

The Browning .50 Cal Machine Gun

Category: General

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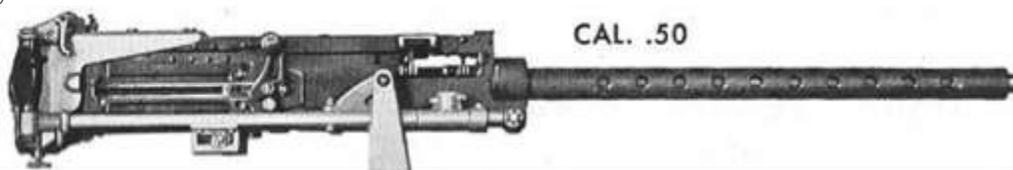
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It would be unusual for anyone who builds, or wants to build, a WWII fighter to not know that the most common machine gun mounted in a P-51, P-47, or almost any other heavily armed aircraft would be the Browning M2 machine gun. The P-51 usually had six, the P-47 eight, and a few B-25's had eight or ten of these mounted in the nose section to cause heavy damage on troops, aircraft, or any other target of opportunity. The B-17 bombers became a veritable porcupine of machine guns with top (2), bottom (2), tail (2), side (2), and nose guns up to 4) to discourage the enemy attackers.

But, did you know this tough and dependable gun was first put into service way back in 1918, just at the end of WWI? It has been used on land, sea and aircraft mounts as a powerful protector of U.S. armed forces. It is probably unknown exactly how many have been manufactured, but there are still an unknown huge number of them at the bottom of every ocean and sea where a modern battle has been fought. The grand total is probably in the many hundreds of thousands, or even millions. They have been the heavy machine gun choice of all U. S. Services in every armed combat since 1918.

While .50 caliber versions are the most likely to be used in modern aircraft, the .30 caliber versions were also produced for land, sea, and aircraft use. The larger caliber guns provided a much higher range and firepower. The fifty-caliber gun had an effective maximum range of almost 7000 feet. The two most common barrel types used a 36 -inch long barrel for the regular or 45 inch for the heavy- duty version. The shorter barrel type could fire between 750 to 850 rounds per minute while the heavier version shoots 450-550 rounds per minute

The P-51D model was armed with six machine guns and a full load of 1880 rounds that provided something less than one full minute of firing! Each round weighs in at approximately ¼ pound depending on the type of round. You may have heard the saying "it was the whole nine yards". That saying comes from the length of a belt of 50 cal shells needed to fill the ammo bay of a WWII fighter. If the ammo bay for each machine gun was fully loaded, it had "the full nine yards" of ammunition.



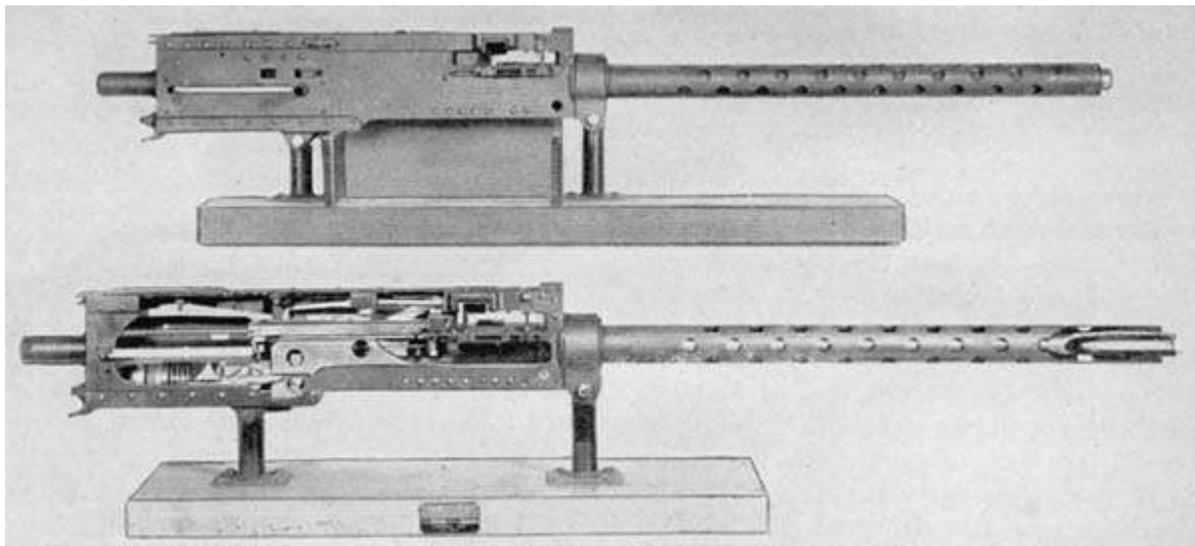
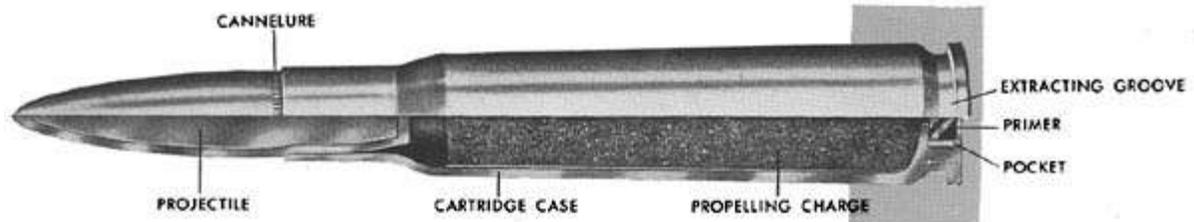
The guns weighed 61 pounds each for a total gun weight of 366 pounds in a P-51, and bullets at a quarter pound per round would add close to 470 pounds for the 1880 round full ammo load. Fighters would aim using a cockpit gun sight usually, but did you know the guns were set to converge fire at a predetermined range? This was done on the ground with the aircraft tail raised to put the fuselage in a flight attitude as the guns were fired at a target, and adjusted to converge. A second or two of fire put an awful lot of lead on target! One second x six guns = 60 rounds.

The bullets for the .50 caliber gun are varied and the standard bullet is the 'ball' round using a steel bullet with a copper cladding. An armor-piercing bullet is made of soft steel with a hardened steel tip is identified by a black tip.

Incendiary, or tracer, bullets are used to provide a visual guide to where the regular bullets are going. They are spaced from one to five regular bullets for each tracer and are made in two

different intensities. A red tip is normal intensity and an orange tip identifies the high intensity tracer.

Incendiary rounds have a blue tip. Other special rounds have a combination of several attributes of the normal rounds.



Top: Aircraft Machine Gun, Cal. .50, M2, Fixed. Bottom: Aircraft Machine Gun, Cal. .50, M2, Fixed (Sectionalized).