

WW II Thompsons in Today's World

By Master Sergeant John Barber, USMC

I have over 21 years active duty service with the Marine Corps, My job for the last 15 years has been that of an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician (EOD). I have been to several formal federal law enforcement schools, as well as a graduate of the FBI Hazardous Devices School at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville AL. Being an EOD Technician has taken me to several countries and unique assignments around the world dealing with foreign ordnance, munitions and weapons systems during peacekeeping missions and war.

Being in EOD has put me in direct contact as the first responder to many Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) / munitions intelligence and weapons scenarios. Being a weapons and small arms historian by personal interest, I've put myself into positions to be part of raids, large explosive demolition projects, foreign munitions and weapons inspections to clearing out enemy weapons caches/buildings/vehicles, ammunition bunkers of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's), booby traps and mines, specifically the last two locations being Afghanistan and Iraq. Along the way I've seen some incredibly rare and fantastic automatic weapons from un-issued and mint German MG34's and 42s complete with all accessories, tools, tripod, belts/drums and 2 barrels in the German marked shipping box to the assortment of "Road Warrior" improvised small arms and ordnance of the Serbs and Muslims of Bosnia.

My firearms passion however is any Thompson there is and the gear that goes with them. I have actively sought them out throughout my deployments to inspect, photograph and in some cases shoot.

Thanks to a lot of Marines having digital cameras and taking pictures of daily dealings, I came across this picture. After raiding a specific location, 20 cases of M1/M1A1 Thompson SMG's were discovered each with 10 guns to a box with what looks like plenty of 30 rd magazines. Everything appears to be nicely coated in grease or cosmoline.



These Tommy Guns were discovered with other weapons and equipment of various Soviet and Combloc origin. The word I got is they will more than likely be destroyed.

I personally did not see any Thompsons during the invasion war of Iraq. However, as far as SMG's go, there was a large number of soviet and/or Iranian PPSH -41's and British Sterlings. There are photos on the web of Marines clearing buildings with the PPSH 41 with drum magazine. Interesting note: It is not uncommon during war to use the enemy's weapons to your advantage. During the invasion, as the advance progressed through Iraq, Iraqi troops gave their lives for a lost cause. Marine Staff NCOs acquired additional firepower with the AK-47 to augment their own, being armed with the M9 pistol. To make a long story short--many a firefight was won by Marines using those AK's which saved many lives.

Of personal note: I've inspected many Thompsons (all M1 and M1A1) in various countries, but they have been for the most part stored away. Talking with foreign commanders about this (Bosnia), the general consensus was that they are "police" guns and not taken seriously because of range limitations and lack of training. Another reason for non-use was no ammunition or a very limited amount available.

An exception to this was in northern Bosnia during the early part of the war (92-96) where both the Serbs and Muslims had access to a large number of Thompsons. Ammo depots throughout northern Bosnia whether Serb or Muslim had enormous amounts of repackaged WW II 45 ACP ammo (repacked mid to late 40's), they called it the 11.43mm. A lot of that ammo today is what has currently hit the US market.

I did speak with several Serbs, who used the Thompson exclusively during the war years instead of the AK-47, exhibiting big smiles and a thumbs up obviously impressed with the performance and effect.

In Bosnia I inspected hundreds of M1 and M1A1 Thompsons thrown loosely in boxes stacked with an equal number of German WW II MP 38's and 40's. All I could keep thinking of was the movie *Kelly's Heroes*, totally filmed somewhere in Yugoslavia.

For you Grease Gun Nuts out there. While in Afghanistan immediately after 9/11, I went in with a force to secure the US Embassy in Kabul. The Afghani "northern alliance" forces were part of the street security elements outside the embassy grounds. The two sad sacks outside the gate shack were armed with "modified" M3 Grease Guns. The guns were already extremely weathered and rough looking, the modification was the hacking of a groove in the right side of the receiver (and I mean a terrible job of it too). Apparently the M3 cocking apparatus had broken and was useless so they cut the slots, drilled a hole in the bolt and welded a threaded machine screw onto the bolt. Obviously the sear was in need of replacement as one of the guards every once and a while would "accidentally" fire the gun in the street, which brought on a whipping by his senior.