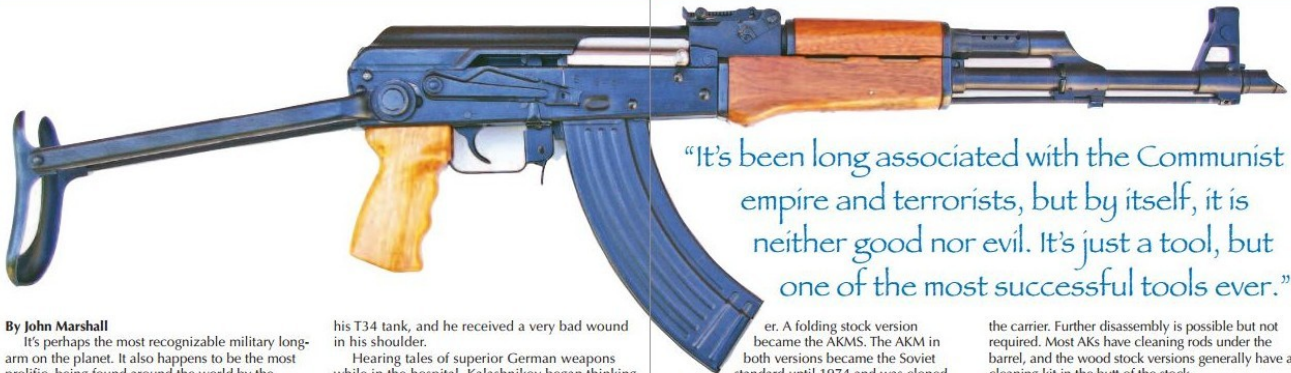


CLASSIC FIREARMS: The AK-47 Rifle



"It's been long associated with the Communist empire and terrorists, but by itself, it is neither good nor evil. It's just a tool, but one of the most successful tools ever."

By John Marshall

It's perhaps the most recognizable military long-arm on the planet. It also happens to be the most prolific, being found around the world by the untold millions in many variants. It's been long associated with the Communist empire and terrorists, but by itself, it is neither good nor evil. It's just a tool, but one of the most successful tools ever. It's simple, totally reliable, durable, intimidating, easy to disassemble and maintain, and sufficiently accurate for battlefield use within 150 yards. Many experts have voted it the number one combat rifle of all time. It's the famous AK47 assault rifle.

The *Avtomat Kalashnikova* was the brainchild of Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov. Until recent years, little was known about the man, but following the downfall of the Iron Curtain, interesting information has come to light about him.

Born November 10, 1919 in Alma-Ata in south-eastern Kazakhstan, Mikhail entered the ten year school, which was roughly equivalent to the American system of grade and high schools, at the age of seven. Graduating in 1936, he went to work for the Turkestan-Siberian Railroad, where he was promoted to become a technical secretary. He was conscripted into the Red Army in 1938. His interest and skill in weapons made him a natural for mechanical work and on the recommendation of his commander, he was trained as a tank driver.

During his training, he designed a fuel consumption measuring device and an improved track assembly for tanks. Soon he was promoted to sergeant, and in 1939 he was sent to Leningrad to be a technical advisor to the factory manufacturing the tank parts he designed. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, his life changed considerably. He was assigned to the Western front, where he became a tank commander. In September 1941, a German shell hit

his T34 tank, and he received a very bad wound in his shoulder.

Hearing tales of superior German weapons while in the hospital, Kalashnikov began thinking he could contribute more to the war effort by designing firearms. He requested technical books on firearms and studied them hard. During his six-month convalescence leave, he designed a submachine gun. While not adopted by the Soviets, his design was noted favorably. He was assigned to design work in the Moscow Aviation Institute, and then became a technician at the small arms proving ground at Ensk. The Soviets had been very interested in the German 7.92mm Kurz cartridge, which was very effectively used in the MP44/StG44, the first mass-produced "assault rifle" or *sturmgewehr*.

This intermediate-power cartridge was modified for Soviet use in caliber and other minor ways to become the 7.62x39 cartridge first used in the *Samozaryadnyy karabin Simonova* carbine (SKS45) designed by Sergei Simonov in the waning days of World War II. Kalashnikov was introduced to this new cartridge at Ensk. The wheels in his brain started turning and he went to work with a purpose. Others doing design work there aided his recognized talents, and with them, he was able to design the Soviets' first officially accepted selective-fire assault rifle. Kalashnikov's design was crafted in 1947 and was designated as the AK47. It was adopted by the Soviets as its standard longarm in 1949.

The first AKs utilized a sheet-metal receiver. Around 1951, the receiver was strengthened by machining it from a forging. After minor modifications, a third variation was manufactured from around 1953 to 1959, when the AKM, or *Modernizirovannyi avtomat sistemi Kalashnikova*, was introduced. This fourth and final 7.62x39mm version used an improved stamped sheet-metal receiver.

er. A folding stock version became the AKMS. The AKM in both versions became the Soviet standard until 1974 and was cloned throughout the Communist world by many nations.

The AK design is an exercise in simplicity. The reciprocating bolt handle doubles as a forward assist. The trigger design is effective, and based on that used in the American M1 Garand rifle. The safety/selector lever is also an ejection port cover, and no bolt hold-open device is incorporated. A tracer round is generally used for the last round in the magazine, giving a visual clue that the next pull of the trigger will result in a "click." There are some other minuses to the design. The safety is noisy, slow and hard to operate. The open rear sight, while optimistically calibrated for long range, is really only good out to roughly 300 yards. The AK is not especially known for accuracy, but in fairness, it was not designed as a target rifle. At the same time, it's boringly reliable under almost any environmental condition including rain, dirt, mud and firing debris. It's compact, particularly when equipped with the folding stock. It is very robust, and almost impossible to damage sufficiently to the point of malfunction. It's quite easy to manufacture on widely available equipment.

Almost anyone can be instructed on how to field strip an AK and clean it without special tools. Remove the magazine and cycle the action, checking the chamber to be sure it's harboring no live round. Push in the action spring retaining rod on the rear of the receiver cover, and lift the receiver cover off the receiver. Take out the action spring and retaining rod by pushing them forward, and then lift them up and back out of the receiver. Remove the bolt and bolt carrier (with its attached gas piston) by pulling them back and out. Take the bolt out of the carrier by twisting it and pulling it out of the front of

the carrier. Further disassembly is possible but not required. Most AKs have cleaning rods under the barrel, and the wood stock versions generally have a cleaning kit in the butt of the stock.

Later designs based on the 7.62x39mm AK are plentiful, including the now-standard AK74, which is much the same, only chambered for the M74 5.45x39.5mm cartridge, the Soviets' answer to the 5.56mm NATO round. Variants on the AK design have been made worldwide, and are too plentiful to cover here. Countries known to have manufactured AK-type rifles include Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Egypt, Finland, Hungary, Israel, Netherlands, North Korea, Poland, Romania, South Africa, Yugoslavia, and more recently, even the United States. Currently, Russia is considering the adoption of an updated AK, the AK12. This latest version of the AK design incorporates modern niceties such as accessory rails and advanced optics, making it somewhat similar in concept to the U.S.'s M4 carbine.

The rifle illustrated is a semiautomatic-only 7.62x39mm Type 56 Chinese-made AKMS, typical of many versions that are generally legal to own in the United States. It's not a dreaded selective-fire "assault weapon." It can fire only **one** shot per pull of the trigger, hoplophobic hysterics to the contrary notwithstanding.

Mikhail Kalashnikov passed away on December 23, 2013 at the age of 94. He was proud that he had invented a rifle that would help protect his country, yet regretful that it was often used unlawfully. He had attained the rank of General in the Russian Army and was well-regarded throughout the world as an intelligent and pleasant man.

It goes bang every time. It's hardy. It's found everywhere in the world. It's the famous AK – a true classic in every sense of the word. Mikhail Kalashnikov did himself proud in designing it.