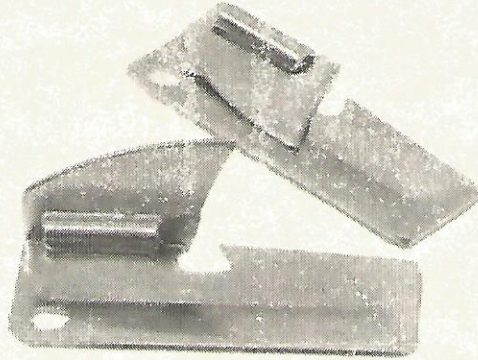


# The P38

By: LT Rex Hon



Many Soldiers and Marines regard the P-38 can opener as one of the major symbols of their service life.

It was invented in just 30 days in the summer of 1942 by US Army Maj. Thomas Dennehy at the Subsistence Research Laboratory in Chicago.

And never in its more than 73 year history has it ever been known to "break, rust very little, need sharpening or polishing," which is why many Soldiers past and present have come to regard the P-38 C-Ration can opener as the best tool ever issued by Uncle Sam.

Next to beer and cigarettes, the C-rats (tin cans filled with a variety of meats and vegetables) were one of the few pleasures for the GI's marching through the stinking rice patties and rotting jungles of Vietnam. Enter the P38 to open the cans of the C-Rations. It is said the P38 got its name from the fact it took "The Duke" AKA John Wayne 38 cuts to open a can of C-rats. The P-38 is the tool you put on the chain of your dog tags. The P38 was like your M-16. My First Sargent, Roy Laudette of HQ, 1Bn 83rd Artillery, always said to the troops about their M-16's "It is better to have a gun and not need it rather than not have a gun and need it".

Other things below the P38 in importance was the steel helmet which had many other uses beside maybe protecting your head in a combat situation. It was ideal for washing, shaving, boiling water, carrying water, sitting on and carrying cigarettes and pictures. And of course there was the old Jeep guaranteed to go anywhere in any kind of weather and was reliable most of the time,

In the new Army the C-Rations have been replaced with Meals Ready To Eat (MREs). However the P-38 remains popular and is still issued by the Army. In addition to opening cans there are countless other uses that soldiers of the new Army have found for it.

"I've had my P-38 since Vietnam, still on my dog tags. When us soldiers re-entered civilian life there was still a need for the P-38. In our minds this tool helped us get through our war and the P38 will help us get through situations that come up in civilian life.

The size of the P38 and design by Army Major Dennehy was ingenious. The size, one inch by one half inch folding to about one eighth inch, made the P38 one of the greatest inventions for the military. Before men in the field used bayonets to open cans. The hole at the top made carrying the P38 easy on dog tags or key rings. Makes a screwdriver and can also be used to pry open containers. The soldier's imagination has taken this perfectly designed tool and found countless other uses for the P38 other than just opening cans.

As us old Veterans travel through life certain sounds, sights and smells trigger will an emotional response and bring back vivid memories of a time long ago. The P38 usually triggers the memory in most WW2 Veterans, Korean War Veterans and Vietnam Veterans of a wonderful dining experience during operations in the field.