The SKS Carbine

(CKC45g)

SKS CARBINE SPECIFICATIONS*	
Caliber	7.62 x 39 mm M43
Muzzle Velocity	2,410 feet per second
Operating System	Semiautomatic, gas
Weight, complete but unloaded With BladeBayonet With Cruciform Bayonet	 8.50 lbs 8.20 lbs
Length, overall Bayonet extended Bayonet folded	 49.6 inches 40.2 inches
Barrel Length	20.5 inches
Bore Diameter Groove Diameter	7.62 mm (.300 inches) 7.90 mm (.311 inches)
Magazine Capacity	10, non-detachable box magazine, staggered row
Nominal Rate of Fire	480 rounds per minute
* These specifications apply to SKS Carbines manufactured at Tula Arsenal in the Russian Republic of the former Soviet Union. Slight variations in measurements and weights will be noted from model variation to model variation and by manufacturers in various countries.	

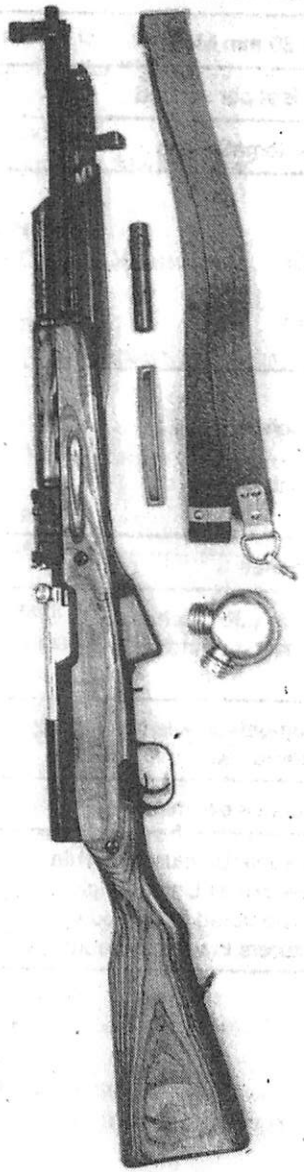

Figure 1. SKS45g with sling, cleaning kit and oil bottle

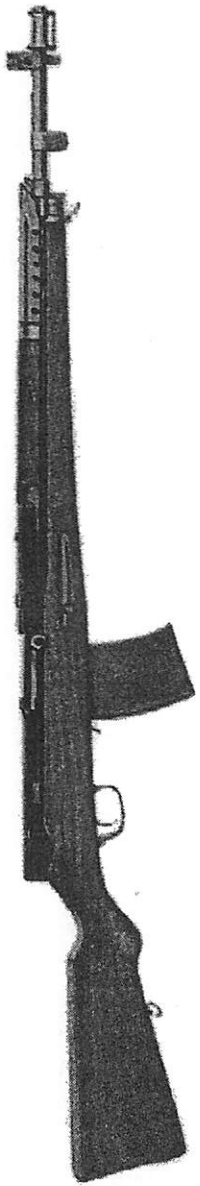

Fig. 2 Simonov SVS38

Introduction

The basic design of the SKS semiautomatic carbine 7.62 *Samozaryadnyi Karabin Sisyemi Simonova Obrazets 1945g* (which translates to 7.62 Simonov System Selfloading Carbine Model 1945) was developed by Sergei Gavrilovich Simonov, see Figure 1. It grew out of more than twenty-seven years of design experience and development work as well as intense competition with, among others, Fedor Vasilevich Tokarev, whose semiautomatic rifle was adopted in 1938 over Simonov's own AVT36 (Figure 2).

Field experience with the Tokarev SVT38 and its revised version, the SVT40 (Figure 3) suggested that the powerful 7.62 x 54R cartridge produced a high rate of parts breakage. Because of the large cartridge, the SVT38/40 had to be made larger and heavier than was desirable. But before changes could be instituted that might have led

Figure 3. Tokarev SVT40

to a reduction in size and weight of the SVT38/40, World War II began. To meet the Red Army's need for millions of small arms, production of the SVT40 and the obsolete Mosin Nagant Model 1891/30 bolt action rifle was increased to the maximum (Figure 4).

The Origins of the SKS

Leading Soviet ordnance officials had long been aware of the need for a less powerful rifle cartridge and in 1939, work was begun on the development of a new intermediate cartridge. Only the year before, German ordnance designers had started similar work, and won the race when they fielded the new 7.92 x 33 mm cartridge for the *Maschinekarabiner* 42 (Mkb 42) assault rifle. The Soviet goal, as it

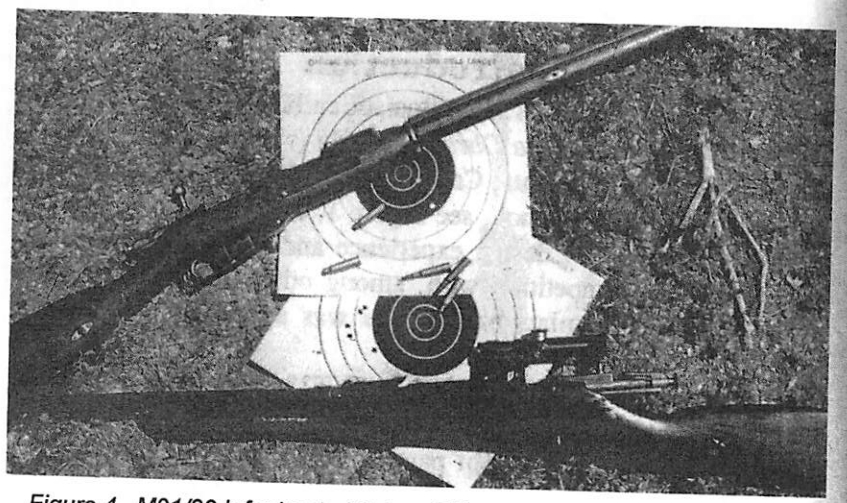

Figure 4. M91/30 Infantry and Sniper Rifles

had been in Germany, was to develop a cartridge that could be fired in a battle rifle with full automatic fire capability.

By 1943, Soviet designers had perfected the new M1943 intermediate cartridge (7.62 x 39 mm). It was first chambered in a short rifle, or carbine, developed by Simonov. The new weapon had a ten round magazine and a folding bayonet. A preproduction run was completed in the spring of 1944 and they were sent to front line forces fighting on the First Byelorussian Front for testing under battlefield conditions. The reports from the combat troops were enthusiastic and with only minor changes, the new carbine was adopted by the Red Army.

But when the war ended in May, 1945, the new carbine was no longer necessary to a nation now awash in military weaponry. Simonov continued to make minor improvements to the SKS and it finally entered production in 1949 at Tula Arsenal, and in 1953 at Izhevsk. But it was to remain a front line weapon for only a short time before it was replaced by the *7.62 Avtomat Klashnikova Obrazets 1947g*, or AK47 (Figure 5) which entered production in 1951. Production ended at Izhevsk in 1954 and at Tula in 1955. The SKS is still used by ceremonial guards units in Russia today.

The SKS45 was manufactured in seven countries (see Identifying your SKS Carbine, Table 1, page 18) and adopted by twenty-one nations. It was even more widely distributed by the Soviets as military assistance to various national liberation armies around the world during the Cold War. Vast numbers of SKS Carbines were captured in Grenada (from Cuban and Soviet sources), Lebanon (Soviet Union via Libya) and from Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army units during the War in Vietnam. Most of these latter SKS Carbines were manufactured in China.

The SKS Carbine in Military Service

The SKS Carbine was only briefly a front line weapon in the Soviet Union and was quickly superseded by the AK47 family of assault rifles in 1951.

Many have questioned the rationale for adopting a semiautomatic rifle at a time when military operations during World War II had clearly demonstrated the effectiveness and superiority of automatic weapons in the type of mechanized warfare that was expected to dominate future conflicts. The question itself demonstrates the fallacy of viewing the world from a single point of view.

Figure 5. AK47

The Soviet Union at the end of World War II was a nation in extremis. It had lost nearly a tenth of its total population and a quarter of its manufacturing and agricultural assets. Its great European cities, with the exception of Moscow, lay in ruins. The country was in no condition to wage further war against a coalition of nations that had

demonstrated clear technical superiority and possessed nuclear weapons. The Post-War period was a time to rebuild. While it may have appeared to the West that the Soviet Union was set upon a reckless course of aggression in the years 1946 to 1955, such was not the case. Soviet gains in this period were confined wholly to areas which they had reconquered from the retreating Nazi armies, and which allowed them to rebuild their infrastructure. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Rumania were the victims of internal subversion, not outright Soviet conquest, unlike the tiny Baltic states which were too far from Western assistance to have been helped.

Whenever Soviet expansionism came up hard against Western interests in these years—Berlin, Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, France and South Korea—the Soviet Union refrained from committing troops and worked instead through local assets. The vast Soviet steam roller of 1945 had spent itself on the long march to Berlin.

At the end of World War II, the Red Army was armed primarily with the Mosin Nagant rifle, as modified in 1930, a variety of submachine guns firing a pistol bullet and several million semiautomatic rifles, the SVT38/40, production of which had ended prematurely in 1944 due to inherent design flaws. Production of an effective select fire assault rifle did not begin until 1951 and the vast Red Army was not completely equipped with the AK47 until the late 1950s. The SKS Carbine was thus a far better weapon than the Mosin Nagant bolt action rifle, in spite of its shortcomings.

In China, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) adopted the SKS Carbine as the Type 56 and placed it into production in 1956 for many of the same reasons. When they assumed power in 1949 by evicting the Nationalist Government, the main task before them lay in pacifying the country and consolidating their power. Invasion of China by foreign forces, or even the badly weakened Nationalist government, was not a major concern. They were friendly enough for the moment with the Soviet Union, the Japanese Army which had terrified China for sixty years was destroyed and the United States and Great Britain

had no intention whatsoever of mounting an invasion of the mainland. Nor did the People's Republic of China intend to invade any of their neighbors—at least those they did not consider a historical part of China, like Tibet.

As far as the PLA was concerned, the semiautomatic, ten round fixed magazine SKS Carbine was a major advance over the collection of German, Japanese, American and Chinese-produced bolt action rifles and Russian submachine guns that formed the majority of their small arms. The SKS was inexpensive to manufacture and did not require great skill upon the part of the workers who made it and the soldiers who had used it. It was therefore, an ideal weapon for a country as backward technologically as China.

The SKS Carbine in North America

Other than a few carbines tested by U.S. Army Ordnance authorities during the Cold War Years, the SKS Carbine has never been used for military purposes in North America. Here, it has always been considered a sporting weapon. In 1986, Congress amended the 1968 Gun Control Act to allow the importation of nonautomatic military long arms designed before the end of 1945 for use by collectors, hunters and sport shooters. Subsequent changes to the law also allowed the importation of obsolete, surplus military weapons from former communist bloc nations after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. As a result, more than 1,000,000 SKS Carbines were imported from Russia, East Germany, Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of China up to 1996 when the Clinton Administration ended the practice by a combination of executive order, pressure on various federal agencies and an implied threat to the "most favored nation" status of the exporting countries.

All Soviet SKS Carbines—except for war trophies—were imported into the United States under the 1986 Gun Control Act. With few exceptions, SKS Carbines from the Russian Federation and the former German Democratic People's Republic were refinished. Metal parts were reblued and stocks scraped, sanded and refinished. In many cases,

marks of former Soviet client states have been removed. The authors have observed more than one SKS with Arabic markings only partly obliterated, indicating that some Soviet and East Bloc SKS Carbines had been returned from Arabic-speaking countries which had received them as military aid. Only a very few East German SKS carbines were imported into the U.S. A small quantity of Yugoslav SKS carbines were imported in the 1987 by Mitchell Arms of Santa Ana, California. The large quantities of Yugoslav SKS Carbines that we see today became available in 2001 from a number of importers. These included the Models of 1959, 1959/1966 and 1959/1966A1.

No SKS carbines have yet been imported from North Korea and the few now in the U.S. were generally brought back as war trophies from Viet Nam. A few thousand Romanian SKS carbines were imported beginning in 1999. As many as 7,000 Albanian SKS carbines were brought in starting in 2002.

Chinese-made SKS carbines appeared in the U.S. as early as 1986. They were first imported for commercial sale by NORINCO (China *No*rth *In*dustries *Co*rporation) and later by China Sports. Early carbines were primarily ex-military weapons (Type 56) that had been refinished. When the supply of these began to run low, new, "civilian" versions were produced and exported to the U.S. The official Chinese designation for these "civilian" SKS Carbines is Model 21.

No SKS-manufacturing nation, including the former Soviet Union, took Simonov's design to the limits as did the arms designers associated with China Ordnance Corporation. Improvements in fabrication techniques led to a series of modified Type 56 SKS Carbines including the Type 63, Type 68 and Type 84.

The select-fire Type 68 could use either the SKS fixed magazine or a magazine similar to the AK-47s thirty round detachable box magazine. It was also equipped with a bolt-hold open activated by the magazine follower after the last round was fired. It is quickly identified by its large knurled, cylindrical gas regulator which projects from the front of the gas cylinder. Gas pressure to the bolt can be adjusted by loosening the gas regulator retaining lever on the front left side of the

gas tube and turning the regulator to change the size of the gas port. Early models of the Type 68 had machined receivers, later models had receivers stamped from sheet steel. Like its predecessor, the Type 63, it also used an AK-style rotary bolt. The Type 84 has all of the Type 68's features and can use the AK47 thirty round magazine interchangeably.

As interesting as the "continuation-models" are, because of their select-fire features, they are not available commercially in the United States and so are described only briefly, here.

Repairing An SKS Carbine

The SKS Carbine was designed and manufactured for use by soldiers who had a minimum of technical skills and training. As a result, the SKS is a very rugged, simple-to-operate-and-repair shoulder arm. Most common malfunctions can easily be fixed by the owner following the diagnostic chart found in Appendix H, and the instructions in Appendices C and E. Currently, most parts for the SKS are readily available. Appendix J also contains a list of parts suppliers.

The SKS Carbine is not prone to breakage when used with service grade ammunition that meets former Warsaw Pact specifications or current SAAMI (USA) specifications. Those reloading for the SKS Carbine should bear this in mind and not exceed specifications listed in any authoritative loading manual published since 1990.

In the rare event that a part does break and no replacement is available, anyone capable of using common hand tools can fashion most parts other than the barrel, bolt, bolt carrier and certain rear sight components. A basic knowledge of machine tools and procedures will allow all but the barrel to be manufactured. Save the broken part to be replaced and use it as a model. Take very careful measurements from it and check dimensions often as you fashion the new part.

One of the authors has fabricated several parts including an extractor, front sight post and magazine follower using only hand tools. Keep in mind that the metric standard of measurement was used in all original factories and all threads are metric as well.

Conventions

1. "Right side" or "left side" refers to the side of the firearm to the shooter's right or left when shouldered properly.
2. All directions are given from the shooter's point of view—i.e., looking toward the muzzle.
3. All references are to the Russian-manufactured SKS Carbine, unless otherwise noted.
4) It was not possible to equate parts changes to serial number ranges as in previous books in the "For Collectors Only®" series as serial numbering conventions used vary widely. Most SKS Carbines have been repaired and refurbished and this has produced a situation where two SKS Carbines with serial numbers only a few digits apart will often differ radically in such parts as stock bolts, extractors, bayonets, bolt carriers, etc. This book will tell you which part is correct for both original and for refurbished SKS Carbines.
5) The design of certain SKS parts were modified during the course of manufacture. In the text, these parts and their changes are identified as "Type 1," "Type 2" and so on. The use of "type" was not part of any official nomenclature and is used here for convenience only.
6) Quotation marks are often used in the text to indicate factory-applied markings. The quotation marks were not part of the factory-applied marking unless noted otherwise.
7) Although the SKS was designed and manufactured according to the metric standard of measurement, the decimal inch system is used throughout this book as it is more familiar to North American readers. Measurements can converted from decimal inches to metric centimeters by multiplying by 2.54 and to millimeters by multiplying by 25.4.
8) Screw hole measurements are from the point used as an index to the center of the hole, unless otherwise stated.
9) The reader may find information repeated several times throughout the text. This has been done deliberately to save having to turn back and forth to find specific information.
10) If you are uncertain of the definition of a specific term used in the text, refer to the glossary in Appendix K.

The original SKS Carbine was the Soviet Model 1945 SKS Carbine produced between 1949 and 1955 at Tula and Izhevsk arsenals, the former between 1949 and 1955 and the latter between 1953 and 1954. The most common variation available in the United States is that manufactured in the People's Republic of China since 1956. SKS Carbines imported before the early 1990s were primarily refurbished Chinese military weapons designated the Type 56. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian SKS Carbines were also imported in large numbers. Since 1993, most Chinese SKS Carbines have been the non-military Model 21. A few SKS Carbines produced in East Germany, 500 from Yugoslavia and a few thousand Romanian SKS carbines have also been imported.

SKS Russian Military Variations

There are only four variations in the Russian SKS line. All were manufactured as experimental weapons for testing only and none are available on the commercial market in the United States, as of this writing. Because of their historical importance, most surviving examples are found only in museums in the member states of the former Soviet Union. See Appendix A.

There are several variations of the commercially available SKS Carbines that have become available in the United States since 1992. All incorporate standard SKS Carbine parts but are supplied with smaller-than normal capacity magazines, shorter barrels, polymer or other stock configurations and so on. Some were manufactured without provision for the cleaning rod and most were not equipped with a bayonet. As of this writing, all were manufactured in China, none are, or were, military in origin and all are described below.

Chinese Sporting Models

SKS Hunter This Chinese export model was produced for sale as a hunting rifle. It is basically a standard SKS Carbine without a bayonet lug and bayonet. It had a 20 inch barrel, an ambidextrous safety, a five round magazine and an adjustable rear sight. A sling swivel was