

1) The author wore the new ACU from US Cavalry during several field outings with the M40A1. 2) Five rounds of Black Hills 175gr moly-coated fired from 100 yards. 3) The M40A1 from Tactical Rifles shown with accessories from BlackHawk and US Cavalry.



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# TACTICAL RIFLES

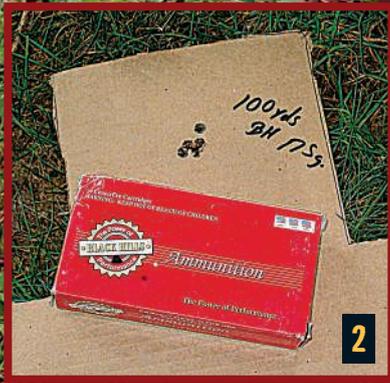
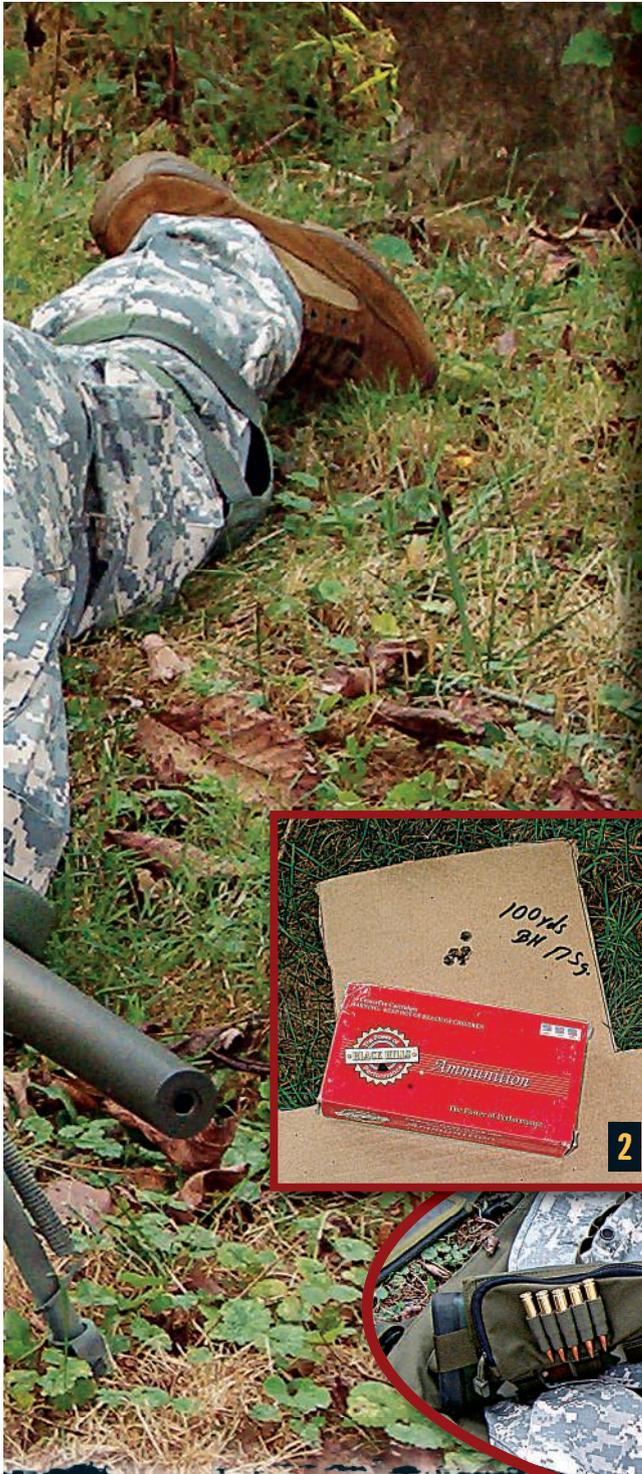
**While the history of the military sniper** might date back to the years prior to the American Revolution, it was during this period that sharpshooters truly made their mark. During the wars and conflicts that followed, precision marksmen, who would come to be known as scout snipers, were pressed into service.

Many of us may know that during the Vietnam War and the years that followed, the sniper programs of both the US Army and US Marine Corps were modernized and put to effective use.

In the post-Vietnam era, the Army and Marines set about designing rifles specifically for their snipers. The Army's models are designated as the M21 and M24; the Marines Corps has the M40 rifle. All are chambered for the 7.62 NATO or .308 cartridges.

When I got my first glimpse of an M40 on a rifle rack in an armory at Camp Lejeune, I was a bit jealous. As a young Marine infantryman the sight of the green camouflaged rifle was inspiring and I was in awe of the Marines that used them.

During my time in the Corps I never worked as a sniper, but I became acquainted with a few, particularly when I worked as a marksmanship coach. These many years later, my comrades and I are all out of the service, but I still keep in touch with a couple of scout sniper friends. Now it is their turn to be jealous.



# M40A1 308

**Based on the USMC combat-proven sniper system!**

**By Paul Markel**

## TACTICAL RIFLES M40A1 .308

When I first contacted Tactical Rifles of Dade City, Florida, we discussed several of the different rifles they offer. When I saw that they had their own version of the Marine Corps M40 it was not difficult to decide what rifle I wanted to test.

What the folks at Tactical Rifles have done is follow the leatherneck example and build a rifle from the ground up to be not only a precision shooting instrument but a robust field gun as well. Many bolt-action rifles will shoot sub-inch groups at 100 yards. However, few of those guns could survive a month or two or more in the field. The harsh treatment that all military hardware is subjected to was a factor considered in the construction of the Tactical Rifles M40A1.

It will not surprise you that the bolt-action for the rifle is a Remington 700. A heavy match barrel is fitted to the action and it is all mounted in a McMillan stock. McMillan synthetic stocks can be had in any number of colors or camouflage patterns. This particular M40 has the traditional woodland camo pattern. A nice rubber butt pad is fitted to the stock as well.

The coating on almost all of the metal parts is a baked-on epoxy that exceeds the US Navy's mil-spec for rust resistance. This particular finish is a non-reflective OD green. Atop the action a Picatinny sight rail is mounted. The rifle I had to test arrived with Warne Tactical 30mm scope rings.

Into the scope rings I would mount a Leupold Mark 4 Tactical scope. The optical sight is a variable power 4.5 to 14. The tube is

# SPECIFICATIONS

## TACTICAL RIFLES M40A1

**Caliber:** .308 • **Barrel:** 20-inch heavy match; 1:10 twist  
**Stock:** McMillan synthetic • **Sights:** None, Picatinny scope mount  
**Action:** Bolt • **Finish:** Mil-Spec epoxy • **Capacity:** 4 + 1

30mm, which allows greater adjustment and the objective lens is 50mm for better light-gathering capability. The scope has a central focus knob and, as you would expect from a tactical model, the windage and elevation knobs are external for quick adjustments. I have trusted Leupold

for many years to provide quality optics for my rifles.

Speaking of optics, while working on this project I was able to work with another product from Leupold, from their product line called Wind River. From the Wind River catalog I obtained a set of

(Right) The M40A1 is built around the ubiquitous Remington 700.

(Below) Note the focus and adjustment knobs on the Mark 4 Tactical Scope.



laser range finding binoculars.

The PR 800 binoculars are a fixed power 8x32mm with an electronic range finder built in. To activate the class-one laser range finder, the user simply holds down the control button on the right side for a moment. Once the object to be ranged is found, one places the red crosshair on it and holds the power button down for a second or two. The distance will appear in the viewable field of the binoculars. A separate button converts from yards to meters and back.

Naturally anyone who shoots a high-powered rifle at varied distances could make use of such an item. Laser range finding equipment is so compact and readily available today that there is really no reason for a sharpshooter to be without one. I found the Wind River binoculars to be a most useful addition to my field pack.

## PERFORMANCE

### TACTICAL RIFLES M40A1 .308

Load	Velocity	Accuracy
Black Hills 168 Match Moly	2608	0.63
Black Hills 175 Match Moly	2577	0.38
CorBon 125 JHP	2950	0.25
CorBon 175 Match JHP	2561	0.38
Federal 168 Gold Medal	2639	0.44
Federal 175 Gold Medal	2592	0.38
I.C.C. 125 Frangible	2938	0.75

*Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by Shooting Chrony F1 and accuracy in inches for best 3-shot group from 100 yards.*



### RANGE TIME

Tactical Rifles guarantees their sniper guns to be half-minute accurate (0.5 of an inch at 100 yards) when shot off of sand-bag rests. The (Please turn to page 86)

## TACTICAL RIFLES M40A1 .308

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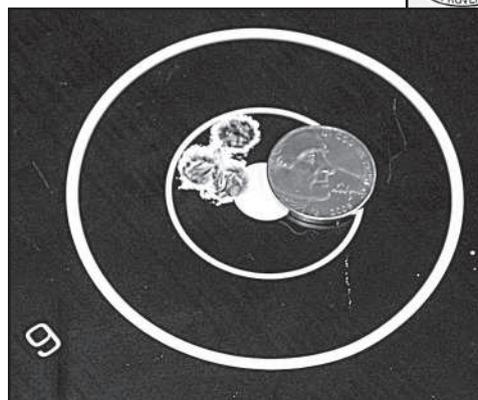
ammunition they test their guns on is the Federal Gold Medal 168-grain match load. For this review I would use ammunition from Federal, Black Hills, CorBon, and a frangible bullet load from International Cartridge Corporation or ICC.

From Federal I had both their 168- and 175-grain Gold Medal match loads. From Black Hills I used their 168- and 175-grain load with the moly-coated bullets. From CorBon I had a 125-grain JHP and 175-grain match JHP. The ICC round used a 125-grain projectile. These frangible bullets are made from compressed electrical-grade copper and are a cleaner alternative to lead. What I would discover through my testing was not only that the M40 was extremely accurate with every load but, despite the variance in bullet weights and manufacturers, they remained very consistent.

In order to get the most reliable results I planned a number of range trips to test out the rifle's precision. For comparison purposes, I fired three rounds of every load from 100 yards, distance verified with a range finder, and measured center to center. In the heat of July and August I laid prone behind



The CTK All Purpose Gun Level made scope alignment much easier.



(Above) A spectacular 0.25" three-shot group. CorBon 125gr at 100 yards. (Left) A nickel could cover the 0.44" group from Federal's 168gr Gold Medal match.

the M40A1 going through my mental checklist; breathe, relax, aim, squeeze, surprise, follow through.

What I learned on Parris Island so many years ago apparently worked. The groups that I achieved were nothing short of spectacular. The upshot of the testing was that every load produced sub-minute of angle 3-shot groups. The largest group was the ICC load with a mere 0.75 of an inch. Every other load was consistently below that size.

I fired the Federal 168-grain load into a 0.44 of an inch group and then fired it again on a separate day and achieved the exact same group size. The tightest group non-

or, however, was a genuine surprise.

CorBon has been making high velocity, hard-hitting ammunition for many years, but they have never really been known for their accuracy. When I chambered the first 125-grain .308 round from CorBon, my hope was to shoot it into a group smaller than an inch. Also, as the round was averaging 300 to 350 feet per second (fps) faster than the other loads, I expected it to strike consistently higher on target.

Three shots later, the ammunition/rifle combination had produced a spectacular 0.25 of an inch shot cluster. Each round touched the shot holes of the others. The group was also less than an inch above the zero for the 168-grain Federal load.

After I had tested all the loads at 100

yards, I moved a target stand out to 300 yards. I decided to check the Federal 168-grain and CorBon 175-grain loads at that distance. The Federal ammo put three rounds into a (Please turn to page 88)

### For more information:

**Dow Arms Room – Tactical Rifles**  
19250 Hwy 301, Dept GW/LE  
Dade City, FL 33523; 352-999-0599  
[www.tacticalrifles.net](http://www.tacticalrifles.net)

**Leupold**  
14400 NW Greenbrier Pkwy, Dept GW/LE  
Beaverton, OR 97006; 503-526-1400  
[www.leupold.com](http://www.leupold.com)

**BlackHawk**  
4850 Brookside Ct, Dept GW/LE  
Norfolk, VA 23502; 800-694-5263  
[www.blackhawk.com](http://www.blackhawk.com)

**US Cavalry**  
2855 Centennial Ave, Dept GW/LE  
Radcliff, KY 40160; 800-777-7172  
[www.uscav.com](http://www.uscav.com)

**Danner Boots**  
18550 NE Riverside Pkwy, Dept GW/LE  
Portland, OR 97230; 800-345-0430  
[www.danner.com](http://www.danner.com)

**Contico Gun Cases**  
305 Rock Industrial Park Dr, Dept GW/LE  
St Louis, MO 63044; 800-831-7077  
[www.contico.com](http://www.contico.com)

**CTK Precision**  
E5861 Herzberg Rd, Dept GW/LE  
Marion, WI 54950; 715-754-2891  
[www.ctkprecision.com](http://www.ctkprecision.com)

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1.88-inch group and the CorBon a 2.25-inch cluster. These are spectacular results.

As for consistency, the rifle remained zeroed from the first test session in early July to the last one I performed in late August just before penning this piece. The bolt-action on the rifle was smooth and precise. The trigger break was as close to perfect on a precision rifle as you can get. While I did shoot off of sand bags on one occasion, the majority of my shooting was done using a Harris bipod for a rest.

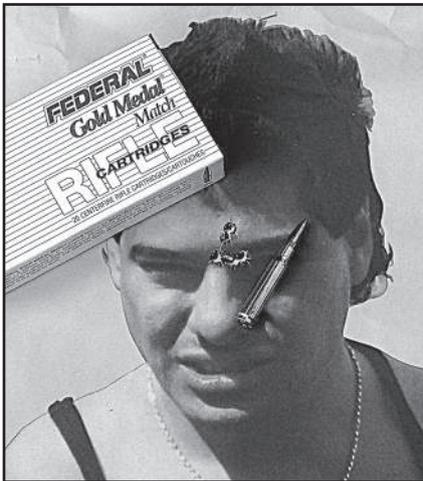
### GEAR

For range and field outings a shooter will need more than just a good rifle; he will need quality equipment as well. During this evaluation I was able to test out several pieces of top-notch gear.

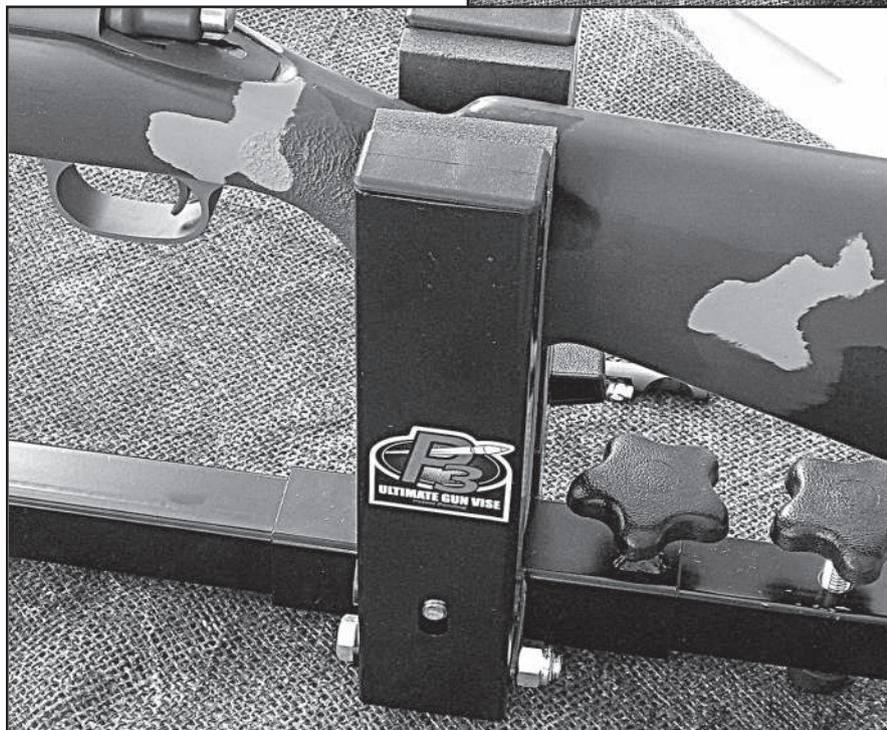
My evaluation began with the mounting of the Leupold scope onto the rifle. I have used various rests over the years, some being more useful than others. For this project I had on hand the P3 Ultimate Gun Vise from CTK Precision.

The P3 uses a padded rear gun vise and a padded v-shaped front rest. The entire unit is adjustable for leveling purposes with forward and rear knobs. The rear vise adjusts from front to rear, allowing it to be

(Right) The padded front rest of the CTK Ultimate Gun Vise. (Below) The P3 padded rear vise.



Five rounds of Federal 168gr Match ammo fired from 100 yards.



used with handguns as well.

Anyone who has ever mounted a scope on a rifle has probably fussed around trying to get the rifle and scope level with each other. Most of the time this is an "eyeball" operation. CTK also offers an All Purpose Gun Level to make this process simpler.

The M40 with the large Leupold M4 scope and bipod is a not exactly a compact package. I needed a padded hard case that would accommodate the rifle with all of its accessories and protect it as well. The case I chose was from Contico.

The Contico padded rifle case has four latches with an internal barrel lock built in. To ease transportation the case includes wheels and handles on both the horizontal and vertical ends. During the course of this evaluation I transported the M40 numerous times, and the Contico case proved

sturdy and a most useful piece of gear.

During my testing time I not only took the rifle to the shooting range, I took it to the field to help thin out some of the local varmint population. During my field outings I used a number of items.

As for field clothing, I wore the new digitized camouflage Army Combat Uniform available right now from the US Cavalry's catalog or website. The new ACU is an upgrade from the old woodland camo BDUs. There are pockets all over these things, including places to insert soft elbow and knee pads.

I put a lot of miles on my feet during field outings and other firearms training. Several months ago I picked up a pair of Desert Eagle GTX boots from Danner. During my first outing I wore them to Gunsite Training Center in Paulden, Arizona. The next time I wore them for an extended pe-



The action on the M40 rifle was smooth and sure. Note the Picatinny rail and Warne Tactical scope rings.

riod was to the SHOT Show in Las Vegas. Anyone who has ever attended a SHOT Show knows that comfortable footwear is a necessity, as you can literally walk miles a day visiting the innumerable booths.

During the M40 review I wore the Danner boots to the range and the field. The Gore-Tex liners kept my feet dry despite walking through wet fields. I have found these particular boots to be exceptionally comfortable and well made. A nice aspect about the Desert Eagle boots is that they blend well with blue jeans or khaki pants for everyday wear.

When you are talking about anything tactical, the BlackHawk Products Group likely has an accessory or two to make your job easier or more comfortable. To protect my elbows and knees while crawling around with the M40, I used protective pads from their HellStorm line.

For rifle work at the range, the BlackHawk padded shooting mat is one of my favorite items from their catalog. I also



used a raised cheek pad from BlackHawk. This device includes a zippered pouch for small tools or accessories and elastic bullet loops.

From the category of "some of the best ideas are the simplest" I acquired a new Shemagh from BlackHawk. The Shemagh is used much like the old green cravats were in the Vietnam era. However, the Shemagh is larger, made of a softer, more absorbent material, and has a break-up pattern to

make it a bit more camouflaged.

Some of the uses for the Shemagh include a headscarf or face cover. It can be used as a hasty sniper veil or simply to wipe the dust and sweat off of your face. One use I found was to lay the Shemagh out on the grass to hold gun parts during a quick field-stripping.

### FINAL NOTES

During the course of a few months I was able to take the M40A1 out and really get a good feel for the rifle. While it was truly a precision instrument, the rifle proved tough as well. Despite oppressive heat, humidity, and me touching the gun with sweaty hands, the only parts on the

rifle to show any signs of rust were the blued steel sling studs. The OD epoxy finish performed as advertised.

From start to finish, the rifle shot every load I fed into it with sub-minute precision. The combination of the M40A1, the premium Leupold optics, and the match grade ammunition ensured pinpoint accuracy. Anyone seeking a high-performance bolt-action rifle would do well to give the folks at Tactical Rifles a call.

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