

# The Submachinegun In the Personal Defense Role

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The Small Arms Master Plan (SAMP) addresses the desire for a personal defense weapon that, along with an individual combat weapon and a crew-served weapon, would create a family of small arms vastly superior to our present infantry weapons. According to the SAMP, the personal defense weapon should be very light (weighing less than 1½ pounds) and capable of hands-free carry. It should have a very high hit probability at 50 meters, with a munition that is deadly at that range and able to penetrate body armor.

The Army's current personal defense weapon—the M9 pistol—meets the requirements for hands-free carry, and its 9mm NATO round is lethal at ranges well beyond 50 meters, but only against unprotected personnel. The greatest weakness of the M9 is its poor hit probability. It is far from easy for most soldiers to hit a target at 50 meters with any semiautomatic pistol; when the target is shooting back, hit probability usually drops to zero. As a result, the handgun is little more than a symbolic armament; it has been used in the personal defense role chiefly because it is small and light.

Until relatively recent times, more effective weapons have been much too big and heavy for a person to carry all the time. But this situation changed with the development of the third-generation submachinegun (SMG).

First-generation SMGs were not only very expensive to manufacture; they were also as big as the standard infantry rifle at the time—and sometimes heavier. A prime example is the M1A1

Thompson submachinegun used by World War II paratroopers.

Second-generation weapons used receivers made of sheet metal stampings and stocks formed from steel tubing or heavy-gauge wire. The result was a big decrease in cost, as well as a significant reduction in size and weight. The M3A1 "grease gun," which the



**Third-generation submachinegun is not much larger than the M9 service pistol.**

Army used for some four decades, is a typical second-generation SMG.

With the introduction of the third-generation SMG, the use of "telescoping" bolts permitted the design of such ultra-compact submachineguns as the Ingram M10, used by Navy SEAL teams. Nine-millimeter SMGs have

been built that are only a little larger than the M9 pistol—still small enough to be carried in a shoulder holster.

Such a weapon offers a dramatic improvement over the service handgun in hit probability, approaching the SAMP standard of 0.9 at 50 meters. And it achieves this hit probability with off-the-shelf weapons and ammunition. It is true that the standard-issue M882 ball ammunition cannot defeat body armor, but high-performance military ammunition does exist that would correct this deficiency. The current stocks of M882 ammunition could continue to be used for training and gradually replaced with the enhanced-penetration rounds.

Third-generation submachineguns use the straight-blowback method of operation, which is the least expensive type of automatic weapon. Low cost is a very desirable characteristic for any personal defense weapon candidate, because it will see little use, even in the biggest war. It is primarily a back-up weapon, for issue to troops whose main duties are not infantry combat—tankers and helicopter crewmen, for example.

It would be an easy matter to attach a sound suppressor to a submachinegun, thereby increasing its versatility and usefulness. Special operations forces often conduct operations that require a high degree of stealth. Members of aircraft crews shot down in enemy territory also need to keep a low profile until they are rescued.

The Small Arms Master Plan envisions a sidearm that can fill every possible requirement, from military police to general officers, from cooks to clerks,

from artillerymen to tankers. It is doubtful that a single weapon can be created (given present technology) that will be suitable for every need. For combat troops, however, the small, 9mm submachinegun can fill the role

quite well. Compact, relatively light, with high hit probability, hands-free carry, and low-cost, the submachinegun could be an effective, affordable personal defense weapon that is available now!

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## FIFTY YEARS AGO IN WORLD WAR II

### MARCH-APRIL 1943

By 1943, the tide of Japanese success in the Pacific was receding. In New Guinea, in the Solomon Islands, and on Guadalcanal, American and Allied forces were dislodging a tenacious enemy in some of the bitterest fighting of the War. In North Africa, Rommel's Army Group Africa faced the ever-increasing numbers of Allied forces and saw its hold on that area slipping away. The German Sixth Army lost its momentum, becoming surrounded at Stalingrad, and the Soviet Army swung into an offensive which would eventually sweep the invaders from their homeland.

Here are some of the highlights of events that occurred in March and April of that year, excerpted from Bud Hanning's superb book *A Portrait of the Stars and Stripes, Volume II* (Seniram Publishing, Inc., 1991).



**1-4 March** A Japanese naval convoy of 8 destroyers and 8 troop transports is attacked by a force of B-24's and fighters in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea off New Guinea. Only four destroyers survive. Over 3,000 Japanese are lost in their final attempt to land troops in the Huon Gulf.

**6 March** General George S. Patton, Jr., assumes command of U.S. II Corps in Tunisia and prepares to go on the offensive.

**8-25 March** A Japanese offensive against Allied positions at Bougainville, New Guinea, is defeated.

**18 March** 1st Ranger Battalion, supported by 1st Armored Division, seizes El Guettar, Tunisia. Three days later, they conduct a night attack on the El Guettar Heights, capturing more than 700 enemy.

**9 April** In action around the Fondouk Pass, Tunisia, Private Robert Booker drags a light machinegun and ammunition across open ground and destroys a German machinegun nest, though wounded by machinegun and mortar fire. He is posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for heroism.

**16 April** Also in Tunisia, 18th Army Group finalizes plans for a thrust toward Tunis and Bizerte. In the British 8th Army area, General Bernard L. Montgomery prepares to launch an offensive against Enfidaville on the 19th.

**18 April** Japanese Admiral Isoroko Yamamoto is killed when his plane is shot down over the Solomons, by Captain Thomas Lanphier of the 339th Fighter Squadron. The story is suppressed because Captain Lanphier's brother is a prisoner of the Japanese.

**22 April** The Allies launch the final offensive to clear Tunisia of Axis forces. The British 5th and 9th Corps commence the attack, meeting stiff German opposition North of Sebkref el Kourzia.

**24 April** The American force ordered to invade the Aleutian Islands departs San Francisco. It will arrive at Cold Harbor, Alaska, on 30 April.