

Collecting and Shooting the Military Surplus Rifle



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Article by [Jamie Mangrum](#)

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I noted that November 22nd passed this year with minimal remembrance and fanfare at least as far as the media is concerned on the subject of the Kennedy assassination. The idea for this article came about when a reporter from a large financial publication contacted Surplusrifle.com and started to ask questions about what type of people collect Carcano 91/38 short rifles. He wanted to know if we knew of collectors that collected for the sole reason that allegedly President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas with a M 91/38 short rifle, with the serial number C2766, chambered in 6.5x52 Carcano. I am not going to debate the assassination as I am not even an amateur buff but I do enjoy collecting Carcano rifles and carbines.

**More Information on the Carcano serial number C2766**

<http://personal.stevens.edu/~gliberat/carcano/c2766.html>

**Questions Asked:**

*I'm working on an article on the Carcano, particularly its history as a collectable during the past forty years. Was there a burst of interest, say, after the JFK assassination (and after the movie)? Has the interest in the gun among collectors been overtaken by its historical significance as a World War II combat rifle? In other words, has Mussolini overtaken Kennedy as the main aspect of historical significance?*

*It's interesting to find that people with knowledge of bolt-action rifles of a certain vintage seem to believe that Oswald could have made that shot, which conspiracy theorists (including some firearms owners)*

consider all but impossible. Any thoughts on why this is? Are you aware of any contests, competitions, etc. in which the basic conditions of those shots are duplicated?

### My Answers:

I collect rifles from WWI, WWII, and Korea and the Carcano is a very challenging subject to collect because they are difficult to find and when you do find them they are usually in poor condition. I believe that (as you said) Mussolini and the interest in WWII have over shadowed the Kennedy assassination for most collectors. The historical significance of who and where it was carried is really the mystique that most folks are drawn to when collecting rifles like the Carcano. Recently I purchased a Carcano Model 38 because it had Finnish markings on it. It turns out that during WWII, Mussolini sent somewhere around 70k Carcano rifles to Finland to help them in their war against the Soviet Union. This to me is incredible history and history I can see and touch. When ever I see the assassination subject come up in message forums or articles concerning Kennedy it is usually in some foot note sense or with some skepticism that the Model 38 was even used in the shooting. Personally I think the Carcano Model 91/38 is a great little rifle. Other than what I have seen on TV, I have never met or heard of anyone attempting to replicate the shots or any type of contest. Personally I think a contest would be in very poor taste.

### An Example of Discussions on our Forum:

<http://www.websitetoolbox.com/tool/post/surplusrifle/vpost?id=682834>



I recently received an email from my friend ([River City Gun Exchange](#)) Don Leong who said he had an interesting Model 38 Carcano with Finnish markings on it. I was intrigued and immediately said that I would take it and I set out researching how this rifle had come about. **Figure 1** shows the Finnish SA Markings ([SA] "Suomen Armeija") on my rifle. Italy gave 91/38 short rifles to Finland as war aid for use against the Russians.

### More Info on the Finnish Carcano

<http://personal.stevens.edu/~gliberat/carcano/models.html>

<http://www.jaegerplatoon.net/RIFLES6.htm>

<http://www.mosinnagant.net/finland/Finn-bayonets.asp>



The 91/38 short rifles given to Finland were chambered in the 7.35x51 Carcano caliber. The 7.35x51mm Carcano was adopted for use by Italy in 1938 to replace the 6.5x52mm Carcano. After critical supply problems the new cartridge was withdrawn from service and the Italians reverted back to using the 6.5x52mm Carcano round again.



Finding 7.35 Carcano can be difficult and costly to purchase. I searched the internet for surplus ammo and found some but it was way too expensive. I looked into the possibility of reloading my own but balked at the cost of brass. Buffalo Arms Co. has [7.35 Carcano brass](#) for \$.95 per case. That is not a case of 20 or 100 pieces of brass. That is \$.95 per single case. A box of 50 cases costs over \$40. Then add on the cost of [7.35 Carcano reloading dies](#) at \$28 and a box of [.298" Dia. 150 Grn. Sptz SP bullets](#) at \$21 for a box of 100 and you have an expensive outing. I am not saying I will not eventually make this leap as I have three Carcanos chambered in this caliber.

<b>Some Sources of Ammo as of 11/26/2005</b>
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[Cabela's Obsolete Ammo](http://www.alleghenytradeco.com/collectibles.htm)

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### Creative 7.35 Carcano Brass Making

7.35mm Carcano brass isn't all that hard to find if you get creative.

NORMA brass in 6.5x54mm Mannlicher Schoenauer is nearly always less expensive than the Carcano brass and shares the same head diameter. (It was developed from 6.5x52mm Carcano.) Simply run the cases into the Lee full length sizing die, trim and chamfer.

You can take Carcano 6.5 brass and resize it to 7.35. 6.5 Carcano brass is available on e-bay at a slight premium as a general rule, and Hornady brass can usually be had from Graf's.

Nordichthug

I was starting to worry that this would be just another rifle sitting in the safe that I was unable to shoot because of scarcity of ammo. Heck, this never stops me from buying rifle. Actually it adds to the overall challenge of collecting. It is nice though to see how a rifle shoots after you finally get it home.

Luckily my friend Don emailed me and had found around 50 rounds of surplus in really great condition. My cost was only \$34. Actually this is great deal when you count they were all in original stripper clips that are very difficult to find and also very costly these days. Just 8 original stripper clips and the shipping & handling would cost me more than the ammo and that is if I could even find them.



Box from surplus 7.35 ammo.



**7.35 Carcano Surplus Ammo on Stripper Clip**



**The front sights were modified to have higher blades to provide for a zeroing distance of only 150 meters.**



**6 shot group at 50 yards using surplus ammo.**



**24 shots at 100 yards using surplus ammo.**

When I got to the range I had to follow our [hang fire guidelines](#) as 6 of the cartridges did not fire and only produced loud audible clicks as the firing pin hit the primer. A couple rounds took a second or two to cook off as the firing pin clicked. It sounded like shooting a percussion black powder rifle. There is nothing that makes me more nervous when shooting as dud rounds, especially with old surplus ammo. I can always picture me taking the cartridge out of the chamber and having it cook off in my hand or possibly uncontrolled from the bench top. I **always** wait at least three minutes before opening the bolt.

**Hangfire:**

A delay in firing a cartridge after the firing pin has struck the primer. ([International Hunter Education Association IHEA](#))

Even though I had problems with the ammo the short rifle was surprisingly accurate at 50 yards. **Figure 7** shows my very first 6 rounds. **Figure 8** shows my target with me shooting out at a distance of 100 yards. By this time I was having ammo problems and was moving the rifle around to remove dud cartridges and as a result my accuracy suffered. I am very interested to see what good hand loaded ammo can contribute.

[Man o war's Firearm Values](#) lists the Carcano M1938 7.35mm SA-marked as rare but the values do not reflect it. For a rifle in Very Good to Excellent condition you would expect to pay \$110 to \$270, which is the price range I paid.

As I told the reporter:

*Personally I think the Carcano Model 91/38 is a great little rifle. The historical significance of who and where it was carried is really the mystique that most folks are drawn to when collecting rifles like the Carcano. Recently I purchased a Carcano Model 38 because it had Finnish markings on it. It turns out that during WWII, Mussolini sent somewhere around 70k Carcano rifles to Finland to help them in their war against the Soviet Union. This to me is incredible history and history I can see and touch.*

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