

China's Kalashnikov Automatic Rifles & Bayonets

by
Graham Priest

We have seen in the first part of this article (The Journal 2007) that Sergei Gavrilovich Simonov influenced small arms production by the People's Republic of China after 1956. The Central Military Commission was equally impressed by the 7.62mm *Avtomat Kalashnikov obrazets 1947g (AK47)* designed by Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov. A copy of this was built with Soviet guidance at the same time as the *Type 56 Carbine*. Also called 'Type 56' due to the year of adoption, this model was termed a 'rifle'. [1] Yet again the number of Chinese models exported have made the weapon a common sight throughout the world.

The AK47 progressed through three basic models in Russian 7.62 x 39mm ob.1943 calibre until 1954. [2] (Fig.1) The version copied was a compact gas operated weapon with a prominent cocking handle and selector lever on the machined steel receiver.

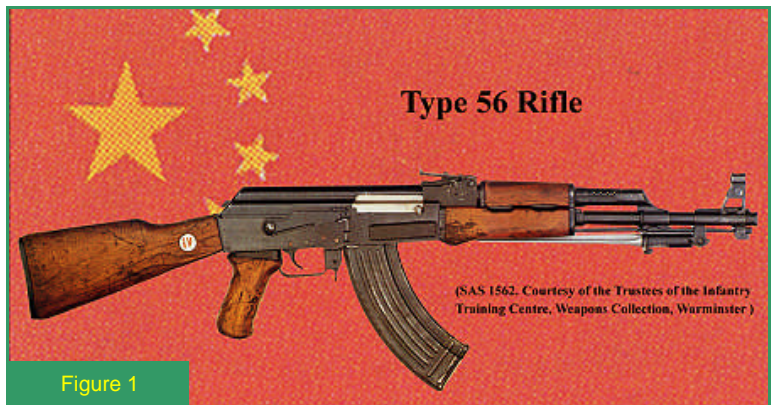


Figure 1



Figure 2

(Fig.2) The conspicuous gas piston above the barrel lacked a regulator and required the large cylindrical foresight to be raised on a triangular bracket to line up with the rear sight on the receiver. Furniture was wood, with a conventional fixed butt, and a detachable knife bayonet was employed. [3] The conspicuous 'banana' magazine with a capacity of 30 rounds slotted in front of the trigger guard. A chunky pistol grip, sling attachments and a clearing rod completed the design.

Large-scale mass production at Soviet factories started in 1949 and construction was in the region of 500,000 to a million by 1951. [4] A similar number was made between 1952-1954 and, by the time a modernised version started in 1959, an estimate of 3 to 7.8 million AK47s can be arrived at.

At the time of Soviet political and economic co-operation during the early 1950s the People's Republic of China's fledgling state industries made some minor modifications to the weapon. Obviously Cyrillic markings were changed for Chinese characters and a bayonet that folded beneath the muzzle was fitted. [5] No markings were added to the latter.

(Fig.3) Unlike the early *Type 56 Carbines* a bladed design was not used.

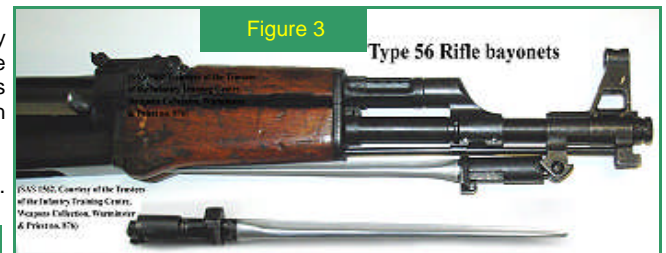


Figure 3

Type 56 Rifle bayonets

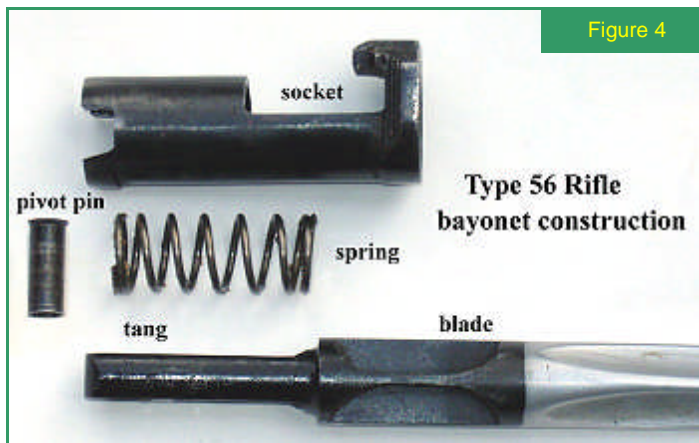


Figure 4

(Fig.4) The rifle had a spike version from the outset. As previously a round-ended double stanchion was fitted beneath the exposed barrel but this time it was part of the front sight assembly. Clearance for the cleaning rod caused the brackets to be extended and this may be why the bayonet lacked a muzzle ring. A double 'hook' was fitted beneath the front of the sight fixture, also with a passage for the rod. When the bayonet was pivoted forwards it engaged with this instead of the barrel itself.

(Fig.5) The bayonet blade was of a 9ins. (230mm) long dull-chromed tapered round-sided triangular form milled from a cylindrical rod. The deeply concave fullers finished abruptly in a vertical spear tip. This was blunted to give a screwdriver facility. The shoulders flared into a circular boss. This was hollowed with four deep slots before it was stepped into a round-sided cuboid tang. A circular hole

at the rear supported a bolt that pivoted the blade on the twin stanchions. A smooth oil blacked tube, without a muzzle ring extension but with a partial notched reinforced collar at the back, sandwiched a coil spring over the tang with enough 'play' to slide in both directions. At the muzzle 25% of the upper part of this sleeve was cut away to expose two of the blade slots. A squared 'hook' at the front overlay this section. Three vertical cuts on both of the bevelled sides gave finger purchase. The spring-loaded 'socket' was large enough to slide over the blade base.

In the stored position the bayonet was aligned beneath the barrel with the tip in a swell of the wooden handgrip in front of the receiver. Two squared recesses on the sleeve were cammed into the round-ended bracket on the firearm to form a lock. Finger pressure on the muzzle extension compressed the spring and released the socket. A 180° rotation mated the 'hook' with the brackets beneath the muzzle and the catch was as before on the stanchion but with the blade fixed beyond the rifle. The pivot for the bayonet beneath the barrel was a rod with concave ends.

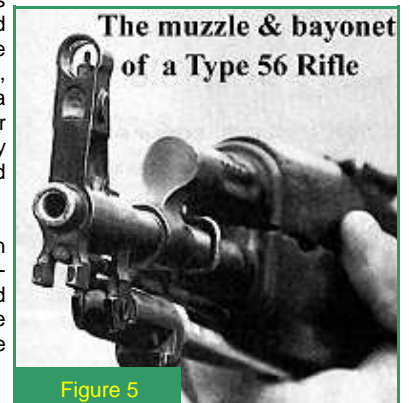


Figure 5

China's Kalashnikov Automatic Rifles & Bayonets

by
Graham Priest (continued)

Markings on the receiver usually consisted of the factory symbol, sometimes a '66' within a triangle, the characters for 'Type 56' and a serial number. [6] The USA allocated the *Foreign MatÉriel Number (FOM)* 1005-5-2-7.62-2 to this weapon. The sequence indicated Federal supply category (1005), country designator (5), matÉriel subcategory - 'rifles' (2), calibre - 7.62mm (7) and specific item identifier (62-2). [7]

China gradually manufactured two more *Type 56* variations; the *Type 56-1* with a steel skeleton butt that folded over the receiver (*FOM* 1005-5-2-7.62-3) and another version with a side acting stock. [8] Some of these had an 'M22' code instead of the factory symbol as they were built for export. Selector markings were often also marked 'L' & 'D' instead of by pictograms. Only the first varieties of *Type 56-1* carried the usual spike bayonet. [9] (Fig.6)

Chinese copies of the *Modernizirovanniy avtomat Kalishnikova (AKM)* were still called the *Type 56-1 (FOM* 1005-5-2-7.62-4), had either a fixed wooden or steel moveable butt, and carried a bayonet. A model with reddish plastic furniture and a stock that folded to the right became the *Type 56-2*. China North Industries Company (NORINCO) of 7A Yuetan Nanjie, Beijing built is and intended it for commercial sales. It lacked the spike.



Figure 6
Members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG) with *Type 56 Rifles & Carbines* in Dhofar c.1971. (Source unknown)

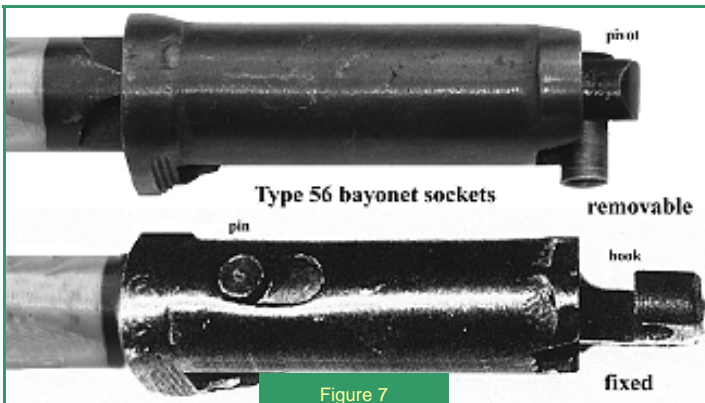


Figure 7

As discussed in the previous part of this paper the same improvements were made to the way the bayonet was fixed to the pivot on the barrel. (Fig.7) Although the brackets remained unchanged some tangs were built with a hook to allow easy removal without the bolt being dismounted. As before, to prevent the compressed spring from 'firing off' the sleeve from the tang, a slotted and drilled socket with a pin driven through the extended blade base was used. [10]

As some customers required bayonets on commercial rifles that did not normally mount them, a complete attachment unit was designed. (Fig.8) Although the blade shape was identical the sleeve reverted to the permanently fixed muzzle ring system of the *Type 56 Carbine*. The ring itself was much larger at 17.5mm instead of 14mm. A stanchion was pinned to the tang and twin slot headed bolts attached a semicircular clamp to this and around the barrel. [11] One model was retailed as the *Polytech Legend Rifle* in the USA. The fitting was added behind the foresight. This did not have to be removed.

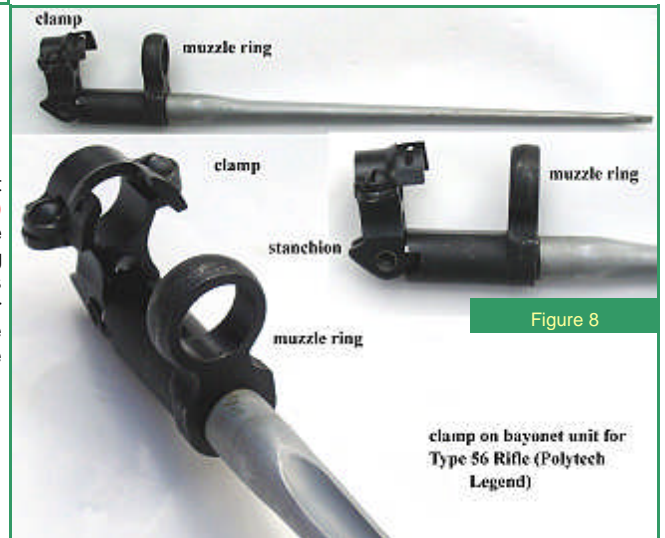


Figure 8

From the early 1960s Chinese designers produced a hybrid imitation of the *SKS45* and the *AK47*. Firstly adopted as the *Type 63 (FOM* 1005-5-2-7.62-5) in 1963 it was also improved and called the *Type 68*. [12] (Fig.9) It had a fifteen round magazine, but could also use the *Type 56 Rifle* thirty round version. The bolt also had a 'hold open' facility not used before. Furniture was either wood or plastic. The bayonet was identical to the standard Chinese *Type 56 Rifle* spike except that the blade was lengthened to 11.75ins. (300mm).



People's Republic of China

Figure 9



Type 68 Rifle

(Pattern Room Collection, Nottingham)

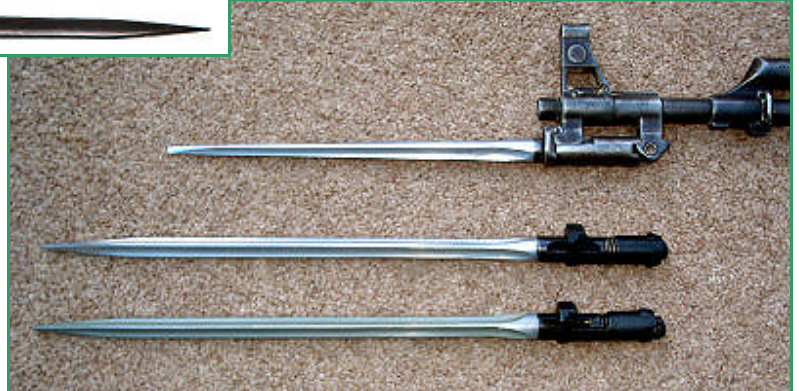
China's Kalashnikov Automatic Rifles & Bayonets

by
Graham Priest (continued)



Figure 10

Figure 11
Two Chinese *Type 68* bayonets (they may also fit the *Type 63*) compared with the *Type 56* on an Iraqi used assault rifle. Notice the dull or bright finishes. (Priest)



(Figs.10 & 11) A reported 6,000,000 were produced for the People's Militia and less have been released on the world market than other designs as the table that follows shows.

The worldwide distribution of Chinese Type 56 rifles c.1988.

(after E.C.Ezell's *Small Arms Today* [1984/1988])

Country	Title	Type 56 & 56-1	Type 68	Other
Albania	People's Sov. Rep.		√	
Angola	People's Rep.	√		AKM
Bangladesh	People's Rep.			Local copy of Type 56
Botswana	Republic	√		
Chad	Republic	√		
China	People's Rep.	√	√	Type 63 & export versions Norinco
Costa Rica	Republic		√	Taiwan (ROC) origin
Ethiopia		√	√	
Iraq	Republic	√		(newspapers)
Kampuchea			√	
Lesotho	Kingdom	√(?)		
Madagascar	Demo. Rep.		√	
North Korea	People's Rep.		√	
Pakistan	Islamic Rep.	√		Bangladeshi?
Sri Lanka	Demo. Soc. Rep.	√		
Tanzania	United Republic	√		
Togo	Republic	√		
Vietnam	Soc. Rep.	√		
Yemen	Arab Rep. of North	√		ceremonial
Zaire	Republic	√		
Zimbabwe		√		AKM

(Figs. 12, 13, & 14) Eventually to be replaced by yet another improvement of the design, called the *Type 81*, it is often shown in Chinese propaganda pictures of citizenry undergoing training and manoeuvres.



Figure 12 .Troops of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) practice with *Type 68* bayonets in mass formation. (People's Republic of China Agency)



Figure 13.
On officer directs PLA soldiers armed with *Type 68 Rifles* at a river crossing. (People's Republic of China Agency)



Figure 14.
Two PLA soldiers with *Type 68 Rifles* and gas masks take up firing positions in a K-63 Armoured Personnel Carrier during a demonstration exercise. (People's Republic of China Agency)

China's Kalashnikov Automatic Rifles & Bayonets

by
Graham Priest (continued)

Global distribution of the *Type 56 Rifle* and imitations has been enormous. It is seen on an almost daily basis in African, Middle Eastern and Asian conflicts used by both regular and insurgent forces. Many readers of this piece will have encountered it in Iraq & Afghanistan. (Fig. 15) Some captured examples have been retained in the Weapons Collection.



Figure 15.

An Albanian version of the *Type 56* with folding bayonet possibly manufactured at Gramsh. It lacks Chinese markings. (Priest)



Endnotes

- [1] Ezell, E.C., *The AK47 Story*, Stackpole Books, Harrisburg, USA, 1986, p. 181.
- [2] *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- [3] Brayley, M.J., *Bayonets. An Illustrated History*, KP Books, Iola, USA, 2004, pp. 188-189.
- [4] Ezell, E.C., *Op. cit.*, pp. 113-117.
- [5] Hobart, F.W.A. (Editor), *Jane's Infantry Weapons 1975*, Jane's Yearbooks, London, England, 1975, p. 285.
- [6] Ezell, E.C., *Op. cit.*, p. 183-185.
- [7] Ezell, E.C., *Small Arms Today*, Stackpole, Harrisburg, USA, 1988, p. 15.
- [8] Hogg, I. & Adam, R., *Jane's Guns Recognition Guide*, HarperCollins, Glasgow, Scotland, 1996, p. 399.
- [9] Ezell, E.C., *Op. cit.*, p. 184.
- [10] Ivie, D.M., *Kalashnikov Bayonets. The Collector's Guide to Bayonets for the AK and its Variations*, Diamond Eye Pub., Texas, USA, 2002, pp. 158-159 & Seidemann, U., *Das Kalaschnikow-bajonett*, Verlag Lenover Neustrelitz, Germany, 2002, pp. 68 & 117.
- [11] Ivie, D.M., *Op. cit.*, p. 160.
- [12] Ezell, E.C., (SAT) *Op. cit.*, p. 104.

Figure 16.

Mujahideen in Afghanistan laying an anti-tank mine in the 1980s conflict against Soviet forces. The fighter in the back row (second from left) has a *Type 56* rifle and the others have SMLEs. (Courtesy of T.A.Davies)

Acknowledgements

Appreciation to the staff and trustees, especially Major Norman Benson & Captain Peter Laidler, of the Weapons Collection, Infantry Training Centre, Warminster. Thanks also to Homer Brett and Ulrich Seidemann together with the organisations mentioned in the captions for their help with this article.

Ed.—About the writer

Graham Priest is well known to many Corps members, especially those involved with the Infantry and SASC Weapons Collection. Three years ago he wrote an article for the Man At Arms Edition 34 titled *The History of the Bayonet* which, among many other publications he has written over the years, makes for acknowledgement of his expertise and enthusiasm for what he calls 'Big Boys' Toys'.

Last year, Edition 36) he provided the article titled *Simonov's Automatic Rifles & Bayonets*, and this year we are delighted to have the follow-on publication he promised for this Journal Edition.

It is not often a retired headmaster is invited to lecture to the Arms & Armour Society at the Tower of London, and as a 'Friend of the Weapons Collection' he has contributed a wealth of knowledge towards exhibits and the provision of library material.

