

The Marine Corps M1941 Pack System

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BY 1940, the shortcomings of the M1910/28 pack had become apparent to a number of Marine officers. One of them, then Lt. Col. Alfred H. Noble, commanding officer of the 5th Marines, issued a Regimental Special Order detailing three senior non-commissioned officers in the regiment to a Special Board which he convened to design a new pack system.¹ One of the three, MGy Sgt. Leland "Lou" Diamond, would later gain fame while serving as a mortarman with the regiment on Guadalcanal and would also earn a special niche as one of the Marine Corps' most colorful enlisted men. The other two members of the board were MGy Sgt. Roy M. Fowel and Gy Sgt. John E. O'Neil.



FIG 1. A Marine on Bougainville carries a modified version of the M1941 Field Marching Pack. Official U.S. Marine Corps Photo.

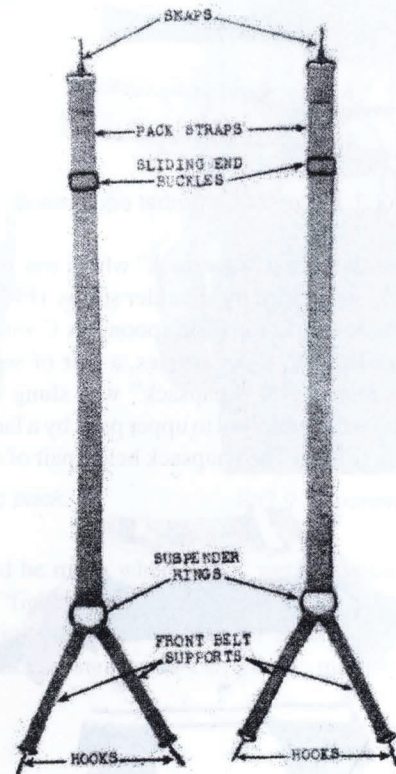


FIG 2. Suspenders, belt.

Incredibly, the new design was completed in a matter of days, and a prototype was made up by T. Sgt. George Jahnet. It was a true departure from the M1910/28 pack in that it reverted to the basic style of the pre-1910 pack, and that it separated the load into two distinct packs. The large pack was little more than a khaki canvas bag with a covering flap and carried spare shoes, clothing, toilet articles, and a shelter half. A "horseshoe" poncho and blanket roll was strapped over the top and two sides of the pack, with the large cover pulled over the upper one-third of the blanket roll. In addition, the new system incorporated a smaller pack with a separate set of shoulder straps which was superimposed over the backpack and could be released to be worn as a combat pack, in lieu of the large pack. The small pack carried rations and a complete mess kit. When worn together, the large flap of the main pack also covered the top of the small pack, as well as the center of the blanket roll.

The idea was sound and the system was further refined and modified by the Marine Corps. Officially adopted the following year, the new M1941² pack system was made of khaki

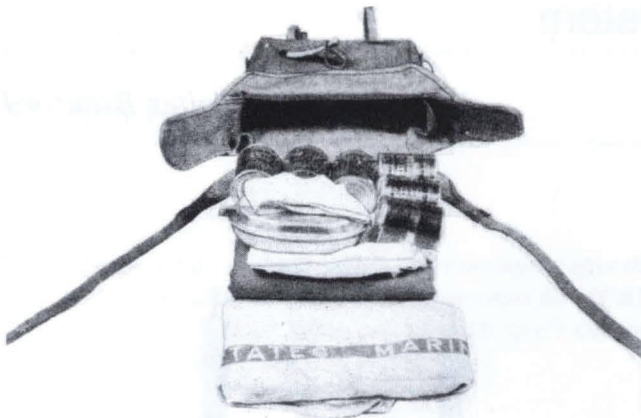


FIG 3. Haversack (combat equipment).

canvas and consisted of a "haversack" which was worn on the Marine's back, suspended by shoulder straps. (FIG 2) It held the poncho, meat can, knife, fork, spoon, six C-ration cans, a D-ration chocolate bar, toilet articles, a pair of socks, and a change of underwear. A "knapsack" was slung below the haversack, and was connected to upper pack by a large canvas webbing strap. (FIG 3) The knapsack held a pair of shoes, two

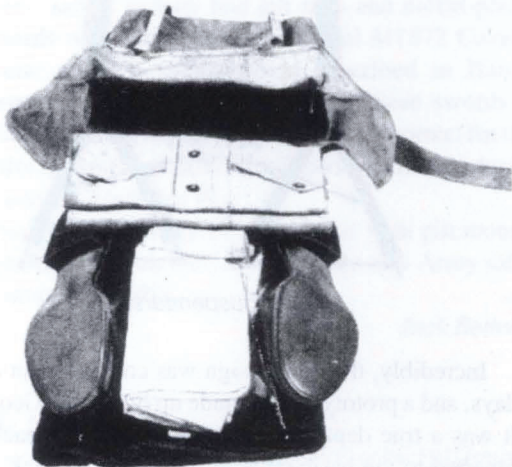


FIG 4. Knapsack.

shirts, two pairs of socks, two changes of underclothes and a pair of trousers, at a minimum. Except in the case of the "leave behind" pack, the horseshoe blanket roll always included the shelter half, tent poles, tent pegs and a guy line. It could be rolled short with one blanket for the upper pack only (FIG 5), or long enough to wrap around both packs, when worn as a transport pack. The long blanket roll (FIG 6) contained two blankets or one blanket and an overcoat. Supporting straps reached from the bottom of either the haversack or knapsack, crossed over, and hooked to the front of the cartridge belt or pistol belt in much the same manner as had the straps on the M1910/28.

In all, there were at least six different configurations for the system. The haversack alone, or with the bayonet and scab-

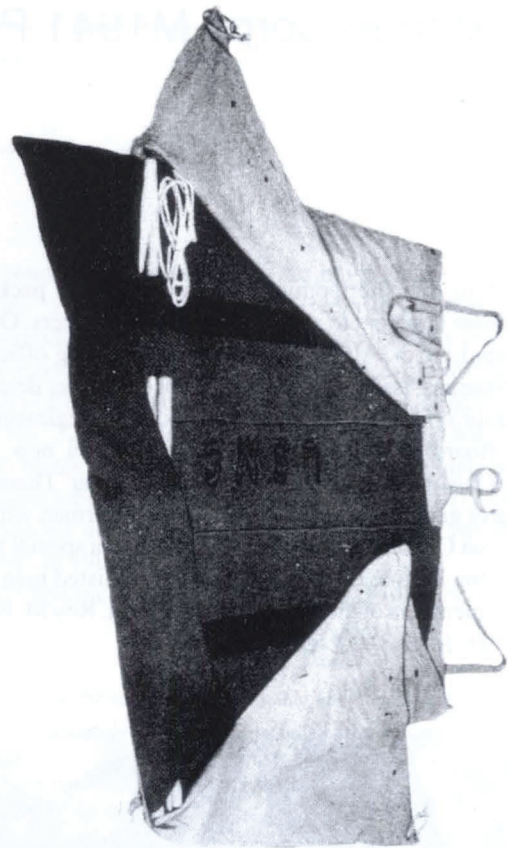


FIG 5. Blanket roll, short.

bard attached, was worn as the "light marching pack." (FIG 8) With the entrenching tool and the support straps, it was the "marching pack." (FIG 9) With the blanket roll attached, it became the "field marching pack." (FIGS 10 & 11) The lower knapsack could also be slung over the small of the back from the support straps hooked to the cartridge belt to form the "knapsack pack," although this was rarely used. (FIG 12) When both packs were worn, the combination was referred to as the "transport" pack. (FIG 13) The "field transport" pack was made up of both packs with the long blanket roll strapped around them. (FIG 14) In addition to the six versions worn on the back, the knapsack could also be slung over one shoulder by a web trousers belt and worn as a musette bag by officers

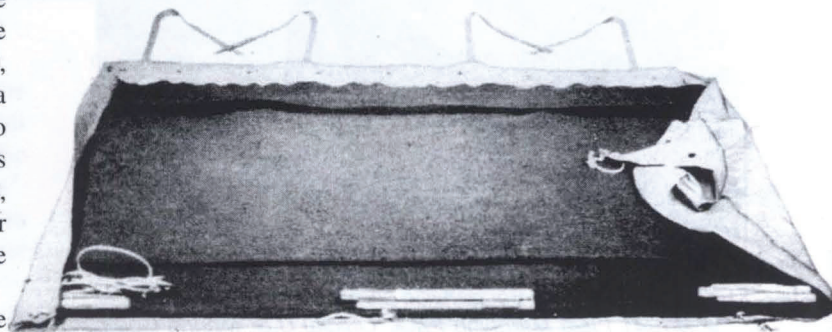


FIG 6. Blanket roll, long.

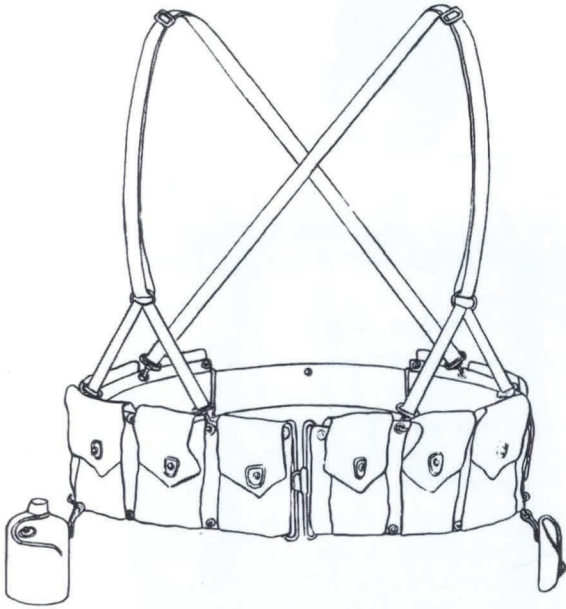


FIG 7. Suspenders supporting a belt.

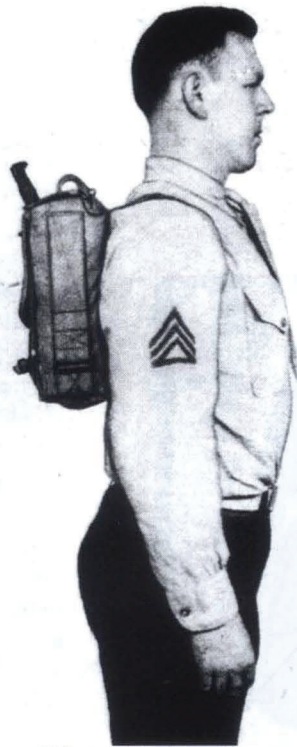


FIG 8. Light Marching pack.



FIG 9. Marching pack.

and senior non-commissioned officers. Although not part of the original design, officers could also carry their field bag on the back, using only the supporting straps. A “leave behind” pack of the knapsack and short blanket roll (minus the shelter

half) could be made when troops were moving into combat with the “field marching pack” and needed to leave any encumbering equipment in the rear areas.

This pack system was carried by marines throughout

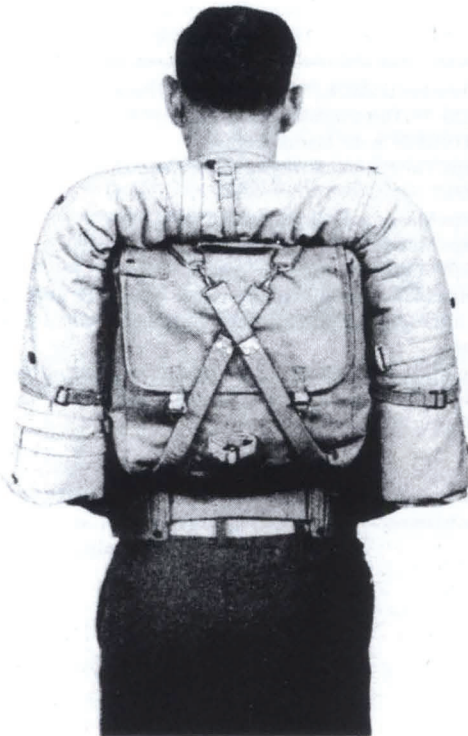


FIG 10. Field marching pack--rear view.



FIG 11. Field marching pack--side view.

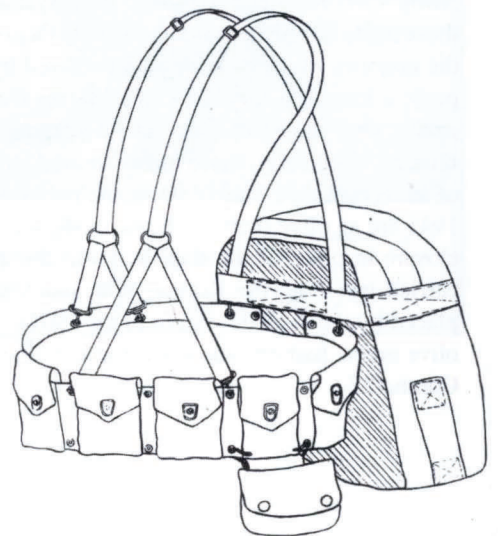


FIG 12. Knapsack pack.



FIG 13. Transport pack.



FIG 14. Field transport pack.

World War II and had an influence on the design of the U.S. Army's M1945 field and cargo pack system. In addition to those made at the Marine Corps Supply Depot in Philadelphia, the majority of packs were manufactured by the Boyt Company, a longtime supplier to the Marine Corps. The earliest packs were made of light khaki canvas with olive drab binding.³ Generally, those manufactured by 1943 were made of an overall dark khaki,⁴ while the packs made in 1944 and 1945 are an olive drab.⁵ Later modified with a "tube" top closure in place of the flap in 1944,⁶ this pack system was carried into both the Korean War and Vietnam. When replaced by the ALICE system in the 1970s, the pack, now in olive green, had become known as the "Field Pack, Canvas, Combat".⁷

Notes:

1. Capt. Robert W. Gordon, USMCR, "The Experimental Pack," *Leatherneck* (October 1940): 20–21. This article details the design of the pack intended to replace the M1910/28 in the Marine Corps.
2. U.S. Marine Corps, *The Pack. U.S. Marine Corps. M1941*, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1942).
3. U.S. Marine Corps Museums Collection, Artifact 842345.
4. U.S. Marine Corps Museum Collection, Artifact 850655.
5. U.S. Marine Corps Museums Collection, Artifact 771053.
6. U.S. Marine Corps Museums Collection, Artifact 790101. Of all those packs cataloged in the Marine Corps Museums system, none with a "tube top" pre-date 1944.
7. The latest example in the U.S. Marine Corps Museums Collection bears the black ink stamped marking "Field Pack, Canvas, Combat" over "DSA 100-3510-SA65" over "382-7966."