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The Moonbeam - aka Flashlight

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

Prior to reliable low light and no light (night vision) devices military operations revolved around having adequate light, unless tactics dictated otherwise. The ability to carry lighting devices that rely on batteries rather than other options, typically combustible, was a tremendous step forward. Not only did this improve operations, it also improved morale. Darkness has always been one of man's greatest enemies.



The TL-122 flashlight, circa 1927, was identical to its civilian version, but with a military name - worth noting is that the manufacturers of flashlight would simply swap out the Boy Scouts of America crest with the proper numerals. Other changes made, eventually, would include changing the body and base from brass to steel, and to painting it Olive Drab (OD) Green. Unlike its replacement, the battery cover did not have a spare light bulb, and the overall construction was quite weak. The "TL" model would be see four iterations, A- through D.

The final model, TL-122-D, entering service in 1944, was capable of storing an extra bulb, and variously colored lens covers. This model of flashlight would be continue to be carried issued until 1960, the era of Jungle Warfare, the Vietnam War.



Flashlight model MX-991/U has been in production and issuance to the US Army and US Marines since 1963 after extensive testing and final approval of design. Keeping the iconic shape, improved features that would be implemented over the successive years included reliable gaskets, additional multi-color lens covers, stronger body material, and a switch guard to prevent accidental-lighting.

Carried by millions of servicemen and women, the military flashlight is a critical piece of kit. It has been used to read maps, install trip-wire and identify traps. Used to write a letter home or read a book, the humble flashlight has been used to clear tunnels on islands and in jungles... it is a piece of kit that is carried and used everyday.

If you have read this far, you are probably still wondering why is it called a “moonbeam.” The military has way of coming up with nicknames, acronyms, and sayings for almost anything... this includes equipment. Since a flashlight is used at night, and it mimics the light of the moon but in a beam fashion, a flashlight, becomes a moonbeam. Similarly, binoculars are called see-fars because they allow you to see further. Such logic can be applied to any number of items.

Despite having advanced optical equipment the ability to carry light in your hand with a reliable and replaceable power source is critical. The moonbeam is an essential piece of kit that has been carried since almost one hundred years and will likely be carried for many years to come. How many times have you used a flashlight in the past week, or better yet, how often have you wished you had a flashlight? Consider adding it your “everyday carry.”