

# AK-47 OR AR-15

» BY STEVE MOSES

In the current world of “fighting carbines,” there are two main camps, each with staunch supporters.

In the first camp, we have the AR-15/M4 (“AR”) carbine, which is well known for its outstanding ergonomics, superlative accuracy, light weight and ability to accept a plethora of modifications that make it shine in CQB environments.

In the other camp, the AK-47/AKM/AK-74 (“AK”) is king, and even the biggest AR fan will grudgingly admit that the AK’s ability to survive rough treatment and function under the nastiest of conditions is unsurpassed. So, which is the best? The correct answer is: both.

To my way of thinking, the AR is the performance coupe of fighting carbines, and the AK the sport utility vehicle. In my family, we have a Toyota Tundra 4x4 pickup and a BMW Z4 convertible, and while both are gas-powered vehicles designed to move people around, each has its niche. Each operates on similar principles, but they cannot be driven the same way in all terrains. I have come to realize that the same is true when it comes to fighting carbines, and I have also come to realize that I can’t drive an AK like an AR (even though I have tried to unsuccessfully).

This article is dedicated to the AR owner who has contemplated a quick stray to the dark side, picked up an AK, shouldered it, wrinkled his nose and

then spat in disgust. Originally designed for a large, conscript-based Soviet army, the clunky, sharp-edged AK will never be a prom queen—but with a few minor modifications and a little operator training, can be turned into a great date.

Many AR operators wonder why there is a need for an AK, or even AK skills. Actually, there are a number of reasons.

## COST

AKs are much cheaper than ARs, and make outstanding trunk guns. While I would never want any of my rifles stolen, given a choice between losing a \$400 AK and an \$800 AR, I would prefer to lose the former. Before someone throws that cliché at me of “Boy, how much is your life worth?” which implies that there is a \$400 difference in performance between the two, I would like to respond by stating that a few inexpensive modifications to the AK not only close that gap, but in some instances cause the AK to kick AR butt.

## CAN HANDLE ABUSE

I am not going to use an AK for dynamic entry work in the CONUS unless pressed into it. AR ergonomics are superior, the manual of arms is similar to that of a handgun, and a properly loaded 5.56mm JHP round is safer for working in



residential structures containing friendlies. While my team practices for entries year-round, the reality is that we actually don’t do them very often. A much more reasonable scenario is one that subjects my gear to rough handling and possible exposure to the elements. By no means is the AR a sissy-gun, but the large gas tube, massive gas piston, crude but robust parts, and generous tolerances give the AK an edge if an edge is needed. I have torn up or abused my share of gear and equipment over the years, and my home state of Texas gets its share of nasty weather. The AK has handled these harsh conditions well.

## ISSUED OVERSEAS

More than a few S.W.A.T. Magazine readers perform (or will perform) over-



T.J. Pilling, owner and chief instructor for Tiger Valley, based in Waco, Texas, runs author's AK. T.J. is an outstanding instructor and former member of Garland, Texas SWAT team.

# Why Not Both?

seas contract security work. The word that I am getting back is that a good percentage of contractors are being issued AKs. While I have no intention of going there myself (the very thought of it would cause my friends to giggle and infuriate my wife), if I were, I would want to be as familiar with the AK weapon system as I could be in advance. I shoot two or three competitive action pistol matches a month with my duty/CCW Glock 19 for that sole reason. Do I win matches? No, but that handgun now feels perfectly natural in my hand, and I know what I can and can't do with it. When I shoot an IDPA stage, I concentrate on complying with the stage rules and making good hits, and I don't worry about how to deploy the weapon and make it function. To my way of thinking, I would want the

same to be true of my AK skills if I were sandbox-bound.

## KNOW THY ENEMY

Unfortunately, the AK is the rifle of choice of most of our enemies. The last Law Enforcement Active Shooter Response course I attended taught a short block on AK operations based on the theory that if we could take out an AK-armed "Tango" with our handgun, we could then pick it up and continue the fight with a much more powerful weapon. It is my opinion that this is good advice, and I encourage others to adopt the same mindset.

## POWERFUL 7.62x39mm ROUND

Penetration, penetration, penetration. The 7.62x39mm round has a well-de-

served reputation for wreaking havoc on light cover like car doors and windshields—so much so that a number of officers who occupy Counter-Attack Team vehicles during high-risk motorcade escorts are now carrying AKs instead of ARs. In the event of a short-range fire-fight against adversaries in or around vehicles, the heavier and more robust 7.62x39mm round displays significantly greater effect than most, if not all, 5.56mm rounds. The Winchester-Western 123-grain jacketed soft point displays excellent penetration and expansion in calibrated ballistic gelatin as terminal ballistics are not very far behind that of the venerable .30-30. 7.62x39mm FMJ ammo is at least 25% cheaper than 5.56mm FMJ ammo, making frequent practice sessions significantly more affordable.

# WON'T CHIP CRACK SWELL GUARANTEED.



## SPEEDFEED



**SPEEDFEED STOCKS ARE DESIGNED TO PERFORM UNDER PRESSURE AND HOLD 4 SHELLS FOR QUICK LOADING. DEPENDABLE IN ANY SITUATION.**

**(800) 433-2909 • speedfeedinc.com**

**ALL SETS CARRY A LIFETIME GUARANTEE.**

**MADE IN THE USA.**

© Armor Holdings, Inc.

## POST-MODIFICATION FUN

Finally, AKs are actually fun to shoot when properly set up. A few judicious modifications to the rifle can make the AK very shootable, and a few more can turn the AK into a veritable "Sexy Beast."

Americans, especially shooters, are inveterate tinkerers, and in the immortal words of the late, great Col. Jeff Cooper, are often designers of "ingenious solutions to non-existent problems." Regardless, the AK needs tinkering in the way of better sights, a better safety, possibly a better trigger, the addition of a flash suppressor and a means of mounting a tactical light. These turn the AK into a 24/7 tool. Slap a Tapco collapsible buttstock and a Galil handguard on the AK, and it becomes crudely endearing to even the most hard-core AR lover.

## SIGHTS

Stock AK sights suck—end of story. The crude rear sight features a smallish U- or V-shaped notch in which the front sight is centered. A combination of poor light and older eyes makes it almost unusable. As I understand it, AKs were primarily designed to deliver quasi un-aimed automatic fire, almost like a one-man volley. AKs are capable of delivering adequate accuracy (4-6 MOA) at the distances at which most bad things happen and well within the effective range of the round itself. The inability to get a good sight picture is correctable. Fixes include the following:

- Open up the rear sight to .100 or
- Replace the rear sight with the Champion Gunsight, a nicely finished rear sight replacement with a significantly opened rear notch or
- Replace the rear sight with a Krebs Custom rear aperture sight or a Mojo Sighting Systems rear aperture sight that features adjustable windage and elevation. Be advised that these rear sights are mounted far enough forward that you do not get a true "ghost sight" picture, and in my opinion they work best with a high-contrast front sight.
- Replace the front sight with an XS Sight Systems 24/7 white stripe sight, or my choice, their brand spanking new Big Dot.

The Mojo rear sight/XS Big Dot front sight combination works very well for

**ONE STOP KNIFE SHOP**  
www.onestopknifeshop.com

## MAXPEDITION



**JUMBO VERSIPACK  
CCW / BUG OUT  
SHOULDER BAG**

REG. PRICE: ~~\$82.99~~  
**ON SALE: \$78.99**

UNIVERSAL HOLSTER: \$9.99

PART #: MAX-JUMBO

BLACK / KHAKI / OD GREEN / ACU CAMO

## CRKT ELISHEWITZ PHARAOH



REG. PRICE: ~~\$99.99~~

**ON SALE: \$65.99**

PART #: CR-1130 (PLAIN EDGE)

CR-1131 (PART SERRATED)

## SPYDERCO WAVED ENDURA



**SUPER FAST  
EMERSON WAVE OPENING  
PART # SC-10PGYW**

REG. PRICE: ~~\$82.00~~

**ON SALE: \$59.99**

## KERSHAW JUNKYARD DOG II



PART #: KS-1725-P  
(PLAIN EDGE)

KS-1725-ST (PART. SERR)

REG. PRICE: ~~\$79.99~~

**ON SALE: \$53.99**

## COLONIAL KNIFE M724 PARATROOPER AUTOMATIC



**OFFICIAL ISSUE!  
ORANGE HANDLE  
PART #: CKC-M724-OR**

REG. PRICE: ~~\$89.99~~

**ON SALE: \$59.99**

## BENCHMADE HK 14700 AUTOMATIC



BLACK OR SILVER  
PLAIN EDGE OR PART SERR.  
PART #: BM-14700

REG. PRICE: ~~\$140.00~~

**ON SALE: \$100.00**

ORDER ONLINE OR CALL TOLL FREE:

**1.866.BUY.1SKS**

ORDER TOLL FREE (1.866.289.1757)

INFO LINE: 1.502.671.5510

MONDAY - FRIDAY 10AM EST - 6PM EST

VISA - MASTERCARD - DISCOVER - MONEY ORDER

\*\*\*\*\*NO PERSONAL CHECKS!\*\*\*\*\*

SORRY, WE DON'T HAVE A PAPER CATALOG!

ONESTOPKNIFESHOP.COM

MAILING ADDRESS: 340 PRODUCTION COURT

LOUISVILLE KY 40299

(INCLUDE \$10 FOR UPS GROUND SHIPPING)

ALL PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

me. Suddenly, the AK becomes suited for quick work under a variety of field conditions and at the distances that most nasty stuff happens. I judge everything by my ability to get a quick sight picture on an armed suspect in a poorly lit room. My AK now does that with ease. I cannot adequately express in words what a major difference the XS Big Dot sight makes. I am no student of statistics, but I believe that the vast majority of the defensive situations that I am ever going to get involved in will take place at distances of 50 yards or less, and only an Aimpoint or EOTech will serve me better than this sight. During initial sighting, I was able to repeatedly hit a two-inch bull using a six o' clock hold, despite the fact that the big, fat dot pretty much obscures six inches at the same distance.

### SAFETY

Both Krebs and Blackjack Buffers make after-market safeties that feature a protruding tab. This permits the right-handed operator to rest his or her index finger directly on the safety at all times. I have a Blackjack Buffer safety with a notch that allows me to store the rifle with the bolt open. These safeties are highly recommended because they permit the operator to take the weapon off-safe while bringing the rifle to bear without compromising the firing grip, thus saving precious nano-seconds that may never be possible to make up.

### TRIGGER

While stock AK triggers range from long but smooth to heavy, creepy and prone to trigger slapping, I think that a short, crisp two-stage after-market trigger makes all the difference in the world. Options that I am familiar with include the following:

- Tapco G-2: This is a \$30 replacement that makes a *huge* difference in precision snap-shooting. Highly recommended, it is as good as most after-market AR triggers. I have experienced no durability issues with mine, nor have I heard anything critical about this set-up.

- Red Star Arms Adjustable: I have no first-hand knowledge of this trigger, although I have read numerous favorable reports. I simply do not want to be seen as damning this trigger via lack of comment.

### FLASH SUPPRESSOR

I hate to be a hypocrite, but while I think a flash-suppressor on an AK is very useful, I have an AMD muzzle break on my personal AK. Oh well, I also told my kids when they were teen-agers not to drink beer.... A diminished muzzle flash is very desirable on a fighting carbine, and I have been rendered "combat ineffective" by a post-ban AR with only a crowned barrel on more than one occasion after dark. Please do as I say, not as I

do. The Wolverine flash-suppressor recommended by my buddy Paul Gomez is probably a most excellent remedy, as is the Smith Enterprise Vortex AK-47/AKM flash suppressor.

### TACTICAL LIGHT

I am a big fan of the removable Streamlight TLR-1 weapon light, although others prefer full-time dedicated weapon lights as offered by SureFire and others. A quick fix is the mounting of a



**EARN YOUR STRIPES**  
with XS Sights

**XS SIGHT SYSTEMS**  
www.xssights.com 888-744-4880

M1A-24/7 AK-24/7

with Tritium Stripe

**24/7**  
EXPRESS SIGHTS  
DAYLIGHT • HALF LIGHT • LOW LIGHT



**S.E.R.T. SYSTEM iSHOT**

We specialize in the product development and production of tactical gear for law enforcement and the military.

- RIFLE & SHOTGUN CASES
- DISCREET TAKE DOWN CASES
- MODULAR GO BAGS
- MULTI MISSION BAGS
- BACK PACKS

**C3 COMPACT CARBINE CASE**  
The most compact case on the market!

- Breakdown carbine case; will fit 16" uppers
- EVA foam and plastic insert protection
- Will hold 3 - 6 Magazines
- 24" (l) x 10.5" (w) x 3" (r)
- Available in custom lengths for team purchases

GSA Schedule Contract GS-07F-94625

**MM DESIGN**

**S.E.R.T. SYSTEM iSHOT**

ADDRESS: 16135 KENNEDY ST. • WOODBRIDGE, VA 22191  
TEL: 703.670.8001 • WEB: WWW.SERTSYSTEM.COM

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

\$15 Tapco rail kit to a Galil handguard. (Note: my Streamlight M-3 weapon light would not mount securely to the Tapco rail, but the Streamlight TLR-1 works great.) Personally, I like being able to take my weapon light off the forend when I throw it into my vehicle for motorcade work, just because the less stuff there is to snag, the better. I cannot adequately express in words how critical a weapon-mounted light is—I have drunk of the SureFire Kool-Aid and found it good. I have personally used white light to gain not only compliance, but also a huge tactical edge in confrontations with suspects. If my funds were extremely limited, I would spend them on sights and a tactical light.

### STOCKS

Truth is, the conventional laminated wood or plastic stock is just fine. In my opinion, the relatively short length of pull is a good thing for any fighting long gun used for close quarters battle. Regardless, it is actually a little longer than what I prefer for a truck or motorcade gun, due to the tight confines of vehicle cabs. I have the same issue with fixed AR stocks. I am not a fan of folding stocks, since they have the same length issues when fully extended, and I may want to be able to bail out of a vehicle and get fire on target as soon as possible. As an AR fan, I like collapsible stocks, and Tapco makes a dandy collapsible M-4 type stock for the AK. I have one on my own, and I like it big-time. I can't attest to the durability of this stock, but it seems to be relatively robust. Even if the stock were to break in a fight, the AK design still allows the rifle to be temporarily fired like a heavy pistol.

This same AK also sports the Tapco Galil forend, which is hand-filling and does a great job of protecting my tender pinkies from a hot barrel. This after-market stock does not make my AK a better fighting tool, but it makes it more comfortable and deserves at least a modicum of consideration.

### OTHER

Some of my buddies run EOTechs and Aimpoints on their AKs by installing an UltiMAK AK-47 Scope Mount over the gas tube. For those wanting to run a red-



Author ran "Swamp Thang" through Tiger Valley scrambler and found that hits were possible as long as he had enough space to superimpose XS Sight Systems Big Dot front sight on target.

dot scope, these are rock-solid and hard to beat. I use my AK for a trunk gun and pure motorcade work, so I rely on my XS Big Dot sight just to keep weight and gear that can snag to a minimum. However, if my only rifle were an AK, I would add an Aimpoint in order to extend my effective range out to 150 yards or so.

Finally, the manuals of arms for the AK and AR differ, and the sooner we accept that, the happier we will be. Paul Gomez is probably one of the foremost authorities on running AKs and is only too willing to share his knowledge. AR aficionados willing to spend some time with Paul—and who are not blinded by his gaudy Hawaiian shirts—will learn a weapon-specific method that allows them to quickly get the rifle to the shoulder, easily acquire a sight picture, and make a fight-stopping hit. My time with Paul over the years has greatly increased my comfort level with my own AK, affectionately nicknamed "Swamp Thang" due to its pukey moss-and-algae paint pattern.

Another authority on AKs is Blane Moore, owner of Echelon Protection and a former employee of a well-known "spook agency." Blane has spent a lot of time in the Ukraine working with numerous operators, and gushes over the attributes of the AK rifle system like a feverish fanboy. Both gentlemen have gone a long way toward helping me develop an affinity for the sharp-edged beast. I also have second-hand knowledge of quality AK instruction being offered by Pat Rogers, Gabriel Suarez and Larry Vickers.

There is an old joke that the difference between your girlfriend and your dog is that your dog likes it when you come home smelling like other dogs. Trust me, your AR does not care if you come home smelling like Hoppes No. 9 after humping an AK. Hmmm, that did not sound right. ☺

### SOURCES:

Blackjack Buffers LLC  
Dept. S.W.A.T.  
416 West Harper RD.  
Portland, TN. 37148  
(615) 323-1768  
[www.blackjackbuffers.com](http://www.blackjackbuffers.com)

Echelon Protection  
Dept. S.W.A.T.  
2101 Acorn Bend, Ste. 100  
Benton, TX 76210  
(214) 336-2837  
[www.echelonprotection.com](http://www.echelonprotection.com)

Krebs Custom  
Dept. S.W.A.T.  
1000 Rand Road  
Wauconda, IL 60084  
(847) 487-7776  
[www.krebscustom.com](http://www.krebscustom.com)

Mojo Sighting Systems  
Dept. S.W.A.T.  
461497 Hwy 95  
Cocolalla, ID 83813  
(208) 255-5276  
[www.mojosights.com](http://www.mojosights.com)

**list of sources  
continued on page 104**