primary weapons being the carbine and saber. This practice was still prevalent during the Indian Wars in this country and in the Middle East during World War I. But as horse cavalry vanished into the dim mists of the past, so did the saber. Mechanized cavalry were armed with pistols and, in some cases, submachine guns. While some SMGs

M1 CARBINE

had found their way into the trenches near the end of the "War To End All Wars", they weren't to become prevalent in warfare until the Spanish Civil War, when their effectiveness in close quarters fighting was firmly established.

Interestingly enough, the United States began looking for a weapon to replace the SMG even before it was used in any quantity by U.S. troops.



M2 Carbine with folding stock.

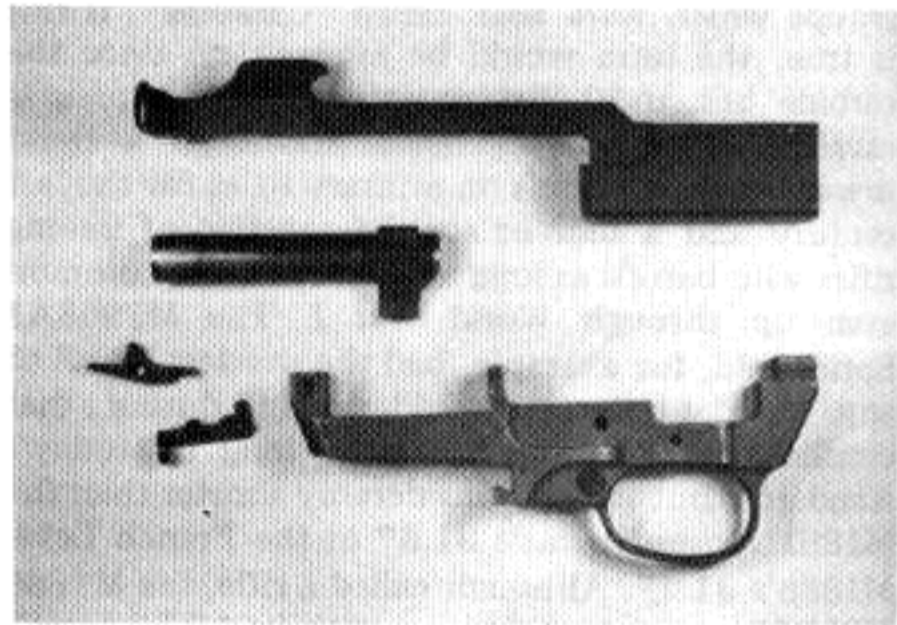
As early as 1938, the U.S. Army began thinking about a light rifle or carbine as a replacement for both the Colt N1911A1 and the Thompson SMG. While the recently adopted M1 Garand rifle was far and away the finest battle rifle in the world at that time, it was too heavy and bulky to be used by support troops who would normally not see combat but who were armed "just in case". Previous practice had been to arm such personnel with the Colt .45, a superior weapon for close in work but definitely not a good choice for the average shooter at medium to long ranges. In the late 1930's, the U.S. armed forces had only a limited number of Thompsons in their inventories, so replacing them would hardly prove an awesome burden. As for the Colt .45, well — it had been in service for nearly thirty years, so was undoubtedly obsolete, as military thinking at that time was beginning to view the military pistol in any form as a relic of the past.

The initial concept of the new light rifle or carbine was for it to weigh five pounds or less, complete with sling, and have an effective range of 300 yards. It should be semi-auto with capability for full automatic fire, have little noticeable recoil and be chambered for a cartridge similar to Winchester's .32 centerfire which they had developed for their Model 1905 autoloading rifle.

In the fall of 1940 the Ordnance Department approached Winchester with their specifications for the new cartridge. Following development work, an order for 150,000 rounds was placed in

June of the following year. A second order for 300,000 rounds followed in August.

Winchester was also invited to submit a prototype weapon for testing, but they were deeply involved in Garand production and declined. When trials began on June 16, John Garand himself had submitted two designs. Others submitting prototypes included Auto Ordnance (manufacturer of the Thompson), Harrington & Richardson, Hyde, Savage, Springfield Armory and Woodhull. Two weeks later, Winchester was again invited to submit a test sample, and agreed. A mere two weeks later to the day, a very quickly hand assembled sample was submitted to Ordnance. While not a true indication of what the production gun would be like, this crudely assembled sample worked so well that Ordnance felt it offered far more promise than any of the other guns previously tested. The Winchester team went back to work at the drawing board and assembly bench and, after 34 days of working literally day and night, had a finished carbine ready for the September tests at Aberdeen Proving Ground. At the end of the testing period, the board unanimously recommended adoption of the Winchester design. Less than two weeks before the attack on Pearl Harbor, an order for 350,000 M1 Carbines was placed with Winchester.



The slide, bolt, sear, magazine catch and trigger housing shown above are necessary for converting the M1 to M2 configuration, but are not considered part of the conversion kit. Not shown, and also necessary for the conversion, is the M2 stock.

Tooling up for large scale production is a different story than creating a prototype, however, and the first carbines didn't come off the Winchester production line until almost three weeks

