

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



The M240B Machinegun

CAPTAIN JOHN HODGE

The latest addition to the infantryman's fighting arsenal is a machinegun that will greatly improve the platoon's ability to provide sustained suppressive fires on the enemy. This weapon is the M240B 7.62mm medium machinegun.

While the M60 machinegun has served the force well for more than 36 years, recent field experiences show that it is becoming more and more costly to maintain and is spending more time in maintenance shops than in training areas. Truly, the time has come to find an improved medium machinegun and place the M60 in the machinegun "hall-of-fame" with the M1917 .30 caliber and the Browning automatic rifle.

The search for this improved machinegun goes back to the early 1980s when the M60's "aging" was beginning to show. Coincidentally, the Army was fielding the M249 squad automatic weapon, the replacement for the M16A1 in the automatic rifle role. The M249 had a longer range than the M16A1 and an increased firing rate, which made it comparable in some respects to the M60.

During this decade, the M60 went through several modifications and variations in both the Army and the Marine Corps. The end result was that in 1989, the Chief of Staff of the Army directed that the M249 light machinegun (LMG)—composed of the M249

automatic rifle mounted on the standard M122 tripod with a traverse and elevation mechanism—replace all of the ground-mounted M60s in the Army.

The result of this decision was that the Army would need time to purchase and field approximately 50,000 additional M249s, as well as time to implement changes in training and go-to-war ammunition allocations. In addition, unit training plans would need to be modified to support the new M249 LMGs. This transition would take time,

The search for this improved machinegun goes back to the early 1980s when the M60's "aging" was beginning to show.

and meanwhile further machinegun development was proceeding apace.

While all of these activities were being planned and executed, several things came along that altered this course of action—*Just Cause* in Panama, *Desert Shield/Storm* in Southwest Asia and *Restore Hope* in Somalia. Combat forces conducting tactical operations observed that while the M249 provided good firepower, in some situations, they needed greater range and penetration power. These reports and subsequent field evaluations questioned the earlier decision to replace the M60 with the M249, and led to a comprehensive examination of the missions

and employment of all ground-mounted machineguns. This effort culminated in the identification and development of a medium machinegun for certain combat forces.

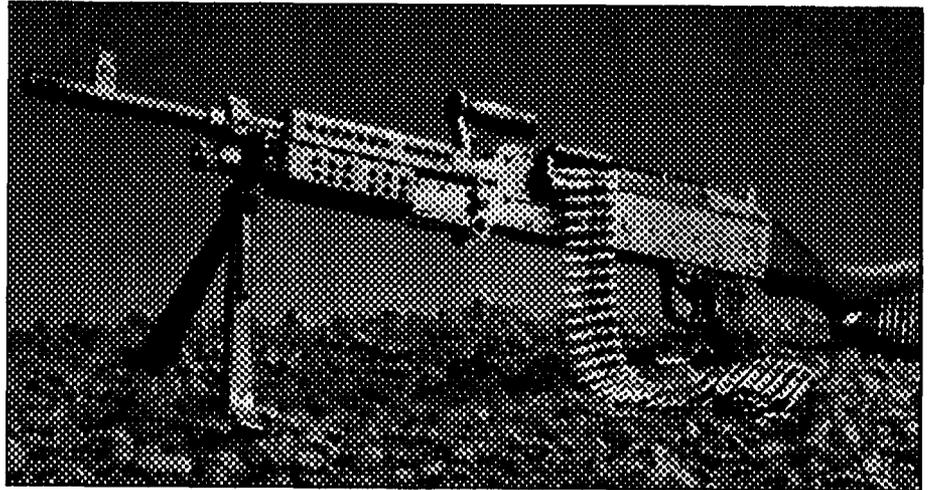
Based on this urgency, the Infantry School received approval in March 1994 and started a program that would provide active infantry units with an upgrade kit for the existing M60 or the M240 (the coaxial machinegun from the Abrams tank and the Bradley fighting vehicle). This program approval was later expanded to include Special Forces Groups, Armor units, and selected Engineer units.

The M60E4 and the M240E4 were the two candidate weapon systems. The results of the "shoot-off" between them, conducted in the summer of 1995, showed that the M240E4 was almost 10 times as reliable as the M60E4. The M240E4 was selected and type-classified as the M240B, despite being almost 5 inches longer and 4.5 pounds heavier than the existing M60. Soldiers who tested both weapons initially were not happy with a bigger weapon, but after firing both, accepted the size and weight as a trade-off for the outstanding reliability and target effects.

The Infantry School and Army Materiel Command are vigorously working to reduce the size and weight of the M240B without compromising its performance. The results of these im-

CHARACTERISTICS

Caliber	7.62mm x 51
Weapon Length	49.3 in.
Gun Weight	27.6 lb.
Maximum Range	3,725 meters
Maximum Effective Range	800 meters (point) 1,800 meters (area)
Maximum Tracer Burnout	900 meters
Rates of Fire:	
Sustained	100 rds/min.
Rapid	200 rds/min.
Cyclic	650-950 rds/min.



provements will be evident in future machinegun fieldings.

When will units get the M240B? Fielding has begun, with active Infantry units being the first to receive it. A collective decision between Headquarters, Department of the Army, and the Infantry School is that the M240B will first be issued to the light, airborne, air assault, and Ranger infantry as well as the Infantry School. This addition will substantially increase the combat power of the units first receiving the new machinegun. Active component mechanized units will get the new weapons during Fiscal Year 1999 in conjunction with the 2x9+5 platoon organization. In the years 1998 through 2003, the M240B will go to reserve component Infantry units, as well as Special Forces battalions, Armor units (mostly Cav-

alry), divisional Engineers who fight with Infantry, and the remaining Training and Doctrine Command schools. At the same time, technical and field manuals are being completed, as well as training videos and CD-ROMs to aid the fielded units in their transition to the M240B.

The results of testing so far have exceeded all expectations. The three guns tested fired 165,000 rounds with only three failed parts, none of which stopped the guns from operating. The failed parts were discovered during routine maintenance and replaced. This reliability far exceeds the stated requirement of 15,000 rounds between failures and is the best result ever recorded for a ground machinegun.

The M240B is an excellent example of the Army's commitment to provide

the best equipment to the soldier, even in the face of budget constraints and diminishing resources. This is an exceptionally reliable weapon units will be able to depend on to accomplish their mission—closing with and destroying the enemy.

If you or your unit have questions, please contact me at the Infantry School: Telephone DSN 835-5013, commercial (706) 545-5013; or E-mail: HODGEJ@BENNING-EMH2.ARMY.MIL.

Captain John E. Hodge is assigned to the Directorate of Combat Developments, U.S. Army Infantry Center. He previously served the 2d Battalion, 7th Infantry at Fort Stewart, the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry in Korea, and the 4th Battalion, 27th Infantry in Hawaii. He is a 1987 ROTC graduate of Marshall University.