

Small Arms of the 1st Parachute Infantry Division

The principle weapon of the Parachute Infantry is the MG42 general purpose light machine-gun. This is a belt-fed weapon that fires full-size rifle-caliber projectiles at a cyclic rate of 1,200 rounds. (This high rate of fire is a product of the long-standing German belief that a machine-gun is a “weapon of opportunity” that should be optimized to deliver brief, but intense, bursts of fire against targets that appear for a short period of time.)

Each standard rifle company of the 1st Parachute Infantry Division rates twenty MG42 machine guns. Of these, eighteen belong to the nine rifle squads of the company and two to the company headquarters. In addition to this, each full-strength rifle company possesses forty-three submachine guns and seventy-three bolt-action rifles. The men armed with these rifles and submachine-guns carry ammunition for the machine-gun teams, provide them with protection at close range, and engage targets that would otherwise require the premature unveiling of a machine-gun.

Ten of the bolt-action rifles in a rifle company are equipped with telescopic sights. Six are provided with launchers for rifle grenades.



The two-man team of an MG42 general purpose machine-gun.

Single-Use Munitions

The men of the 1st Parachute Infantry Division make extensive use of single-use munitions. The classic “potato masher” hand-grenades serve as the chief weapon for engaging enemy troops who might be lurking around corners, sheltering in fox-holes, or making use of trenches. Magnetic shaped-charge mines and disk-shaped teller mines provide a means of dealing with hostile tanks at close range. (Both can be placed on top of the hulls of tanks. The teller mines can also be placed in the path of armored vehicles.

Of late, units of 1st Parachute Infantry Division have been issued with small numbers of single-use rocket-propelled grenades. Known as “tank fists” (*Panzerfäuste*), these can throw a three-kilogram shaped charge as far as sixty meters.

Mortars

The 1st Parachute Infantry Division makes extensive use of mortars. One reason for this is the relatively ease with which mortars can be delivered by parachute, glider, and transport aircraft. Another is the rugged character of the terrain in central Italy, which greatly complicates both the movement and the employment of low-trajectory artillery pieces.



The 1st Parachute Infantry Division employs three types of mortars. The short-range 81mm mortars are assigned to infantry companies. The long-range 81mm mortars belong to the heavy (“machine gun”) companies of infantry battalions. The 120mm mortars belong to the 13th (Mortar) Company of each of the three infantry regiments.

Model Year	Caliber	Weight of Bomb	Range
1942	81mm	3.5 kilogram	1,100 meters
1934	81mm	3.5 kilogram	2,400 meters
1942	120mm	15.6 kilogram	6,000 meters