

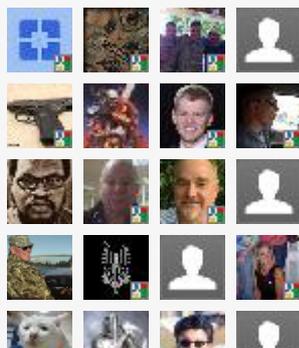
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What are the differences
between AK-47, AKM,
AK-56...

Shotguns: Why are

Saturday, February 26, 2011

What are the differences between AK-47, AKM, AK-56, AK-74 and AK-101?

The AK family of [assault rifles](#) are pretty widespread around the world, because of their lower cost of manufacturing, lower tooling costs, general reliability under rough conditions and the fact that the former Soviet Union were pretty much handing them out like candy for years. Clones of the original AK design have also been manufactured by other countries: China, Bulgaria, Romania, even companies in the good ol' USA. Unfortunately, the media keeps referring to just about any assault rifle in the AK family as the "AK-47". This post aims to point out some members of the AK family and some of their major differences.

The AK is a Russian abbreviation for *Avtomat Kalashnikova*. The name *Kalashnikova* comes from the fact that its inventor is Mikhail Kalashnikov. The original development for this rifle started in 1945 and a prototype (the AK-46) was submitted for evaluation in 1946, but it was only in 1947 that it was cleared for production for use by select Soviet forces. There have been several improvements to the original design over the years and there are now many models in the AK family. With that little bit of history said, let's now study some of the key features of some models.

AK-47: This is the original version that was approved for use by the Soviets. It fires a 7.62x39 mm. cartridge. It was originally approved for some Soviet forces in 1947, which is why the name has 47 after it. During 1948-1951,

shotguns used to break locks and...

Shotguns: Chokes and Choke Boring

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What are the differences between AK-47, AKM, AK-56, AK-74 and

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The AK family of assault rifles are pretty widespread around the world, because of their lower cost of manufacturing, lower tooling costs, ...



Revolvers: Pepper-Box Revolver

The first repeating revolver type weapons and predecessors of modern revolvers are called pepper-box revolvers. The name has to do with the ...

it went into general production to be used by other Soviet military units as well (the Type-1 model). In 1952, the Type-2 version was introduced, which had a chrome plated barrel and receiver to resist corrosion and wear. The Soviets had originally tried to make the receiver out of stamped sheet metal, but didn't have the technology then to produce the part reliably. After a large number of rejections of faulty receivers, the Soviets opted to use a receiver made of forged steel, which was milled into the final shape using various machining operations. This made the overall production rate slower.



AK-47 Type 2 variant. Click on image to enlarge. Public domain image.

AKM: This is a popular variant of the AK family. This was created as an improvement of the original AK-47 design. The letter M in the name "AKM" stands for *Modernizirovanniy*, which is the Russian word for "modernized." The AKM design was developed in the 1950s and finally was approved for full production in 1959. It fires the same 7.62x39 mm as the AK-47 for backward compatibility. However, the design was much revised and enhanced from the original AK-47 to allow it to be mass-produced. The Soviets acquired modern mass production technologies from captured German engineers (including Hugo Schmeisser, the designer of the StG-44) and used those on the AKM. Among some of its improvements:

- Replacement of the milled receiver with a receiver made out of stamped sheet steel. Machining is a lot slower process than using a press to stamp parts. Hence, use of stamped parts made it much faster to produce AKMs.
- Using rivets instead of welds on the receiver, in order to speed up production.
- Improvements to barrel, gas ports etc. to speed up manufacturing and enhance reliability
- Weight reduction of approximately 1 kg. (2.2 pounds)
- Retains the chrome lined barrel and chamber of the AK-47 Type-2 variant, but the barrel is pressed and pinned to the receiver, instead of the AK-47 which



Pistols: Derringers

The name "derringer" is often associated with a class of pistols that are small and designed to be carried in a coat pocket, woman...



Concealed Weapons

In our last post about combined firearms, two of the examples (the whip pistol and King Henry VIII's mace) are also examples of a conce...



Shotguns: Actions and Designs

The early history of true shotguns begins in the 1800s, when people began to use them to hunt birds. During that time, the flintlock firing ...



Testing Firearms: Proof Test

The first type of testing we will study is the Proof Test. The idea behind such a test is to verify the strength of the barrel, breech and ...



Actions: Lever Action

In the last post, we studied a popular mechanism called the bolt-action. Now we will study another mechanism that is also still being used...



Revolver: Walker Colt & Colt Dragoon Revolvers

In our last post, we discussed the Paterson Colt, which was the first weapon to bear the term

has a threaded barrel that is screwed into the receiver.

- The barrel is the first in the AK family to have a **slant compensator** to reduce rifle climb, when shooting in automatic mode.
- Gas relief ports are moved forward to the gas block, instead of the gas tube.
- Bolt carrier was lightened slightly. The wooden stocks were also hollowed out as well, in order to reduce more weight.
- Sights on an AKM are calibrated to go up to 1000 meters, whereas AK-47s are only calibrated to go up to 800 meters.
- Changes to the metal treatment applied. The AKM is **parkerized** instead of **blued** like the AK-47.
- Uses modified spring and trigger assembly for better safety. The AKM fires in automatic mode only when the bolt is fully locked. The new trigger assembly also reduces "trigger bounce" and has a hammer release delay device to delay the release of the hammer by a few microseconds in automatic firing mode. The hammer release delay mechanism is sometimes incorrectly called a "rate reducer" by some people, but it doesn't appreciably change the cyclic rate of fire. Instead it allows the bolt group to settle in the forwardmost position after returning into the battery.



AKM assault rifle. Click on image to enlarge. Public domain image.

Note the slanted barrel tip: that is the slant compensator, which is one of the improvements over the original AK-47 design

The AKM was used by the Soviets, most Warsaw Pact countries, several African countries and many Asian countries as well. Manufacturing licenses, as well as necessary technical data, were sold for very nominal rates (or gifted for free!) to Warsaw Pact countries, as well as other "friendly" countries like Egypt and Iraq, so that they could make their own AKMs. Because of this, it became very widespread around the world. Many variants of this design still exist in use around the world today. One popular variant of the AKM is the AKMS, which

"revolver". As we noted in our pre...



Rifling:

Manufacturing:
Button Rifling

In our last post, we studied a method of rifling called Broach Rifling . Now we will study another method of rifling called Button Rifling



Sights: Iron
Sights: Aperture
Sights

In the last couple of posts, we studied the basics of sights , some details about iron sights and some details about open iron sights . In ...

features a folding metal stock instead of the fixed wooden stock of the AKM.

AK-56: This is a Chinese made variant of the AK family. While it is officially called the "Type-56", it is often referred to as the AK-56. Predictably, the number 56 indicates that the production of the Chinese models started in 1956. In the initial stages, the type-56 was a direct copy of the AK-47 type-1 model. However, in the 1960s, the Chinese incorporated some of the AKM improvements (e.g. stamped sheet metal receiver and slant compensator) and made some of their own modifications into their type-56 model, but did not change their version number for some reason. One visual difference between the AKM and the AK-56 is that the front **sight** of an AK-47 or an AKM is a partially open type, whereas the type-56 model has a fully hooded front sight.



Chinese sailor carrying a type-56 assault rifle. Click on image to enlarge. Public domain image.

The type-56 is the most prolific version of the AK family, since it was exported by the Chinese to various communist movements, especially in third world countries of Asia, South America and Africa. Nearly one in five (i.e. 20%) of AK type rifles in the world today is a type-56. When US forces were in Vietnam, the type-56 was found in enemy hands far more often than AKM or AK-47s.

AK-74: This was the next rifle that was officially adopted by the Soviet military in 1974. It was based on the AKM

design. However, this variant fires 5.45x39 mm. ammunition instead of 7.62x39 mm. ammunition that the older variants fire. Because of this new cartridge, the barrel, receiver, magazine, firing mechanism, gas cylinder, springs and sights are also altered to accommodate the new cartridge's dimensions and power. This rifle's magazine is made of a plastic, which makes it much more durable than the metal magazines of the AK-47 and AKM. The magazine shape is also subtly altered with two extra horizontal ribs, in order to make it impossible to insert it into an older AK model (since they don't use the same ammunition anyway). The pistol grip is made of a polymer plastic as well. Some early AK-74s have wooden hand guards and butt stock, but they use [laminated wood](#) instead of the plain wood that the earlier AK models use. Some later versions of the AK-74 use entirely polymer furniture (i.e. butt stock, pistol grip and hand guards) which is usually plum colored or black colored. The butt stock also has some cuts in it to reduce overall weight and also provide an easy way to distinguish it from an AKM.



AK-74 assault rifle. Click on image to enlarge. Public domain image.

Note the laminated wood stock with distinctive cuts on the side, laminated wood hand guards and the dark-brown plastic magazine.

There are also variants, such as the AKS-74, which feature folding metal stocks instead of wooden stocks, AKS-74U, which is a shorter carbine form of the AKS-74, AK-74M which features black plastic furniture completely (i.e. no wood parts) and has a mounting rail on the left to attach [telescopic sight](#) models etc. The firearm issued by the Russian military since the early 1990s is the AK-74M model, though earlier AK-74/AKS-74 still remain in service as well.



AK-74M assault rifle. Note the complete lack of wooden parts. Click on image to enlarge.

AK-101: This is a variant of the AK family that is meant for the export market outside Russia. That is why it is chambered to fire NATO standard 5.56x45 mm. ammunition, which is standard in many countries around the world. Naturally, many of the other parts (barrel, receiver, magazine etc.) are also modified to fit the cartridge. In short, the AK-101 is essentially an AK-74M design resized for the NATO cartridge.



AK-101 assault rifle. Click on image to enlarge. Public domain image.

Like the AK-74M, it also has a mounting rail on the side to allow attaching many optical devices that are common in Russia and Europe.

These are only a few of the models in the AK family of assault rifles. Unfortunately, many people in the media insist on calling all of them "AK-47s", in spite of the major differences between all the models. Surprisingly, true AK-47s are actually quite rare these days, especially the Type-1 variant. Most of what is referred to in the media as an "AK-47" is usually not the original AK-47 model, the weapon in question is usually a variant of AKM, a Type-56, an AK-74 etc. This became painfully apparent to the blog author [when he attended a court case as a juror](#). The prosecutor kept referring to a firearm presented as evidence as "an AK-47 assault rifle". As the case progressed, it emerged that the firearm in question had a different firing mechanism as it was incapable of automatic fire (it could only fire in semi-automatic mode), had a laminated stock, used stamped parts and was made by an American manufacturer named Ewbank Manufacturing from Winslow, Arizona.

Posted by [The Editor](#) at 2:16 AM

Labels: [AK-47 family](#)

10 comments:



[Wojciech Imbierowicz](#) [December 24, 2012](#)
at 3:41 PM

Iron sights that are adjustable up to 1000,

800, or even 600 meters are completely useless in my opinion. In real warfare conditions, it looks like it's nearly impossible to hit anybody from further than approx. 400-500 meters with any 7.62x39-fed AK rifle. It may be due to the bad 7.62x39 aerodynamics (compared to the 7.62x51, 5.56x45 or even 5.56x39 ammo, as you mentioned in one of your previous posts, "AK47vs. M-16" or something like that), short distance between the front and the rear sights, which is clearly visible on all images of the AK-family rifles, and maybe rather poor (russian, korean, chinese etc.) ammo quality?

What do you think about it? Do you agree with me?

PS. Merry christmas, happy new year and greetings from Poland!

14-years old kid :)

[Reply](#)

▼ [Replies](#)



[The Editor](#) [December 26, 2012](#)
[at 12:07 AM](#)

For the average person, about 400-500 meters is about the most they can shoot reliably, but there are exceptional people who can shoot well beyond this.

When it comes to man-sized targets, it is hard for many people to hit one at 400+ meters with iron sights (heck, even 300 meters is a challenge). This is true for all rifles, not just AK rifles. This is not necessarily because of the design of the sights or the ammo quality, but also because of the person shooting the rifle.

However, there are people who are capable of hitting targets beyond that range with iron sights. For example, here in the US, the Marine Corps requires every recruit (male or female) to hit targets from 200-500 meters with a M-16 rifle and iron sights, to qualify as Marines.

There are also "service rifle" competitions in the US, where people have to use rifles which are currently in use or were in use by US military and in these competitions, people shoot out to 600, 800 and 1000 meter ranges with iron sights. One of the categories in these competitions is "Foreign Military Rifles", where people use AK-74, SKS, FN-FAL etc. and they also shoot at these distances! Of course, people in these competitions are expert shooters and far better at shooting than the average soldier.

Merry christmas to you as well, happy new year and greetings from the USA!



[The Editor](#) [December 26, 2012](#)
[at 2:38 AM](#)

I forgot to mention that there are similar "service rifle" competitions held in many other countries around the world as well. So there are some talented shooters in every country in this world, who are capable of hitting targets at longer ranges.

[Indra Ida Bagus](#) [June 9, 2013](#) at



5:00 AM

Well, AK-47 was the first model (as you can see in the article), no wonder if it has a very bad accuracy. But how ever the worst accuracy of AK family is the AKM. The AK-101 is very good until a lot elite military organization (or what ever is it) adopt it. I'm also still 12 =D



Karim Khan July 5, 2013 at 12:13 PM

ya its slightly up n down barrel when fire or reload.



jbtiburon November 4, 2013 at 8:04 PM

Wow when I served not hitting a figure 11 @ 1000yds with a L1A1 was a fail. Standards have dropped!

Mind you the elephant gun was pretty good at the longer range shots, at least better then the 5.56 rounds.

Reply



Daniel Avrit February 4, 2013 at 9:11 PM

This was a great read, very informative. Thanks for the pics too!

Reply



Hatosan September 1, 2013 at 10:06 AM

Excellent info! and btw, is there any AKs related website that I could check for AK variants? I'm looking for some answer and I couldn't find any. Or is there a way that I

can contact with the Editor? Need some confirmation about an Ak model. I have a picture but I'm not sure if it's even an AK, since I have never seen such muzzle before. If the editor could contact me, that would be great!

[Reply](#)



[BucketOfTruth](#) [March 9, 2014 at 9:07 AM](#)

You may not hit a target at 1000 yards, but you can get it close enough for covering fire. If the guy you are shooting at hears bullets wiz by, or hitting nearby, he is going to duck for cover. Useless if you hare hunting, but not necessarily in a tactical situation.

[Reply](#)



[Anupam Dev](#) [May 13, 2014 at 1:56 AM](#)

Amazing aritcle..thanks for such a great explanation

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