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The Lewis Gun

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, T. Gum, Site Admin.)

At the start of World War I, American forces relied upon British and French armaments until state-side manufacturing was able to meet demands. One particular arm that would become a viable option for use on land and by air, was the Lewis Gun, better known as the Lewis Machine Gun.



Photo of soldier, MM2019.17.26

Pictured here is a member of the 28th Division along the southern border training on a Lewis Machine Gun prior to deploying to France in 1916.

Invented by Issac Newton Lewis (COL., US ARMY) in 1911, and mass produced by two companies, the Birmingham Small Arms Company (BSA) and Savage Arms, it is estimated that more than 300,000 were produced from 1913 to 1942. Despite it being realized before WWI broke out, it would take until 1914 for it to be widely produced and dispersed to ally units.



Photo of Lewis Machine Gun.

Weighing nearly thirty pounds and providing a rate of fire of 500-600 rounds per minute, it is considered a light machine gun being chambered in four possible rounds, two of which being the 30.06 and the British .303.

Perhaps its most recognizable features include the aluminum barrel shroud that assisted with cooling, and the large ammunition “pan” on its top.

A number of military historians attribute the Lewis not being as broadly used as it could have been by American forces to a number of differences between US military leadership and the gun's inventor, though it was officially adopted by the US Navy and Marines in 1917.

Regardless, the Lewis Machine Gun holds a well earned spot on the list of trusted arms used by American forces, and remains a well respected military-arm by collectors and historians alike. The Pennsylvania Military Museum has two examples of the Lewis Machine Gun in the permanent collection.