

Collecting and Shooting the Military Surplus Rifle

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Article by: Jamie Mangrum

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I dream of times long past, long before I was ever born. Although I work with technology as my job I think I may have been born a hundred years...too late. I am a romantic at heart. No, I am not suffering from a midlife crisis. I have had these same feelings for most of my life. Let me explain.

I crave things that test a man more than the mundane challenge of racing day after day (*in heavy traffic*) to my job. The prize I win? Sitting in a small office and staring at a computer screen, day-in and day-out. When my work day ends I get back in my vehicle and make the journey home. While I sit vegetating in my sealed capsule of sanctuary, in stop-n-go traffic, I look over at all of the unhappy people making the same pilgrimage as me and it makes me feel very sad. I wonder to myself, what have we become? Have all the frontiers been conquered?

Since I was a little kid I have craved adventure. Throughout my life I have had a good share of adventure. Even so I still find that I have a thirst that is impossible to quench and it never seems to go away. I do many things to supplant the need. Collecting military rifles is just one of many. I read every single night before falling asleep. I have read many great books about adventure, stories about the endurance of the spirit of man and what great feats we are capable of when put to the test. [One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey](#) is one of my favorite books about Richard Proenneke who went into the wilderness of

Alaska intending to build a cabin as an experiment to try and live a subsistence living for a short period of time. Over thirty-five years later he finally left his beautiful cabin (*in his eighties*) because age had finally brought his experiment to a conclusion.

I also watch movies like [Farewell to the King](#), starring Nick Nolte, about an American soldier during WWII trying to escape the war. He escapes Japanese occupation of [Corregidor Island](#) and lands on the Island of Borneo. Oddly enough he ends up becoming king of several head hunter tribes. British commandos parachute in and bring the war back into his path. I saw this movie in the theatre when it first came out. In my opinion this is a very highly underrated film and I would recommend it to anyone that loves war movies and mil-surp rifles. This panoramic adventure is on par with great epics directed by Sir David Lean such as *Lawrence of Arabia*. The story line will bring you back to Kipling like adventure stories of your youth. Something very lacking in today's video game world. It is the type of movie that makes you want to stand up and say with a great big uncontrollable grin, "I will do it! I will do it for king and country!"

You may ask yourselves what is the point of the above diatribe. This brings me to an email I received from a friend of mine. He said that he had a couple of Enfields in stock that had been converted to .45-70 caliber by Gibbs Rifle and that I should come down and take a look. The .45-70 is a caliber from a romantic era when men still embarked into the unknown frontier and made their way and fortunes out of nothing but hard work and determination. A .45-70 Enfield is something very unique. I have seen Arisakas and Siamese Mausers converted to this caliber and my curiosity has always been peeked. Not enough to actually buy one, but I have always wondered what it would be like to shoot one. I was very intrigued and made the trip down to his store and had no choice but to buy one.

Although Gibbs no longer makes the [Gibbs Summit Frontier](#) carbine periodically you can find used and new specimens at firearm dealers for around \$275 to \$400 depending upon condition and availability.



I have many Enfields. In fact it is one of my all time favorite bolt action military rifles. Give me an Enfield [No. 1 Mk III](#) or a [No. 4](#) and I am a very happy man. Until now, all of my Enfields have been in the original caliber of [.303 British](#). In my opinion there are few military rifles finer than the Enfield. The Enfield **is** the complete package when you consider the:

- speed and smoothness of the action;
- wood and metal fit and finish;
- and over-all accuracy.

It is really difficult to find anything negative to say about an Enfield.



To build the Frontier, Gibbs started with an Enfield No.1 Mk III [SMLE](#) receiver. They then installed a 21 inch heavy .45-70 caliber barrel. The barrel has a set of excellent [Williams Gun Sights](#) installed. For the furniture they used an SMLE stock set including the butt stock with a traditional brass butt plate and a modified fore stock. The butt and fore stocks both have a sling swivel stud installed that allows for the "quick detach" style commercial slings.



The fore stock has been shortened so that it has a snappy sporter style look. As you can see in **figures 2 and 3** the fore stock was inlet quite a bit to facilitate the much larger dimensions of the .45-70 barrel. Then the furniture was finished in a hand rubbed oil finish. The carbine has no hand guards.

The overall fit and finish of the metal is excellent and comparable to a high-end commercial hunting rifle.

Figure 4 shows a view looking down the huge .45 caliber bore and the Williams rear sight. The rear sight is adjustable for both windage and elevation. The windage and elevation adjustments are made easily using a small flat blade screw driver. The sight picture is exceptional.



The .45-70 was the military cartridge for the U.S. for the years 1873 to 1892. I wanted to start out with a not-so-hot load. The specs on the Gibbs carbine state not to exceed SAAMI specifications for the load and you should be alright. This means it should be safe to shoot most commercial ammo in the Frontier.

What is SAAMI?

The Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute is an association of the nation's leading manufacturers of sporting firearms, ammunition, and components. Since being founded in 1926, SAAMI has been actively involved in the publication of industry standards, coordination of technical data, and the promotion of safe and responsible firearms use. SAAMI currently publishes more than 700 voluntary standards related to firearm and ammunition quality and safety.

Web Site: <http://www.saami.org/>

I also did not want to start out reloading a cartridge I had never even shot before so I sought out a commercial load. [PMC](#) makes a suitable reproduction of the original military load using smokeless powder.

You know it **really** makes me smile when I think about shooting a 405 grain flat nose cast bullet down range at a velocity of 1250 feet per second. Shooting an accurate



cannon comes to mind.

PMC .45-70 vs. .303 British Ballistics Chart

Caliber	Weight (Grain)	Muzzle Velocity	Muzzle Velocity 100 Yds.	Energy 100 Yds.
45-70 Gov.	405	1350	1193	1280
.303 British	174	2400	2216	1898

The magazine is full when loaded with three .45-70 cartridges.

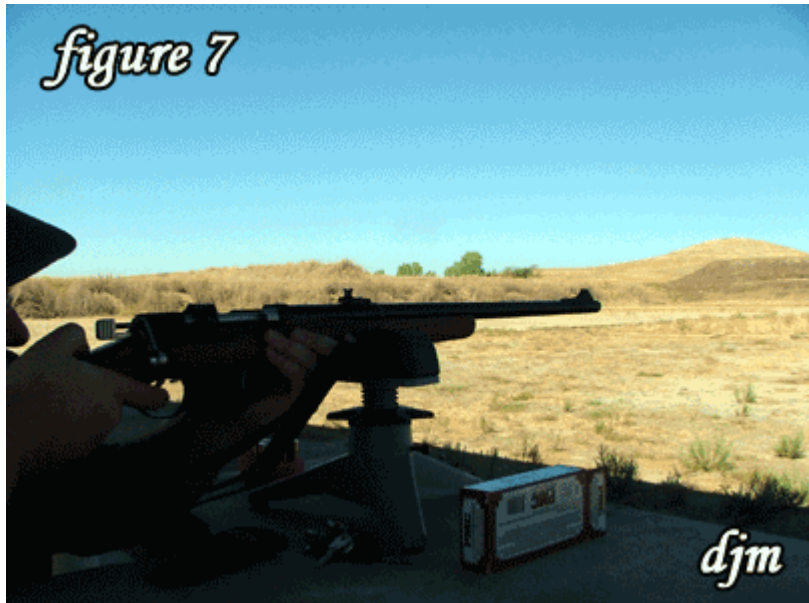
Figure 5 shows the standard 174 grain FMJ .303 British cartridge at the very bottom with three of the 405 grain .45-70 cartridges sitting above.

What monsters!



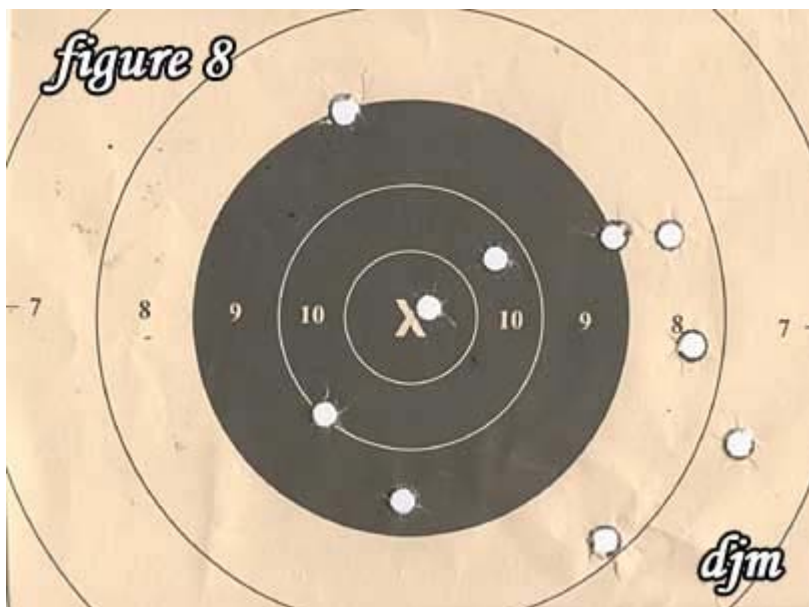
I like the look of the nickel plated bolt and trigger, but I think it would be an even better looking firearm if Gibbs had used stainless steel. But hey! They were working with original components, I should stop being so critical. The bolt functioned as well as you would expect of any typical Enfield, but the trigger was a little stiff. It was a little much to pull. It measured a stout 9 lbs on the trigger pull gauge. The only modification I would consider is adding a [Huber Concepts Enfield trigger](#). It would **greatly** improve performance.

Recoil was not what I expected



it to be at all. I had anticipated that even with the slip-on recoil pad the carbine would thump the living day lights out of my shoulder. It did not.

Figure 7 shows my friend Tony shooting from the rest and you can see, in the animated graphic, the plume of smoke and the minor rise of the muzzle when fired. I can say from both an off hand shooting position and from the bench it was comfortable to shoot.



One important thing I have to comment on: I swear! When the bullets hit the target you could hear a loud smacking noise. Every single time. Talk about positive feedback! My friend Tony noticed the same thing. So it was not my over active imagination playing tricks on me.

This little carbine was a blast to shoot! I have not had this much fun shooting in a while.

Figure 8 shows three magazines (9 rounds) shot at 50 yards in the off hand position. I am not very good with off hand shooting but that is because I don't practice off hand shooting.

The only problems I experienced with the carbine were:

- 1) It was a little difficult to load from the top of the receiver.
- 2) The trigger was stiff.
- 3) The last or third cartridge



was difficult to chamber and required some working. This happened every time. I examined everything involved with the process of feeding and could not figure why.

Figure 9 is a three shot group shot from the bench at 50 yards. Note that this is a small 25 yard target and not the typical SR-1 target center. Also note the huge holes!

All right...I feel my desires or cravings are placated enough for a little while. Now I have another tool in my arsenal of things that keep me smiling and wondering what frontiers are next to be conquered. I know that the Gibbs carbine did not ever actually exist in production a hundred years ago. But it is the kind of firearm I can imagine carrying into Africa or Alaska long before they were overrun by modern man. I am talking about a period of time just before the end of the 19th century. Imagine....stepping off a steamship with your pack and carbine looking for the next big adventure. Any adventure! And then you grin uncontrollably and utter.. the words:

"I will do it! I will do it for king and country!"

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