A "Dope Bag" Report

The M1A: Good News For Target Shooters

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A commercial version of the M14 rifle in semi-automatic form suitable for target shooting has recently become available to civilians at $269.95 from a private firm in Texas. It represents something of a break-through in this respect.

Since the adoption of the M14 as an official U.S. service arm in 1957, many individual riflemen have wished to own this rifle in the desirable cal. 7.62 mm. NATO for formal target shooting over NRA and service courses. None have been legally available to civilians, however, because of their fully-automatic capability as a service arm.

Now the semi-automatic commercial M14, designated M1A, is being offered by Springfield Armory, Inc., Devine, Tex. Although this corporation has copyrighted the Springfield Armory name as its firm designation and trademark, there is no connection between it and the former U.S. National Springfield Armory in Massachusetts.

The M1A is made in a variety of models including both "issue-grade" and "match grade" versions. The maker furnished an issue-grade M1A rifle to *The American Rifleman* for evaluation.

With the exception of the receiver and certain small action components, Springfield Armory M1A rifles are assembled from M14 service rifle parts manufactured originally by Government contractors or by the Government's Springfield Armory. According to Elmer Ballance, owner of the Springfield Armory firm, these surplus parts became available as the result of contract terminations and from foreign nations that had been furnished M14 rifles and parts under U.S. military assistance programs. All parts, with the exception of the commercially manufactured receiver, are interchangeable with M14 rifle parts.

The M1A rifle receiver is an investment casting of 8620 alloy steel and is manufactured for Springfield Armory by Valley Ordnance, Inc., of Wilkes-Barre, Pa. According to Springfield Armory literature, it is machined with surplus U.S. Government tooling and is heat treated and given a rust-resistant Parkerized finish in accordance with U.S. military specifications. Unlike the M14 service rifle receiver, the M1A receiver has no provision for a selective-fire change lever and the M1A rifle is capable of only semi-automatic fire. After examining a production sample, the Department of the Treasury informed its maker that the cal. 7.62 mm. M1A rifle is a firearm as defined in Section 921(a)(3) of Title I of the Gun Control Act of 1968, but is not a firearm as defined in Section 5845(a), Title II of that Act. This finding was based on the fact that the M1A rifle is not capable of full-automatic fire and was not originally designed to fire full-automatically.

Except for the absence of the selective-fire change lever on the right side of the receiver, the sample issue-grade M1A rifle appears mechanically identical to the as-issued M14 service rifle. All metal parts have the gray-black, rust-resistant Parkerized finish characteristic of U.S. military small arms. While this non-reflective, matte finish is appropriate for a semi-military rifle of this type, it is often considered dull and unattractive by civilian-oriented riflemen accustomed to the polished blued finish of typical commercial rifles.

Turned from straight-grained American walnut, the stock of the sample M1A rifle has a dull, non-reflective oil finish. Two small fillets of a contrasting walnut-colored material were glued in to fill cuts necessary for the displaced M14 selective-fire change lever mechanism. All metal stock components, including the 1¼" sling swivels and hinged shoulder rest-buttplate assembly, are original M14 rifle parts. There is a hinged trap in the buttplate leading to two recesses in the buttstock for storage of the issue combination tool and related bore cleaning equipment. These accessories were not furnished with the sample M1A rifle, but are readily obtainable in new condition from dealers in military surplus equipment.

Made of walnut-colored heat-resistant fiberglass, the upper handguard has two rows of ventilating slots running lengthwise along the assembly.

According to the maker, the barrel of the sample M1A rifle is of original Springfield Armory (Government) manufacture. The bore and chamber are chrome-lined. Nominal length of the barrel is 22", or slightly more than 25" with flash suppressor attached. Cleaning of the bore from the muzzle end is necessary in this rifle as the receiver design does not permit breech cleaning with a conventional rigid cleaning rod.

The wing-protected square-blade front sight and full-adjustable aperture rear sight of the M1A rifle are of unaltered M14 pattern. Windage and elevation adjustments are made by turning sepa-

Springfield Armory M1A cal. 7.62 mm. NATO semi-automatic rifle, disassembled into basic groups. Box magazine is detachable from rifle.

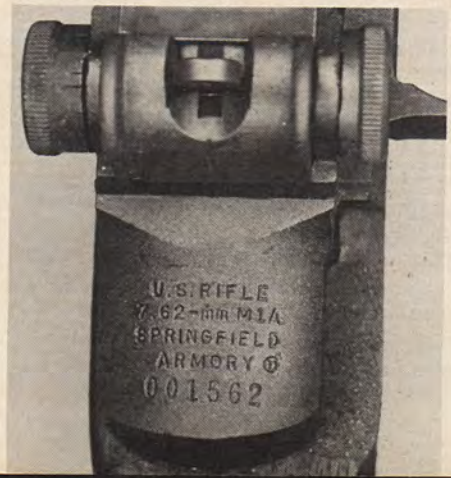
rate drum dials, and the positive click adjustments can be both felt and heard. One click of windage or elevation moves the point of bullet impact 1" for each 100 yds. of range. In the sample rifle the aperture could be raised 76 clicks in elevation above its lowest setting, and windage adjustment latitude was 16 clicks left and 19 clicks right of the central zero index. Receiver of the M1A rifle is adapted and threaded for attachment of the service telescope sight base.

Made from Parkerized sheet steel, the box magazine of the M1A rifle holds 20 rounds. After depressing a latch in the front of the firing mechanism group, and rocking the magazine forward, it can be withdrawn clear of the rifle. When the magazine is detached, single rounds can be loaded into it with the fingers until its full 20-round capacity has been reached. When attached to the rifle, the magazine can be charged with four 5-round stripper clips of cartridges inserted into the clip guide on the receiver. The action must be locked open when charging the magazine in this manner.

The M1A has an efficient mechanical safety integral with the firing mechanism group. When the safety lever has been pulled all the way to the rear with the trigger finger, the hammer is withdrawn and locked out of engagement with the hammer hooks. When in engaged position, the safety lever intrudes into the guard loop opening, effectively signaling the safe condition of the firing mechanism. With the mechanical safety engaged, the action can be opened to clear the chamber. The safety is disengaged by pushing the safety lever forward with the ball of the thumb.

The M1A rifle can be disassembled quickly into its three main subassemblies or groups. After removing the magazine and unlatching the trigger guard, the firing mechanism group can be pulled clear of the rifle. Detachment of barrel and receiver group from the stock group then completes basic disassembly of the rifle.

No special tools are required in field stripping the action, to include removal of the operating rod, bolt, and other action components. However, an issue combination tool or small wrench of proper size is required to unscrew and remove the gas cylinder plug when it is desired to clean or inspect the various parts in the gas system.



Springfield Armory receiver marking is trademark and corporate name of firm.

Deep box magazine of M1A necessitates high prone position in competition.

Strictly military appurtenances on the M1A rifle include the remarkably effective flash suppressor introduced in conjunction with the M14 service rifle, a bayonet lug for attachment of the M6 bayonet-knife, and an adjustable spindle valve in the gas system for use when firing rifle grenades, or when it is desired to convert the action to hand rather than semi-automatic function. The hand-function state improves the accuracy of the rifle in slow-fire use.

Both military 7.62 NATO ball and commercial .308 Winchester sporting ammunitions were used by *The American Rifleman* Technical Staff in test firing the sample M1A rifle. This rifle showed no evidence of significant break-in firing prior to shipment, and after receipt by *The American Rifleman* it was fired more than 500 rounds without a single malfunction or untoward incident of any kind. This excellent performance speaks well for the basic design of the rifle as well as the care taken in its assembly and adjustment by the manufacturer.

Test firing for accuracy was done from bench rest at both 100 and 200 yds., using match-grade ammunition. At 100 yds., five consecutive 5-shot groups had an average extreme spread of 2.56", with the smallest group measuring 1.8."; the largest, 4.19". At 200 yds. five consecutive 5-shot groups had an average extreme spread of 5.50", with the smallest group measuring 4.25"; the largest, 6.00". This was very good performance considering that the sample was not the specially-tuned, glass-bedded, match-grade version.

Over-all performance of the sample M1A rifle was excellent. Quality of machine work as well as the general fit and finish of parts are very good. The trigger mechanism has a release weight of about 5 lbs. and is free from objectionable creep. There was no perceptible change in trigger function during the entire firing program.

Because of the favorable design of its gas system, the M1A rifle is pleasant to shoot. By comparison with a manually-operated rifle of the same relative weight, the recoil impulse of the M1A rifle is delivered to the firer's shoulder over a longer time period. This has the desirable effect of moderating felt recoil.

Descriptive literature furnished to the NRA by Springfield Armory lists a variety of M1A rifle models, including fiberglass, walnut, and beech stock options. Match-grade models have glass bedded stocks, and all M1A rifles are guaranteed for one year against defects in workmanship and materials.

This commercial equivalent of the U.S. M14 cal. .7.62 mm. NATO service rifle may be used in NRA competitions.

Manufactured by: Springfield Armory, Rt. 1, Box 210, Devine, Tex. 78106.

Specifications

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY MODEL M1A RIFLE

Mechanism Type: Gas-operated, semi-automatic, clip-loaded, detachable box magazine
Grade: Standard "Issue-Grade" w/walnut stock
Caliber: 7.62 mm. NATO (.308 Winchester)
Weight: 8 lbs. 15 ozs.
Barrel Length: 25-1/16" w/flash suppressor
Over-All Length: 44¼"
Magazine Capacity: 20 rounds
Stock Dimensions: Length of pull, 13¼"; drop at comb, 2⅜"; drop at heel, 2¾"
Sights: Military. Square blade front; full click-adjustable aperture rear
Sight Radius: 26-1/16"
Rifling: Four grooves, right twist, one turn in 12"
Accessories: 2 magazines
Price: $269.95