



THE ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY'S OVERSIZED TRAINING GUNS

By Tom Laemlein

Our friends at the Fort Harrison Military Museum in Helena, Montana, contacted us about an interesting discovery they made while searching through one of their storage sheds. Sorting through dust-covered artifacts, our friends at the museum stumbled across a small treasure-trove of unique pieces of American firearms history they put on display: a group of the double-sized training aids representing key U.S. small arms of World War II and the immediate post-war period.

Big Idea in Firearms Training

During World War II, the U.S. military needed to train as many men as quickly as they could. In those demanding circumstances, many new training methods were born, and most of those ideas focused on providing information using over-sized graphic presentations. Posters, training films, and film strips were created (and supported by workbooks) for many topics — and particularly for small arms. The concept of the double-size training aids took this idea one step further, providing a tactile, and instantly self-explanatory educational tool.



The Browning Automatic Rifle compared with the M23 2X training aid. Image: J. Kindrick, Montana Military Museum, Fort Harrison, Montana

The first known of these 2X training aids was the *BAR Double Size "Device 3-F-3"*. During 1943, the U.S. Army, working with the Naval Research Special Devices Center, created a double-size, non-firing, sectionalized training model of the M1918A2 Browning Automatic Rifle (<https://www.thearmorylife.com/the-bar-a-flawed-foundation/>), with the intended purpose:

"For reasons of easier identification by training classes, all vital component parts have been made to the same scale, two times as big as the corresponding parts in the operational weapon."

The U.S. Navy Training Manual P-1151 describes it like this: *“Device 3-F-3 demonstrates the complete cycle of performance of the operational piece. This includes loading and unloading, extraction and ejection of simulated cartridges, action of hammer, trigger, safety, clip latch, change lever and sear, movement of gas piston, and operation of the buffer spring.”*



Giant weapons or tiny riflemen? The M23 (BAR) and M24 (M1 Rifle) 2X training aids on the range at Camp Pendleton, October 1956. Image: NARA

The visible operational features in the sectional training aid were color-treated to look like the real thing. The device is hollow and constructed of a light aluminum, so although massive, it is not heavy. Simulated ammunition, made of plastic, was used to demonstrate how the

Where Are They Now?

The big training aids came and went rather quickly. They were lightly constructed, and so consistent problems with damage and a lack of spare parts were encountered during their era. Also, the M1 rifles, M2 Carbines, BARs and Browning M1919 machine guns were being replaced in U.S. service during the late 1950s, so there was less and less need to train our troops on them.



The M1 Garand and the M24 Training Aid compared. Image: J. Kindrick, Montana Military Museum, Fort Harrison, Montana

Most of the examples found today are incomplete, or, at best, refurbished. During the later 1960s, some double-sized training aids were constructed for the [M14 rifle](https://www.thearmorylife.com/an-eternal-warrior-the-m14/) (<https://www.thearmorylife.com/an-eternal-warrior-the-m14/>) and M16 rifles, the [M60 machine gun](https://www.thearmorylife.com/shooting-the-mighty-m60/) (<https://www.thearmorylife.com/shooting-the-mighty-m60/>) and the Browning M2 .50 caliber machine gun.

Montana Military History Museum

Fort Harrison, now a National Guard installation, is known as the home of the [First Special Service Force \(1SSF\)](https://www.thearmorylife.com/devils-brigade-secret-weapon-the-johnson-m1941-img/), the “Black Devils” or “Devil’s Brigade” of World War II fame (<https://www.thearmorylife.com/devils-brigade-secret-weapon-the-johnson-m1941-img/>). The

fort's museum contains many rare artifacts and is the ultimate destination for those interested in the U.S./Canadian ISSF. We appreciate their contributions to this article, and to helping to preserve our military history.

Visit the Montana Military Museum website. (<https://montanamilitarymuseum.org/>)

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