

M1 GARAND—CARE AND FEEDING

Most of these comments are addressed to the WW II reenacting fraternity and specifically to those who use M1 Garand rifles and shoot blanks. Some parts of this may have applicability to other rifles and other venues but that is for the reader to determine.

The M1 rifle is an excellent rifle in either caliber .30 or 7.62 NATO cartridge but like all machinery, it can be unreliable or unsafe if not kept clean, maintained and lubricated. Reenactors use blank cartridges which simulate firing a live round but have no intended projectile. However, the release of gas at the muzzle (or action if the case splits) can cause injury or worse if someone is too close or not wearing safety equipment.

Blank Devices

Two types of devices have been observed which enable the M1 rifle to function while firing blanks.

One is an Allen (or socket head if you are British) head bolt which has been threaded full length (the head is turned down to the thread outside diameter) and a proper size hole has been drilled length wise to allow venting. The interior of an old worn out barrel is then drilled and threaded at the muzzle and the modified Allen head bolt is screwed into the barrel. The length of the modified bolt should not interfere with the normal gas system port in the barrel.

The second is a device which attaches to the end of the barrel and is usually held in place by the figure eight nut at the end of the barrel. Usually these are painted red to draw your attention to it and avoid firing a live round through it. This type of device has been

known to break and large parts fly a significant distance.

The first type is completely hidden unless you look directly down the muzzle. This means the reenactors and their equipment appears accurate. The second has the advantage of being obvious— you can see there is a barrel obstruction and would logically not try to fire a live round without removing it first. Safety should govern your performance at all times.

Cleanliness –

While most blanks usually do not have a projectile, even the wad at the mouth of the case can cause injury. (Oops, we forgot to install the plug after cleaning the rifle.) And the burned/unburned powder can leave a residue so cleaning periodically is important.

Some blanks have a wood or plastic bullet which are intended to be used with a shredder to reduce the possibility of someone being hit with material. This type of blank should never be used without the shredder in place.

All American WW II ammunition, except the .30 Caliber carbine, had primers which leave a corrosive residue. This changed as non-corrosive primers became more reliable but the only way to be sure is use military blanks made in 1953 or later. There have been reports of the military reloading blanks which, if it occurred, would help confuse the issue even more. As the supply of blanks from that era is drying up, this may not be much of a problem.

We have not seen any information on British ammunition but given their conservative approach, they probably stayed with corrosive primers

for awhile. If you have converted your M1 rifle to 7.62 NATO, it appears the recent batches are non-corrosive primed— at least most rifles can go several events before cleaning.

Reloaded or currently manufactured blanks probably do not have corrosive primers.

If you are past that issue, the concern is now to keep the rifle clean. As the barrel is plugged by either device, there can be a build up of residue which could plug the gas system. At the best, the rifle will quit working— at the worst, there may be some structural damage to the rifle.

Periodically— you know how many events you attend and how many times you fire blanks— the rifle should be disassembled, cleaned and lubricated. The blank device should be removed, the barrel cleaned and all parts checked for unusual wear, cracks, etc. All of our rifles are old (unless you have a brand new M1 rifle) and some, in spite of being “rebuilt”, have some parts that have seen many cycles of operation which does cause fatigue cracks/failures.

Disassembly –

The M1 rifle is designed to be easily disassembled in the field for cleaning by the soldier and of course by the armorer in the process of repairing the rifle. The process was intended to be performed without a take-down tool but not everyone's hands are that strong.

To remove the trigger group, stand the rifle muzzle down between your legs with the trigger guard facing away from you. Grip the rifle with your knees, slide a large screw

(cont. on page 4)



Reenactors use blank cartridges which simulate firing a live round.

General George S. Patton Jr. reported to the Ordnance Department on 26 January 1945: “In my opinion, the M1 Rifle is the greatest battle implement ever devised.”



This poster was created by the artist Jes Schlaikjer in 1945 for the Office of War Information.

M1 Garand (cont. from page 4)

Concerns –

One concern which is not too prevalent now is re-welded receivers. The government scrapped large numbers of M1's and other military arms by cutting them and the process for M1 receivers was to torch cut either one or both rails of the receiver. In the 1960's when M1's were scarce, some craftsmen— and they usually were quite good at it—took the parts and welded them back together. As you may suspect the quality was variable.

Re-welded receivers are easy to tell as the weld metal will not have the same parkerizing color as the rest of the receiver, there will be pits— usually inside or under the rails where grease will hide them— and the machining pattern will not match the rest of the receiver.

The concern with re-welds is of course the quality of the workmanship but also the temper of the steel at the receiver ring and whether the receiver will stretch over time. Since investment casting was developed and new M1 receivers are relatively inexpensive, re-welds ended up being hung on the wall as decorations which is a good use for them.

Factory ammunition— which includes that made in government arsenals is reasonably reliable and used to be inexpensive. Nothing stays the same so blank ammunition along with other types is becoming scarce and/or expensive. Many people are loading

blanks and the quality of that work depends on the ethics of the individual.

Blank powder is not your normal run of the mill powder. Since there is no intended projectile, the powder has to develop pressure (noise, smoke and flame) without the resistance furnished by a projectile. There is a great deal of reloading data for normal cartridges but not much is available for guidance on loading blanks.

Each time you purchase a batch of blanks that have been loaded or reloaded by an individual, you should test them in your rifle to assure they will chamber, work the action and do not have an excessive charge. The testing process should be performed in a way and at a location where risk to people is minimal. Probably the best assurance you can have in buying such ammunition is personally know the individual who performed the work.

Safety –

Throughout we have made comments about safe equipment and performance. Actually this is the first step in any process. Even though you are firing blanks, the rifle should never be pointed at anyone. Hearing damage can occur and in the odd chance the rifle



sends something down range a person can be injured or killed— remember the comment about fatigue failure of the blank adapter.

When any firearm is not in use, the action should be open, bolt or slide to the rear and placed where it is secure. Ammunition of any kind should not be accessible except to the owner of the rifle and if blanks are intended to be used, all loaded cartridges should be left at home.

Reenacting is intended to be respectful of our veterans, educational for the public and enjoyable for the reenactor— safely.

By Steven *****

“Reenacting is intended to be respectful of our veterans, educational for the public and enjoyable for the reenactor— safely.”

