
M3 37mm Anti-tank Gun

The **M3 37mm anti-tank gun** was the standard U.S. infantry anti-tank weapon at the outbreak of World War II. In 1937, the U.S. Army Ordnance Department issued a requirement for a lightweight anti-tank gun. After two years of design and testing, the M3 was accepted for service. The weapon was essentially a copy of the German Panzerabwehr-Kanone (PaK) 35/36.

The M3 weighed 990 pounds. It traversed 60°, elevated -15° to +15°, and could fire up to twenty rounds per minute. Ammunition included armor-piercing, high-explosive, and canister shells. Between 1940 and 1943, the Watervliet arsenal in New York produced over 20,000 M3 guns. In 1941, the muzzle was threaded to accept a muzzle brake, and designated the M3A1.



In the Pacific, Marine Corps M3s were effective against lightly-armored Japanese tanks, but less so against dug-in bunkers. The lightweight M3 could be man-handled across reefs, over seawalls, and into the jungle. M3s equipped the weapons company of the Marine infantry

regiment and saw action in every Marine battle of World War II.



In Europe and North Africa, however, the M3 was already obsolete before it went into combat. During the U.S. Army's first actions in Tunisia in 1943, the M3 was found to be ineffective against German tanks. German armor technology had far surpassed the weapon's capabilities. Indeed, the German army had already upgunned to a 50mm PaK in 1940.



The M3 was a legacy of U.S. military complacency and lack of pre-war combat readiness during the 1930s.