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# SMALL ARMS REVIEW

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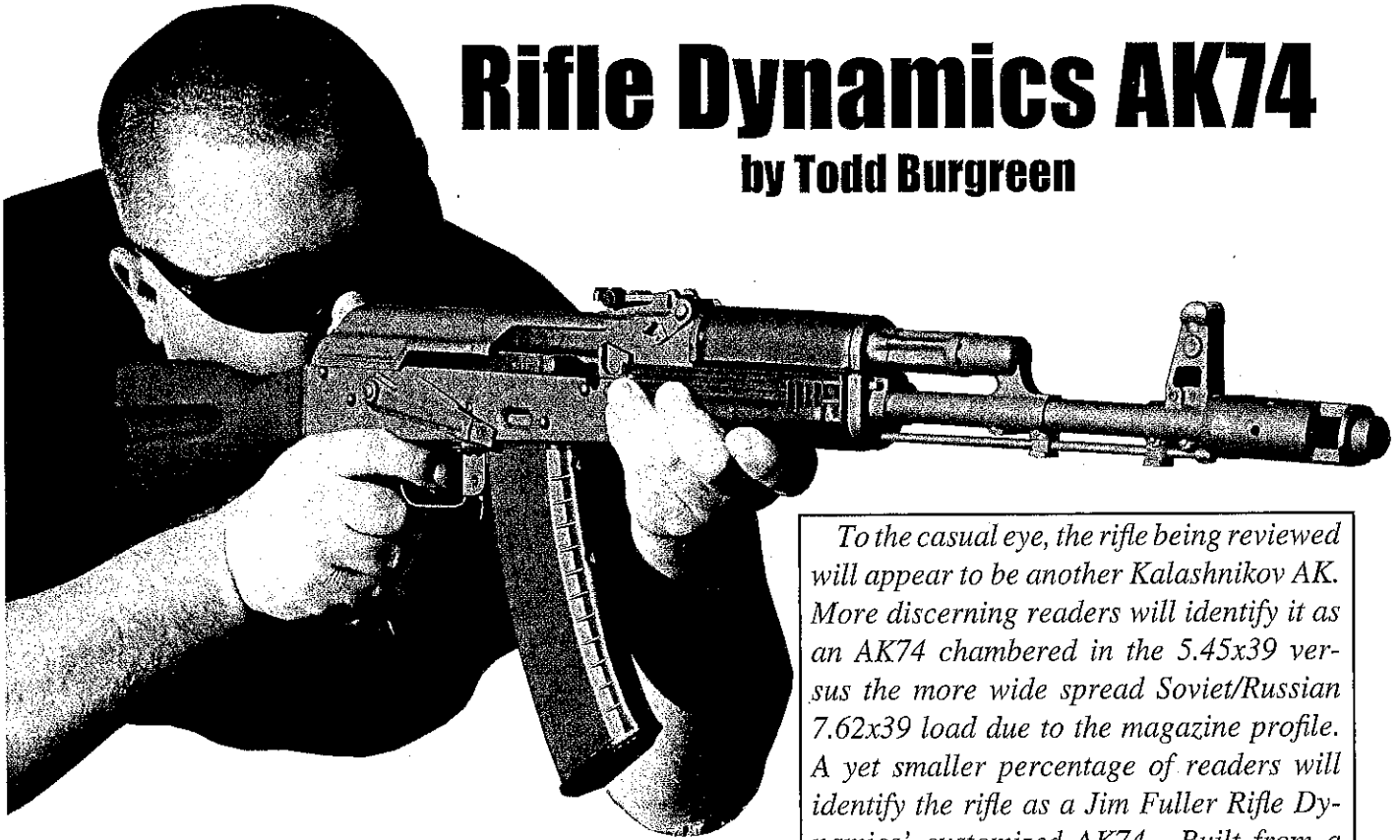
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# Rifle Dynamics AK74

by Todd Burgreen



As it arrived from Rifle Dynamics, the RD AK74 represented a return to a more traditional AK form compared to a rifle equipped with rails and such - though this was altered with addition of a Midwest Industries/US Palm front handguard and folding wire stock. There is a tremendous amount of fitting that goes into the RD AK74. It receives an internal reliability check with a light honing of the bolt/carrier group and guide rails. All exterior surfaces where users touch are dehorned. Most owners will not even notice the Rifle Dynamic attention to detail, but can take comfort that everything possible has been done to make it the best fighting rifle available. Even without firing a live round the Rifle Dynamics AK superiority over a standard AK could be detected in the smoothness of the action, trigger pull, quality of re-finish and overall weapon feel. Rifle Dynamics is well versed in the nuances of the AK platform and can educate even the most diehard AK connoisseur.

The simplicity and reliability of most Soviet-bloc weapons has always impressed Jim Fuller. This led him to studying the AK system of operation

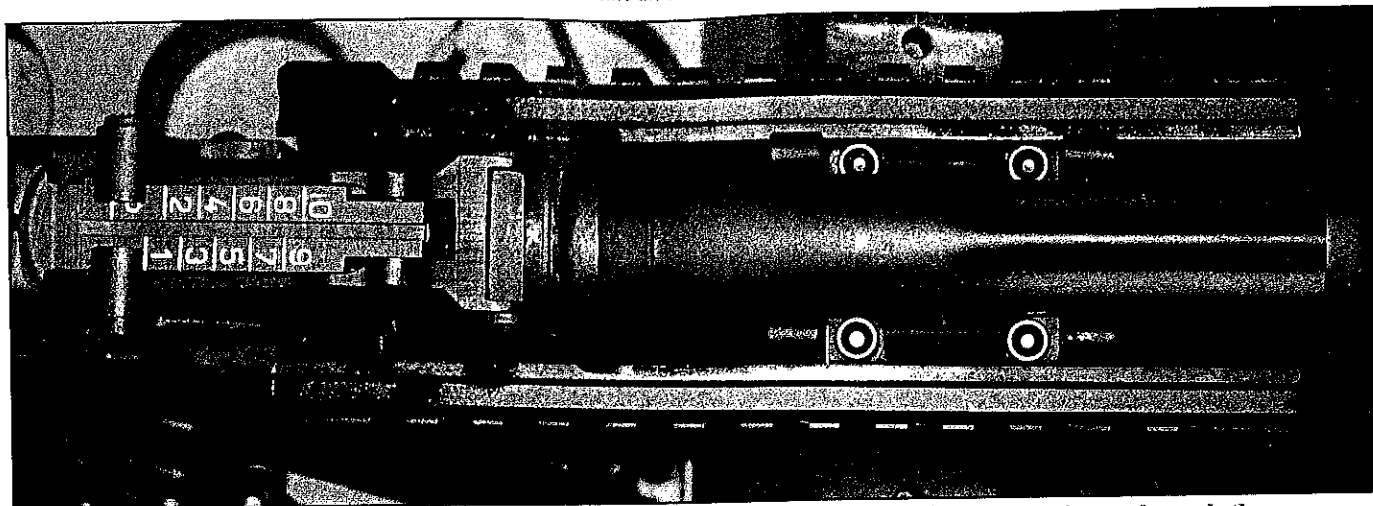
beginning in the early 1990s. Jim believes the AK is the most dependable fighting rifle ever produced. Rifle Dynamics is a 07 FFL/SOT manufacturer, which allows for work on machine guns, suppressors, SBRs and SBSs combined with being considered a dealer as well. Jim is more concerned with form following function as all weapons are fighting utensils with work reflecting this mindset. Jim's shop offers custom work on ARs, Saiga, PSL rifles, as well as MACs, along with other typical work found in custom shops involving revolvers, 1911s, stock work, and other tasks. Rifle Dynamics is also involved in providing dynamic firearms training along with armorer courses and has a large selection of belt-fed and select-fire Com-bloc weapons to facilitate orientation demonstrations bringing personnel up to speed on operational use of these weapons.

Rifle Dynamics offers a wide range

*To the casual eye, the rifle being reviewed will appear to be another Kalashnikov AK. More discerning readers will identify it as an AK74 chambered in the 5.45x39 versus the more wide spread Soviet/Russian 7.62x39 load due to the magazine profile. A yet smaller percentage of readers will identify the rifle as a Jim Fuller Rifle Dynamics' customized AK74. Built from a Bulgarian AK74 parts kit that included a chrome-lined barrel, the RD AK74 arrived with an AK74 style flash hider/muzzle brake installed on the muzzle via 24mm threads. A NoDak Spud receiver is combined with KVar furniture that includes a double-shielded forend handguard. A G2 trigger group is installed in conjunction with the polishing of the trigger surfaces and a Fuller modified rear sight is utilized. The RD AK74 features a Norrells Moly Resin Gray finish over Parkerizing that Rifle Dynamics has found to be the best finish for a rifle that will take a lot of abuse, heat and lack of cleaning. Jim reports the finish has proven itself many times over under the worst conditions. This rifle may appear as a basic AK74, but it benefits greatly from Rifle Dynamics' treatment.*

of services and upgrade packages for customer owned AKs without having to resort to custom builds from parts kits. One example of these improvements is the Fuller Modified Rear Sight unit. Jim

**Lead photo, above: Rifle Dynamics AK74 in the form it arrived in with K-VAR furniture and open sights. It performed with no problems in this condition.**



**Above:** Installation of the Midwest Industries/US Palm Tri-Rail shown approximately half-way through the process. The barrel clamp securing the rail system is evident below the installed gas tube. No problems were encountered with the rail in terms of shifting zero and it stayed markedly cool thanks to the amount of space between the barrel and upper/lower handguards.

reports this is one of his most popular AK modifications in terms of customer feedback. Over the years many have complained about the iron sights on the AK: the Fuller Rear Sight improves this tremendously. The Fuller Sight has the rear notch widened and corners radiused to a spec that was given to Jim by an optometrist for maximum efficiency in centering the front post in the rear notch. Both windage and elevation adjustments are made on the front sight. Many will be more than satisfied with the Fuller sight and eschew mounting anything on the RD AK74 choosing a more traditionalist route.

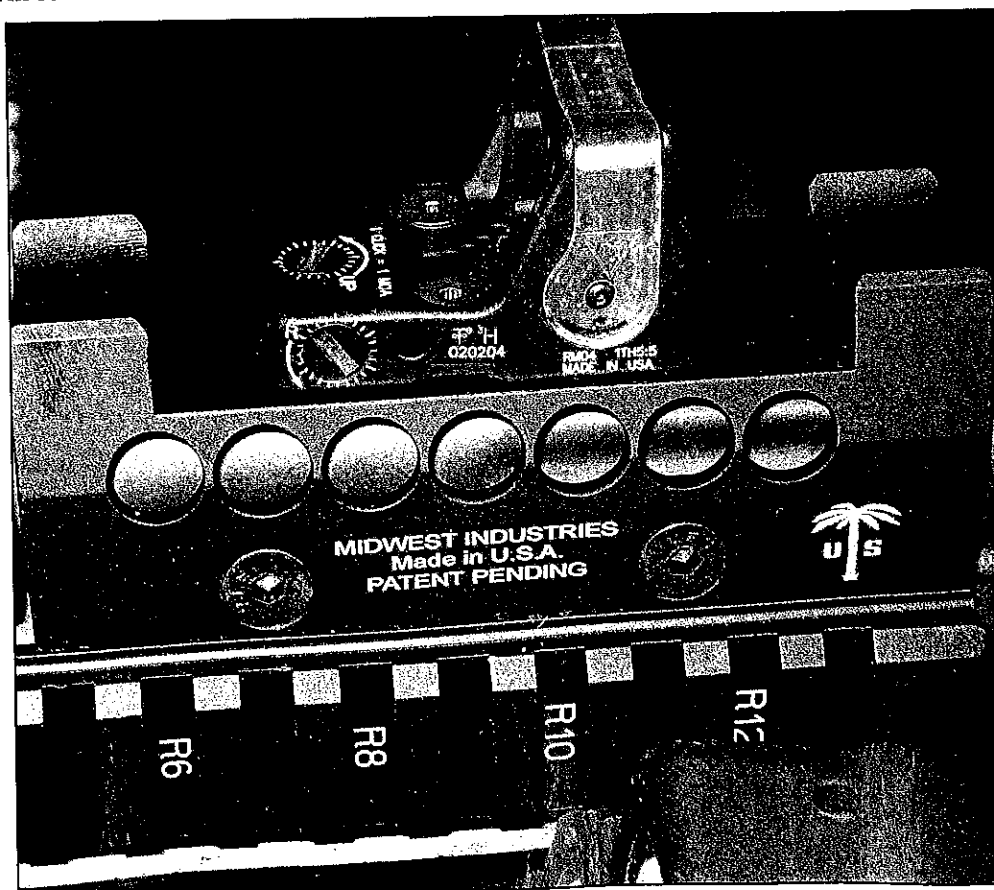
Importantly, the RD AK74 features the same great handling characteristics and reliability the AK family is renowned for. The Kalashnikov gas-operated piston-rod system is the heart of its reliability. The RD AK74 weighs 7.5 lbs and measures 37 inches long with its 16.5-inch barrel. With

the wire stock folded, the rifle measures 29 inches in length. The original intent was not to replace the standard stock with a wire folding stock model due to previous experiences with wire stocks. However, the simplicity of doing this with the RD AK74, considering no special adaptors are needed to accomplish this combined with handling a friend's AK74 at the range, forced a reassessment. The minimal recoil impulse of the 5.45x39 combined with an effective muzzle brake

makes shooting the RD AK74 accurately and without discomfort with the wire stock very possible. Steel MGM man targets were routinely struck at 200-250 yards with rounds sent down range rapidly. This exhibits both the ergonomics of the rifle and overall accuracy of the RD AK74 /5.45x 39 combination.

For testing, both the 60gr and 70gr Wolf Ammunition was used as well as the relatively new Hornady 5.45x39 60gr VMax. Additionally, some surplus

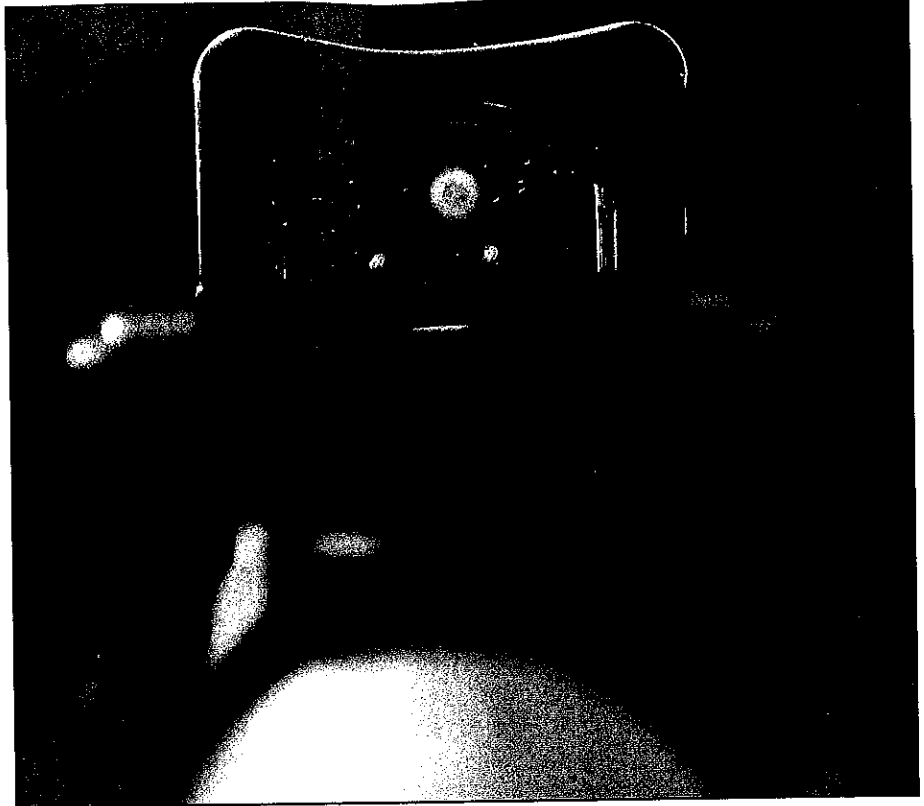
**Right:** The US Palm part of the collaboration consists of model specific upper handguards - this one for the Trijicon RMR. Current options for upper handguard options are Trijicon RMR, Aimpoint T1/H1, Vortex Sparc, Burris Fastfire, and Leupold Delta Point. A key feature with the Tri-Rail is that it enables co-witnessing of existing iron sights and installed optic.



**Right:** The Tri-Rail enables a lower 1/3 co-witness option for a number of optics coveted by AK users, including the Trijicon RMR used in this evaluation.

52gr 5.45x39 ammunition was accessed. This is loaded with the 7N6 "poison pill" bullet that first gained notoriety in the Soviet-Afghan War. Basically, the Russian designers constructed the 52gr FMJ with an air cavity behind the tip of the bullet. This causes the bullet nose to deform when penetrating a target causing it to tumble that is devastating when striking flesh. One downside typical to most surplus ammunition is that it utilizes corrosive primers. Something the Russians and other ex-Soviet bloc states insist on using due to concerns with cold weather ignition and long-term storage capabilities offered by corrosive primers. The Wolf 70gr load produced approximately 2,600fps and the Wolf 60gr nudged 2,900fps when fired through the RD AK 74 with the 52gr surplus ammunition clocking in at 3,000fps.

As alluded to earlier in the article, it was decided to change out the RD AK74 Kvar forend furniture. This was an attempt to increase accuracy and effective range of the RD AK74 by enabling the mounting of a red dot optic. The US Palm and Midwest Industries collaborative AK Tri-Rail was installed. Installation of this rail is quick and does not require a trip to the gunsmith. Easy to follow instructions and all of the necessary hardware to mount this rail system is included. Since the Tri-Rail doesn't mount directly to the gas tube, your optic is spared exposure to a large amount of heat, thus extending the life of your optic. Another benefit of the US Palm/Midwest Industries Tri-



Rail is that it allows for better ventilation around the rifle's barrel, thus cooling it down faster after long strings of fire. As expected from a US Palm/Midwest collaboration, the Tri-Rail was well made and did not move once installed on the RD AK74. The Tri-Rail was considered essential for getting the most out of the RD AK74; without the Tri-Rail it would have been impossible to proceed with mounting a red dot optic to enhance the RD AK74. The Tri-Rail enables a lower 1/3 co-witness option for a number of optics coveted by AK users. The specific optic needs are decided before ordering a Tri-Rail due to the top cover being made per individual optic base design. Current options are Trijicon RMR, Aimpoint T1/H1, Vortex Sparc, Burris Fastfire, and

Leupold Delta Point.

It was decided to mount a Trijicon RMR on the US Palm/Midwest Tri-rail. The RMR sight is a proven commodity able to withstand the recoil and heat generated by repeatedly long strings of fire. The RMR only weighs several ounces; thus adding little in weight to the Rifle Dynamics AK74 preserving its natural handling. Due to engineered co-witnessing, the RMR sat low enough on the Tri-Rail that no adjustment of cheekweld was required to pick up the RMR's amber 7 MOA dot. The beauty of the Trijicon RMR sight is that it does not require batteries to generate the aiming dot because of the dual use of fluorescent fiber optics and tritium lamp. The lack of reliance on batteries appealed to this

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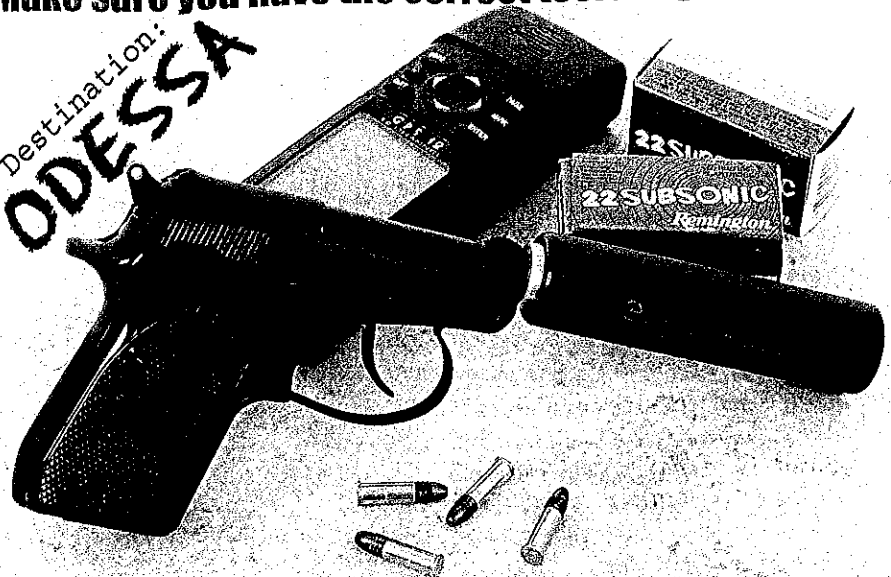
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author as matching the RD AK74's rugged nature. The mounted Trijicon RMR did not disappoint in range tests proving more than capable of withstanding the RD AK74's recoil and heat generated from firing multiple magazines during Team Tactics exercises. The RMR's dot aided in acquiring a fast aiming point at CQB ranges. The 7 MOA dot in the Trijicon RMR proved more than capable of hammering steel man targets out to 200 yards reliably. For reference sake, a military silhouette target measures almost 17 MOA at 100 meters. It was found that a 50 yard zero with the Trijicon RMR fit the needs best when mounted on the RD AK74. The red dot sight offer the capability to engage multiple targets in rapid sequence compared to open sights. Age may be catching up to us as the single focus plane with the red dot is easier to shoot accurately than coordinating front and rear sights, especially at speed.

The Rifle Dynamics AK74 was evaluated at Echo Valley Training Center (EVTC). Echo Valley Training Center hosts numerous well known training entities every year along with DoD personnel, Federal, State, and local law enforce-

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ment agencies. Manufacturers are also finding their way there to take advantage of what the facility offers. Echo Valley Training Center has multiple 100 yard enclosed bermed bays capable of handling numerous students conducting "square" range drills or more dynamic/fluid types of training utilizing the barricades, building facades, and doorways constructed for this purpose. In conjunction with the individual training bays, EVTC features multi-stepped target berms that are strewn with reactive steel targets, fluid drained automobiles, and moving targets at ranges varying from 150 yards out to 350 yards. EVTC is further enhanced by the existence of prepared firing positions. This allows for more realistic prone and "dug-in" trench-style firing points. These firing positions and target arrangements are ideal for all types of training scenarios with most types of weapon systems including assault and precision rifles, not to mention belt fed weapons, and ultimately team exercises for team members to train coordinated fire sequences.

Range evaluation commenced with a function test involving firing several magazines in rapid succession. A 100 yard open sight zero confirmation took

place after functionality was established and rifle sights shot on paper at 25 yards. While not unique, this is a good way to establish a baseline for reliability. Let's face it: if an AK-type weapon does not have pristine reliability, its major attribute is nullified. The Rifle Dynamics AK74 functioned fine leaving the handguards smoking. Accuracy with

the Wolf Ammunition 60gr and 70gr loads hovered in the 3-inch range at 100 yards. The surplus Bulgarian mirrored this performance. The Hornady VMax produced 2-inch groups. This is probably more indicative of my deteriorating eye sight than actual accuracy potential

*AK-74 Continued on page 62*

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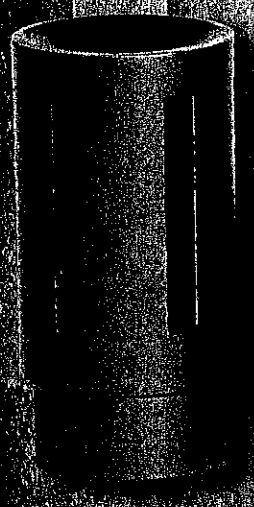
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of the RD AK74. Other range tests consisted of completing several runs at a carbine course set-up at EVTC. Several ISPC-style man targets are engaged from different firing positions. Multiple shots were fired at each target and a magazine change was mandated before leaving cover. The various stages consisted of three different styles of barricade with one including coming through an operable door frame. Time was stopped by engaging two steel man-targets placed approximately 125 yards downrange. I find testing any rifle in this format helps highlight any strengths or weaknesses in handling or weapon manipulation. The RD AK74 turned in times that were on par with any of the different rifles and competition times previously tested at the range.

The Rifle Dynamics AK74 exhibited all of the positive Kalashnikov characteristics combined with the lethal Russian .22 caliber service round - the 5.45x39. Arms aficionados will find and appreciate Rifle Dynamics' attention to detail. The RD AK74 proved desirable due to its reliability, accuracy, ammunition costs, and controllability during rapid strings of fire. It is strongly suggest anyone interested in a 5.45x39 chambered AK, whatever their reasoning, to contact Rifle Dynamics about your needs.

### SITES OF INTEREST:

**Rifle Dynamics**  
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[www.rifledynamics.com](http://www.rifledynamics.com)

### Midwest Industries, Inc.

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