

# About the small arms of the Danish army 1932-1941 - Gevær 1889

## Introduction

During the work of describing the organization, equipment and materiel of the infantry, I came across the booklet *1889 - the rifle in the Danish defense service* by AN Hvidt (Source 1), which contains an excellent overview of the system. The booklet provides, not least in combination with a number of contemporary textbooks, a good starting point for understanding what kind of handguns the units of the period were equipped with.

The following is the result of my investigations in the area and unless otherwise mentioned, the image material comes from Source 1.

## Rifle 1889 system

### The Rifle 1889 system included:

1. Rifle 1889 2.  
Rider rifle/rider carbine 1889 (1912 and 1923)
3. Engineer rifle/engineer carbine 1889 (1917)  
4th Infantry Carbine 1889 (from 1924)
5. Artillery carbine 1889 (from 1924)
6. Sniper rifle M.1928

*Apart from the sniper rifle, the other weapons are not officially designated by model year. However, the designation Gevær M.1889 also seems to have been common terminology.*

*In this article, model years are listed in parentheses.*

The rifle 1889 as well as the cavalry rifle and the engineer rifle (from 1924 called the engineer carbine and the cavalry carbine respectively) were manufactured for their purpose, while the infantry carbine and the artillery carbine were shortened versions of the rifle 1889, equipped with new sights. All guns in the 1889 system were of 8 mm caliber.

It was with these handguns that the various units of the period were equipped or had to be equipped. There were never enough carbines, whereby rifle 1889 had to be issued instead, which was not always practical for the specialists, e.g. horse-pullers or cartmen, who intended the carbine as a functional weapon.

On 1 April 1919, the army had 115,512 units. rifle 1889, including 1,641 cavalry rifles and 3,999 engineer rifles. With an ever-decreasing force, there was thus a shortage of rifles and with a very tight economy, there were no resources to convert a sufficient number of rifles into carbines.

Whether the last shot on the trunk - the sniper rifle - was custom-made or adapted from the 1889 rifle, I am not aware.

## 1. Gun 1889



*Rifle 1889.*

Gun 1889 was 133 cm long and weighed 4.2 kg.

The rifle was intended for single shots, with loading and re-sighting between each shot. However, the rifle was also equipped with a 5-cartridge magazine, which could be used in a critical situation. The cartridges were placed individually in the magazine and there was thus no loading rail or similar for the rifle. A so-called filling box had been developed which allowed the magazine to be filled, but such was not used in the army.

The fire was delivered either as slow or rapid rifle fire, or as magazine fire. The slow artillery fire was the rule. Magazine fire was only used in situations, e.g. if the enemy was at odds. A well-trained shooter can fire 8-11 shots/minute with sniper fire and magazine fire, respectively. With the slow artillery fire, 2-4 shots/minute were calculated.

The rifle's sight was divided from 200 -2,000 m. An experienced marksman had the prospect of hitting a lying man at a distance of 250 m and a standing man within 350 m with a single shot; at greater distances (600-800 m) an effect could only be expected against larger targets.

The shooting regulations also operated with indirect shooting, so-called hidden shooting, where the shooter could only see the target by rising from his hiding place/cover. Using a number of calculations and an auxiliary aiming point, the gunner now aimed his rifle at the target and fired. It is stated that the execution is easy to implement and that the skirmish is no worse than with open shooting.

## **2. Rider carbine 1889 (1912 and 1923)**

In 1912, a carbine of the 1889 system was introduced into the cavalry. The cavalry carbine was 25 cm shorter than the 1889 rifle and provided with an upper stock.



*Horseman Carbine 1889 (1923).*

The horseman's carbine was carried slung and attached to a special underlay leather M.1905, which was mounted in the waist belt.

In 1923, the rider carbine was equipped with a bayonet post.



*Horseman Carbine 1889 (1923).*

The rider's carbine differs from the system's other carbines by the two hangers for the carbine strap (a. and b.), which are located on the side, and by the button (c.), with which the carbine is attached to the rider's base leather.

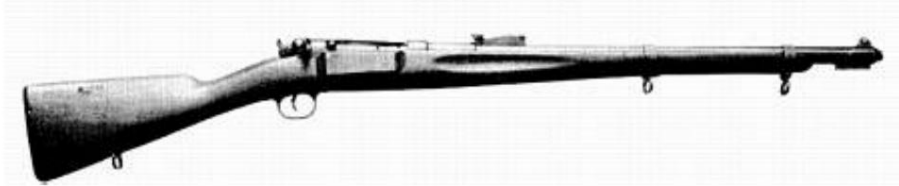
Despite the shortened barrel, the horse carbine and the other carbines had roughly the same range as the rifle.



*Engineer carbine 1889.*

### **3rd Engineer Carbine 1889 (1917)**

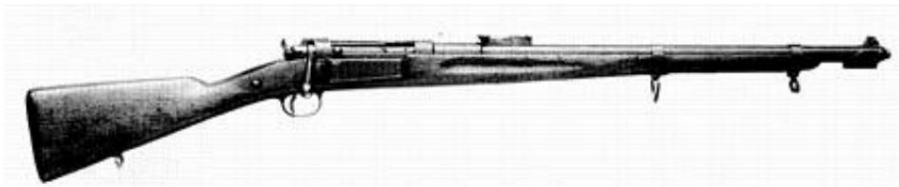
The engineer's carbine was identical to the rider's carbine, except that from the beginning it was equipped with a bayonet post and that the hangers for the strap were placed as on rifle 1889.



*Infantry carbine 1889.*

### **4th Infantry Carbine 1889 (1924)**

The carbine was 110 cm long and weighed 4 kg.



*Artillery carbine 1889.*

### **5. Artillery carbine 1889 (1924)**

The artillery carbine is, like the infantry carbine, a shortened version of rifle 1889.

It is not clear from the sources how exactly the artillery carbine, apart from the designation, differs from the infantry carbine.

### **6. Sniper rifle M.1928**

The sniper rifle was equipped with special aiming devices - a diopter sight and post reticle - but for economic reasons, cf. Source 1, scopes were not acquired for the snipers. The rifle was, however, equipped from the beginning with a "bearing for scope". The sniper rifle was not equipped with a bayonet post.



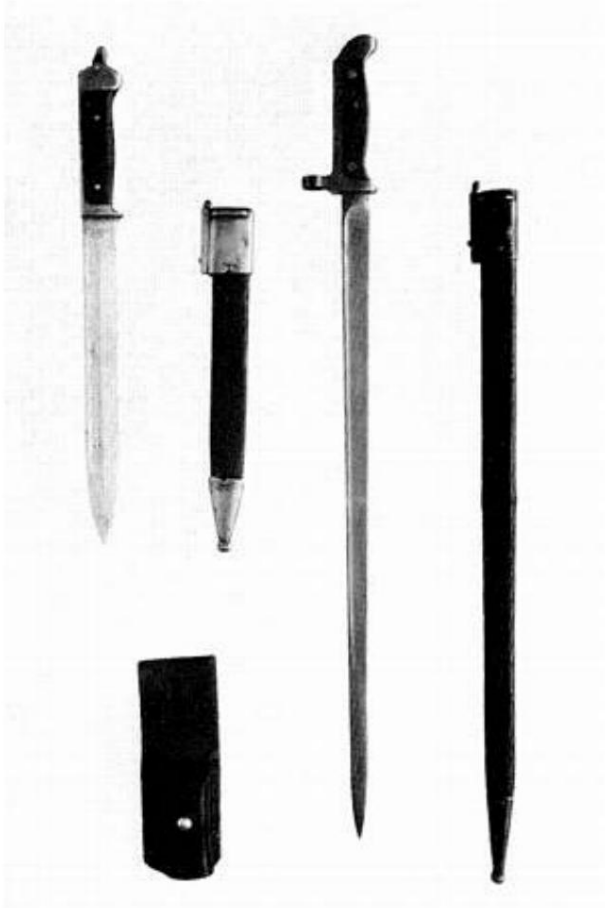
*Sniper rifle M.1928.*

The rifle weighed approx. 5.3 kg.

It also existed in a civilian version for use in shooting associations.

The sharpshooter shot as far as possible with the rifle aimed at a target within 900 m.

## Sidearms and their means of guidance



*Knife bayonet 1889, shepherd's bayonet  
M.1915 and sword case 1889.*

As can be seen from the model year, the long rifle was already equipped with the knife bayonet.

Under the impression of accounts of bayonet fights at the beginning of the First World War, a 56 cm long (incl. handle) bayonet was introduced, which could penetrate completely if necessary.

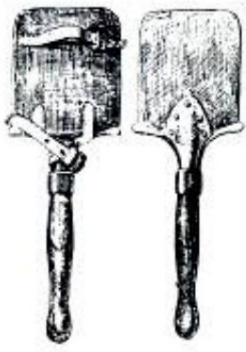
With the bayonet attached, the rifle had a total length of 179 cm.

In the infantry, the *körde* bayonet then became a sidearm for soldiers equipped with rifle M.1889.

From the knife bayonet, knife M.1923 was constructed, which was issued to personnel who were not equipped with a rifle or carbine, and was intended as a trench knife. Among other things, it was issued to foot marching officers, non-commissioned officers and specialists.

Seen from a distance, the two sidearms are identical, but the knife differs from the bayonet in that the bayonet post groove is filled in. After this change, knife M.1923 was heavily browned.

In the absence of knife M.1923, knife bayonets were also provided for the same purpose.



*Foot shovel M.1870.*  
From Source 6.

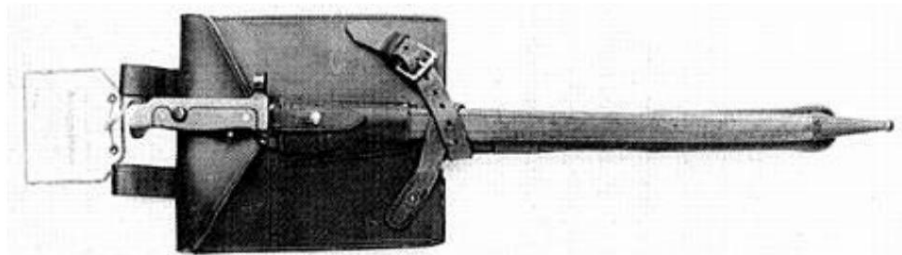


*Ax hoe M.1890.*  
From Source 6.

Sidearms were generally carried in the sword pouch hanging from the left side of the belt, fastened to it by a button. The sidearm was placed in the sword case, with the edge forward.

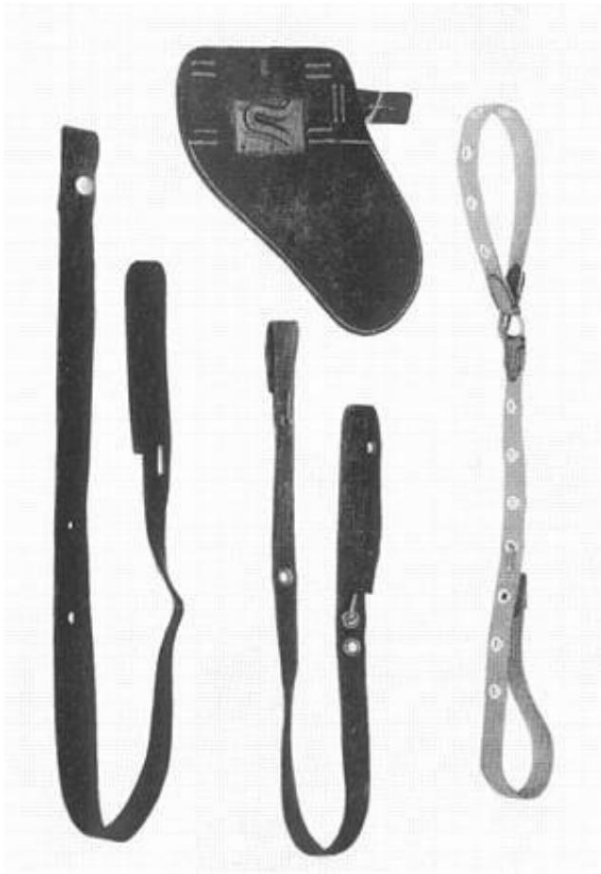
When the soldier carried an infantry spade at the same time, the bayonet rested against the outside of the spade sheath and was attached by a cross strap that held the spade up in the sheath.

If the soldier was equipped with a hatchet M.1890 (as a rule of thumb every fourth soldier in the infantry), the bayonet was carried in the hatchet's guide, which was a bag with space for both entrenching equipment and the bayonet.



*Spade bag for cavalry M.1912/23.* From Source 7.

Mounted personnel in the cavalry and infantry carried spade bag M.1912/23, on which the sword bag was sewn.



*Rifle strap 1889 (leather), rifle strap 1915 (holstering belt) and carabiner belt for mounted personnel M.1912 (holstering belt) and underlay leather M.1905.*

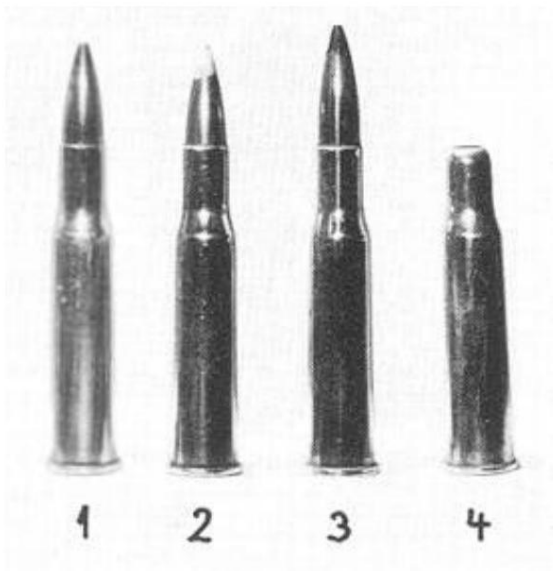
## **Gun straps etc**

The gun strap was black leather.

The term *timber girdle* corresponds to what would be called webbing today.

The rendering does not suggest that the middle strap is of webbing, but in Source 7, which uses the same illustration, it is easier to see.

The underlay leather shows the rail into which the button on the rider's carabiner is inserted. The strap was attached to the soldier's waist belt.



*8 mm war ammunition.*  
Formed after illustration in Source 1.

## Cartridges and guides

1. 8 mm sharp cartridge M.1908.
2. Light track cartridge M.1908/33, 1908/34 or 1908/40.
3. Armor cartridge M.1908/30, 1908/36 or 1908/39..
4. Rifle grenade cartridge.

- The light track cartridges had a white base.
- The armor cartridges had a black base.
- The rifle grenade cartridges had a black base.



*Patrontaske M.1906.*



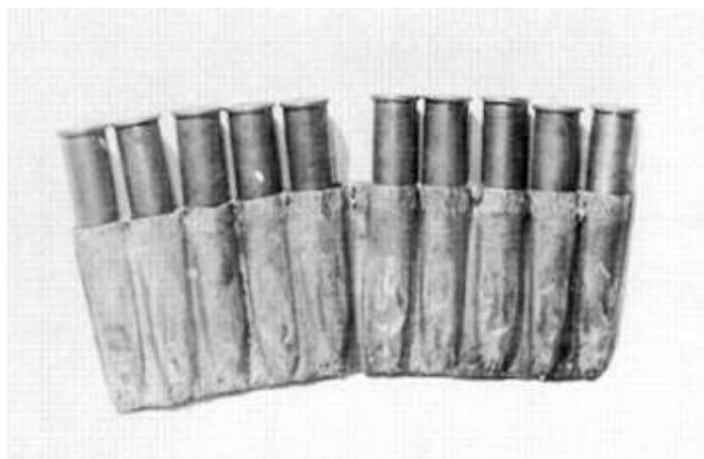
The majority of the soldiers carried 1 cartridge bag, on the right side of the waist belt, with 40 cartridges. Certain specialists carried 2 cartridge pouches. Platoon leaders and a few other specialists usually carried a mixture of regular cartridges and armor cartridges (20 of each).

The cartridge case was black leather, except for the cavalry, which used brown leather clothing.

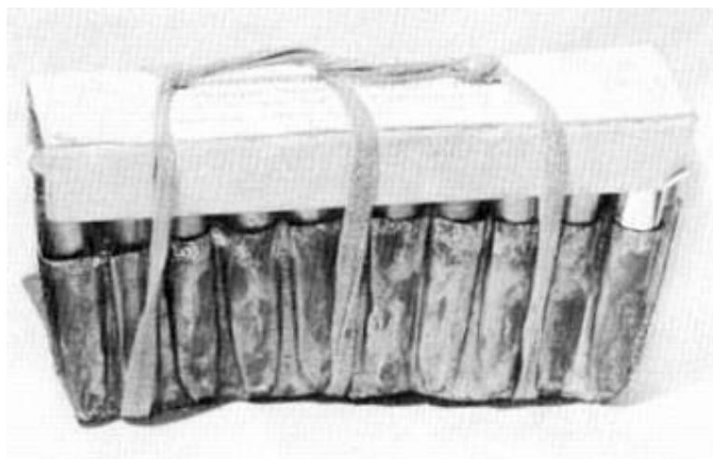
The cartridges were individually placed in and taken out of the cartridge bag, which thus first had to be opened and then closed.

## The Ammunition Service

The cartridges were delivered in cartridge holders, made of brass or cardboard, each with 10 cartridges. The 3 cartridge holders were assembled 3 and 3 with a piece of cardboard over the cartridge bases and tightly tied together with linen ribbons. The cartridge packs were packed in light blue (!) cartridge boxes, which typically held 24 cartridge packs, i.e. 720 cartridges in total.






Cartridge holder of tin brass, with 10 cartridges.



Cartridge pack 1906 with 3 holders of 10 cartridges.

Even in contemporary times, the color of the cartridge cases gave rise to wonder, as the decisive importance of material blurring was emphasized in every way. Likewise, the choice of 3 and not 4 cartridge holders for 10 cartridges in the bundle, as all cartridge cases, regardless of model year, were intended for 40 cartridges.

### Cartridge cases

Patrontype	Packing	Number of cartridges in the pack	Color and marking of the cartridge case (Principle sketches drawn according to Source 3.)
Patron M.1908.	Cartridge boxes and holders or cardboard boxes	720	 The cartridge case is light blue, with a horizontal, circular, maroon stripe.
Lysssporpatron	Cartridge boxes and cardboard boxes	1.000	 The cartridge case is light blue, with a vertical white stripe on all 4 sides.
Panserpatron	Cartridge boxes and cardboard boxes	720	 The cartridge case is light blue, with a vertical black stripe on all 4 sides.





## Accessories - Rifle grenade cup M.1923



*Rifle grenade cup  
M.1923 with cartridge.*

The cup was placed with the cone tip over the rifle muzzle, where it was held by the bayonet mount's grip on the bayonet post.

The cylindrical rifle grenade was placed in the cup from above, the rifle was loaded with the projectileless cartridge shown here and placed with the butt on the ground at a "suitable" angle.

When fired, the gunpowder gas hurled the grenade out at a distance of 200-300 m, depending on the angle at which the kneeling gunner held the rifle.

See *Recylgeværkkompagniet* for a picture of rifle grenade launchers in firing position.

The bag for carrying the grenade cup and the 10 rifle grenades - which were painted gray - with 10 loose cartridges, carries cf. Source 1 the model designation M.1931.



Infantry handguns.

From *Textbook for the Army's privates, Part 1, Common for all weapons, corps and divisions*, Copenhagen 1939.

## Closing

From a shooting technical point of view, the rifle and carbines shot well and accurately.

From a tactical point of view, they shot slowly and especially the rifle, with its shiny barrel, was easily visible in the terrain.

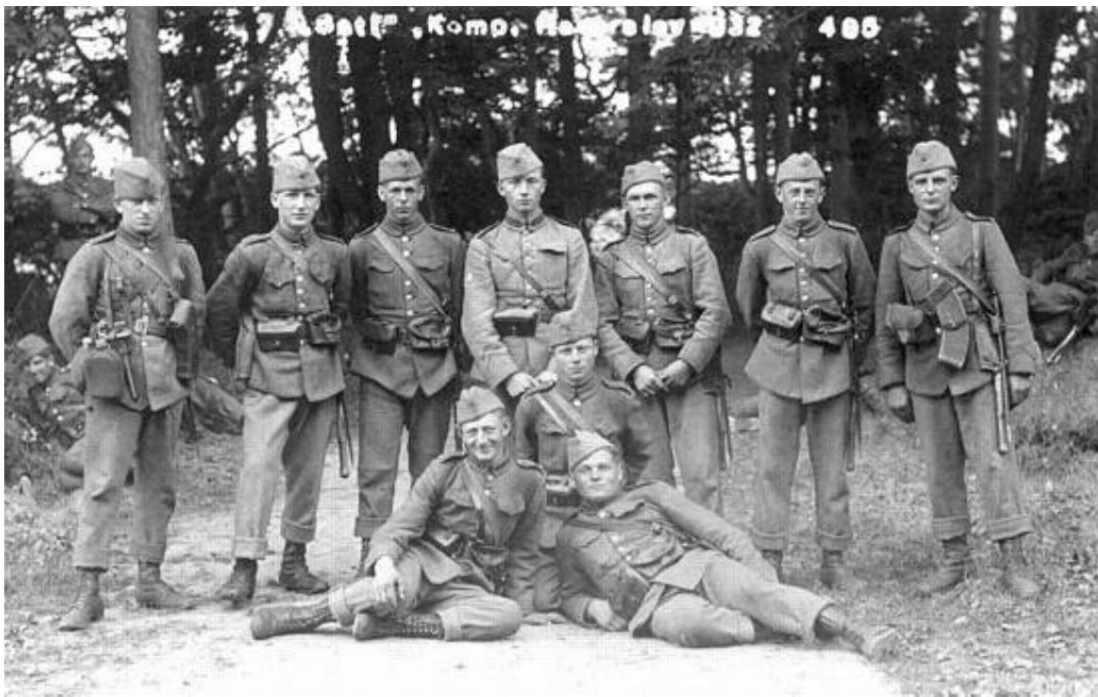
The picture gives an impression of the relative size of the individual weapons.

## Sources

1. *The 1889 rifle in the service of the Danish defense* by AN Hvidt, Special print of Våbenhistoriske Årbøgers XIII, Copenhagen 1966.
2. *Textbook for Infantry Corporal Schools - Weapons*, Ministry of War, Copenhagen 1938.
3. *Field equipment for Individuals*, Ministry of War, Copenhagen 1936, with correction sheets up to August 1941.
4. *Textbook for Infantry Corporal Schools - Shooting*, Ministry of War, Copenhagen 1938.
5. *Danish Uniforms 1900-1990 - The Army and the Air Force* by Bjørn A. Nielsen, Tøjhusmuseet, Copenhagen 1992, ISBN 87-89022-26-2.
6. *Gardehusarkasernen on 29 August 1943* by Anders D. Henriksen, Forlaget Devantier, Næstved 1993, ISBN 87-984530-0-9.
7. *Danish infantry uniforms and equipment over the last 200 years - in 12 colored pictures with Danish and English text* by AN Hvidt, no year (probably from the mid-1960s).
8. *Memory book for use in the field, during exercises and war games* by HH Jørgensen, N. Olaf Møllers Forlag, Copenhagen 1936.

Per Finsted

## Postscript 1



*Recoil rifle group, Haderslev, 1932.*

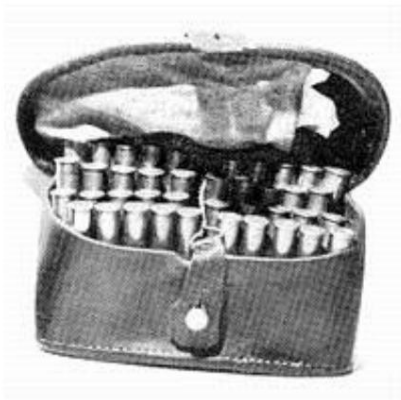
From a simultaneous postcard.

Among the things worth noting in the picture is the compressed cartridge bag that some of the soldiers carry on the left side of the waist belt. Why do they carry this when the regulations only prescribe a cartridge case?



*Patrontaske M.1894.*

From Source 1.



### **My theory**

These are cartridge bags of M.1894, which are softer than cartridge bag M.1906, which the soldiers carry on the right side of the waist belt - and which was the standard equipment of the period.

The reason is possibly that the cartridge bag is intended for carrying the cleaning props that belong to the rifle 1889.

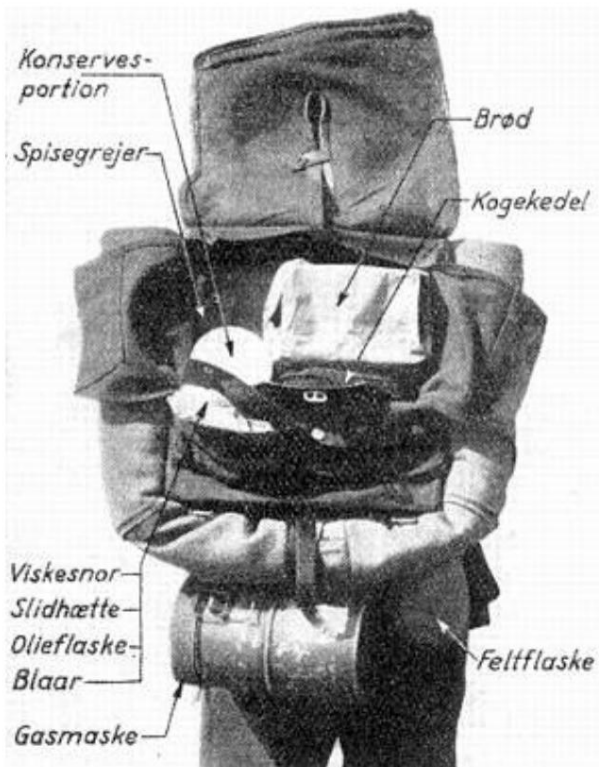


Cleaning props for the 1889 system: Oil bottle, wiper cord and wear cap. Formed after illustration in Source 1.

After the introduction of the cartridge bag M.1906, the regulations stated that the cleaning supplies had to be carried in the soldier's supply bag, as there was no room for it in the new cartridge bag.

However, soldiers of the period often complained that the gun's cleaning props greased the contents of the supply turrent into oil.

The wear cap is attached over the gun muzzle to protect it during cleaning. The wiper cord is used for wiping bruises etc.



Catering Tornyster 1). [\\_](#)

In order to fully immerse yourself in the soldiers' situation, here is a picture of how the catering tornyster should be packed.

A consequence of a leaking oil bottle and unwrapped oil cloths and the wiper cord is obvious, and unpleasant...

The problem was even worse for certain specialists who had not provided catering bags; they had to carry the cleaning tool in a pocket.

## Closing

Maybe the reason is completely different, but that's my theory so far.

If anyone knows the real explanation, I'd love to hear about it, and similarly why the recoilless rifle shooter (far left in the picture) is carrying two field bottles...



Mortar division advances 2). [—](#)

## Postscript 2

The picture shows the ammunition team from a mortar group, with grenade launcher M.1931.

The horse puller's infantry carbine 1889 is prominent.

If the soldier had had that somewhat longer rifle in 1889, his task, which of course requires thought and foresight, would not have been easier.

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### To note:

1) From *Textbook for Infantry Corporal Schools - Equipment and Train*, Ministry of War, Copenhagen 1941.

2) From *Folk & Værn*, no. 4 (April) 1942.