



# *How to Travel Light*

*...or why are my HBTs so baggy??*



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*90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Preservation Group*  
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# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*“What’s ‘dis all about?...”*

*One of my favorite parts of reenacting is to watch the inexperienced take to the field. Usually, this involves a full 1928 pack, 1936 suspenders, 2-3 bandoleers of blanks, and K- or C-rations. Many never get far past this point, instead taking pride in the fact that they’re “carrying just what the GI’s did”. Unfortunately, this is not quite the truth – most GI’s took equal and opposite pride in carrying the bare minimum!*



Clearly walking along a road, not under fire.

The over-stocked reenactor.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

For starters, most reenactors carry some arrangement of the M1928 field pack, or the M1936 mussette bag and '36 suspenders. Both of these items were issued and carried in vast quantities. Get rid of them. (Ok, not completely. Keep it for displays, or the next time you feel like throwing out your back. Neither of these packs need be brought to tactical events!) "Why", you ask? Infantry regularly left behind heavy items such as the field pack prior to going on an attack. They also neglected to wear them when fighting from a fixed position. If you must bring it to a field event, do what the GI's did, and leave it under a tree somewhere before you try and take that village. Just remember; to the GI's, all equipment was expendable. Is yours?

Got a headache? Tired? Irritable? Perhaps you're carrying too much.

Fork, knife, spoon, mess tin, 5 cans of spam, bottle opener, 'aesthetic' Vargas calendar (for 'refined' use, of course)

E-tool (we are attacking a town)

6x D-cell batteries (two weeks' issue), 3 luger pistols, rohm dagger

5-button sweater, scarf (95° outside today)

**SPECIAL INSET:** Heavy or Bulky gear was often dropped in the rear before attacking.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

By doing this, we naturally arrive at the next step: deciding what you want, what you need, and what you can stuff down your field jacket. There is a reason that front line troops rarely kept bulky souvenirs. Go through your pack, and ditch the following rarely-found items:

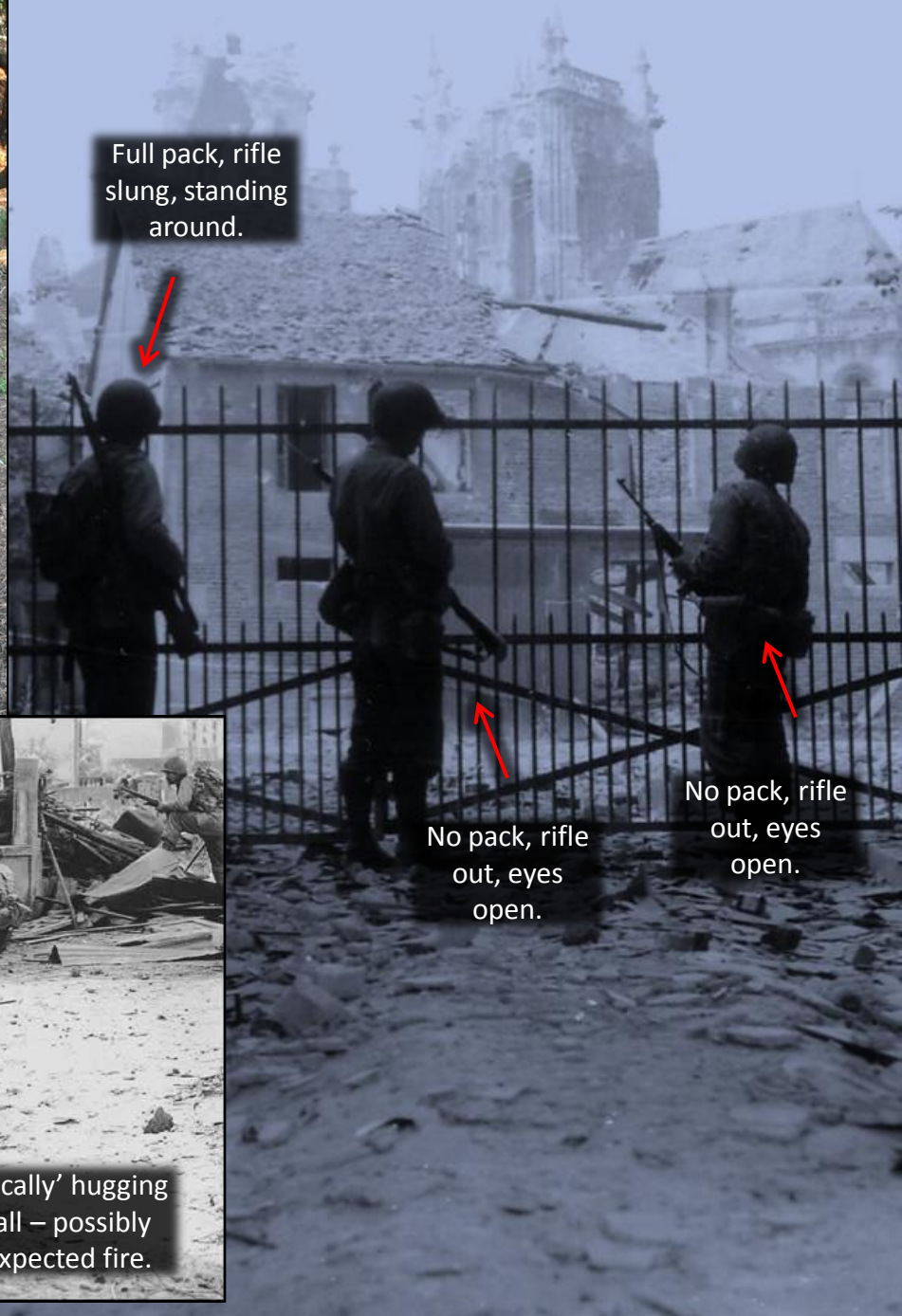
- Shaving Brush
- Shaving Soap
- Shaving Mirror
  - Towels
- Flashlight (including those 10 lb D cells stored within)
  - Mess Tin
  - G.I. Fork/Knife
- That large, bulky, useless, Red-Cross made sewing kit (find yourself a needle, wrap some thread around it, and you're good to go.)
- E-tool and Cover

*“What specifically?”*



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*They may not sound like much, but the weight and bulk of these items is what makes you dance like an elephant in the field. Now that you've gotten rid of them, you really can ditch that pack. Note how some of these Soldiers retain the pack, some have already dropped it.*



Full pack, rifle slung, standing around.

No pack, rifle out, eyes open.

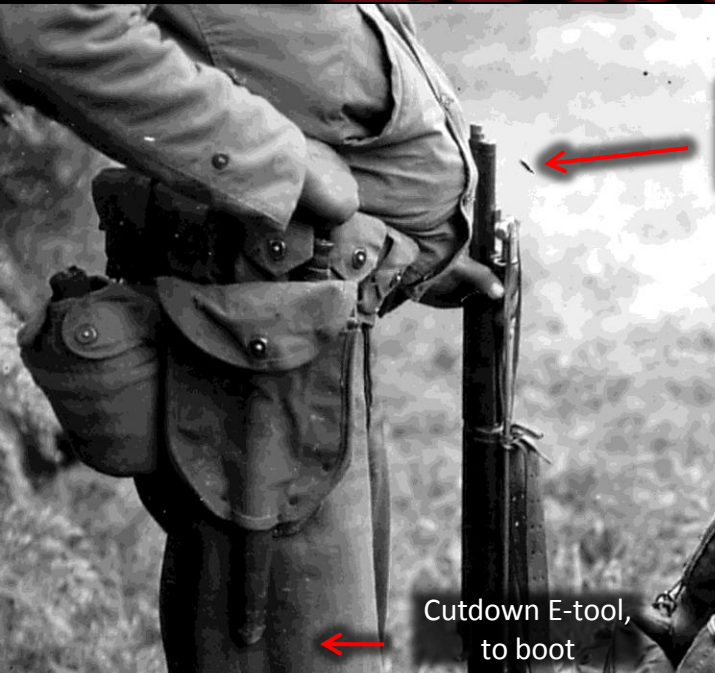
No pack, rifle out, eyes open.



'Tactically' hugging a wall – possibly unexpected fire.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT



Excess gut? No. There are items stored in here.

Cutdown E-tool, to boot



Additional views – note the slight bump in the front of the jacket. This is where you store your basic needs items such as food, maps, or binoculars. More on this later. Cigarettes were often kept in one of the compartments of the ten-pocket cartridge belt. Note the highly-attractive OD7 leggings.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*What about shaving? Does this mean you'll start growing a beard? If you're like many GI's, this may actually be the case...on the other hand, many more realized that one can easily shave with a standard bar of soap and a razor. Fill your helmet shell with water, wet both the soap and your hands, and begin lathering.*



Shaving brush.

Wash basin.

Wash basin.



Shaving.

Wash basin.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT



The ultimate GI shave – several days' stubble.

*Congratulations. You've just replaced the shaving soap, brush, and cup. As for the mirror, build up by practicing shaving in the shower, then gradually start shaving out doors. With a week's practice, you'll find that a GI steel mirror actually hinders your shave. Finish by wiping your face on your field jacket.*





# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

Flashlights are replaced by a small unscented candle, the kind found in hundreds of churches, cathedrals, and farmhouses across Europe. Zippo lighter fluid is found under the driver's seat of any Jeep, and matches are a perennial favorite found in field rations of all sorts. The GI sewing kit need be nothing more than a needle with some thread wrapped around it.



2 hours' light

No batteries needed



Sew buttons tightly before they fall off



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

An Army runs on its' stomach, so why don't we move on to carrying the field ration? D-rations provide plenty of compact energy, but not the kind you'd want to eat. K-rations are small and light...but they're angular, bulky, and generally take up lots of space. The best thing to do is to open the box and carry only the inner contents. If you'd like, the waxed inner carton may also be torn into strips to be used as a fire starter. For C-rations, the meat and hash canned goods must be kept whole, but the B-unit may be opened and the heavy, bulky can discarded. You may also string the cans on wire to use as an early warning signal.



← 'Beer gut'



Strip this down

Keep this whole



These store better outside the box

Start fires with this



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT



More secret stash.



This replaces your mess kit.



As printed on the outside of the carton, save the bag as a waterproof holder for matches, ID booklets, playing cards, ect.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*“But what about?...”*

*Now to the business end of things - nature's business. You may find yourself looking at that pitifully small K-ration toilet paper wondering if it really is a single serving. It's not. Which means you're going to be spending time hunting down for, shall we say, a better way. Soldier's readers were notorious for their alternate uses, and many GI's sadly recall the moment they had to make the choice between a favorite novel and pine cones. On top of this, they make for great bathroom reading...*



Which one would you trust more to protect your hand?

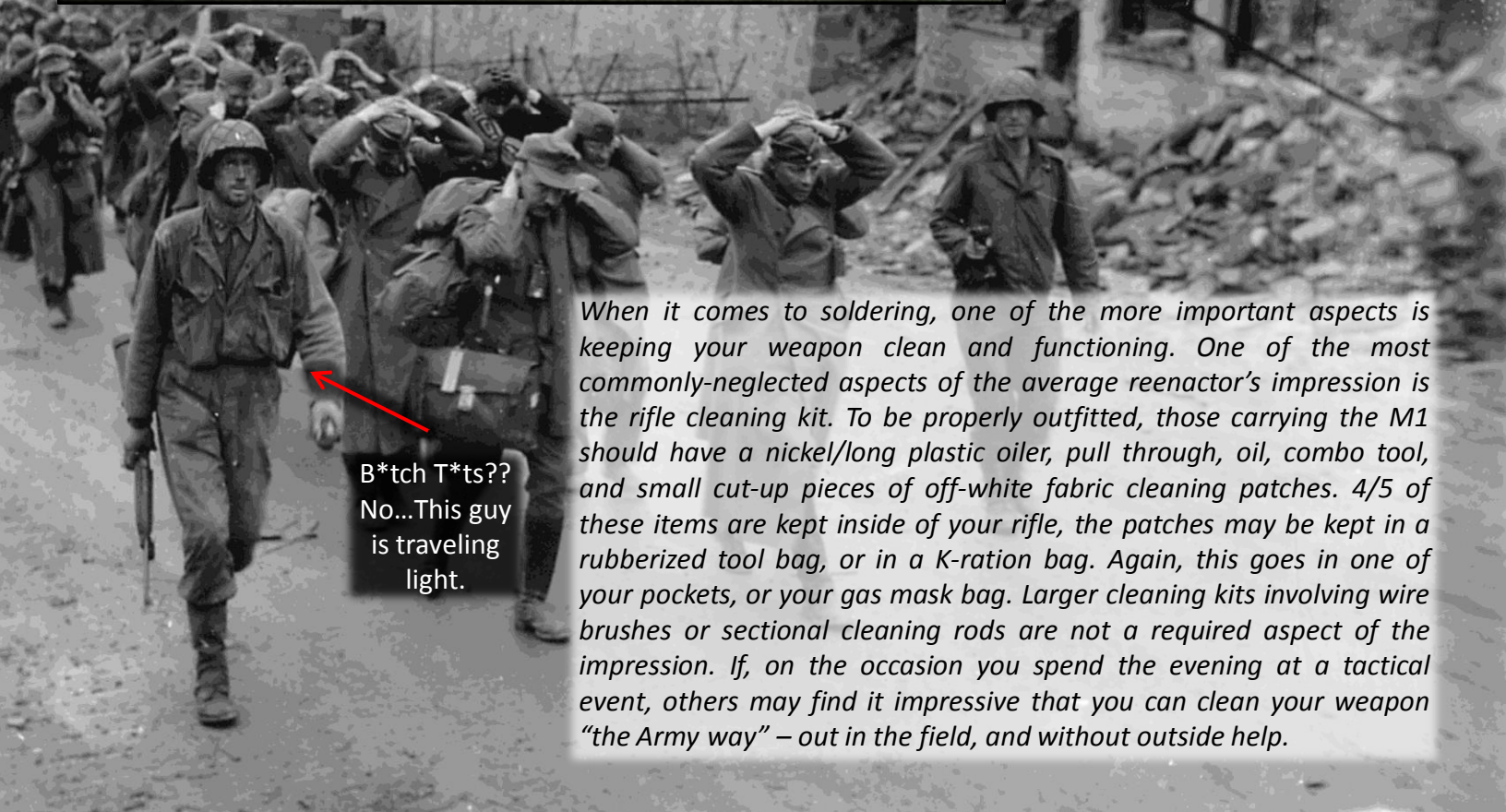


# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT



Rifle bore cleaner, jag, patches – in your pocket.

In your rifle's butstock.



B\*tch T\*ts??  
No...This guy is traveling light.

When it comes to soldering, one of the more important aspects is keeping your weapon clean and functioning. One of the most commonly-neglected aspects of the average reenactor's impression is the rifle cleaning kit. To be properly outfitted, those carrying the M1 should have a nickel/long plastic oiler, pull through, oil, combo tool, and small cut-up pieces of off-white fabric cleaning patches. 4/5 of these items are kept inside of your rifle, the patches may be kept in a rubberized tool bag, or in a K-ration bag. Again, this goes in one of your pockets, or your gas mask bag. Larger cleaning kits involving wire brushes or sectional cleaning rods are not a required aspect of the impression. If, on the occasion you spend the evening at a tactical event, others may find it impressive that you can clean your weapon "the Army way" – out in the field, and without outside help.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*Sans pack, you'll now keep most of your items down your field jacket or in your pockets. Many reenactors simply cannot comprehend how this is done, as things keep falling out. If this is the case, you are wearing your cartridge belt too loosely. The various models of suspender, both integral and separate, are not an absolute requirement and may be dumped at the side of the next French roadway. Your belt should be adjusted so that it will ride atop your hips and not slide down.*



Not too loose, not too tight – just right for foot patrols.



'Gunslinger' style. Sometimes seen even in vintage photos, but useless if you're dismounted.





# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*If done correctly, you'll actually be able to access the lower pockets on an M43 jacket. Imagine that...it's as if it were designed that way. With a belt worn like this, you may now comfortably store items such as socks, books, and rations down your jacket. When buttoned up, these will not fall out, nor will they interfere with your running abilities. Worn properly snug, this will also prevent most belt wandering, one of the main causes of discomfort while moving.*



This can still be done today.



Great example: tight belt, lots of stuff down the jacket.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*“What does that leave me with?”*

On to what you'll want to keep. The following list is a general guide, but goes a long way in keeping down the weight:

- 1-2 Soldier's readers (for use as reading materials, toilet paper, and notepad)
- Razor, with spare blades
- Soap (for shaving and washing)
- Candle, Matches/Zippo (Kilroy's flashlight)
- A Pencil
- A spoon (GI, Kraut, or period civilian, your choice)
- A canteen cup (your new mess tin)
- A needle and thread (“sewing kit”)
- K/C Ration Inners (keep the bag to store cigarettes, matches, cleaning patches, ect. in)





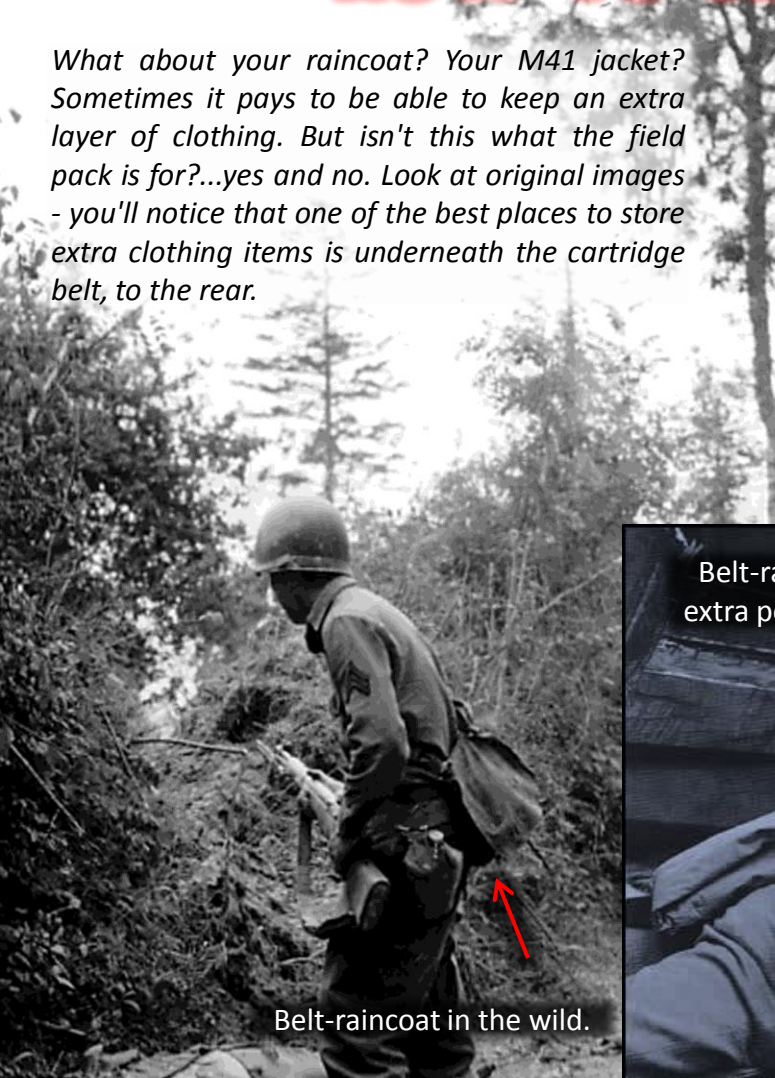


# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

What about your raincoat? Your M41 jacket? Sometimes it pays to be able to keep an extra layer of clothing. But isn't this what the field pack is for?...yes and no. Look at original images - you'll notice that one of the best places to store extra clothing items is underneath the cartridge belt, to the rear.



It's this easy.



Belt-raincoat in the wild.



Belt-raincoat \*and\* a Hobo roll - extra points for looking unsoldierly.





# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

## *A Word on the E-tool*

*One final note on E-tools: you may need them, you may not. Entrenching tools were one of those items that were carried on condition, and that condition was the type of fighting encountered. For vehicle-bourne troops, or those fighting in an urban enviornment, they were left strapped to one's pack, or delivered by truck only when it was necessary to dig in. It was common was to simply tuck the m43 shovel, sans carrier, into one's belt.*



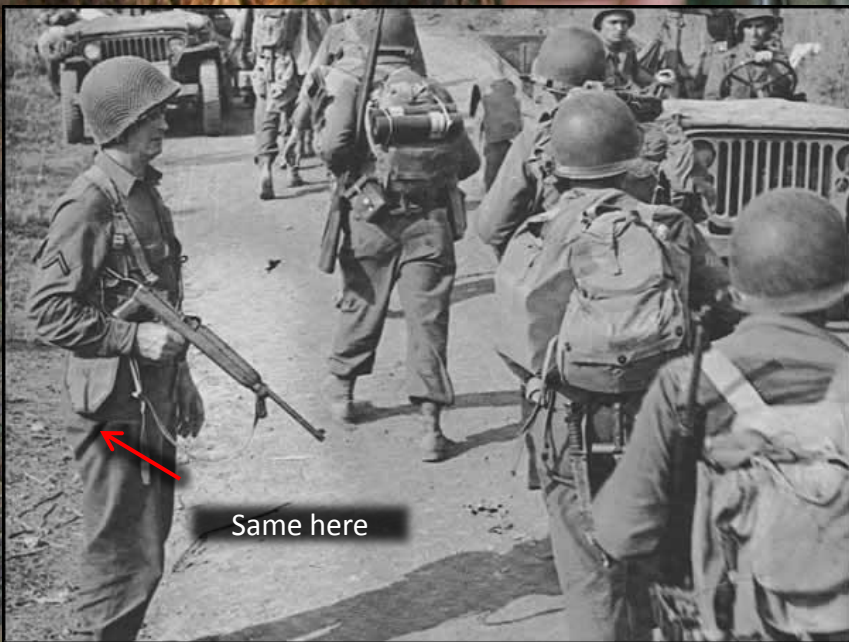
'Just' the E-tool, no cover



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT



Just the cover, no E-tool.



Same here

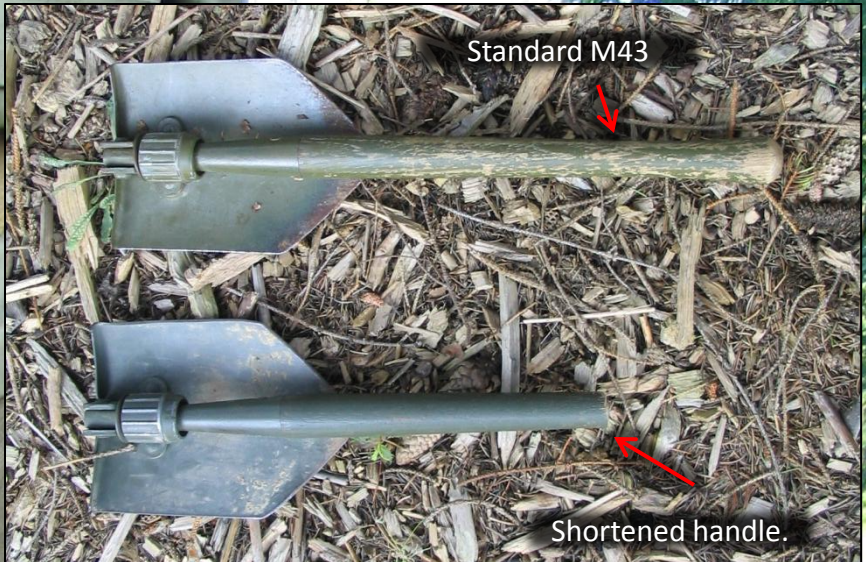


*Others kept only the carrier on their belt, as rotating troops were ordered to leave their E-tools for the incoming relief force to dig-in with.*



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

Occasionally, men would resort to further shortening the already stop-gap instruments: this is well-known when it comes to paratroopers and the T-handle shovel, but it was also done by standard infantry to m43 shovels.





# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT



*It was also possible to place the M43 into the carrier without fully securing it. This wasn't a common carry method, but did allow rapid access and replacement as might be needed when suddenly forced to move. Regardless of your choice when it comes to carrying an E-tool, just know that there is more than one option.*

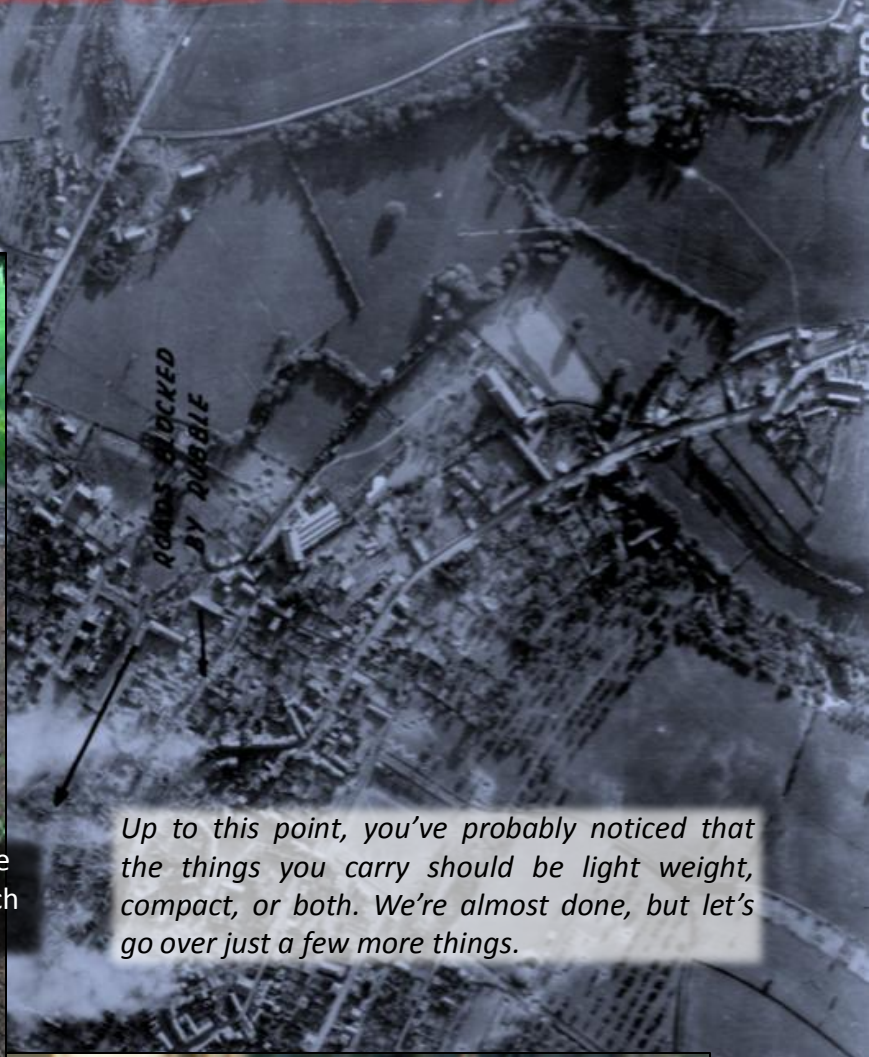


# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

## *The Big Picture*



Man t\*ts. Clearly these original uniforms stretch with use.



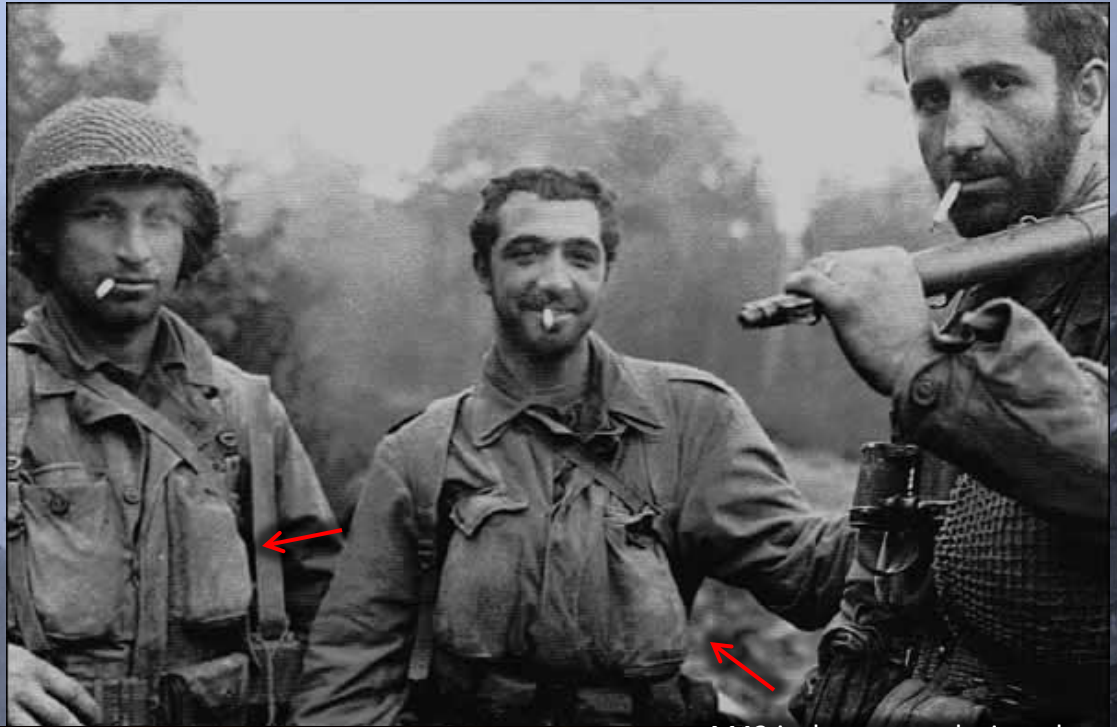
Up to this point, you've probably noticed that the things you carry should be light weight, compact, or both. We're almost done, but let's go over just a few more things.



Even more damming.



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT



M43 jackets were designed to be used like this. Ike hated them.



Generally pudgy appearance.

D-bar in pocket, along with other things.

*Take a look at a few more examples of GIs traveling 'light' – yes, you can wear a full field pack at the next event, but know that it's not the only way to be authentic.*



# HOW TO TRAVEL LIGHT

*In other words,  
'lose' the following...*



Load-bearing suspenders

Excess clothing  
(weather dependent)

1928 pack/1936 bag

Oversized eating  
accessories

Gas Mask

More excess clothing  
(weather dependent)

Flashlight

Ludicrous Shaving  
Ensemble

E-tool

Towel

Chem gear

Red-Cross made sewing kits





# How to Travel Light



## About the Author:

Michael Ellis has previously written such articles as "Four Eyes", "How to Travel Light: Packing Tips for the Seasoned Reenactor", and "The M-1938 Legging - An Introduction". He is a 9 year member of the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Preservation Group and returned from a deployment to southern Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2012.



*No profit of any kind was made or intended from this article.*