

The ArmaLite AR-18 & AR-180

was used. The upper and lower receivers were joined by a cross pin in front and a locking catch in the rear. These receivers pivoted apart much like the M16. The magazines were similar to those used in the M16, but utilized a slightly different magazine release. M16 mags could be modified to work in a pinch by cutting a slot at a specific point in the side of the body of the mag with a Dremel tool. A stamped rear sight was utilized that was adjustable for elevation and windage, and a 2.75x quick-detachable scope made in Japan was available. This had an inverted post reticle and was range-adjustable, calibrated to the 5.56mm/.223 round. All in all, this was a good package that had a lot of appeal.

The AR-18 was put into initial production at its plant in Costa Mesa, California, and a semiautomatic-only version known as the AR-180 was also made there. These first rifles were basically machine shop fabrications and many of them show some hand fitting. A license to produce the AR-18

adopted, as the U.S. was already too heavily committed to the AR-15/M16.

ArmaLite then concentrated on civilian and police sales of these arms. Some small quantities were also sold to Botswana, Haiti and Swaziland. The outlawed Irish Republican Army liked the rifles immensely and nicknamed them the "widow-makers." While the U.K. did not formally adopt the AR-18, many of its design features were used in the Sterling SAR-87 and the bullpup SA-80 family of British firearms. Other foreign weapons inspired by the AR-18 were the Japanese Howa Type 89, the Singaporean SAR-80, and the Australian Bushmaster M17S.

Minor complaints lodged against these rifles were that the folding stock became somewhat wobbly over time, and that there was no bolt release that could override the bolt hold-open feature when the magazine was empty. The fact that the magazines would not interchange with those of the M16 also worked against them on the civilian and police market. In all, the design still



was sold to the Howa Machinery Company of Nagoya, Japan, and production was initiated there. However, Japan soon declared its neutrality in the Vietnam War, and production therefore ceased, as no military-style weapons could legally be exported to the combatants in that war. ArmaLite then turned to the Sterling Armaments Company of Dagenham, Essex, in the United Kingdom to produce the rifles.

The AR-18 was evaluated officially by the U.S. in 1964 and the U.K. in 1966. In the U.S., the Army's official decision was that the design was sound but needed development. Not happy with the company's progress, Arthur Miller resigned from ArmaLite in 1968. ArmaLite made several minor changes, and the arm was re-evaluated in 1969. However, in spite of its merits, the AR-18 was not

proved to be a compact, reliable, accurate and easily maintainable product that could be manufactured with commonly available equipment.

Other than prototypes made for evaluation, Costa Mesa produced 5,189 AR-18s and AR-180s from July 1969 to June 1972. Howa made 3,927 AR-180s from 1970 to 1974. These were particularly noted for quality. The rifle illustrated was made by Howa in early 1971, and is equipped with the ArmaLite quick-detachable scope. Sterling made 12,362 AR-180s from 1979 to 1985, of which 10,496 were imported into the U.S. Quality on the Sterling rifles varied. Some Sterling variants with wooden thumbhole stocks were made, as well as some short-barrel versions with cone-shaped flash hiders. 21,478 AR-18s and AR-180s were manufactured under the ArmaLite name by all plants from 1969 to 1985.

In recent years, a modern version of the rifle has been made as the AR-180B, although it is no longer in production. It was marketed by ArmaLite, Inc. of Geneseo, Illinois. This rifle has a fixed stock integrated into a plastic lower receiver using AR-15 components, and utilizes AR-15/M16 magazines.

The AR-18 was a good concept, and had not the U.S. become so heavily invested in the M16, it could have been further developed to become the standard U.S. assault rifle. Many still swear by it today. This classic has become a hot collector's item, with good examples bringing hefty sums when sold.

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