

M-1943 Entrenching Tool

The Swiss army knife of field spades

Length: 27 ¾ inches

Length folded: 20 ½ inches

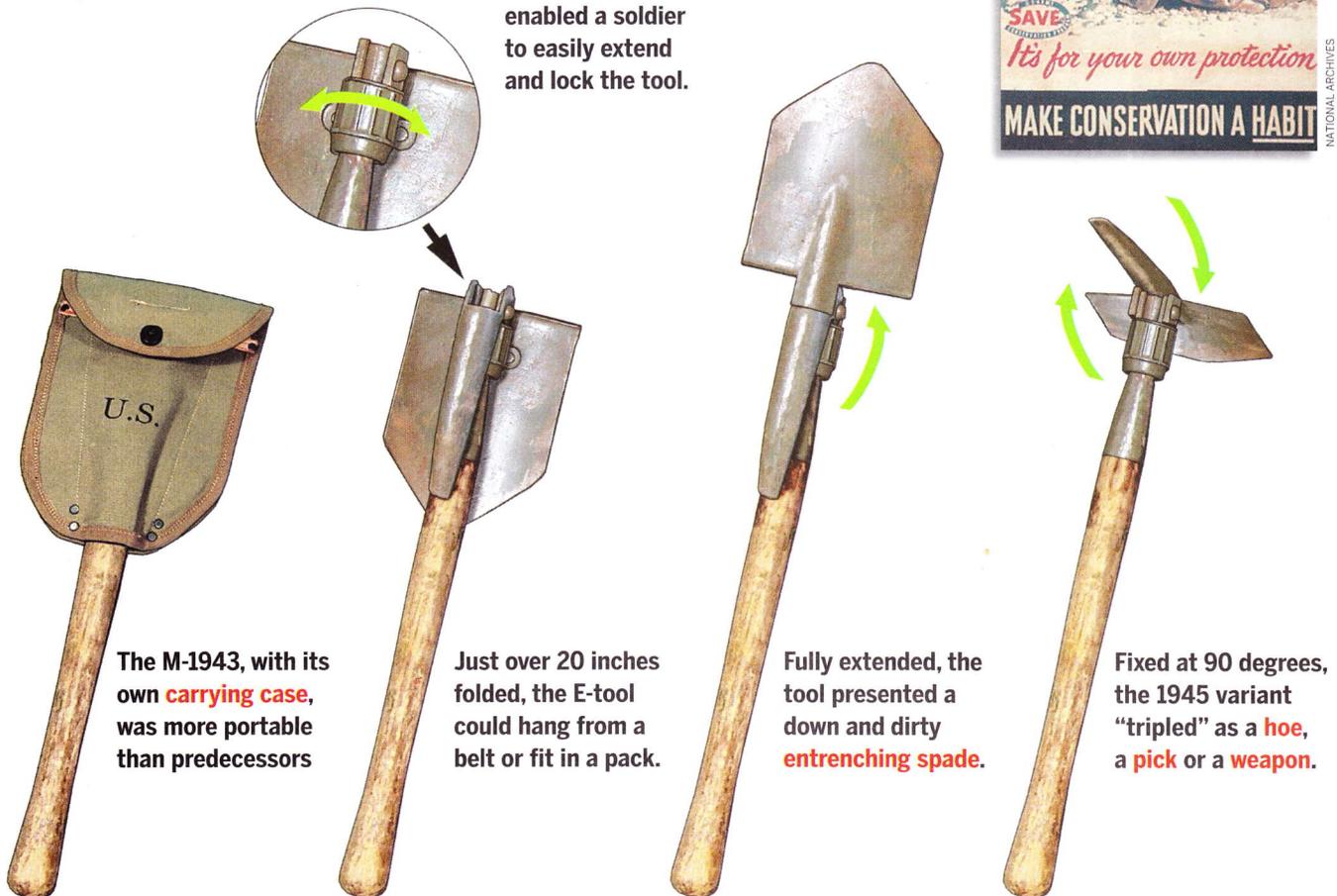
Width: 6 inches

Weight: 2 ¼ pounds

The **aluminum nut** enabled a soldier to easily extend and lock the tool.



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The M-1943, with its own **carrying case**, was more portable than predecessors

Just over 20 inches folded, the E-tool could hang from a belt or fit in a pack.

Fully extended, the tool presented a down and dirty **entrenching spade**.

Fixed at 90 degrees, the 1945 variant "tripled" as a **hoe**, a **pick** or a **weapon**.

The spade has been an essential part of a soldier's gear as long as man has practiced siege warfare—both for digging field defenses or shelters and, in a pinch (with sharpened blade), as a weapon. Oddly, though, not until the early 20th century did gear designers think to create a less cumbersome folding spade, since dubbed the entrenching tool, or E-tool.

The Austrians and Germans developed the first operational E-tools in the interwar period. The German ver-

sion comprised a blued steel blade hinged to a folding tube riveted to a wooden handle; a Bakelite nut fixed the blade in place for digging. The U.S. Army had also experimented with such tools but recognized the German *Klappspaten's* merits and reverse-engineered its own version, issuing it to soldiers in 1943.

Much like its German forebear, the M-1943 centered on a folding blade affixed to a hilt riveted to the handle. An aluminum nut locked the curved

blade in place, either at a 180-degree angle for use as a spade or at a 90-degree angle for use as a pick or hoe. It went through at least three versions during the course of World War II. The 1945 variant, above, added a folding pick opposite the blade.

Postwar variants of the E-tool incorporated a hinged aluminum handle, making it considerably lighter and allowing it to be folded entirely within its case. Such folding E-tools are common to most modern armies. **MH**