

Rifle, Caliber .30, M1903A4, Snipers



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for the A4 over the A3 was a whopping \$1.90 per rifle. Remember that these were 1943 dollars, of course. Also, Remington was not responsible for procuring either the stocks or the scopes, as these were provided by the Ordnance Department.

Remington began A4 production in February 1943, but there were initial problems in securing satisfactory scope sights. The Infantry Board had chosen two scopes as best suited. These were the Lyman “Alaskan” and the W.R. Weaver 330C. Lyman scopes were assigned the nomenclature M73, and the Weaver scopes M73B1. Unfortunately, Lyman was unable to supply scopes in anything like the quantities desired, so the 2.5x Weavers were used, often taken right off Weaver’s shelves in El Paso. Few, if any, Lyman scopes actually saw service. Some Weaver 330M8 scopes were delivered and used; these had rounded open screw-slot adjustment turrets rather than the finger knobs of the 330C. Most of the 330M8 scopes had post reticles rather than crosshairs. Later knob-type scopes were marked as M73B1s, and some, very rare, were made by Frankford Arsenal. Some scopes had serial numbers engraved on them with an electric pencil. These numbers bore no relationship to the serial numbers on the rifles. Most scopes were provided with leather lens covers connected by a leather strap. The rifle illustrated, manufactured in August 1943, has one of the early Weaver scopes with screw-slot adjustments and a “stalagmite” post reticle. It is a late first-production rifle with a serial number in the 3421500 range, and has a four-groove barrel, which remains in excellent shape.

Only Remington produced the M1903A4. There were three serial number blocks assigned for the new sniper rifle. These were 3407088-3427087, 4000001-401500, and 4992001-5784000. A “Z” prefix was added to A4 serial numbers that were in the second range, if the serial number was duplicated by an A3 rifle that could also be in this block

of numbers. Remington continued to produce the M1903A4 through June of 1944, and delivered a total of 23,365 rifles to the U.S. armed forces. Most were provided to overseas combat units quickly.

Right away, as the rifles were employed, both soldiers and Marines criticized the Weaver scope as not being rugged enough for service. In fairness, the scope was designed for weekend deer hunting, not for the rough and tumble world of combat. In the Pacific theatre in particular, the scope would admit moisture, and water in the scope was a constant problem. In Europe, one G.I. threw away the Weaver and had the Ordnance guys braze on a Russian sniper scope. He reportedly had good results with it. Although supplanted by the newer semiautomatic M1C and M1D sniper rifles, the A4s saw service in the Korean War, often fitted with newer M81 and M82 scopes. M84 scopes were utilized from the mid-1950s on. The M1C and the M1D rifles then were standard, but the 03A4 was still in service as late as the Vietnam War. A technical manual for it and the M84 scope was published in 1970, and some were in military inventory as late as the mid-1970s.

Many 03A4 rifles were sold (without scopes) to civilians through the Director of Civilian Marksmanship after being released from service. Scopes for these rifles were and are quite scarce, and collectors scrambled to find them. A 1903A4 receiver is nearly impossible to fake due to the placement of the markings on the receiver ring. Still, some modern reproductions have been cobbled up using M1903A3s as the basis. Today, an as-issued M1903A4 is a hot collectible and quite valuable.

While the M1903A4 was clearly not a prime choice for a sniper weapon at the time of its deployment, it gave a good account of itself in battle when nothing else was available, and today it’s considered a classic infantry weapon of the Second World War.