


Collecting and Shooting the Military Surplus Rifle



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Article written by: Ron Stresing

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A sudden calm in the late afternoon made me sit up and take notice. All the chipmunks and small birds around the bait stump had vanished. A shadow then moved in the swamp next to the bait site. A large bear had eased into the shadows and was watching the area around the bait. After maybe five minutes of watching, the bear walked out, and circled the bait and my tree, testing the wind. Watching from maybe twenty feet up, and twenty five yards from the bait, I cradled my Mosin carbine in the crook of my elbow, and eased off the safety. The bear met all the criteria of a trophy bear, the heavy build, large head, and thick black fur. After five long minutes of watching the bear to make sure it had no cubs in tow, I decided it was time to stop watching, and start harvesting.

Wrapping the sling around my arm I then placed my elbow over my knee and held just behind the bear's left shoulder. Feeding on the bait in a hollow stump, the bear had no idea a 180 grains of copper-jacketed lead was about to ruin it's day. I squeezed the trigger and the sledgehammer impact of the bullet knocked the bear forward into the stump. As I worked the bolt, the bear kicked itself backwards, out of the stump, biting at it's left shoulder and growling. A fast follow up shot to the base of the neck ended the bear's struggle, and the woods became quiet again. My eight year wait for a Wisconsin black bear permit had ended with the harvest of a 300 lb. trophy bear. Information from a tooth that the Wisconsin Department of natural Resources (DNR) requires being submitted for testing revealed my bear was 9 years old when taken.

So why did I choose a 50 year old Chinese-made bolt action carbine that was already obsolete when built for the hunt-of-a-lifetime? Simple, it fit me well, and I knew exactly where it would place the bullet when I pulled the trigger. Prior to using it for bear, three whitetail deer had fallen to the Type 53, all one-shot kills. Rugged, accurate, and above all reliable, Mosin carbines and rifles are excellent hunting guns. The [7.62x54](#) cartridge it fires is a "full power" military round, right between the popular .308 Winchester and .30-06 Springfield hunting calibers. Hunting ammo imported from former Eastern Bloc countries where these rifles used to serve as military weapons leads me to believe they are popular hunting guns in that area.

I am not the only one using these old firearms to harvest game. An article on wild boar hunts in modern day Poland showed maybe half of the hunters and guides carrying [M44's](#). A Mongolian wolf hunt on the cable TV show "Going Tribal" showed most of the herdsman using

M44 or Type 53 carbines. A Snow sheep hunt in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan on Outdoor Life Network (OLN) TV showed the guides carrying [M91/30's](#) with various scopes attached. Ever notice boxes of Czech made Sellior & Bellot 7.62x54 hunting ammo have Czech as well as English text? Some Hungarian soft point ammo I bought some years back was packaged the same. It's a solid bet Mosin rifles and carbines are harvesting big game all over Eastern Europe, Finland, the Balkans, and the Asian part of the former Soviet Union.

Rifle or carbine? Probably the most commonly seen member of the Mosin-Nagant rifle family is the M91/30. Sporting a 27 1/4" barrel and a 48" over-all length, it's considered long and heavy even among other WW II battle rifles. While not my first choice as a hunting gun, it has been used to harvest big game, and can be deadly accurate from a steady rest. Finn re-arsenaled M91/30's, as well as [Finn M39's](#), and M27's have heavy barrels and tighter diameter bores. Finnish rifles have a well-deserved reputation for accuracy, and are harvesting game in Finland to this day. If you don't mind toting a heavy rifle, and have steady rest to shoot from, it might be the right gun for you. For the close quarters of the blind I bear hunted from, or the thick Eastern deer woods it would have been rather unwieldy.

The M38 carbine, and more commonly seen M44 carbine with the attached folding bayonet have 20" barrels. These seem to be faster and easier to handle, and the shorter barrel seems to speed up target acquisition. The M38, and 91/59 are the most "user friendly" Mosins for hunting. As they lack the bayonet, they look ready to hit the woods right out of the box. The Chinese Type 53 and Warsaw Pact clones of the M44 are identical in size, weight and handling. If you want to remove the folding bayonet, it can be taken off by removing a single screw. The 91/59 is actually a M91/30 re-worked into a carbine with a 20" barrel. Less common than the M44, 91/59 carbines have a reputation as some of the most accurate Mosin carbines. If you are lucky enough to own a 91/38, a post WW II Czech re-work of a 91/30 into a carbine, I'd suggest wall hanging it rather than hunting with it. These carbines are so rare, many collectors (like myself) have never even seen one.

Scopes and accessories: I support the idea of preserving historic military arms. One has only to look at the "sporterization" of classic '03 Springfield rifles to what a crying shame it is to do this. I have always held to the same principle as the Hippocratic Oath, "first, do no

harm". Simple upgrades like synthetic stocks, slip-on recoil pads, aftermarket peep sights, etc. can replace G.I. parts without destroying or modifying the original parts or gun. Scope mounts for long eye relief scopes replace the rear sight leaf, and require no drilling or tapping. Simply save the G.I. parts, and replace them to restore the gun to it's original state. My Type 53 wears an ATI black synthetic stock. With the ATI stock, the rifle fits me better than my Winchester Model 70 .30-06. That is the only modification, as the trigger, sights, etc. are all original. Most Mosin stocks seem a little "short" in length of pull.

A simple inexpensive slip-on recoil pad solves the fit as well as recoil problems. The stripper clips that allowed fast reloading of these rifles in battle are another good hunting accessory. A stripper allows you to carry 5 rounds, ready to go, silently in your pocket.

The safety: The one big drawback in hunting with Mosin-Nagant rifles is the safety. The large knurled knob at the end of the bolt that can be turned to lock the bolt and prevent an accidental discharge. I prefer to carry with an empty chamber, then work the bolt and chamber a round if I jump game when walking in. My first whitetail deer was harvested this way, as she jumped up and crossed a fire lane. On stand I will have a round chambered, with the safety on. By holding the butt of the rifle in the crook of your elbow, the safety can be rotated quietly and quickly. Practice doing this until you are sure you can do it safely.

Hunting Ammo: Wisconsin, along with most other States, prohibits the use of non-expanding full metal jacket military ammunition for hunting. Twenty some years ago when I bought my Type 53, hunting ammunition was scarce and expensive. Norma was over \$30.00 per box, and Privi Partisan, imported under the Hanson brand name (\$15.00 per box) were all that was available. My how times have changed! Now quality ammo from Russia and former Balkan states runs less than "green box" Remington .30-06 shells! Wolf and Barnual (Russia) Privi Partisan, and HotShot (former Yugoslavia) and Sellior & Bellot (Czech Republic) all produce accurate and deadly soft point hunting ammo. Winchester imports and markets 7.62x54 hunting ammo as it's Metric brand. Also check out local gun shows for hunting ammo. I found 150 grain hunting loads made with quality loading components for \$15.00 at the last one I went to. I suggest range testing several brands to see what bullet weight and/or brand your rifle groups best. You can also reload, or load your own with new brass (www.grafs.com) and loading components (www.midwayusa.com). All the major powder manufacturers post loading data on their web sites.

My Type 53 shoots .308 dia bullets well, some Mosins may not, and may need .311-.312 dia. bullets. Again, try various loads and bullet weights to find what your particular Mosin groups best. If I owned an ammo company and could make my idea of the "perfect" 7.62x54 hunting round for the Mosin it would be a .310 dia. polymer-tipped 165 grain boat tail at 2600 fps.

So if you own a Mosin-Nagant rifle or carbine, it's not just for the range or gun collector's safe anymore. Most will deliver shots into a 3"-4" group at 100 yards, some like my Type 53 will cut that group in half. If you use the popular Winchester Model 94 as a yardstick, that's about similar accuracy, with a cartridge that packs a lot more power than the .30-30.

Mosin's are harvesting boar, red deer, reindeer and other big game in Europe, and I'd bet more than one big Brown bear has been taken with one in Siberia or the Kamchatka. I have often said the guys who made my rifle in 1954 back in China would have never

dreamed a Wisconsin hunter would shoot a bear with it 50 years later. These historic firearms that served well in wartime are not just collectable. Still accurate and powerful, they also make deadly hunting arms. Who knows, you may even want take your old warrior on the hunt of a lifetime like I did!

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