



The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team

www.coleshillhouse.com

Researching Winston Churchill's Secret Army, The Auxiliary Units.

Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR)

By Peter Antill



An M1918 and an M1918A2 at the Infantry Weapons Collection, Warminster.

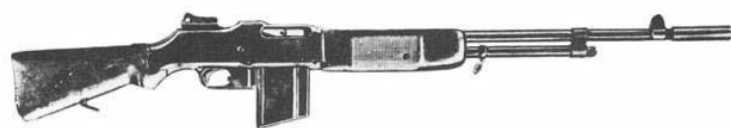
The Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) was a family of weapons used by the United States and a large number of other countries during the 20th Century and developed by the famous firearms inventor, John Moses Browning.

The M1918 BAR is a selective fire, air-cooled, gas-operated automatic rifle, being cycled by propellant gases that are bled off through a vent in the barrel. The bolt is locked by a rising bolt lock and the gun fires from an open bolt. The bolt contains the extractor which is spring-powered while there is a fixed ejector in the trigger group. The weapon's barrel is screwed into the receiver and not easily detachable. The weapon feeds via a double-column magazine holding twenty .30-06 calibre rounds. It has a cylindrical flash suppressor fixed to the end of the barrel, a fixed wooden butt stock and closed-type iron sights, consisting of a forward post and rear leaf sight, adjustable to between 100 and 1,500 yards.

In early 1917, before the US had entered the war, Browning travelled to Washington DC to demonstrate two automatic weapons. Both weapons were accepted for service, one becoming the M1917 heavy machinegun, the other becoming the M1918 automatic rifle. Between 1918 and 1919, some 102,125 BARs were produced by Colt (16,000), Marlin-Rockwell (39,002) and Winchester (47,123). The first weapons arrived in France in July 1918 and the first unit to receive them was the 79th Infantry Division, seeing action for the first time on 13 September 1918. It was personally demonstrated by 2nd Lt Val Allen Browning, the inventor's son (in the picture, right).

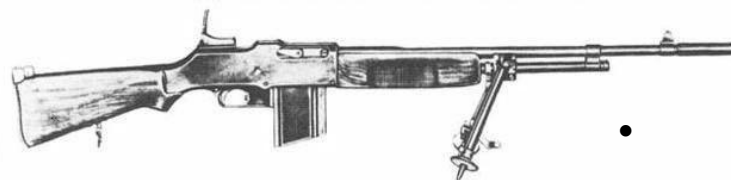


In 1937, the M1918A1 was introduced into service. This variant included a lightweight spiked bipod attached to the gas cylinder that also had a leg-height adjustment feature and a new hinged butt plate.



M1918 Cal. 30.06 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR)

In late 1938, work started on another variant, this time the M1918A2, which was accepted into service in 1940. The new M1918A2 was broadly similar to the older versions but could only be fired on full automatic but with a variable rate of fire. The Fire Selector Lever could be set to:



M1918A1 Browning Automatic Rifle

- 'S' – Safe;
- 'F' – full automatic fire but at the mechanically reduced rate –approximately 350 rounds per minute;
- 'A' – full automatic fire at the normal rate of approximately 550rpm.



M1918A2 Browning Automatic Rifle

The BAR was exported all over the world, including Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Israel, Poland, South Korea, South Vietnam, Sweden, Turkey and the UK. The UK imported a significant number and issued them to the Home Guard and Auxiliary Units – indeed, by the end of 1942, they had been issued somewhere in the region of 23,630 BARs. The rate of fire expected for British troops would have been approximately 100 – 110 rounds per minute, allowing for magazine changes.

The weapon however did have weaknesses – the A2's rate of fire reduction mechanism proved difficult to clean and was susceptible to corrosion, especially in damp conditions, as was the recoil buffer mechanism and the gas-cylinder.

Despite its shortcomings, if it was cleaned and maintained properly, it was a rugged and reliable weapon providing decent firepower at the squad level. One of the more famous users of the BAR, Clyde Barrow, used a shortened version of the weapon, stolen from a National Guard armoury, while the six lawmen who killed both him and Bonnie Parker on 23 May 1934, used the FBI variant of the BAR, called the Monitor.

Specifications (M1918A2) –
Calibre: .30-06 (7.62x63mm)
Length: 1,215mm (47.8in)
Length of Barrel: 610mm (24in)
Muzzle Velocity: 860mps (2,822fps)
Rate of Fire: Approximately 350 or 550rpm
Feed: 20-round box magazine

