

by Frank Iannamico



The Browning 1919A4 and 1919A6 Machine Guns in Vietnam

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While the U.S. 7.62 M60 General Purpose Machine Gun was the most prevalent weapon of its type used during the Vietnam War, it fought alongside a seasoned veteran. The old soldier sharing the machine gun role was the venerable Browning 1919A4 and 1919A6. Early in the war both the 30'06 caliber 1919A4 and 1919A6 machine guns were used by U.S. troops, but as more M60s became available the old workhorse 1919's were turned over to the South Vietnamese Government. Vietnam was the fourth major U.S. conflict that the old Browning design served in. Ironically enough the M60 GPMG shared many traits of the Browning's old adversary in WWII, the German MG42 machine gun.

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Lead Photo: A squad of South Vietnamese troops patrol armed with a number of U.S. manufactured WWII weapons, including a BAR and M1 carbines. The soldier at the center of the photograph is carrying a 1919A4 machine gun on his shoulder.

The Ordnance department was pleased with the model 1917 machine gun, but realized that they needed a more compact machine gun for its fledgling tank corps. The liquid cooled Browning 1917 was simply too large and cumbersome for the job. Browning went to work to design an air-cooled version, the result was the Caliber .30, Tank Machine Gun Model of 1919. The Army also desired an air-cooled variation as a "Light Machine Gun" for infantry and cavalry units. Several modifications to the 1919 "Tank" gun were made eventually resulting in the Model of 1919A4 "Light" Machine Gun. Prior to WWII, the air-cooled .30 caliber Browning machine gun had only existed in blueprints and in a few hand built models at the Rock Island Arsenal.

During WWII, the Browning 1919A4 was considered the "light" machine gun of the United States Army. Its official nomenclature was the Machine Gun, caliber .30, H.B. M1919A4 (H.B. for heavy barrel). The weapon was air cooled, recoil operated and belt-fed. The receiver of the 1919A4 for all practical purposes was the same as the earlier "Heavy" Browning Machine Gun, the water cooled 1917 series.

The 1919A4 machine gun was utilized as a direct fire weapon, designed to deliver automatic fire at close and mid-ranges. Because it was considered a support weapon it was to be kept well forward so that the crew could see both their targets and the location of their own front lines. The flat trajectory of the light machine gun was highly destructive against unsheltered enemy troops, and when well directed, could

inflict heavy casualties. When used against a well dug-in enemy the weapon had little effect except to neutralize their fire and pin them down.

Principle of Operation

In a recoil operation weapon, the rearward force of the expanding powder gases is utilized to mechanically perform the operations of; unlocking the breech, extracting and ejecting empty cartridge cases and feeding a fresh round, as well as cocking, locking and firing. The air cooling system was less efficient making the 1919A4 less capable of rapid, sustained fire than the water-cooled

1917. The air-cooled heavy barrel could keep the A4 weapon at operating temperature for approximately 30 minutes at a rate of fire of about 60 rounds per minute. A rate of approximately 150 rounds per minute could be maintained for about 15 minutes, but faster rates of fire could only be maintained for short periods. The 1919A4 had a

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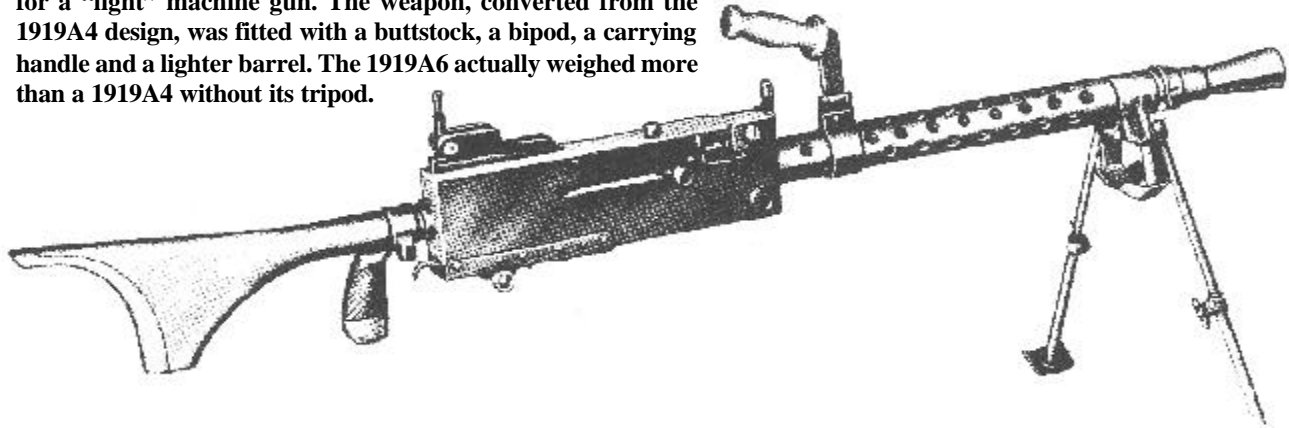
Mounting

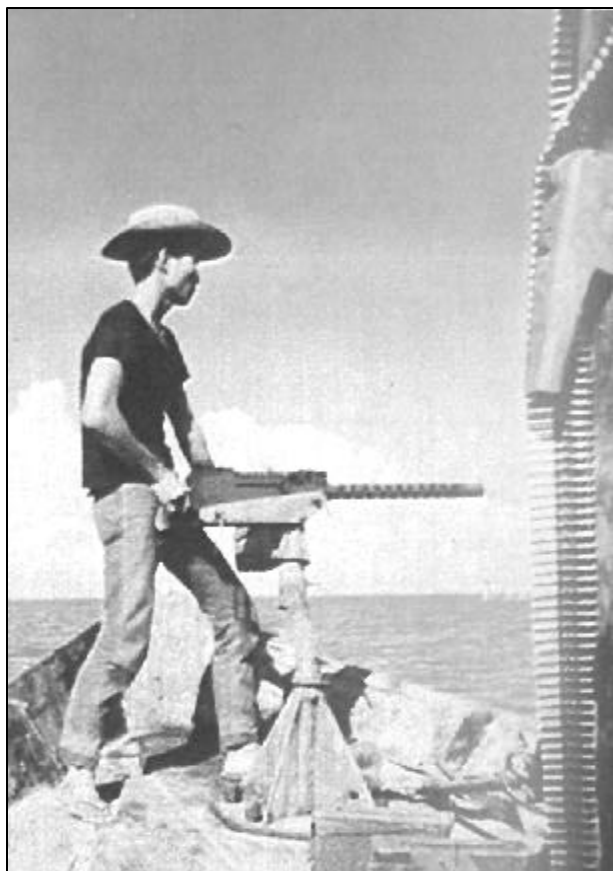
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A South Vietnamese sailor opens fire with his boat's pedestal mounted 30'06 caliber 1919A4 Browning.

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The M37 was yet another variation of the basic 1919 Browning design. Essentially a tank weapon, the M37 could be fed from either the left or right side and had an improved top cover. This post WWII weapon was manufactured by one of the prime contractors of the M60 Saco-Lowell. (Photo Courtesy of Ohio Ordnance)

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While the 1919A4 was successful in its intended role, a more portable weapon was desired to fill the gap between the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) and the tripod mounted 1919A4. The Ordnance department decided to modify the 1919A4 as an expedient solution to the problem. As is the case with most adaptations of existing weapons, the resulting 1919A6 model

was less than ideal for the task it was intended to perform.

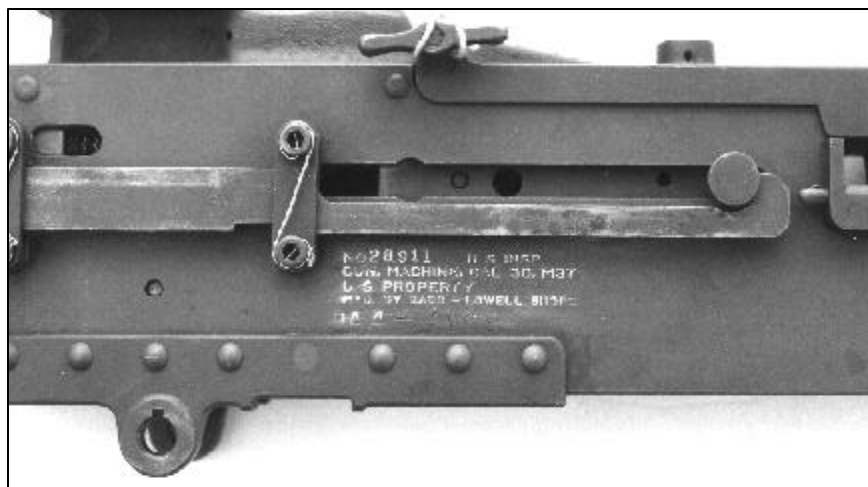
The 1919A6 Machine Gun

The new version of the 1919A4 was designated as the Browning Machine Gun, Caliber .30, M1919A6. The weapon was equipped with a light bipod assembly attached to the front barrel bearing, and a shoulder stock that

was attached to the buffer tube. The weapon was capable of delivering rapid automatic fire. The gun was designed primarily as an offensive weapon, and was most effective in employing direct fire against enemy personnel and unarmored vehicles. Its high mobility and low relief adapted it to front-line missions and enabled it to accompany the attacking echelon. At midranges, when mounted on the M2 tripod, its accuracy was approximately that of the heavy machine gun. Its most important characteristic as compared with the heavy machine gun, was its superior mobility, which made it a suitable weapon for use in the rifle company. This advantage, however, was obtained at the cost in the efficiency of the cooling system. The 1919A6 had a lighter barrel than the 1919A4, consequently its rate and length of fire was limited by its tendency to overheat. Although it could fire indefinitely at the slow rate of fire of approximately 40 rounds per minute, it could maintain a medium rate of about 75 rounds per minute from 25 to 30 minutes. At a rapid rate of 150 rounds per minute it begins to overheat after about five minutes firing.

Flash Hider

The function of the flash hider M7, was to conceal the weapon's muzzle flash, as well as ensure ample recoiling when the weapon was fired at angles other than horizontal. Accomplishing this, the weapon cyclic rate was also increased. The detachable retaining clip assembly secures the flash hider to the front barrel bushing. Therefore when a portion of the expanding powder gases



are trapped in the chamber of the flash hider, the rearward force was exerted on the front of floating barrel to aiding in its recoil.

Bipod mount

The A-6 weapon was equipped with a bipod assembly that was attached to the front barrel bearing and was held in place by a lock ring. The bipod legs could be folded back alongside the barrel, or placed in a position at right angles to it. Each leg had a sliding leg that could be pulled out to raise the position of the muzzle. A wing nut and clamp were mounted on the sliding leg assembly, to permit adjustment of bipod legs with one hand. The bipod head rotated around the bearing so that the gun would not be canted when on a slope. The bipod legs were constructed to remain in a position that was vertical or parallel to the barrel when clamped in place. The sliding legs were clamped in place by means of the lower thumb-screws. Fixed rest legs were attached to the bipod head for use when the legs were folded back parallel to the barrel.

The M60 General Purpose Machine

1919A4 Light Machine Gun General Characteristics

Weight of weapon.....	28 pounds
Weight of weapon with pintle and elevating mechanism.....	31.25 pounds
Weight of tripod mount, M2.....	14.11 pounds
Length of barrel.....	24-inches
Rate of fire.....	400-550 rounds per Minute
Maximum usable rate of fire.....	150 rounds per minute
Sight graduated to (yards).....	2400
Muzzle velocity (w / M2 ball cartridge).....	2700 feet per second

Gun was adopted by the Ordnance Corps, along with the M14 service rifle in 1957. The 7.62 M60 and the M14 were intended to replace virtually all of the WWII era small arms in the U.S. inventory. Soon after the M60 was being produced in number, the Browning 1919's began to be phased out of front line service. The M60 offered a light-weight (23.1 pounds versus the 32.5 pounds of the 1919A6 model) weapon that could be fired from its barrel mounted bipod or a tripod. It also had the desirable feature of a true quick-change barrel without the headspace adjustment procedure of the Brownings. The M60 however had its share of criticisms and problems. The weapon was nick-

named "The Pig" by the troops.

The 1919 Browning is very popular with today's collectors and shooters, and is available in a number of configurations. The most common 1919A4 and A6 Brownings are those that were assembled from surplus parts sets and a "new manufacture" receiver side plate. Completely original Browning machine guns can be obtained, but are difficult to locate and more expensive. Original Browning machine guns are on the BATF's Curio and Relics list. There are also a number of semi-automatic-only models as well as non-firing display guns being produced by a number of companies.



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Gun only. Special 1919 member pricing.
7.62mm or .30-06 belt-fed semi-auto.
Non-member price: \$1995

A6 Kit \$125
With gun purchase. Butt Stock, Bipod
and Carry Handle. Without gun: \$175



M2 Tripod \$495
With gun purchase only.
Kit sold separately.



Wooden Transit Chest \$50
With gun purchase only. Securely holds gun
and Link Loading Press (shown). Made from
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Link Loading Press \$75
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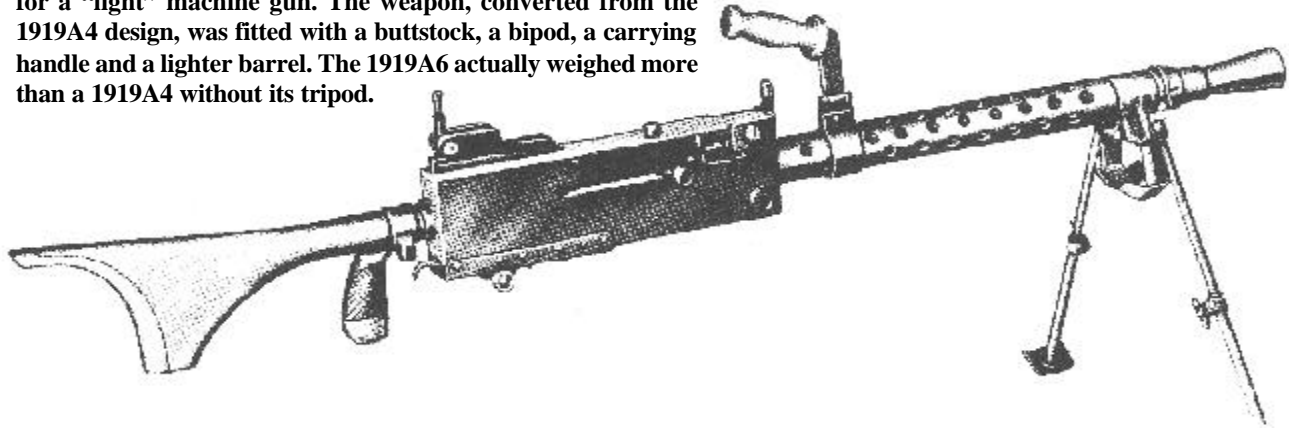
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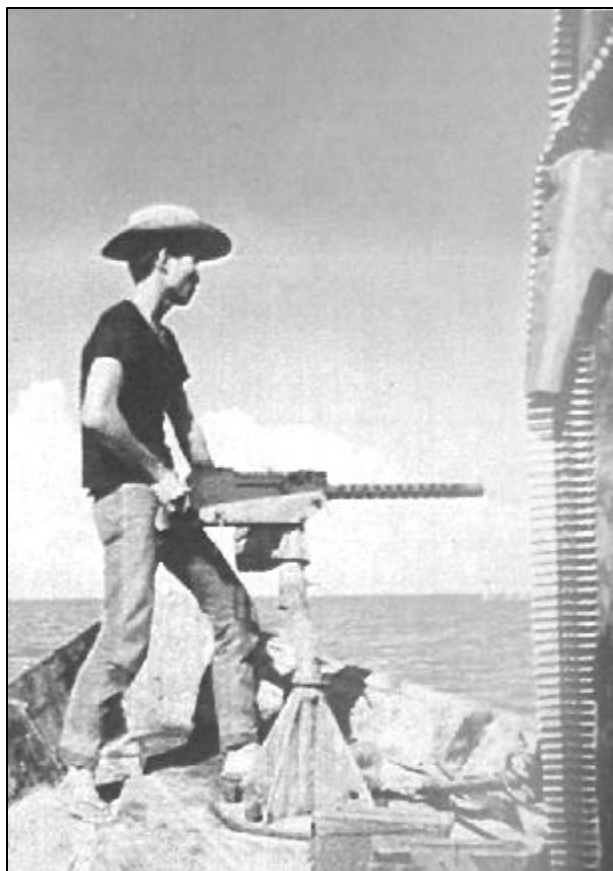
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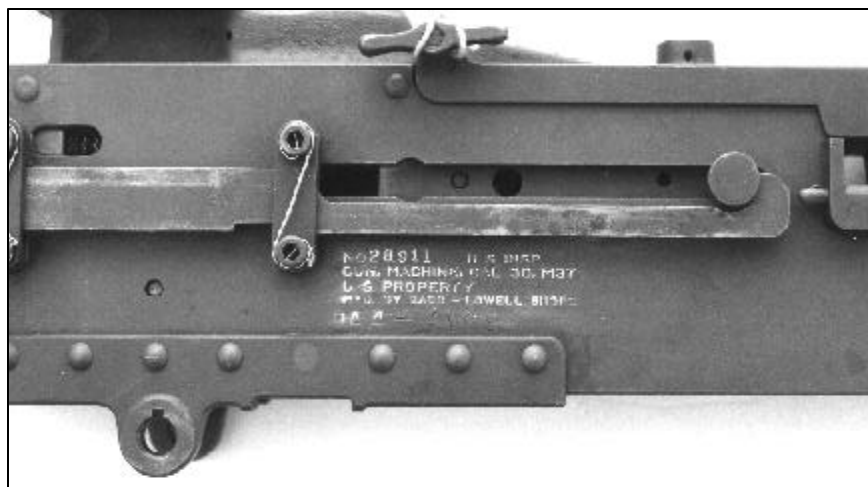
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