

M1895 Colt-Browning machine gun—“potato digger”

The Colt-Browning M1895, nicknamed “potato digger” due to its unusual operating mechanism, is an air cooled, belt fed, gas operated machine gun that fires from a closed bolt with a cyclic rate of 450 rounds per minute. Based on a John Moses Browning design dating to 1889, it was one of the first successful gas operated machine guns to enter service. By 1890, Browning perfected the design, offered it to Colt, which built the first working model. His

first patent for an automatic rifle, filed in early 1890, was the M1895's operating mechanism.

The M1895 uses a unique operating mechanism, which is quite similar to that of a lever action rifle. The earliest prototype developed by Browning in early 1889 was a .44 caliber black powder cartridge rifle, weighing less than 12 pounds, which was capable of firing 16 shots in less than one second. Operation was via a lever located under the barrel, which operated the action when swung downwards. The lever was actuated by the muzzle blast operating upon it.



The M1895 was the first machine gun adopted by the United States military, and it saw service with the Army, Navy, and Marines, and was adapted to use in many roles. It was mounted in tripods, horse drawn carriages, boats, aircraft, and even armored cars. The M1895 saw extensive service with the United States during the Spanish American War, including the 1898 invasion of Guantanamo Bay by U.S. Marines. It was also used by American forces during the Philippine–American War and the Boxer Rebellion, where it proved to be accurate and reliable. The M1895 also saw use throughout the protracted Mexican Revolution, where it was one of few machine guns to see use in that conflict.