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Questions & Answers

New NATO 5.56 mm Ammunition

I understand that improved 5.56 mm ammunition is being tested for standardization by NATO to replace the current 7.62 mm load. Can you give any details as to the bullet's construction and its performance compared to 7.62 mm NATO ammunition?

Answer: In the NATO ammunition trials the U.S. M16A1 rifle and M193 (lead core) ball cartridge were used as a yardstick against which to compare the other ammunition being tested.

The trials were intended to recommend a cartridge for dual use in rifles and squad-level machine guns. Although the U.K. entered its 4.85 mm in the trials, both it and a 4.7 mm West German entry have been dropped and the weapons redesigned to handle 5.56x45 mm (.223 Rem.) cartridges.

At this time it appears likely that an improved 5.56 mm cartridge using a steel penetrator insert will be standardized. The 62-gr. SS109 cartridge produced by Fabrique Nationale in Herstal, Belgium, has been recommended for adoption, though a similar U.S. round designated XM777 (see *American Rifleman*, April 1977, p. 36) is also a likely candidate, since it can be used in M16A1 rifles with the current 12" twist barrels, whereas the SS109 requires at least a 9" twist and preferably a 7" twist barrel for adequate stability. A possible U.S. course of action

From the tens of thousands of questions and letters on guns, ammunition and their use that the *American Rifleman* receives every year, it publishes here the most interesting. Receiving answers to technical questions is a privilege reserved to NRA Members. Questions must be in the form of letters addressed to Dope Bag, c/o NRA, 1600 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; must contain the member's "code line" from an *American Rifleman* or *American Hunter* mailing label or membership card; must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope and must be limited to one specific question per letter. Non-members may submit a question with membership application and dues.

We regret that no technical question can be answered by telephone and that we cannot place even an approximate dollar value on firearms of any description.

which has been speculated on by some observers is that the more effective SS109 cartridge would be used when needed in the Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW) while the M193 and XM777 cartridges would probably be retained for rifle use. Existing M16s eventually probably would be fitted with fast-twist barrels on a retrofit basis.

The SS109 cartridge offers a considerable improvement from the now-standard M193. According to manufacturers' data, the SS109 (FN) round will defeat a U.S. helmet at more than 1300 m. The 5.56 mm M193 round's figure is 515 m, while that for the 7.62 M80 is 800 m.

The 62-gr. steel core SS109 ball is potentially more accurate at ranges beyond 400 yds. than the M193 type because of its greater ballistic coefficient and reduced wind drift. It attains a muzzle velocity of approximately 2950 f.p.s. vs. 3200 for the M193, and has the same internal ballistics (breech and port pressure, etc.) as the M193 round. Although the SS109 cartridge cannot be used satisfactorily in M16 rifles with 12" twist barrels, the M16 SAW, designed by FN for the SAW role, is said to perform well with standard M193 cartridges in its 7" twist barrel and the gun permits changing the barrel quickly when needed, facilitating use of either twist barrel if desired. This weapon, which is said to be one of the most promising new designs, can use either line-of-ammunition or cartridges fed from large rifle magazines interchangeably with standard M16A1's. — R.F.D.

Handloading 7.62 mm Ammo

I am just getting back into high power match shooting after many years. What loads can I use with currently available components to duplicate military ammunition in 7.62 mm, both ball and match?

Answer: In the gas-operated guns such as the M1 and the M14 (or the civilian M1-A), the following loads approximate the military loads, in military cases with standard primers:

7.62 mm Ball	
150-gr. bullet	IMR 4895 42.5 grs.
	IMR 3031 42.0 grs.
	IMR 4064 43.0 grs.
7.62 mm Match	
168/174-gr. bullet	WW 748 46.0 grs.
	IMR 4895 40.5 grs.
	IMR 3031 40.0 grs.
	IMR 4064 42.0 grs.

— R.F.D.

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