

GAS MASKS

Collector's Guide for Identifying Common American Military Gas Masks



Ron Ruble

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Neither the author nor the publisher assumes any responsibility for the use, misuse or the accuracy of the information contained in the publication.

To my friend Chris C. Curtis, without his generous help and the use of his gas mask collection, this book would not have been possible.

Front cover: U.S. Navy Diaphragm Optical Mark I Gas Mask

Title page photo: U.S. Army Chemical Corps insignia (see page 248)

Back cover: Different types of common military America gas masks

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**DESIGNED FOR
LIVING**



TAKE CARE OF YOUR GAS MASK
DON'T USE IT AS A KNAPSACK OR PILLOW

WWII US Army poster showing the Army M2A2 Gas Mask (page 55)

OVERVIEW

This book is designed to be an easy guide for identifying American military gas masks by using these two old sayings for its creation and layout: “a picture is worth a thousand words” and KISS, the acronym for ‘Keep it simple, stupid’, the design principle noted by the U.S. Navy in 1960. The goal in making this book is to provide a reference guide that is easily usable by a novice military collector that knows little or nothing about American military gas masks and at the same time, provide a useful quick reference book for the advanced collector. Each gas mask has multiple photographs showing all sides of the masks and bag, allowing the reader easy identification of the masks. The collecting of military gas masks can be very complicated and overwhelming to the novice collector because of the number of different types of masks, sometimes complicated by way the U.S. military identified each of the masks with their improvements, and each model of mask may have many variants adding to the complexity. In this book, an effort was made to reduce the complexity and ‘Keep It Simple’.

Gas Mask – sometimes called respirators, filter masks, protective masks, chemical and biological defense respirators; in this book they all are called ‘gas masks’

Canister – sometimes called filters, respirator inserts, chemical or biological removal insert or devices. In this book they are called ‘canisters’ referring to filter or filtering devices.

Gas Mask Bag – sometimes called carriers, mask holder, filter carrying bag, or other names. In this book they all are called ‘gas mask bags’.

Simplifying gas mask type / designation – The U.S. military would designate a mask with the following: “mask type – filter used – bag used” which allowed them to specify type of mask, the filter being used and the style of bag which worked great for the military but not so easy for the beginning collector trying to identify the basic style of mask they found. Example: The U.S. Army Lightweight Gas Mask made in 1944 was called **M4-10A1-6** by the military. In this book it is called simply **M4** and using the mask type only, it makes looking up the type of mask much easier. This book does contain some detail information about each mask but once a mask is identified by using this book and if the collector wants more very detailed information about it, there are many books and internet references for that purpose. When doing research for this book, it was found that there is conflicting information from different sources, including the basic mask type identification. Where possible, in these cases, the information from military sources was used in this book. To add more confusion, during WWII, two different agencies of the U.S. Government military procured gas masks, one was for the military and the other noncombatant personnel, and (insert “Military Intelligence” joke) they made two gas masks with the same designation; M1A2 gas mask and the M1A2 noncombatant gas mask which are completely two different types of gas masks; see page 33.

Other numbers on masks and canisters – Only basic identification molded on the masks and markings on the gas mask bags are covered in this book. All the other numbers on the masks, canisters and bags are not covered for a simple reason: it is complicated. These numbers can be detail part numbers, contract numbers, different

Overview

manufacturer's numbers, order numbers and many other types of identifications. Sometimes these numbers add to the confusion when trying to identify a mask. Example: Canister that is marked M9; one would expect that this canister would be with an M9 gas mask but it does not; it was used on the M3 Lightweight Gas Mask. The M9 marked canister is the model or revision designation of that style of canister and has nothing to do with the mask it was used with. On some masks a circular manufacture/date is molded in to each part. This can be useful for dating mask but at the same time may add to the confusion because of different parts that were replaced on the masks during the time of use, it will have completely different year of manufacture. See page 247 for information about these manufacture/date markings.

Not all types of American military gas masks are pictured in this book, only the ones that can normally be found and the gas masks that are pictured in the book, not all their variations are shown. Example: the **M1A2** Gas Mask has two earlier versions, the **M1** and the **M1A1** (page 31) that looks like the M1A2 with only minor differences. These two earlier versions are not pictured but they have a written description in the book allowing the collector to identify these different versions of the M1 masks. Gas masks that are not included in this book with detailed information are the experimental masks, animal masks (dog, horse, etc.), head wound gas masks and the ones that were manufactured in very low quantities, making them almost impossible to find.



Gas masks photographs used in this book are from a real collection, they not from a museum collection that has mint condition masks. Some of the rare masks have damage to them because that is the best condition masks the collector has been able to find and afford.

Photos of the masks are an aid to easily identifying types of gas masks but many of the head harnesses shown holding the masks on the display heads are not in the correct position for wearing the mask. They were photographed this way because many of these old masks are fragile, brittle and trying to move the head harness to the correct position for photographing could have cause damage to the masks. Canisters are photographed on the masks because trying to remove them could cause damage.

- Handle gas masks with care to prevent damage; they can be fragile and brittle -

Overview

For each of the masks, a description line gives you quick reference information:

1942 to 1949 – US Army – Color: greenish gray or black – Scarce
(Dates) (Service) (Color of mask's face-piece) (Rarity scale)

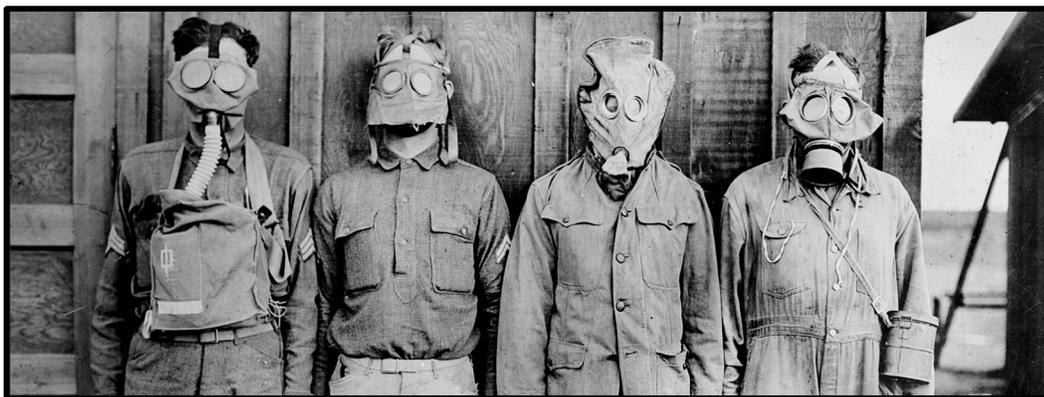
Dates are the approximate year when the mask was issued or production started and to the approximate year when the mask was removed (obsoleted) from service use.

Service is the branch of U.S. military service that issued and used the mask. Other branches of the military may have also have used the mask but may not be listed.

Color is the general color of the mask. It should be noted that some masks may be found in different colors other than listed because some mask's material faded with age (depending of storage conditions) and during war times, different manufactures used slightly different material in making the masks resulting in different colors for the same model of masks.

Rarity scale for each mask is based on how easy it is to find, not its value or condition. The M9 Left-Hand Mask is hard to find because of low production quantities but its value is about the same as the common M9 Mask which is easy to find. Many of the WWI gas masks can be found but value can vary widely because of condition; rough condition WWI masks are uncommon while some that are in very good to excellent condition masks are very rare to find and they have a high value. Some masks are higher value because of the history connected to their usage, like the M5 Assault Mask that was used during the WWII D Day Invasion; it is sought after by many military collectors. All gas masks can be found in any condition, from rough to mint/unused condition; it is just the matter of time and difficulty finding the mask and the cost required to purchase it.

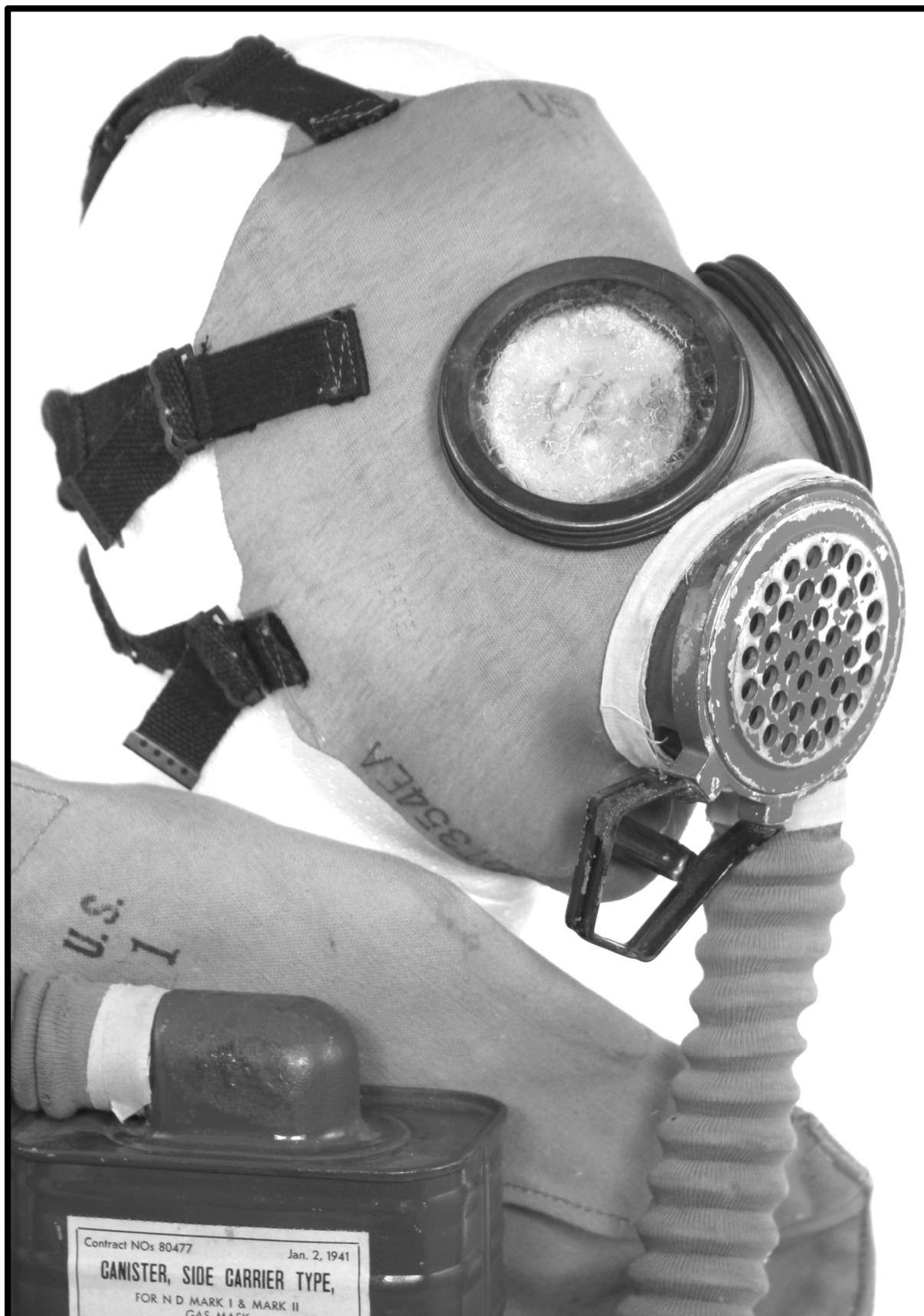
Very Rare – Extremely hard to find these masks in any condition
Rare – Very hard to find - better condition masks are very difficult to find.
Scarce – Hard to find but can be found in all conditions including unused
Uncommon – Can be found in any condition without too much difficulty
Common – Easy to find in any condition – large quantities in surplus market



American, British, French and German WWI gas masks, circa 1918

(Photo: U.S. Army Signal Corps)

Navy Mark I Diaphragm Mask



M2A1 Heavyweight Mask

GAS MASK BAG:



Bag marked **US**, chemical insignia, mask size letter, **ARMY SERVICE GAS MASK**

M2 series masks

This was the first service gas mask to eliminate stockinet coverings because of improved stronger age-resistant rubber. Improvements to the outlet valve resulted in the M2A1 in 1941, the M2A2 in 1942, and the M2A3 in 1944. Over 10 million of the masks were produced during World War II. Color of mask varied because of changes in raw material availability during WWII and different gas mask manufactures. Most masks are green, greenish-gray color with some dark, almost black while others are very light color almost gray in color. The color of these masks also later changed because of usage, age and storage conditions. The masks were replaced by the M9 mask in 1949 but continued in use until the late 1950's.



M2 Army Service Gas Mask: Fielded in 1940 and used the M-IV outlet valve.

M2A1 Army Service Gas Mask: Fielded in 1941 and used the M-V outlet valve (Shown)

M2A2 Army Service Gas Mask: Fielded in 1942 and used the M8 outlet valve.

M2A3 Army Service Gas Mask: Fielded in 1944 and used the C15 outlet valve.

For photos of the different outlet valves used on these masks, see page 56.

M9 & M9A1 Mask

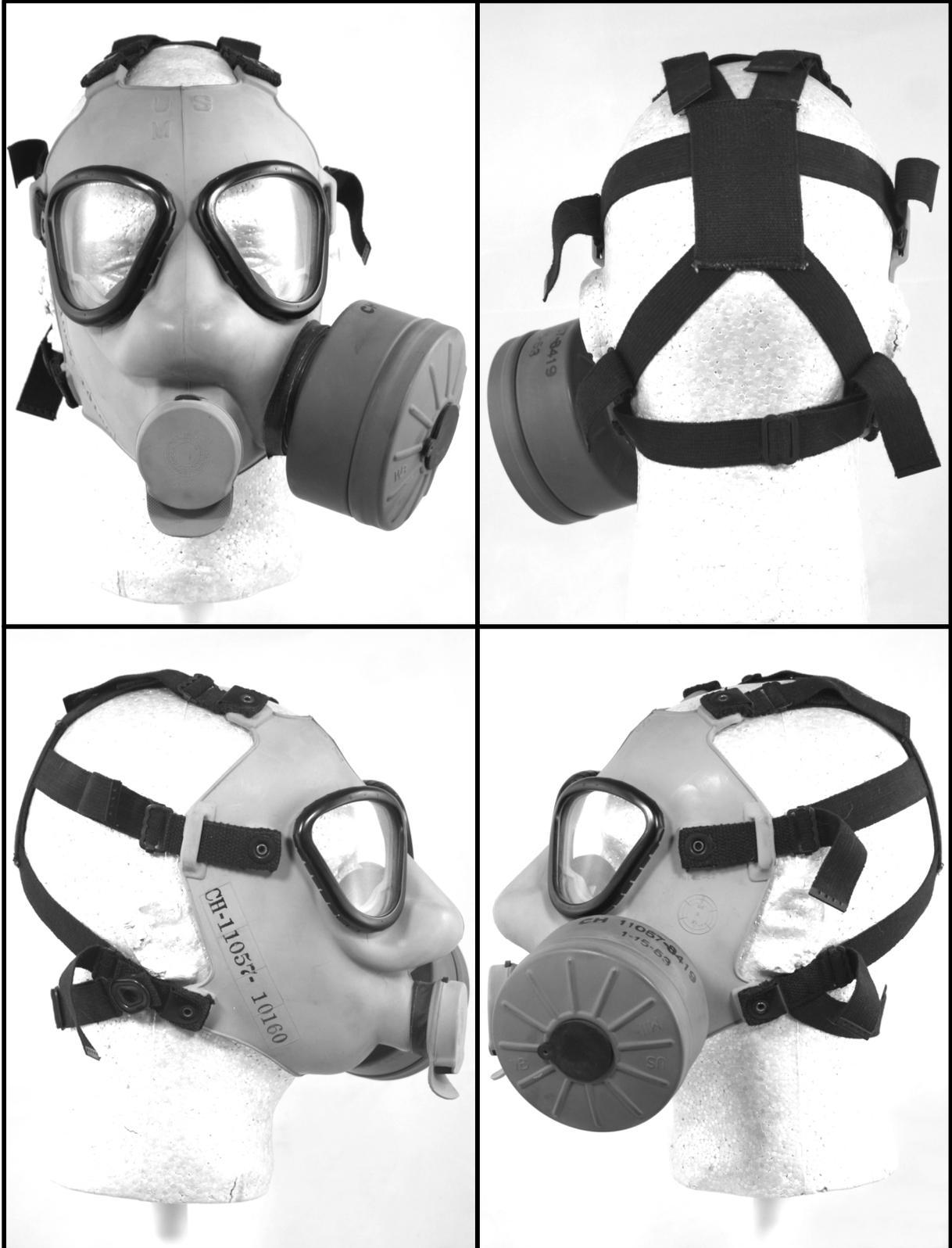


M9 & M9A1 Mask

Gas Mask M9 and Field Protective Mask M9A1

1947 to 1997 – US Army, Marine Corps – Color: gray (see note) – Common

Improvements to the face-piece design of the M5 Assault Mask resulted in the M9 Gas Mask. The M9A1 mask is the same as the M9 mask; only the gas mask bag changed.



M9 & M9A1 Mask

MARKINGS:



Mask face-piece is marked **US** above right forehead and mask size on left forehead. The mask was made in 3 sizes, marked: **S** (small), **M** (medium) and **L** (large).

NOTE: A few early production masks are very dark gray almost black in color and some are olive green but most of the M9 series masks have a grey color face-piece.

Collector's Note: The M9 series masks with the canister mounted on the left side closely resembles the M5 Assault Masks that were used in 1944 by amphibious assault troops and during the D-Day Invasion. Very few of the M5 Assault Masks survived making them very rare to find in any condition by collectors today (see page 130). Over 3 million M9 series masks were produced and they are commonly found. For comparison photographs of M9 and M5 masks, see page 146.

CANISTER:



The M11 activated charcoal canister mounts to the side of the mask and the canister is painted gray or black. In the photo on the right, the canister inlet is shown with rubber plug in place to stop foreign material from getting inside. M11 Canister, see page 140.

Approximate body size: Diameter 4.18 inches (10.6 cm); Length 2.4 inches (6.1 cm)

M9 & M9A1 Mask

GAS MASK BAG:



M9A1 Gas Mask Bag shown. For M9 Gas Mask Bag, see page 151.

M9 and M9A1 masks are the same except for the gas mask bag used with them. The M9A1 bag is marked with **US**, chemical insignia, **FIELD PROTECTIVE MASK M9A1** and mask size: **L** (large), **M** (medium) or **S** (small). The 2nd letter on the bag is the canister location on the mask: **L** (left side) or **R** (right side). The M9 bag (see page 151) is marked with **US**, chemical insignia, **GAS MASK M9**, mask size: **L** (large), **M** (medium) or **S** (small) and canister location on mask: **L** (left side) or **R** (right side). Masks with canister of right side were made for left-handed shooters; see page 148.

A can of Anti-Dim used to reduce fogging of lenses is held in the bag by a small loop of cotton webbing; see page 253.

M9 Gas Mask

Improvements to the face-piece design of the M5 Assault Mask resulted in the M9 Gas Mask being fielded in late 1947. To resolve problems associated with “cold set”, (hardening of the rubber in cold weather making the mask useless) the synthetic neoprene rubber used in the M5 face-piece was replaced with natural rubber and later with butyl rubber. The excellent cheek mounted filter design of the M9 mask was copied by at least 5 other countries and influenced later American gas mask designs.

M9A1 Field Protective Mask

In 1951, changes to the rectangular gas mask bag resulted in a change of nomenclature. Although only the bag changed, the mask model number was advanced to become the Mask, Protective, Field, M9A1. The M9A1 was standardized for use by the Army in 1951 but the Marine Corps continued to use the M9 Mask configuration.

M9 & M9A1 Mask

Identifying M9 and M5 Masks



M9 & M9A1 Mask (canister of left side of mask)

M5 Assault Mask (D-Day Mask)

The M9 series masks with the canister mounted on the left side closely resembles the very rare M5 Assault Masks that were used in 1944 by amphibious assault troops and during the D-Day Invasion. Both masks use the M11 canister and have the same style eye lenses. The masks have different outlet valves, face-piece color, location of mask size marking on forehead and slight difference in the shape of the nose section. The M9 masks will have manufacturing date stamp marking on face-piece; see page 247.

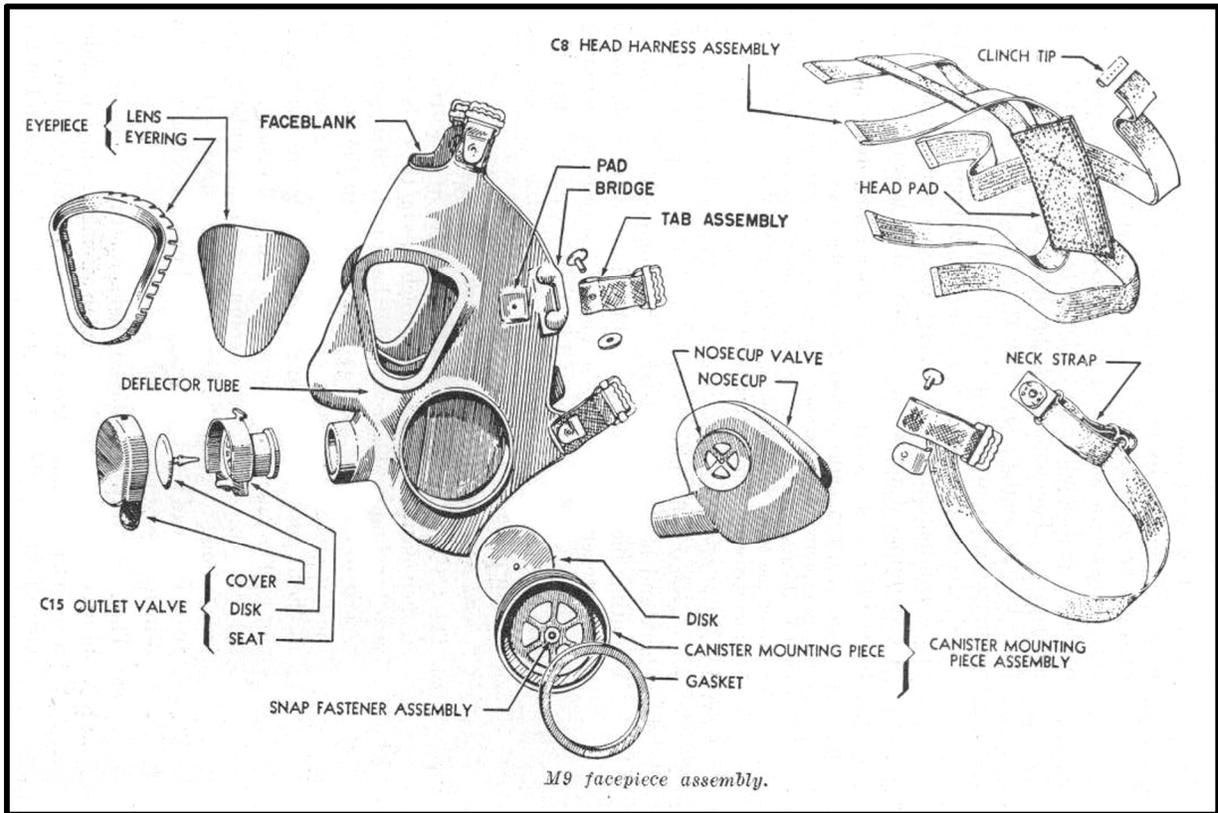
Canned Gas Mask

The M9 or M9A1 Gas Mask, Gas Mask Bag and accessories were hermetically sealed in a metal can and a second, inner can held the canister. This was done in an effort to retain its usefulness for 30 years and to protect the masks during distribution and supply to the field. A coffee can type key was attached to the top of each can for opening it.

Collector's Note: Do not open can from the top; see information about canned gas masks and canisters on page 250.



M9 & M9A1 Mask



M9 and M9A-1 Mask

(Photo - U.S. Army Technical Manual TM 3-205)

The assembly view of the M9 and the M9A1 Gas Masks. They are identical Masks that have the M9 facemask and the M11 combat canister. The M9 Mask has the C15R1 gas mask bag used by the US Marine Corps (see page 151) and the M9A1 has the M11 gas mask bag used by the US Army (see page 145).

M9 & M9A1 Mask

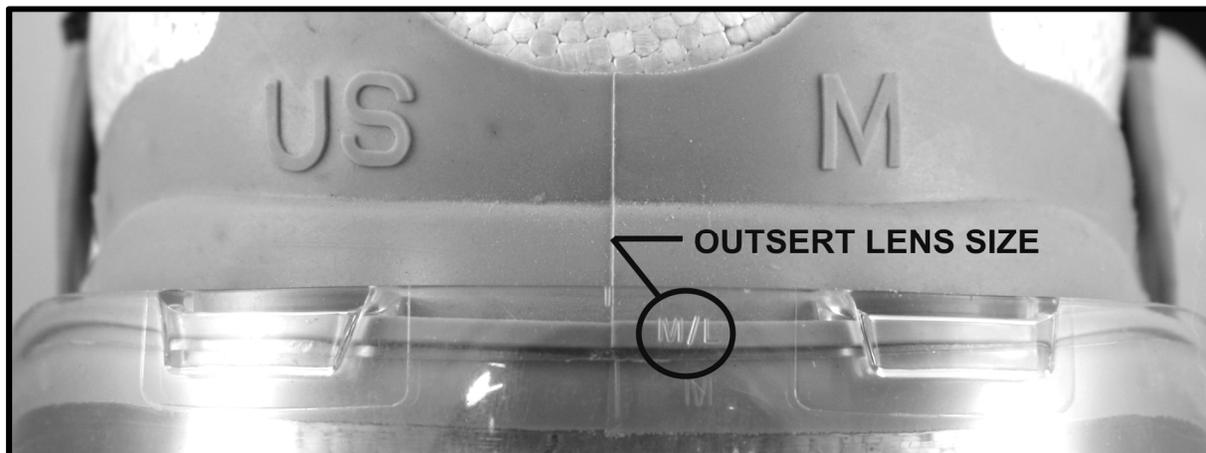
Service	
M9	US Army & Marine Corps
M9A1	US Army
Date	1947 – 1997
Quantity	over 3,000,000

The common M9 and M9A1 masks closely resemble the very rare M5 Assault Masks. The M9 series masks were replaced by the M17 mask in 1959 but the M9 and M9A1 masks continued in use as special purpose masks until the late 1990's.



MCU-2A/P Mask

MARKINGS:



Mask face-piece is marked **US** above right forehead and mask size on left forehead. The mask was made in 3 sizes, marked: **S** (small), **M** (medium) and **L** (large).

OUTSERT LENS

The one piece ballistic polycarbonate clear or tinted outsert lens (clear lens shown on mask page 190) hooks to the forehead of the mask above the mask lens two place as shown in the above photo. The outsert lens is secured to the mask by elastic strap that stretches round the bottom of the snout/nose of the mask. The size of the outsert lens is embossed at the top center of the lens.

CANISTER:



The MCU-2/P series protective masks used a single filter canister, designated C2. In the initial configuration, the canister is on the left side of the mask; however, it can be moved to the right side by switching the locations of the inlet valve body and the side voicemitter on the mask. Canisters found with a white stripe is painted around the rim are canisters used for training.

Approximate body size: Diameter 4.18 inches (10.6 cm); Length 2.4 inches (6.1 cm)

Other Gas Masks

Aircraft Gas Masks

M43 Apache Aviator Mask

In 1986 the Army developed the M43 Apache Aviator Mask to meet the special requirements for the Apache AH-64 helicopter crews. It was compatible with the unique sighting system of the Apache helicopter, included a portable motor/blower filter assembly which operated on either battery or aircraft power, and came in four sizes.

M43A1 Type I Apache Aviator Mask

An improved version of the M43 was standardized as the M43A1 Type I Apache Aviator Mask in 1991.

M43A1 Type II Aircraft Mask

This mask is the same as the Type I except it does not have the notched right eye lens for use with the AH-64 Apache Integrated Helmet and Display Sighting System (IHADSS) and the mask is for general aviators (all helicopters except Apache).



M49 Aircraft Mask

M48 Apache Aviator Mask

In 1996, improvements were made to the M43A1 Type I mask and it was standardized as the M48 Apache Aviator Mask. The improvements eliminated the need for aircraft-mounted motor-blower with a lightweight man-mounted blower. The mask is lighter in weight than the M43A1 Type I mask and provides longer operating life outside the aircraft.

M49 Aircraft Mask

The mask is the same as the M48 Apache Aviator Mask except it does not have the notched right eye lens for use with the AH-64 Apache Integrated Helmet and Display Sighting System (IHADSS) and the mask is for general aviators (all helicopters except Apache).

The M49 replaced the M24 protective mask and the M43A1 Type II Aircraft Mask, as the general aviator's mask (all helicopters except Apache). The M48 replaced the M43A1 Type I mask and worn only by Apache Helicopter Aviators. The masks provides protection against nuclear, Biological, and chemical agents.



Apache Attack Helicopter

Other Gas Masks

Children's Gas Masks

At the beginning of WWII, the War Department in Washington, D.C. aware of the possibility of a chemical attack by the Japanese immediately shipped military training gas masks to be used by the adult civilian population of Hawaii. These were fine for adults but were useless for children and infants. Not only were children and infants not strong enough to be able to suck in air, the features of the masks scared children who refused to be near them. On December 18, 1941, Colonel George F. Unmacht sent a request to the War Department for children and infant masks but none existed.

Bunny Gas Mask

Colonel Unmacht came up with the idea to add “ears” to the hood to make it more appealing to children. The design of the “Bunny Mask” was a double bag with an eye window and a drawstring to fasten it tightly around the child. The outer bag was made of felt or denim impregnated with CC-2 (chloramide powder) in paraffin. The inner muslin bag was also impregnated with paraffin. The eyepiece was scrap celluloid from old x-ray negatives. Inside the hood was a small breathing pad made of a double layer of heavy Turkish terry cloth. All seams were double stitched. The bunny mask was designed to grow with the child. As an infant, the entire child was placed in the hood. For a toddler, the mask was tied at the waist and for an older child; it was tied at the neck. Construction of the 27,000 bunny masks was a volunteer effort and many were sewn by the women of the Japanese community in Hawaii.



Mickey Mouse Gas Mask

In January 1942, T.W. Smith Jr., the owner of the Sun Rubber Company and his designer, Dietrich Rempel, with Walt Disney's approval created the Mickey Mouse Gas Mask. This mask design that would be more acceptable to children was presented to Major General William N. Porter, Chief of the Chemical Warfare Service. After approval of the CWS, Sun Rubber produced approximately 1,000 masks. They were never issued or used and after the war they were distributed to senior officers as keepsakes.



Walt Disney and Maj. Gen. William Porter, January 1942
(Photo - U.S. Army Chemical Corps Museum, Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.)

Civilian gas masks M1A2 Noncombatant Gas Mask, M16 Civilian Mask, and the M22 Civilian Mask all were made in child sizes. During WWII there were gas protection devices made for protecting babies from gas attack. These were not made by the US government for civilian use but were produced by private companies or imported from England.

Collector Information

Canned Gas Masks and Canisters

Some gas masks were sealed in air-tight metal container in an effort to retain its usefulness for 30 years. This method of packaging gas masks was started just before WWII and continued into the 1960's. These "canned gas masks" can still be found today in unopened condition. Air-tight sealed cans were also used for canister filters until the 1970's. They are well marked with content information but do not indicate which gas mask the canister is to be used on.



M14A1 and M9A1 gas masks in large cans

Collector's Note: By carefully opening the bottom of the can, the mask can be removed for display and the can when displayed will look to be unopened. These masks are mint, unused condition but maybe brittle and fragile after many years of storage. After removing the mask from the metal container, the mask must be very slowly stretched into displayable form; this may take many weeks.



June 1940 Edgewood Arsenal photo showing workman soldering a sealed gas mask container
(Photo: ACME Photo dated June19, 1940)

Collector Information

Saving History

During WWI, gas masks were used in combat and the stories of the men that used them are important pieces of history but this history can be easily lost forever if not collected and saved. Many times collectors acquire gas masks that are identified to a soldier but never make an effort to find more information. There are many sources available to the collector to find the military history of the soldier but one of the best sources is sometimes overlooked; the family of the soldier. Many gas masks are sold by or for an estate and some of the families are willing to share information. This also gives collectors an opportunity to acquire other items used by the soldier. I purchased a Corrected English Mask to photograph for this book and I asked if the family had any information or a photo of the soldier. By asking these simple questions, it changed a standard ordinary WWI gas mask into documented history of a soldier that fought and survived the Great War; a small piece of saved history for future generations.



The Man Behind the Mask



Pvt. Louis Kenyon

The Corrected English Mask, uniform and helmet of Army Pvt. Louis Kenyon, Company B, 127th Infantry, 32nd Division was kept by his son, Donald Kenyon (see photo page 18) all his life. This had special meaning to Donald because his father died when he was only 3 years old in 1924. The helmet has a large dent in it and I thought Donald dented the helmet when he was young while playing with it. This turned out to be far from the truth; Pvt. Louis Kenyon was wounded by artillery during a battle on July 30, 1918. He sent many letters home but his letter dated August 5, 1918 from the hospital best illustrates what soldiers endured fighting battles during WWI.

