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German Automatic Rifles 1941–45: Gew 41, Gew 43, FG 42 And StG 44 (Weapon)



Synopsis

This book explores the origins, development, combat use and lasting influence of Nazi Germany's automatic rifles, focusing on the Gew 41(W), Gew 43/Kar 43, FG 42 and MP 43/StG 44. The Blitzkrieg campaigns of 1939-40 convinced many observers that most infantry combat took place at closer ranges than the 750-1,000m for which most contemporary rifles were designed. In addition, current bolt-action rifles could not provide the rate of fire required for such engagements. From 1941 Germany's arms designers took note and produced a new series of infantry firearms that not only transformed squad firepower, but also laid the foundations for postwar assault rifle design. The Gew 43/Kar 43, fitted with a telescopic-sight rail as standard, was one of history's first semi-auto sniper rifles. The FG 42, designed specifically for airborne soldiers, had a landmark straight-in-line design and other features frequently seen in subsequent small arms, notably the US M60 machine gun. Most influential was the MP 43/StG 44, arguably the world's first true assault rifle, which delivered formidable full-auto fire from a shortened 7.92mm round. This weapon also went on to influence the design of the greatest assault rifle of all time - the AK-47. This study not only provides a detailed technical description of each weapon, but also explores how the firearms performed on the battlefields of World War II. The combat takes us from the FG 42 in the hands of Fallschirmjäger at Monte Cassino through to StG 44s being used by Waffen-SS soldiers on both the Eastern and Western Fronts. Postwar service is also studied, such as the Gew 43's adoption by the Czech Army and the StG 44's use by the Viet Cong in the Vietnam War. Setting each firearm in its tactical and historical context, and employing striking photographs and full-colour artwork, firearms expert Chris McNab sets out the absorbing story of this distinctive and influential series of weapons.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Photos, drawings and paintings season Osprey’s study ... Alan Guilliland’s cut-aways ... proved excellently informative. An index and summary of primary and secondary sources complete contents. And the whole thing is annotated!”
—David L. Veres, www.cybermodeler.com (May 2013)
“In this book, author Chris McNab covers the development of automatic rifles including those developed by other countries and how they influenced German design. Each of the major types, Gew 41/43, FG 42 and StG 44 are fully covered in their means of operation and their development. The book has many period photos as well as photos of extant guns. This is further enhanced by a few nicely done pieces of artwork showing these guns in use. It is a great addition to the Weapons line of books and is a title that any enthusiast needs to have on their shelf.”
—Scott Van Aken, *Modeling Madness* (April 2013)

Chris McNab is an author and editor. To date he has published over 25 books, including *A History of the World in 100 Weapons*, *Hitler’s Armies* and *The Uzi Submachine Gun* for Osprey. Chris has also written extensively for major encyclopedia series, including *African-American Biographies* (2006), *USA 1950s* (2006) and *Reformation, Exploration and Empire* (2005), and has contributed to *The Times* on the war in Iraq.

This book is very, very well researched and organized. It starts out by discussing German pre-world war two rifle doctrine. This was basically, like most of the world’s armies, that the typical infantry man was equipped with a bolt action rifle (in the German case the Kar 98k to be specific). At the time (i.e., immediately preceding the start of the Second World War) only the US army made extensive use of semi-automatic weapons (specifically the M1). The Russian army also had large quantities of semi-automatic rifles but they were not universally distributed. The typical Soviet infantry man, at the time, was still only equipped with a bolt-action rifle. The author, Mr. McNab, then provides historical context as to why the Germans decided to develop semi-automatic rifles and what would later become known as "assault rifles" (i.e., rifles that could shoot both in single and rapid fire settings). The main reason was that, as the war progressed, more and more firepower was

deemed necessary - firepower that a bolt action weapon could not provide. Unfortunately for the Germans, they came to this decision mid-way through the war (1942-3) and as a result could not develop and mass produce these weapons in large scale quantities. The production of all German semi-automatics and assault rifles, by the end of the war was only in the lower hundred thousands, thus insuring that only a small percentage of German riflemen were equipped with such weapons. It should also be noted, as Mr. McNab so well documents in his book, that many of these weapons left much to be desired in terms of both build quality and reliability. There were two reasons for this. One was that the Germans did not have the necessary time to weed out the many problems inherent in developing such weapons, especially of the more revolutionary STG 44 assault rifle, to produce them en masse before the war ended. In addition, German industry was in very pathetic shape by the time serious consideration and effort was made on the mass production of these weapons. The lack of strategic materials and the disruption caused by strategic bombing lead to many short cuts that greatly reduced the quality of these weapons. For example, stamped steel had to be used in the production process which lead to a less durable and resilient weapon than would have been the case if the appropriate materials and build process was available. The book is very well researched in that many varieties of each weapon, along with strengths and weaknesses of each, are discussed. This research is based not only on German records but American and British. As well as being a book purely on the physical characteristics of the weapon, the book also examines the doctrine behind the use of these weapons as well as how the weapons were actually used and how they performed in combat. Again, this is based on meticulous research. For example the book includes lengthy quotes from documents from German front line troops on how these weapons were used and performed. The book concludes with the influence these weapons had on small-arms manufacture after the Second World War. Mr. McNab discussed the influence of these weapons on the development of specific weapons such as the AK-47 and the Belgian FN as well as their implications on the selection of small arms ammunition in NATO. This discussion involves the innards of the weapons (i.e., firing mechanisms) as well as ammunition characteristics and is quite technical but interesting nevertheless. The only weakness of the book is its lack of discussion on how allied weapons (in particular the US M1 and the Soviet SVT-38) influenced the development of this selection of German weapons. Did the Germans try to copy these? If not, why not? Did the development of these weapons (or at least those that were not assault rifles) proceed independently of the influence of these allied weapons? Despite this minor weakness the book does an excellent job at covering its topic, especially so given the relative brevity of the book (80 pages). For those interested, Mr. McNab has also written another very good book in the Osprey series on German MG

34 and MG 42 Machine Guns. Please see my review (Yoda) under this book if you are interested. This is another book by Mr. McNab that this reviewer highly recommends.

A very good book in a concise format with nice photo illustrations. The work gives a straight forward history of the development of the various types of semi and full auto shoulder weapons of Germany during WWII. The book started by speaking of the Vollmer rifle which was developed just prior to the period involved in the book; yet no photo of the Vollmer was shown. I would have liked that since photos are readily available. The book skips around from type to type and back following production histories of each type weapon. I would have enjoyed the book more had it covered one weapon fully then another. Still, notwithstanding my minor gripes this work is well worth its cost.

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I was happy to have the book and enjoy it. Most anything regarding the MKb42, MP43, MP44, STG44 is of interest to me. I would add though that there are several obvious mistakes regarding the MP43 rifles that should have been caught in proofing the copy. Pete Fleis St. Louis, MO.

Excellent

This is a great reference that covers all of the semiautomatics to full auto, a good read for all those that like historical German weapons of the WW2 era.

Probably the most comprehensive discussion of German automatic and assault rifles I have read so far. As listed in the Title, it covers both the army and parachute troops (Fallschirmjaeger) weapons.

Helped me with a presentation with relevant information. Very informative and useful. My presentation went well. I would have had to do a lot of research and used many more sources.

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