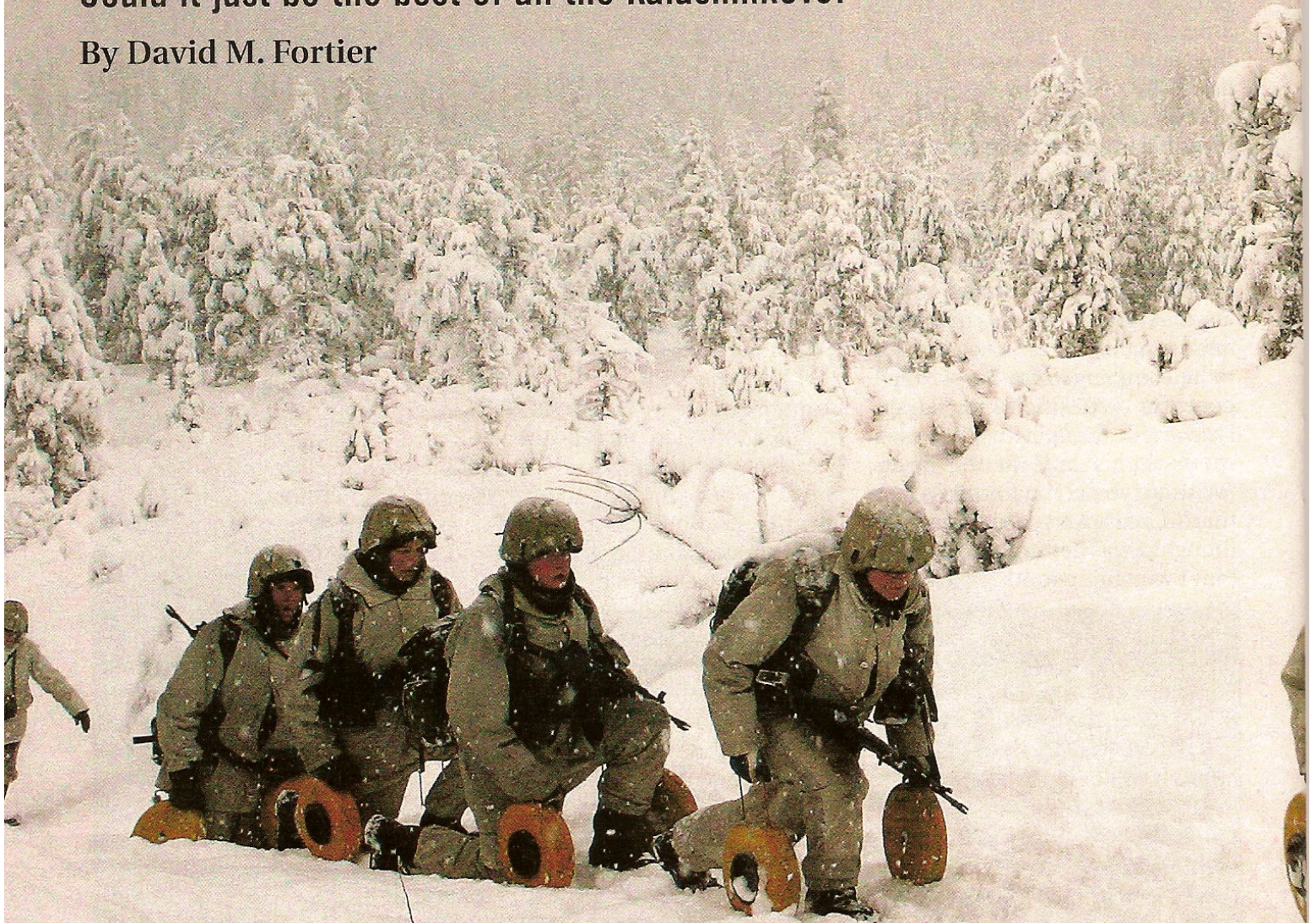


Finland's Rynnakkokivaari 95 TP Assault

Could it just be the best of all the Kalashnikovs?

By David M. Fortier



Good grief, I thought, as I tried to estimate the wind howling across the Vattajanniemi training area. To my front, at a distance of 450 meters, were two Finnish military pop-up targets, just waiting to be shot. Standing around me were a number of Finnish reservists who were helping to run the annual Lapua Sniper Competition. With a break in the match, they had offered me the chance to fire an Rk 95 TP (Rynnakkokivaari 95 Taittopera—Assault Rifle 1995, Folding Stock) assault rifle in 7.62x39mm. I had immediately accepted, and now they were interested in seeing if the “Yankee journalist” could run something besides a camera—nothing like a little pressure to get your competitive juices flowing.

Rifle



Finnish troops armed with Rk 62 assault rifles move out on winter maneuvers. Photo courtesy of the Finnish Defence Forces

Dropping to a sitting position, I got comfortable in the Lohtaja sand. Then I snapped up the long-range aperture on the rear sight, chambered a round and wished for a sling. The wind was a steady 25 mph, with gusts pushing well past this. As the rear sight was only good out to 300 meters, I guesstimated the additional holdover. Wind compensation? I held about six feet to the left, concentrated on the front sight and squeezed. The SAKO spit an empty case in a curving arc high into the air. What seemed like half a minute went by before sand sprayed into the air, indicating a miss. I was low and needed to hold farther into the wind. Making a correction, I fired again and there was a cheer as the right target dropped. This was especially interesting, as I had been trying for the left one.

Egad, the wind velocity combined with the '58 Plymouth Fury aerodynamics of the S309 ball round made for truly brutal wind drift. Holding farther to the left, I fired again and the shot went between the two targets. Shoving the front sight even farther away from the pop-up, I fired again and it dropped. Another cheer went up. With the elevation and wind compensation figured out, the Rk 95 proceeded to knock down the silhouettes with surprising regularity. I will admit I was somewhat shocked at how well the SAKO shot at this extended distance.

Engaging pop-up targets at 492 yards with an iron-sighted 7.62x39mm Kalashnikov derivative is not normally very fruitful, but then the Rk 95 is no ordinary Avtomat. A very well-designed and -manufactured piece, it's every bit as rugged as the land it protects. Its lineage can be traced back to 1954-55 when the Finnish Defence Forces (FDF) began looking for a modern combat rifle. Following their defeat at the hands of the Soviet Union's Red army during the Continuation

War, Finland had to pay heavy war reparations and their military was limited. When the FDF was able to begin reequipping, one badly needed item was a replacement for the obsolete 7.62x53R Jalkaväkikivääri m/39 (Infantry Rifle M1939). Although a good weapon in its day, the Mosin-Nagant-based five-shot bolt-action rifle was badly outclassed by the newly fielded AK-47s facing them from across the Soviet border.

At this time the West was concentrating on developing/fielding 7.62x51mm battle rifles, while the East based its latest rifles around the intermediate 7.62x39mm M43 cartridge. After carefully considering both concepts, the Finnish Defence Forces decided the 7.62x39mm round was the most suitable for their needs. With the cartridge chosen, quantities of AK-47 rifles were purchased from Poland in 1956 and 1957. Although the Finns liked the AK-47's robust and reliable nature, it was not completely suitable for their needs in its standard Com Bloc configuration. Due to this, the FDF requested both SAKO and Valmet (formerly VKT) to develop a more suitable Kalashnikov-based design.

So work was carried out to redesign the AK-47 to make it easier and less expensive to produce and more suitable for use by Finnish troops. Lauri Oksanen performed most of the redesign work for Valmet, and this first model, the m/58, was accepted for testing by the FDF. This was followed by the Rk 60, which was utilized for field trials. The Rk 60 evolved into what can best be described as the classic Finnish assault rifle, the Rk 62, which was officially adopted in 1962. Simple, rugged and reliable, the Rk 62 was a true improvement over the Soviet design. Beautifully made, it sported dramatically improved sights, a simple stock, synthetic

95 TP Assault Rifle



Adopted in 1995, the Rk 95 TP was an improvement over the older Rk 62.



The Rk 62 was adopted to replace the obsolete m/39 rifles still in service. Note the leather strap to prevent loss of the magazine. Photo courtesy of the Finnish Defence Forces



Developed by Valmet, the Rk 62 (seen in foreground with late-style handguards) was an improved AK-47. Photo courtesy of the Finnish Defence Forces



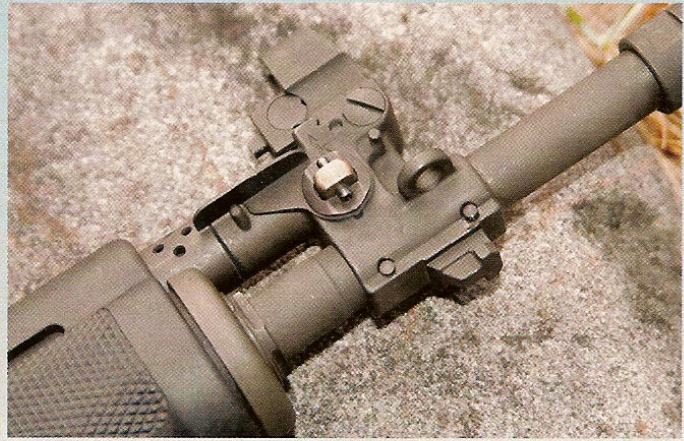
Left to right: 6.8 SPC, 7.62x39mm, 7.92x33K. The 7.62x39mm is very well suited to the terrain encountered in Finland.

furniture and a flash suppressor. Both Valmet and SAKO were contracted to manufacture it, and production of this model began in 1963-64. Valmet's production run began with serial number 100,001, while SAKO's production run began with serial number 200,001. The first rifles were delivered in 1965. It served the Finnish army well throughout the Cold War and remained in production until 1988. Although small improvements were made during production, the nomenclature remained unchanged. It's also interesting to note that the Israeli Galil was based directly upon the Rk 62.

In the late 1980s the FDF began to consider improving the basic Rk 62. Research was conducted in 1986-87, which led to the FDF developing requirements for a new assault-rifle design in 1988. As SAKO and Valmet had been merged in 1987, with Valmet eventually disappearing, this work was undertaken by SAKO. In August 1989 SAKO submitted three different prototypes for evaluation. These were quite different from the Rk 62 in regard to



The Rk 95 TP features a combination muzzlebrake/grenade launcher, which also accepts a sound suppressor.



The Rk 95 TP's gas block features a two-position valve, allowing the gas flow to be shut off.

sights, folding stock and furniture design. In addition, they had the ability to mount optical sights and launch rifle grenades.

Following field tests, two models were selected for trials. The army then ordered 10 rifles, of which five had conventional AK-type selectors and five had a thumb-operated selector mounted on the left side of the weapon's receiver. These were known as 7.62 Rk 90 proto I and proto II. Over the next couple of years further testing refined and evolved the design, in some cases back toward the original Rk 62. Two prototypes designated Rk 92 were produced for tests and delivered to the FDF in the spring of 1993. Eventually, the design was finalized and adopted as the Rk 95 TP in 1995. Production of the new rifle began in the summer of 1995, with the first rifle bearing serial number 960,001. Manufacture of this model was completed in 1997.

Like the earlier Rk 62, which remains in service, the Rk 95 TP is based upon Mikhail Kalashnikov's basic design. It utilizes his long-stroke gas system and rotating bolt. Like the AK-47, the foundation for this model is a machined-steel receiver. This is profiled to provide additional support to the magazine compared to the Rk 62. Mated to this



A side rail allows day/night optics to be easily mounted. Also note the top-cover retainer.



One drawback to side-mounted optics is that they tend to sit rather high.

is a 16½-inch hammer-forged barrel with four-groove rifling and a 1:9.4-inch twist chambered for 7.62x39mm.

The protected front sight, which is adjustable for windage and elevation, is located on the gas block. The rear sight, which

95 TP Assault Rifle



The stock folds to the right to prevent it from interfering with side-mounted optics.



Since it was first fielded, the Rk 95 TP has proven to be extremely popular with Finnish troops. Photo courtesy of the Finnish Defence Forces

has dual 150m and 300m apertures, is mounted onto the rear of the top cover. Sight radius is 18.3 inches. In addition to the standard daytime iron sights, tritium night sights are also mounted. Flipping the rear sight to a middle position allows the rear night sight to be viewed. The front night sight is housed at the rear of the front-sight block and must be flipped up for use. To ensure there is no loss of zero, the top cover is secured to the receiver by not only the traditional Kalashnikov method but also by an additional rotating lever. In addition to the standard iron sights, an optics rail is also mounted on the left side of the weapon's receiver. This allows

day/night optics to be easily mounted onto the weapon.

To facilitate launching rifle grenades from the weapon, a two-position valve (On/Off) was added to the gas system. This is actuated by a cut-off lever mounted onto the right side of the gas block. Rotating this perpendicular with the barrel shuts off the flow of gas to the operating system. To work in conjunction with this feature SAKO also developed a new muzzlebrake. The new unit was designed to reduce both muzzle rise and flash while also acting as a launcher for rifle grenades. It also acted as a mount for a sound suppressor and a blank firing device.

SPECIFICATIONS: Rk 95 TP

Maker:

SAKO Oy

Caliber:.....7.62x39mm

Operation:Kalashnikov long-stroke gas with rotating bolt

Barrel:.....16½ inches long with four-groove rifling and a 1.94-inch twist

Feed:.....30-round detachable box magazine

Sights:.....Protected front post adjustable for windage and elevation, dual 150/300-meter rear apertures; also tritium night sights

Overall Length:36.6 inches; 26½ inches with stock folded

Weight:.....8.8 pounds without magazine

Muzzle Velocity: 2,345 fps

Cyclic Rate:.....650 rpm

Status:.....Out of production but still in front-line service with Finnish Defence Forces

Although the Finns evaluated thumb-operated selector levers, they eventually returned to the standard Kalashnikov selector design. The top position of this design is safe, the center position is full auto, and the bottom position is semiauto. To make charging the weapon with the left hand easier, the bolt handle is angled up at approximately 45 degrees. The magazine release is an extended, AK-style lever. Feed is from polymer 30-round magazines.

In place of the Rk 62's tubular stock, the Rk 95 TP has a solidly locking unit that folds to the right side of the weapon for storage. Although the contour resembles



A semiauto variant, the M92S, was made in limited quantities. It's seen here with a suppressor mounted.



The Rk 95 TP's magazine release is an extended paddle.

the stock utilized on the Galil, the locking mechanism is different. To allow cleaning gear to be carried on the weapon, the upper tube of the stock features a storage compartment. With the stock closed the weapon measures 26½ inches. Unfolded the Rk 95 TP is 36.6 inches long. A synthetic pistol grip and rugged handguards are also fitted. Weight is 8.3 pounds without a magazine.

In the hands, the Rk 95 TP feels very good. It handles and balances well, although the stock may be a bit long with body armor. The sights are simple, robust and well suited for use on a combat rifle. The weapon is easy to operate, but the Kalashnikov selector lever is a drawback. Cycle rate of fire is 650 rounds per minute. Muzzle velocity of the standard S309 ball round is 2,345 fps. Also issued is a VJ313 tracer load, color coded with a white bullet tip; AP479 armor-piercing load, color coded with a blue tip; blank, identified by a blue-colored wooden bullet; and a dummy identified by nickel plating and longitudinal grooves. Standard packing is a 30-round cardboard box. Effective range is

listed as 300 meters. Reliability, as to be expected, is outstanding.

As stated previously, the accuracy of this model is quite good. During a previous trip to Finland I had a chance to test-fire an Rk 95 TP from a bench rest on Lapua's 600-meter outdoor range. Using high-quality 123-grain Lapua ball ammunition and the iron sights, I averaged 1½-inch five-shot groups at 100 meters. Firing from a sitting position at 300 meters I was able to keep all my shots well inside a silhouette target. Regarding accuracy, I was told by my hosts at the 2006 Lapua Sniper competition about one particularly impressive bit of marksmanship performed with an M92S, the semiauto version of the Rk 95 TP. At a previous competition one competitor's sniper rifle had gone down during a timed event. His spotter, using a scoped M92S, immediately took over and made first-round hits on silhouettes out to 600 meters. This is a feat you will not perform with a standard Com Bloc-pattern Avtomat.

Practical accuracy and controllability of the piece are very good. It is much more user-friendly

than an AKM or AK-74. This is thanks to the better sights with a longer sight radius and more comfortable stock/fore-end. Controllability on full auto is typical of a 7.62x39mm weapon. Stay on the trigger and it jumps about. Negatives? The machined receiver is heavy and holds heat, the side-mounted optics sit very high, and the standard Kalashnikov selector blows chunks.

I am very impressed by the Finnish Defence Force's Rk 95 TP assault rifle. Although the Russians moved away from the 7.62x39mm cartridge decades ago the Finns remain quite happy with it. They feel it offers the best combination of penetration and terminal performance for the terrain they will be fighting on. Mated to the tough Rk 95 TP, it makes a combination well suited for fighting in Finland's forests.

Although the Rk 95 TP is now out of production, it will remain in service well into the future. It is possibly the best Kalashnikov assault rifle ever fielded. ©

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