

Collecting and Shooting the Military Surplus Rifle



<http://www.firearmreflections.com> is live with new articles - with many more to come!!!



Your one-stop source for professional optics!

Kalinka Optics Warehouse

<http://www.kalinkaoptics.com>



## THE SPIRIT(s) BEHIND A GUN:

A Previously Owned Firearm  
is it Simply Wood & Blue Steel?  
or, Could There Possibly be Something More?

By Mark Trope

Article Published Date: 11/17/2007

Article by Mark Trope

[Adobe PDF Downloadable Version of Article](#)

It's a strange thing, go into a gun store and handle a new gun (Note.1). It may very well be a wonder of design, or a work of art, but, until it gets some history behind it, there's just no character to it! That new gun is like an empty vessel, waiting to be filled. It seems, well...bland!

If you decide to acquire title to that new gun, you become the one to build its character. You are designated to be the keeper of its history and stories. The first stage in a new arms life may very well be a range shooting session to bore sight and adjust the scope, or develop an accurate load. Taking on its first hunt writes a chapter in its history, and adds to the character of the gun. A target or match arm's first "Top Gun" win is always a story to be told, and retold! As we said, a new gun's history has yet to be written, but, what about a used arm?

Go to the same gun store and pick up a used arm. The difference can almost be felt through your hands! Just the look and feel of the gun tells *volumes* about its history.

A "truck gun" almost always has dust in every nook and cranny, and scratches where it lay in a window rack. A "barn gun" usually has a fine coating of rust and splotches on both wood and metal. A six-gun or semi-auto pistol carried in the course of business almost always shows holster wear. I once looked at a *real* cowboys gun and holster/ belt rig in a gun shop. The holster and belt showed the scars and type of wear & stains that only long, hard days & nights in the saddle can produce. The gun had all the usual signs, finish wear at all the edges, bluing on the grip frame was dull and gritty feeling, etc. These guns are the tools of a working men and woman. They may uphold the law; provide security, or keep poaching varmints from a ranch or farm's livestock etc. Such guns are usually respected almost as much as any valuable, reliable, hardworking man or woman on a crew or team.

Hunting rifles carried in brushy woods carry their own brands. Various nicks in the stock tell that tale about being carried through brambles and tree limbs. Dull spots on either side of the upper fore stock and left side of the stock bring out the fact the gun was carried across the front of someone's body. The finish on the steel will show signs of the kind of wear that comes from being carried in fall rain & snow. Perhaps that rifle harvested the first deer for a man. It may have been the rifle a young son or daughter carried on their first hunt, while dad broke in another, newer rifle. How many times have that gun brought home the meat, or been present while a new chapter has been written during some adventure?

Target and match rifles & handguns are another breed of cat altogether. They usually show signs of very careful care. If they are from another era of shooting, and they wear finely adjustable front and rear aperture sights, the sights alone could tell some interesting stories. How many times has a shooter peered through them, trying to make every shot count? The knurled adjustment knobs on a fine Redfield or Lyman aperture may be almost devoid of finish. The fingers or a knowledgeable shooter bringing them to "zero" impacts creditability to those sights. The part of match shooting .22 rim fire arms that often discloses the most wear is the bold handle. Usually, it is almost devoid of finish! Match shooters put lots of rounds downrange, and the bolt gets worked a lot. Once again; the hands of a good shooter running his rounds before the clock runs out. And, once again, more history and stories a rifle could tell.

Custom match arms can tell special tales. Often, if a recognized master, or a group of specialized masters builds the arm, one can *almost* feel their presence as the gun is handled and shot. It's almost like they are standing behind you, watching, and talking directly to you while you shoot it in a match.

*"We did our very best work on this rifle, nothing was left to chance. Make sure the rifles forend is against the rest stop. Watch the wind flags. Take up pressure slowly on the trigger. Hold the stock gently now. An X, yes, that's right! Now, reset the rifle on the bags, do it again, just like before." Watch for that tricky wind reverse that comes down the canyon. It's cost you a match in the past...*

Old military arms have their ghosts too. Consider that quite often the markings on an arm can tell what battles or campaigns it participated in. Perhaps research will disclose a rifle was at the battle of the Bulge. A freezing winter, death could be behind every tree. Perhaps a German farm boy held that K98 Mauser, was he a true believer in the Nazi cause; or just another frightened boy hoping to survive the war?

What about a British Enfield that was at Tobruk in North Africa? By all accounts, the British *should* have lost. But they didn't, the resolve of those brave men saw them through, despite overwhelming odds, and being understaffed and under equipped. That is the type of character and spirit impressed on a rifle. No new, or un-issued arm could ever carry itself like that.

Many Swiss K-31's still carry a card under the butt plate with the name and address of the man it was issued to. What are his stories and memories when Europe was in the throes of WWII?

So, next time you acquire or are thinking about acquiring a used arm; don't gauge its value strictly by a price guide, or what similar arms sell for on an auction site. Consider, if you will, the stories and spirit of the arm, and what it's gone through in its life. If you look and listen very hard, you may be quite surprised by what you see and hear!

Note 1
--------

A "new" gun is one that has never been sold at retail. It may pass through the hands of jobbers, distributors, wholesalers and possibly more than one retail dealer, but, until it is titled to a retail consumer, it is still considered new. Guns are test fired at the factory.
--

[Adobe PDF Downloadable Version of Article](#)