

The Japanese Type 99 Arisaka



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“last ditch” rifles. These were extremely crudely made. Chrome plating was eliminated; sights simplified, no bolt-cover slots were incorporated, no cleaning rods were mounted under the barrel, monopods were dispensed with, and stamped stock furniture was utilized. The receivers often had improper heat treatment, and are considered unsafe to fire. However, the early models of the Type 99 were extremely strong. In tests conducted after the war, the Type 38 and Type 99 Arisakas proved to have the strongest actions of any bolt-action rifles used during WWII. The rifle illustrated was manufactured at Nagoya Arsenal, located on the southern coast of Honshu, Japan, in 1940. It has the chrome-plated bore and bolt face, and the anti-aircraft rear sight, but the monopod and bolt cover have been removed.

It's noteworthy that what appear to be duplicate serial numbers may be encountered. The serial number on the left of the receiver may have a “series” symbol in front of the Arabic numerals. This needs to be taken into account, as well as the specific arsenal at which the rifle was manufactured. Deciphering the series symbols and arsenal marks requires a good reference book, of which there are several. The last three digits of the serial number should be found on the underside of the bolt handle base.

As originally manufactured, the receivers of most Type 99s were stamped with a 16-petal chrysanthemum design. This was the symbol of ownership by the Emperor. At the end of the war, most of these “mums” were ground off as a face-saving gesture either by the surrendering Japanese troops, or possibly by U.S. personnel at the order of General Douglas MacArthur. Rifles with the mum intact are probably battlefield pickups, while those with the mums ground off were undoubtedly formally surrendered. Both are collectable, but mummied rifles will bring a premium in price.

The Japanese used both Type 38 and Type 99 Arisakas extensively during WWII. It was hoped that the Type 99 would fully supplant the Type 38, but production never caught up to the demand. Combined production of all Arisaka models between 1906 and 1945 has been estimated at 6.4 million, with about 3.5 million of them being the Type 99. Type 38 and Type 99 rifles were made at seven Japanese arsenals plus the Mukden Arsenal in Manchuria and the Jinsen Arsenal in Korea. 133,000 Type 99 rifles were acquired by the Republic of Korea after the war, re-chambered to .30-06, and used during the Korean War. A .308 bullet slipping down a .311 bore didn't make for extreme accuracy, but these re-treads worked well enough.

The bayonet used on Japanese rifles during WWII was called the Type 30, which dated from 1897. These were usually about 20 inches long and may be found with either a hooked quillon/crosspiece (for stacking arms), or a straight one, and a curved or straight pommel/butt. There were 12 different manufacturers. Serial numbers are independent of the rifles.

Examples of the Arisaka Type 99 can be found easily, as many came to the U.S. as war souvenirs lugged back by veterans of the Pacific conflict. Long ignored by collectors as “cheap Japanese junk rifles,” the early rifles were in fact very well made, accurate, and extremely strong. They are becoming increasingly popular as relics of World War II. Avoid the “last ditch” examples, and check for matching serial numbers on the receiver and bolt. Also avoid those re-chambered to .30-06, as many were. Have a gunsmith check the rifle out before shooting it. Ammo and reloading dies and components are available. As a shooter, an early Type 99 should be able to give you a 1.5-inch group at 100 yards. These are classics, and an important piece of military history.