

Thames Valley Guns Armourers Report Kongsberg M59 Rifle

Introduction

As Armourer reports go, this restoration should never have happened, as everything that could go wrong, generally did. This report, highlights the dangers of unscrupulous firearms and Ebay dealers, discusses the level of cost to restore one of these classic rifles, the technical aspects of this Mauser type and my stubbornness to see this restoration through.

At the end of 2017 I planned to build a replica of this Norwegian M59 Sniper rifle as shown in the images below. The



incentive for the whole build was a very kind Norwegian gentlemen who provided me with the scope mount, which without, the restoration would have never get of the ground. Other essential components, was the targets sights and the Hertel & Reuss scope.



The first purchase, was the M59 rifle shown above, complete with the correct original aperture sights. Things where looking good, as I had the correct scope mount, the correct rifle and sights. The sellers website stated this 7.62x51mm rifle was "simply THE BEST example of one of these CLASSIC and MUCH SOUGHT AFTER DANISH TARGET Rifles I have come across to date. ANYONE looking for a TRULY CLASSIC 'old style' Target / Sniper rifle you are going to be seriously hard pushed to find a better candidate".

Upon receipt, the barrel was shot out with the first six inches of rifling being non existent as can be seen below. I advised the seller and providing some bore scope imagery to support my case, but the response was patronising and less than supportive and therefore I decided more evidence was required and would accuracy test the rifle. The resulting outcome was the blown out case as shown which was clear evidence of a rifle in a dangerous condition. With evidence "in hand" I approached the seller and this time, he offered a refund.



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However I was trapped between a rock and a hard place, I had the correct aperture sights, I had the mount and whilst all this was going on, I had also purchased a nearly correct scope. Sending the rifle back now, would get me a refund but would leave me with a handful of expensive components, no rifle and no restoration. Therefore what options were available to me?

Potential solutions consisted of returning the rifle, retain the rifle, take the loss and purchase and fit a new barrel which would add further cost of £600.00 or so. Another option was to purchase another M59 with a known good barrel and swap barrels. Searching the Internet identified a hunting rifle that had been converted from a M59A1 as shown below. For a shade under £300.00, this M59A1 had an excellent barrel but its foresight had been removed, the bolt handle ground down for scope clearance and the receiver had been drilled for the scope rings. I decided on purchasing



a second M59 as shown above, as this last option had the added bonus of providing a selection of spares so I could selective fit and restore a superior rifle. Build costs so far where approaching £1K and I had not even started work on the rifle.

Therefore anybody considering restoration should consider his/her cost options. Whilst this is an extreme case it does clearly highlight the costs involved. Restoration in the main, is a not for profit exercise, but restoration should aim for some element of resale balance as a general target, or in my case a labour of love to restore a unique rifle and be damned with the cost.

History

The capitulation of the German forces at the end of WWII provided Norway with a glut of K98's and therefore it was logical and cost effective for any future service rifle to be built around the Mauser action. The M59 sniper rifle was approved for service in January 1959 for use by the Norwegian Army, Voluntary Shooting Force (DFS) and for home defence.

Whilst Kongsberg started production in 1959, only 150 rifles were produced in the first year. Rifles allocated for civilian use, were produced in separate production runs and the government offered financial assistance to civilians with state subsidies. In 1963/64 the typical purchase price was 660.00Kkr, with the state providing 175.00kr towards the cost of the rifle.

Early production rifles where produced only in .30-06 and in 1964, the Norwegian Defense Department approved production in 7.62 NATO. Rifles where modified slightly to accomadate the new calibre and as a result were redesignated as the M59F1. Rifles where manufactured in various production runs with some being delivered with scopes and earlier 30.06 rifles being updated to 7.62 NATO. A special edition of the M59 was developed for skiers, but only a small numbers were ever produced.

In 1967 the 6.5x55mm was accepted for use by the DFS in their M98 rifles. 6.5mm had been in use, with the Norwegian Krag from the late 1890's. The M59 was never a success in DFS and resulted in limited sales of approximately

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5,000 rifles. Norway already had a sniper rifle based on the earlier Krag and the M59 was relatively expensive to produce in comparison, with accuracy and performance being reported as inferior. For those not having access to defence ammunition, 7.62mm was more expensive at the time than 6.5mm and therefore the M59 became a reserve gun for shooting in severe weather conditions when the Krag could not be used. Production of M59 and the M59F1 was greatly reduced when the new M67 sniper rifle was approved, with the last M59 rifles being delivered to the Armed Forces in 1969. The only work that took place after this date was rifles produced for home defence were converted to 7.62 NATO and standardised to the M59F1 model.

Receiver, bolt and Barrel

The M59's receiver is a typical K98 large ring receiver and differs little from the original German K98 and therefore I will not go into any specific detail on this rifle, I will however discuss the minor differences that Kongsberg introduced. As part of the manufacturing process Kongsberg removed all the original German markings and re-stamped with their



own. The original trigger was retained but was fine tuned and a small spring plate added underneath which protruded into the cocking piece channel. This locates the cocking piece in exact same position for each shot thereby providing a consistent sear release which in turn creates a light crisp trigger pull. The front of the receiver was fitted with a permanent hand-guard ring and the old barrel replaced with a 26" heavy target version. My rifle differs slightly due to the extremely poor quality of my original barrel, I replaced it with the barrel from my second M59A1 which was 2" shorter than the original and fitted the tunnel foresight assembly, salvaged from the original barrel.



The receiver is fitted a small aperture rearsight. I am not sure if Kongsberg manufactured this sight or whether it was sourced from elsewhere as there are no identifying marks on the sight itself. However the eyepiece was manufactured by Parker Hale Ltd in England, which could indicate its source or that the eyepiece was added at a later date. Being so compact, the rearsight has very little in the way of protruding parts, which prevents the rifle getting caught on any clothing etc.



The most obvious change was the addition of the scope rail/base, it is secured by pins/screws and fits much in the same way as the German K98 side rail. The major difference in comparison with other K98 rails is the scope bracket secures to the side and not the top.



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This approach projects the scopes some 3.3" out to the left, which looks odd to most shooters as there is no obvious cheek weld and causes the rifle to be unbalanced as shown in the image to the left. As this section is to discuss the receiver, I will discuss the scope configuration in its own section.

Woodwork

The original German K98 stocks were replaced with traditional target stocks by Kongsberg. Quality of the stocks was very good, but mine needed restoring and to get the best out of the design I decided to bed the action as well.



As I was fitting the scope mount, the wood work required relieving. Unlike K98 scope ramp, which has more than its fair share of radius's the M59 ramp is nice and square and therefore much easier to fit.



Whilst Kongsberg fitted new stocks to all their rifles, they were typically WWII technology, therefore unremarkable and I shall not discuss in any further detail.

Scope & Scope Mount

The Kongsberg scope mount is unique and manufactured to a very high standard. In the UK it is simply none existent and therefore I was extremely fortunate to have been provided one from Norway.



It is a cast design and uses rings very similar to the American Weaver style which clamp two thirds around the body. Rings are 26mm in diameter which is typical for scopes of the period. The mount slides onto the ramp using a typical dovetail mount and a central thumb screw locks the mount into place. Whilst the scope has windage and elevation, the mount is also fully adjustable. The rear ring has windage adjustment using two screws and the front ring provides course elevation/depression using a thumb screw and a lock ring.

Adjusting K98 mounts in situ was awkward at best using the key with the square slots, the M59 mount in comparison is a much better design and especially the windage adjustment as it aligns perfectly with the thumb slot in the receiver. However like all rifles from this period, course adjustment of the scope mount is best done in a workshop with a fixed rest, aligning the bore using a laser and then fine adjusting on the range using your scopes adjustment drums.

Before we finish this section, a few words about the scope. From what I can identify Kongsberg used Hertel & Reuss scope, model Macro-Ziel 4 x 36-L81. As nothing was available in the UK, eBay provided a 3-7x45 model from Germany. The scope was advertised as in good working order, however upon arrival, the windage and elevation drum did not work, but I was hoping I could get it fixed in the UK.

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First impression of Hertel & Reuss scopes is one of good quality, using a traditional layout. However be warned, they are extremely unusual, in that the elevation and windage adjustment are both in the elevation drum and the focus is



in the windage drum. This unusual layout makes for a complicated internal scope mechanism and prone to failure. To make matters worst it had been a couple of months since purchase and sending the scope away for repair. The elevation/windage mechanism was broken and could not be repaired therefore by the time all this came to light I was lumbered with a unserviceable scope and was further out of pocket. Therefore a message to readers, if you are attempting a restoration project and you purchase a scope of eBay, it there is a fault it may be prudent to return the scope straight away and obtain a refund rather than wait and attempt a repair as I had attempted.

A solution to my scope problem came in the form of a German B Nickel 6x42 which I had in my scope collection. It had the same German No1 Reticule and a steel 26mm tube. It may not be the exact model, but it was from the same period and an all together superior scope.

These problems did lead me to a question about the Hertel & Reuss scopes, why did Norway procure such a scope and how did such a complicated mechanism cope with Norwegian winters and military use? my gut feeling would be, not well.



Mounting a scope in such a position, leads one to think how does this configuration works, after all, the layout is far from traditional. The first obvious observation is that the mount and the scope adds weight to the left side of the rifle and therefore the balance is effected and therefore the rifle wants to twist to the left. As a right handed shooter, the operator uses his right eye to use the scope, the fact that this scope sits 2.27 Inches to left raises the question of check weld and using the right eye would be impossible. In practice you place your check on the butt as normal and you use both eyes, your right for the aperture sight and your left for the scope.

The feeling is odd and requires practice, but with time, the easier it becomes. Having said that, when testing and zeroing the scope, I let a fiend handle the rifle, I say handle because he didn't fire a shot as he couldn't adapt to the configuration and could only in theory use the aperture sight.

On the range

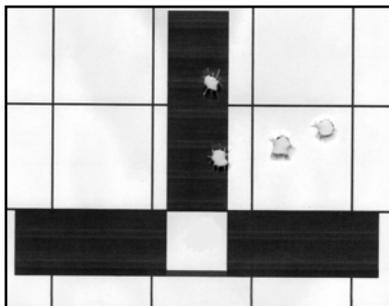
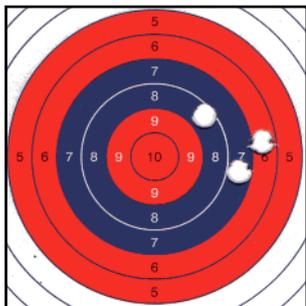
My first trip to the range was to function test the rifle and zero the scope. Shooting from the bench and using a front rest, my first few rounds was to test the rifle, feed, fire, extract and the rifle cycled perfectly. The next few rounds was to carry out any course adjustment of the scope and ensure rounds where reliably hitting the target at 100 yards. This course adjustment also helped me get use to shooting with my left eye. There is always this natural reaction to try and

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align your right eye and from time to time I would move my cheek away from the butt, realise what I was doing and therefore had to reposition my head. As a result of this unusual shooting position, zeroing took a little bit longer than usual, but group sizes were superb, consistently obtaining 1" or less. The target shown on the left was a very pleasing 20mm group.



My next trip to the range, two weeks later was to zero the aperture sight. Using the same format as before, i.e. shooting fully supported, I zeroed the rifle with group sizes being typically 2" and the image on the right was a good example at 49mm. I modified the post type foresight blade by grinding a point, which gave me a better

point of aim, however no matter how hard I tried, group sizes did not improve. To be honest that was probably down to me and not the rifle as I rarely shoot with aperture sights any more, due to my eyes and therefore I am out of practice.

Summary

If you follow my Armourers Reports, you will know that I like unusual rifles. As a target rifle this is a heavy barrelled Mauser typical of many Mauser's converted after WWII using surplus actions and therefore is fairly traditional. However the good build quality is reflective of Kongsberg and the rifle shoots formidable groups which puts many modern 308's to shame.

The scope mount is what makes this rifle unique. Why Kongsberg decided on this mount configuration is unknown to me. It certainly upsets the rifles balance and rotates it to the left, but to be honest I was so busy concentrating on shooting with my left eye, that I didn't really notice it.



As a life long shooter, shooting with my left eye is very odd and demands supreme concentration, however I was amazed at my group sizes. I had assumed wrongly, that shooting in this format would be a struggle and I cant understand why this unnatural position hasn't opened up my group size. On another note, as human beings our heads are different sizes, as are the distances between our eyes. My head size and the distance between my eyes are quiet large and therefore I have to really push my cheek into the butt to obtain good eye/scope alignment. This doesn't cause me any problems, in fact it helps me focus more on shooting with my left eye, but a person with a larger head might have problems. As mentioned earlier, a shooting friend of mine simply could not shoot in this configuration and therefore this setup is definitely not for everyone.

This report also highlights the problems of unscrupulous firearms dealers in the UK and similar hazards on eBay even with its built-in precautionary mechanisms. As a result the project took longer and was considerably more expensive than originally planned. If it wasn't for my dogmatic approach, this project it would have probably fallen

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at the first hurdle and it would have been doubtful that a finished rifle would have materialised. Having said that, I am pleased that I pursued and finished this project, despite all the trials and tribulations, this rifle is unique, is very accurate and as far as I know it is the only model of its type in the UK which attracts attention on the range.



The rifle is now a proud part of two of my collections, my WWII era sniper rifles and my Kongsberg collection. Despite all the unforeseen troubles, the rifle turned out well and is a pleasure to shoot.

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