

Collecting and Shooting the Military Surplus Rifle



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Article by Mike Conroy (Itcboy)

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I have read about many ways to refinish stocks on surplus rifles. There have been literally hundreds of threads on various message boards, articles in different gun magazines and other websites that have devoted probably too much time regarding this subject. Sometimes it seems that everybody you speak with or communicate to is "thee" authority on this subject. I am in no way portraying myself to be either.

You will hear many tell you that when you start to refinish the wood on your rifle, anything from degreasers to conventional oven cleaner does the trick. Many use acetones or mineral spirits. Others have actually put their stock sets in into their oven in the kitchen. While all of these methods and products are favorable amongst some people, I for one, couldn't care less about using any of them. I don't need to.

You see, I am a surplus rifle junkie. I am the type that does not want to wait for days on end to finish a rifle stock. I want to be out at the range shooting. That's what the rifle is made for. I am in no way trying to portray myself as an expert, but, with my limited amount of time for shooting, the last thing I want to be doing is messing around in my garage using harmful chemicals that can be noxious and also damage my stock set.

So, what I am about to tell you is going to make some of your scowl with skepticism. Others will probably say this is a stupid idea and will refuse to try it. But, those of you who do believe me, you will find a very useful, convenient and easy way to not only strip your stock set, but to also raise a lot of those gouges, dings and dents out of the wood.

The method that I am talking about is using your dishwasher. Yes, I just said it... your dishwasher. I cannot count the amount of stocks that I have refinished this way. I have also used the dishwasher, at the same time, to clean and degrease, literally to bare metal, all of the rifles metal parts. The dishwasher is a safe way to strip the stock set and to also clean out all of the small little nooks and tight spaces on a rifle that would normally be very tedious to clean, and might take several hours to finish.

I have bought many rifles from the CMP. I love shooting the M1 Garand and if I buy a rack grade, after a couple hours of inspecting it, it will go into the dishwasher that night. My wife was totally against this at first. However, after seeing that there is no harm done, she has never had a problem since then. Typically, I have to take out the top rack from the dishwasher. I leave the bottom rack in, and I place all of the small metal parts into the silverware tray. Next I will completely field strip the rifle down to its last part. If it's meant to come apart, I take the whole rifle apart. When I am refinishing a stock, I always put the butt down towards the rack. The reason for this is because water will collect into the hollowed out areas meant for cleaning kits and other accoutrements. Trust me, I learned this the hard way.

Next I put all of the parts into the dishwasher, including the stock set, and I use regular dishwashing detergent. I will set the dishwasher on a heavy cleaning "pots & pans" cycle and then start the wash cycle. I usually do this at night before bed. I will let it go overnight and then in the morning I will check on the results.



The stock before

When you actually see the results in person, they are unbelievable. Almost all of the dings and dents are gone. If there are gouges in the wood, they are raised as best as they are going to be. All of the crud, muck, grease, crap and whatever you can think of are gone.

All of the metal parts have absolutely no cosmoline left. It's all gone. It's hard to believe that the dishwasher does such a great job. It actually looks as if the parts are from a different rifle.

I normally inspect the stock set first. The wood is nice and smooth and is ready to be rubbed out with #0000 steel wool or a very fine sand paper. The drying cycle from the dishwasher has dried the wood, but others I know will let the wood sit for a couple of days. As far as the metal parts are concerned, all they need is to be rubbed down with some penetrating oil on a shop cloth. The bluing or parkerized finish will not be ruined by the dishwasher method.



Here are some pics of the stock set the next morning. Notice how clean and smooth they are.

After letting the stock set dry for a day or two, I will rub the stock down with the fine steel wool. After that, I will apply several coats of Watco Danish Oil and then after that I will apply boiled linseed oil. I will leave my refinishing techniques at that. I am not here to tell you about Danish oil and BLO, every person has their own way of commencing with their own refinish that they want. All I am here to do is to convey to you a fast and very easy way to completely strip and clean all of the parts on your surplus rifle.



I have had discussions with skeptics concerning the dishwasher method and their claims to problems that it can cause. Here is a list of problems and how I reply to them;

1) The dishwasher will ruin or raise a cartouche on a stock. First of all, you should not be refinishing a stock that has collector potential. Secondly, a piece of cut out duct tape over the cartouche will prevent it from being ruined.

2) The heat and water will warp the stock. I have never had any problems with this and I have refinished over 100 stock sets. If you really think about this, it's ridiculous. When the troops landed on Normandy and waded into the ocean on Guadalcanal, were their stock sets warped. I can see if you leave the wood in water for a continuous amount of time, but for a wash cycle in a dishwasher, I disagree that any warping would happen.

3) The drying cycle will “crack” the wood. This has never happened to me. If there is a concern, turn off the dishwasher dry cycle and let the stock set air dry.

4) The wood will swell so that the receiver and barrel won't fit. If anything, a tighter fitting stock will allow for better accuracy. I have only had to sand down a couple of areas on some stocks to get them to fit. However, the sanding that was needed was very minor.

5) My wife won't let me use the dishwasher because it will ruin it. I have never had a problem in using my dishwasher, my wife was skeptical at first, but now she's used to it.

Sometimes, you will run into a rifle that simply won't fit into a dishwasher, i.e., a Turk Mauser. If that's the case, I will fill up the bathtub with the hottest water it will give. I will let the stock sit in the hot water for a few minutes and then I will use Palmolive soap and a plastic scrub brush. I will gently scrub the stock and all of the grime and crud will come right off. All of the other parts will go into the dishwasher for cleaning.

I am not one to take credit for an idea that I didn't think of, and this whole idea of using the dishwasher was not my original idea. I really don't know who's idea it originally was, nor do I think we will ever find out the truth as to who's it was. I will give credit to a gentleman who I did get the idea from. He frequents a lot of the gun forums on the internet and his handle may or may not be familiar to you. I got this idea from Swampy. Swampy is an avid surplus rifle collector and has his own website detailing the dishwasher method. The website is

www.swampworks.com/Swampy%27s%20Stuff%20Pages/Stock%20Refinishing-1.html



Here is the finished product!

Hopefully this will save you literally hours when it comes to cleaning up that old beater of a rifle. After the dishwasher method, that beater will look like a hot looking shooter! Good luck.

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