

A captured folding-stock AK-47 is being examined by the author Maj. George Nonte who sets the record straight as to its performance and dependability in action.

"U.S. Army Ordnance tests in 1966 revealed appalling figures. During one set of identical tests, there were 112 malfunctions of the enemy AK-47 and 164 of the M-14. But there were 2,476 malfunctions of the M-16."

Senator Charles Percy
"This Week" March 24, 1968

the Mysterious AK-47



A stylized signature of Maj. George C. Nonte.

By Maj.
George C. Nonte

“WHAT IS AN AK-47?” This is a question we’ve heard quite often of late, usually in the wake of news media controversy and mudslinging at the U.S. M-16 .223 (5.56mm) rifle seeing service in Viet Nam. A goodly number of news stories tell about U. S. soldiers who have appropriated and are using “AK-47’s” in preference to the weapon issued them. Sometimes the AK-47 is described by zealous, but weapons-ignorant correspondents, as a submachine gun; as a rifle; or in awed tones that imbue it with “ultimate weapon” qualities. The end result of all this is to create in the public mind an image of a terrible, effective “new” arm with which Viet Cong and North Viet Nameese troops can overwhelm at will the U. S. trooper.

It’s not quite that way, really. In 1942, a new concept in infantry weapons was introduced to the Russian front by Germany—the “Assault Rifle,” in the form of what was to become the MP-43/44. It was a compact selective-fire weapon chambered for the 7.92mm Kurz cartridge driving its 125 grain bullet at a bit over 2100 fps. It was far more accurate and effective than the submachine gun, which the Soviets had already adopted.

Apparently mightily impressed, the Soviets developed their own intermediate cartridge—7.62mm M43—quite similar (Continued on page 56)



To illustrate its adaptability to extreme climates, the AK-47 is shown in action in the Russian Winter and semi-tropics of Guantanamo, Cuba.



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THE MYSTERIOUS AK-47

(Continued from page 19)

in size and shape and slightly superior in performance to the German round. By 1946-47, they had adopted a short, light, semi-auto carbine—the SKS (Simonov)—to use it. Vast quantities of the SKS were produced, and today they may be found wherever Red influence is felt.

Hard on the heels of the SKS came the weapon in question, the AK-47. In concept, performance, general configuration, size, and weight it was quite similar to the German MP-43/44 series from which the Soviets had taken their lesson. Credit for the design goes to T/Sgt. Mikhail T. Kalashnikov. "AK" means, simply, "Avtomat Kalashnikov."

The design is quite conventional. It is gas operated, with piston and cylinder above the barrel to drive a heavy bolt carrier rearward in the machined steel receiver. Riding in the carrier is a very ordinary rotating bolt with front locking lugs. A curved, staggered, double-column, 30-round magazine is inserted beneath the receiver. It has a two-piece straight-line stock and separate pistol grip, and is fitted with open sights quite high above the barrel. A large safety lever is pivoted on the right side above the trigger—with three positions: top, safe; middle, full-automatic; bottom, semi-automatic.

The AK-47 was manufactured almost entirely from machined steel forgings and showed excellent workmanship. However, by our standards it was unnecessarily heavy for its cartridge (9.5 lbs. empty) and costly. It did not have a bolt hold-open device (to tell the soldier his magazine is empty) or provision for fixing a bayonet. The design did permit use of a hinged metal buttstock on weapons for issue to armored vehicle crews, paratroops, etc., where a shorter arm is desirable.

The AK-47 soon proved to be a durable and reliable weapon that required very little maintenance and care in the field. This fact that it was of conventional design—well-proven mechanisms assembled to suit a specific concept, rather than a radical departure from existing weaponry—may well be responsible for its quick success.

The Soviets consider the AK-47 effective to 300 meters in short, full-automatic bursts—and to 400 meters fired semi-automatically. While existing accuracy standards may differ slightly, the weapon was required to

place 3 out of 4 shots in 15 cm (5.9") at 100 meters in U.S.S.R. acceptance tests.

Following its adoption, the AK-47 was placed in large-scale production—not only in the U.S.S.R., but in several satellite nations as well. One military arms authority stated a couple of years ago that he estimated as many as 35 to 40 million AK-series weapons had been produced within the entire Soviet Bloc since the late 1940's. Much of this at a time when Western nations were at a virtual standstill insofar as new rifles were concerned.

In addition to the U.S.S.R., the AK-47 became the standard arm of Bulgaria, Poland, North Korea, North Vietnam, Romania, Hungary, East Germany, and Red China. In most, it is produced just as in the U.S.S.R., but Hungary has modified it slightly. Also, in East Germany it is designated MPi-K, and in Red China, Type-56. In addition to being the standard infantry weapon of many nations, it has been furnished in varying quantities to Cuba, the United Arab Republic and revolutionary and guerilla groups elsewhere.

The Czechoslovakian Model 58 rifle (chambered for the same Soviet cartridge) is so similar in appearance that it is often mistaken for the AK-47. In reality, it is an entirely different design and is of much lighter weight. In Finland, the M60 and M62 Assault rifles are highly modified copies of the AK-47 and use the 7.62 mm M43 Soviet cartridge, though they appear less like the AK than does the Czech M58. In short, within relatively few years after its introduction, the AK-47 became the most widely used and manufactured modern, selective-fire military rifle in the world. It remains so today.

The AK-47 design has not remained entirely static in the score of years since its Soviet adoption. Like any other mechanical device, it has been the subject of minor changes and improvements from time to time. That no major changes have been made in the basic design seems ample evidence of its excellent performance in the field. Its tenure as a major power's standard arm already matches that of the M1 rifle in the U.S. Even with WWII and Korea thrown in, M1 production never began to approach the quantities of AK's that have been built.

About 10 years after the AK-47 went into service, a new model ap-

peared. Called the AKM, it retained the basic AK design, but utilized a heavy-gauge stamped (pressed) steel receiver instead of the older forged-steel type. This simplified, cheapened, and sped up production, since the receiver is by far the most complex and costly part of the AK-47. It also achieved a weight saving of about 12 ounces—significant in view of Western criticism of the AK-47's weight. Apparently, though, the Soviets aren't as weight-conscious as we.

Some changes were also made in the gas system, particularly the gas-relief ports; and a rate-reducing device was added to the firing mechanism. Apparently, the two changes balance one another out, for the rate of fire remains virtually identical with that of the AK-47. There are other minor differences, such as shape and width of fore-end; phosphated rather than bright finish on bolt; etc. Regardless of all this, the AKM remains simply a lighter and cheaper AK-47, and a great deal of parts interchangeability exists between the two.

The Soviets were sufficiently pleased with the AK-47 and AKM that the RPK Light Machine Gun was developed from the basic design. Take an AKM: replace its buttstock with one of LMG style; substitute a longer (23.2") and heavier barrel; and add a folding bipod—and you have an RPK LMG. It uses a 40-round box or 70-round drum magazine, as opposed to the 30-round box of the AK-47 and AKM, but will accept the rifle magazine.

This has given the Soviet Bloc an Assault Rifle/Light Machine Gun combination in which most parts are interchangeable, and in which both use the same ammunition—something most other nations are still striving to achieve. A fair degree of success along these lines has been accomplished with the FN FAL, the CETME, and the as-yet-developmental Stoner System.

How does the AK work? Semi-automatic fire, with safety-selector lever in full down position, hammer cocked, bolt locked, round in chamber, loaded magazine in place. When the trigger is pressed, the semi-automatic sear and disconnector rotate. The rear of the sear (actually part of trigger) raises the end of hammer/trigger spring. As movement continues, the sear slips from hammer engaging surface. Hammer/trigger spring rotates hammer around its axis to strike the firing pin to fire the cartridge. As the bullet passes the gas port, gas bleeds into a gas cylinder and expands against the gas piston face, forcing piston and bolt carrier (connected together) to the rear. After short preliminary travel

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("dwell") of the carrier, the carrier cam acts on a bolt guide lug to rotate bolt to left, thus disengaging the locking lugs from their seats in receiver. Inertia of the heavy carrier keeps it moving to rear, drawing the bolt along, extracting and ejecting the fired case, and compressing the recoil spring.

Also, as bolt and carrier move rearward, the hammer is forced to rotate into cocked position, compressing the hammer/trigger spring. The disconnecter rotates with the hammer and the disconnecter spring forces the disconnecter to enter its notch in the hammer and hold it at fullcock. Releasing the trigger causes the hammer/trigger spring to rotate the disconnecter and semi-automatic sear to rear, releasing the hammer to rotate slightly until the cock notch engages the semi-automatic sear.

Rearward movement of the carrier is halted by the rear receiver wall, and as the bolt clears the magazine mouth, the follower spring forces a fresh cartridge up into feeding position. The recoil spring asserts itself and drives carrier and bolt forward, the latter stripping the ready cartridge from the magazine into the chamber. As the bolt approaches the barrel face, it begins to rotate to the right to engage the locking lugs in their recesses, and the extractor snaps over the cartridge rim. Continued carrier movement after the bolt halts, cams the bolt to rotate farther right, completing locking lug engagement. Carrier comes to rest against its abutment in the receiver—leaving the weapon ready for another pull of the trigger to repeat the cycle.

Fully-automatic fire. As above, except that the semi-automatic sear and disconnecter functions are blocked out and the full-automatic sear is rotated into position to hold the hammer at full cock, and is withdrawn by trigger movement. Then, during the carrier's final travel (after bolt locking) the full-automatic disconnecter strikes the full-automatic sear and disengages it from the hammer, allowing the arm to fire—to repeat the cycle so long as the trigger is held to the rear.

HOW to operate the AK? Simply shove a loaded magazine into the recess under the receiver until it snaps into proper position. Set safety-selector lever in middle full-auto or bottom semi-auto position—in top ("safe") position it prevents opening the action. Pull the operating handle (right front of receiver) fully rearward and let it snap forward under spring pressure—don't "ride" the handle. Aim, and press the trigger. If

firing full-automatic, the muzzle will begin to climb early in the burst. Recoil of single shots is moderate—in fact, only about 4½ foot pounds is produced by a fully-loaded gun—less than that of the .222 Remington Magnum cartridge in a 7-lb. rifle. It is also approximately ½ foot-pound less than the recoil of a fully loaded M16, .223 caliber rifle.

Theoretically, this makes the AK-47 more controllable in full-automatic fire than the M-16. Add to this the fact that the M-16 rate of fire ranges from 100 to 300 rounds per minute higher than that of the AK-47. This means that in a burst of given time length, the M-16 will deliver 16 to 50 per cent more recoil impulses to the firer, increasing muzzle climb a comparable amount.

WHAT else has the AK-47 got going in its favor over the M-16? The weight of its recoiling parts (bolt, bolt carrier/gas piston) is considerably greater than those of the M-16. This produces two effects: Less violent extraction, thus, less likelihood of the extractor pulling through a case rim when chamber and/or if ammunition is dirty; more energy available as the bolt closes, thus, greater reliability in chambering deformed or dirty ammunition, or in the event of a dirty or roughened chamber. There is also the fact that AK 7.62mm ammunition is often loaded in steel cases, making extraction more difficult but, at the same time, making the rim much more able to resist extraction forces and less likely to deform or give way and leave a case stuck in the chamber. Then, the AK uses a conventional gas piston, isolating powder fouling from the rotating and reciprocating surfaces of the bolt/carrier combination—an area where fouling causes trouble in the M-16.

In ammunition, some comparisons can be made. The 7.62mm AK bullet moves out of the muzzle at 2330 fps and 1346 fp of energy. The U. S. .223 produces 3250 fps and 1287 fp. While much has been made of the wound-producing capability of the .223 because of its relatively high velocity, ex-Captain (M.C.) Tom Bryan, now in civilian practice, states that in examining over 1,000 combat wounds, he found it impossible to differentiate between those produced by the .223, .30 Carbine, .30-06, or 7.62mm M43—even when individuals were shot at very close range where any difference should be the most evident.

So, in the final analysis, is the AK-47 better than the M-16, as is implied and stated in news stories and off-the-record utterances of some Vietnamese veterans? Depends on what

you mean by *better*. These questions and answers may enable you to make up your own mind:

Is the AK more accurate (than M-16): No. Is the AK more stable in full-auto fire: Yes. Is the AK lighter or easier to carry and handle: No. Does the AK require less maintenance: Yes. Does the AK have a larger magazine capacity: Yes. Does the AK produce more severe wounds: No. Is the AK less likely to malfunction: Yes. Does the AK have a greater effective range: No. Is the AK avail-

able in more compact form: Yes.

And, let me make a final statement—remember that the AK-47 has been in existence more than 20 years and that at least 30 have been made for every M-16 that's come out of Hartford, where the M-16/AR-15 has been in production only 5 years. The AK has to be good to have achieved its present status; it has to be thoroughly "debugged," after all that service and development while the M-16 can't be expected to be in such a short time.



SCOPED HANDGUNS

(Continued from page 35)

glad to work with him.

Let's now consider the present day handguns that may be used for practical handgun hunting and which, when equipped with a scope, allow the handgunner to enjoy all aspects of handgun hunting.

In my opinion, the finest small game and varmint handgun is the XP-100 manufactured by Remington. This bolt action pistol is a single shot firearm chambered for the Remington .221 Fireball cartridge that has a proven record for superb accuracy at ranges out to two hundred yards.



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Remington has endowed the XP-100 with a plastic stock and hand-contoured pistol grip that makes it a natural pointing firearm. The bolt action mechanism makes this pistol the strongest and safest handgun ever designed and built, capable of literally firing rifle cartridges to give near-rifle velocities and accuracy. The 10½" barrel has a ventilated rib with a high front sight.

In order to obtain maximum accuracy with this XP-100 the shooter must use a scope because the potential cartridge/handgun accuracy far

exceeds the accuracy potential of the iron sights. Before we get into a discussion of scope sights let me give you some data on the .221 Fireball cartridge. This cartridge resembles a shortened version of the now-famous .222 Remington cartridge. It fires a 50 grain factory bullet at a listed velocity of 2650 fps in the ten inch barreled XP-100. Muzzle energy runs a full 780 foot pounds, making it one of the top handgun cartridges. This cartridge has proven to be versatile and will handle bullets from 40 grains on up to 55 grains in handloaded ammunition giving the handloader a relatively large selection of bullets. One of the best powders for reloading is #4198. My favorite load is 16.0 grains of #4198 powder, the Nosler 55 grain ZIPEDO bullet, and CCI small rifle primers.

When equipped with a scope, this XP-100 can handle turkeys, jacks, crows, chucks, coyote, fox and even predators the size of treed bobcats and mountain lions. The choice of bullets gives the handloader the ability to let this XP-100 substitute for a saddle gun, truck gun or even long range varmint rifle.

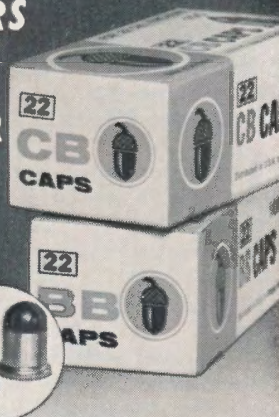
Recoil is negligible so that women and youngsters can fire it. How the XP-100 is fired controls to a great extent the degree of accuracy that results. This is not a conventional handgun to be fired in the conventional handgun manner; rather it is a super accurate firearm that must be fired in such a way that its potential accuracy will be fully realized. This means using two hands to hold it—regardless of firing position. The shooter should make full use of all natural and artificial aids to enable him to pin-point his shots.

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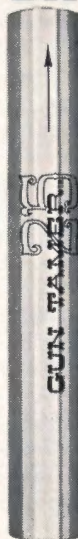


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