

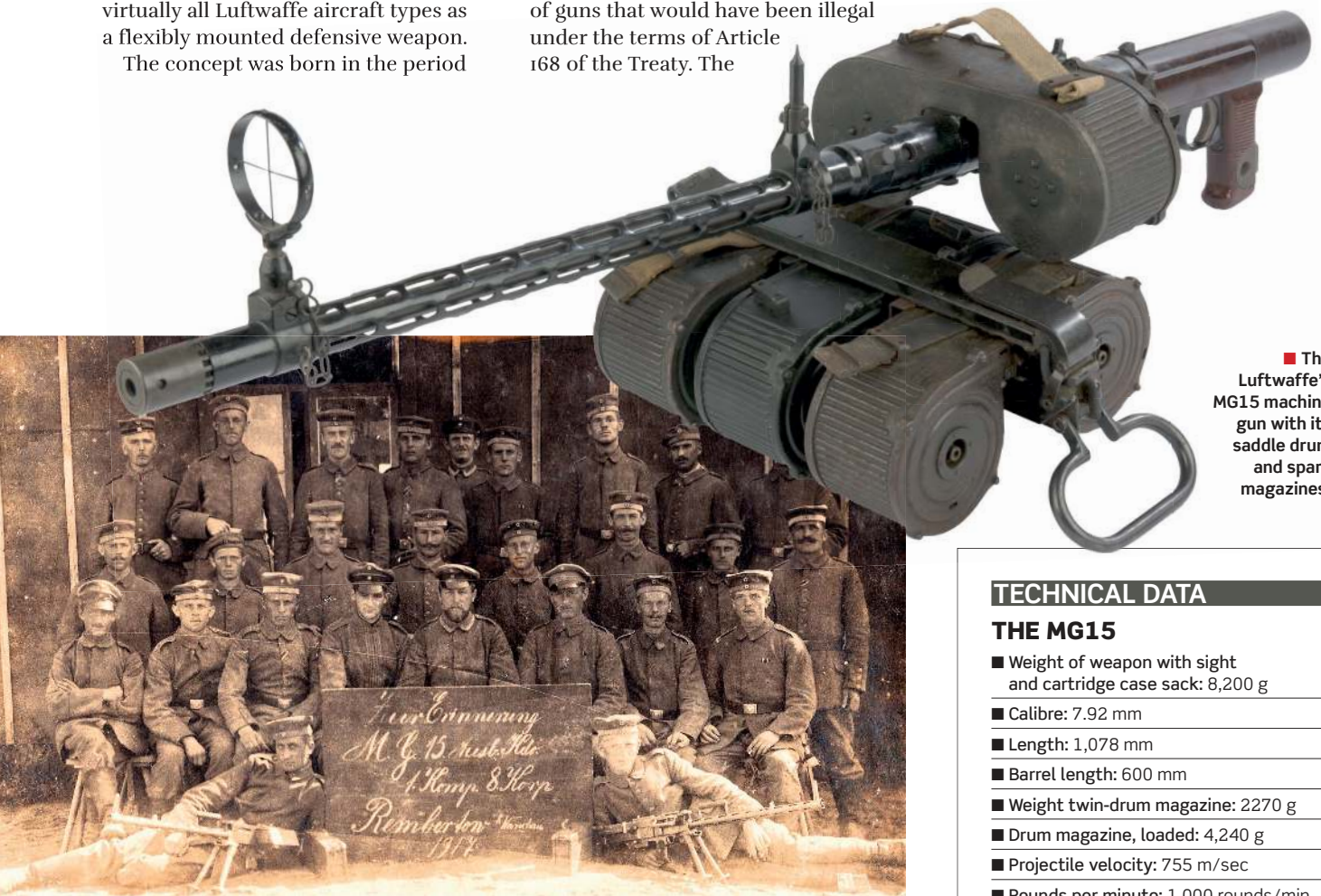
The MG15 Machine Gun

The MG15, a Rheinmetall-Borsig design, was introduced in 1934 as an aircraft mounted machine gun. An excellent and extensively used weapon it is rarely described in reference literature.

The design of the MG15 was based on the MG30 weapon, and although it shares its designation with the MG15 n.A., a light machine gun used in the First World War, it actually has nothing in common with it. During the Second World War, the MG15 was used in virtually all Luftwaffe aircraft types as a flexibly mounted defensive weapon. The concept was born in the period

between the two World Wars and during a time when German arms production was heavily regulated by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However, as a major shareholder in the Swiss Waffenfabrik Solothurn AG, Rheinmetall was able to outsource and continue the design and production of guns that would have been illegal under the terms of Article 168 of the Treaty. The

initial motivation had been to design a light machine gun to be used by the Reichswehr, where it would be replacing the heavy and outdated MG08 which had been Germany's standard machine gun during the First World War. Rheinmetall/Solothurn came up with the MG30, a recoil-



■ The Luftwaffe's MG15 machine gun with its saddle drum and spare magazines.

TECHNICAL DATA

THE MG15

- Weight of weapon with sight and cartridge case sack: 8,200 g
- Calibre: 7.92 mm
- Length: 1,078 mm
- Barrel length: 600 mm
- Weight twin-drum magazine: 2270 g
- Drum magazine, loaded: 4,240 g
- Projectile velocity: 755 m/sec
- Rounds per minute: 1,000 rounds/min

■ The MG15 n.A. machine of the First World War bears no relationship to the MG15 of the Second World War, despite its designation.



■ The MG15 in its rear position onboard a Junkers 87 Stuka. The gun is mounted in a ball-and-socket swivel in a rotatable gun ring, giving a wide field of fire. Spare saddle drums can be seen stowed in racks, and an empty case container is fitted underneath the gun.



■ An external view of the same weapon, showing a device at the end of the barrel to prevent shots being fired into the gunner's own aircraft.

operated and air-cooled design adopted to fire the standard 7.92x57 Mauser round and sporting a new locking system invented by Louis Stange in the 1920s.

Fed by a 30 round magazine, it was a brilliant, well-made and quality design and even though the Reichswehr would ultimately chose the Dreyse MG13 for its arsenal, the MG30 would become the father of the light standard machine guns of the Luftwaffe during the early years of the Second World

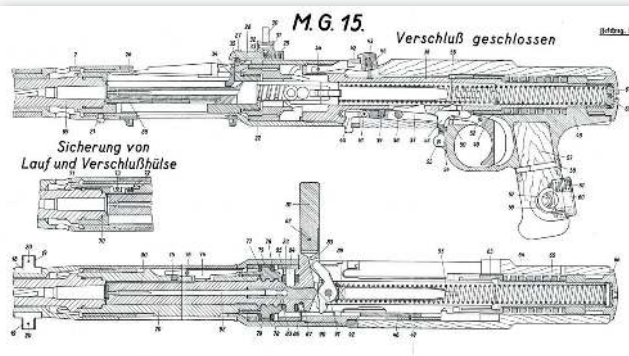
War. By lightening the MG30, equipping it with the twin (saddle drum) magazine and modifying it by removal of the stock for use within the cramped and confined quarters of a bomber aircraft, so the design became the MG15.

Being of a modern and modular design it could quickly be modified with a number attachments, different sights, cartridge case collectors, bi- and tripods and even shoulder stocks. The MG15 became a byword for easy-handling and it operated smoothly,

firing from an open bolt which stayed open (cocked) when the gun was ready to fire, thus making it unnecessary to re-cock after a change of magazine. By pulling the trigger, the bolt would be released and then strip a round from the magazine. This would then be pushed into the chamber, locking up when the locking rotated, locking the the bolt and barrel extension together. A trip lever would then release the firing pin and the gun would fire. The discharge recoil would



■ An MG15 in its transit case, complete with spares - including sights, tools and empty cartridge case collector bags.



■ Breech detail of the MG15 from the weapon's official handbook.

then push the barrel, lock, and the bolt assembly backwards until the base of the fired cartridge case would hit the ejector and fling it out of the receiver. This cycle would continue for as long as the operator held down the trigger.

The saddle-drum magazines held 75 rounds of ammunition, evenly distributed in both sides of the drum. One magazine would allow a firing burst lasting only about 4.5 seconds.



■ A steel-helmeted Luftwaffe crew member of a Dornier 17-Z mans one of the defensive MG15s fitted with a 'bowl' type empty case collector.



■ An example of the 75-round MG15 ammunition saddle drum. (Guy Black)

As such, each gun would usually have a supply of 10 spare magazines.

With the eventual advent of more modern and powerful machine gun types (like the MG81, MG 131 and even the heavy MG 151/20), well over 17,000 MG15s were ultimately modified for

what was known as 'Erdkampf' or ground combat use.

Without a doubt, the MG15 machine gun was one of the most important aerial weapons in the arsenal of the Luftwaffe during the Second World War. ✚

THE WEAPON IN USE

AN AIR GUNNER REMEMBERS

Oberfeldwebel Fritz Pons was a Bordfunker (radio operator) and Fliegerschütze (air gunner) with 8./KG55 during the Battle of Britain and the Blitz. In this role, he was also responsible for manning the MG15 mounted in the upper gondola of the unit's Heinkel 111 aircraft but he told how that he became dissatisfied with the installation of a single weapon in that position.

"For one thing, it became necessary to regularly change the saddle drum on top of the MG15 and this took valuable time. It was time you didn't have in a combat situation, and so I decided to design and make a double mounting frame to carry two MG15s instead of the usual single weapon. This meant that I could quickly change over to the other gun if the magazine was empty. This gave me a better chance, I thought. I could also use both guns together for greater firepower if I needed to."



Fritz Pons liked the MG15 as a defensive weapon, but stressed that repeatedly changing the magazines was tiresome and that the drums also took up a great deal of stowage space. In his view:

"I had experience against the Spitfire, for instance, using the MG15. In my opinion, we had a fifty-fifty chance of winning."



■ The double MG15 mounting fitted by Fritz Pons to his Heinkel 111 during 1940. Only one cartridge case collector bag is fitted. The empty cases from the outboard gun were allowed to fall overboard. (Left) Oberfeldwebel Fritz Pons of 8./KG55, 1940.