

How to Clean a K98k Wooden Stock

By *Darrin Weaver*

Collectors would be amazed at the things you can do with a little soap, water and patience. Like many of you, I enjoy collecting Mausers. I began about 10 years ago with a beat up, mis-matched "S/42" with a stock in dire need of cleaning. Along the way, I picked up a few tricks to clean and restore what is becoming increasingly difficult wood to obtain. Most, if not all stocks could benefit from a thorough cleaning, even the most valuable collector grade stocked firearms.

Another consideration is the stocks that are imported attached to the K-98s currently entering this country. There are some really nice jewels out there and just take a minimal effort to restore them to pristine shape (note: Historical Parts sells stocks that have not been cleaned or altered, leaving up to the buyers discretion). And yes, even the Russian arsenal re-finished stocks with the deep, left butt serial numbers can be brought back to vibrant life.

But before we continue a word about originality. I don't personally embrace the idea that cleaning a stock of 50+ years of grease, grime, and sweat affects originality in any way. There are those that do..... let personal preference and the value/overall condition of the piece be your guide. If you are putting a stock onto another rifle, originality is out the window anyhow (and you shouldn't try to misrepresent the piece as original if you do switch stocks). In regard to the Russian re-works, they have been heavily "dicked" with (I like that verb- Call it poetic license) already, so who cares what you do in order to bring it closer to originality? Enough said.

The first thing you have to ask yourself is what kind of wood do you have, Laminate or Hardwood (usually walnut)? Second is what type of glue was used in the lamination process, white or red? Thirdly, ask yourself, what markings are you trying to preserve? And lastly, what was the original finish, stained or unstained, finished or semi-finished? Ok, so now you're in the garage with a 50+-year-old piece of wood.

The first thing I like to do is strip all of the metal off the piece. You will need a spanner wrench for the stock reinforcing cross-lug as well as a set of punches to remove the bayonet lug, and if desired (sometimes I do, sometimes I don't), the bolt take down disk. The reasons for stripping the piece of metal should be obvious: metal rusts and you will be using a little water.

Once stripped, take a look at the wood. The laminates during most of the war were made with a red hydrophilic (water-repellent) epoxy resin. These can be cleaned easily with water or water-based cleaners or solvents. However, later in the war, white wood glue, similar to Elmers carpenters glue, was used. You should never get these stocks wet! The laminations may fall apart as the glue softens with prolonged exposure to water.

If attempting to clean the white glue laminates, I remove as much of the grease and grime that I can with a tiny spatula or other instrument. Then I liberally apply acetone (this can be bought in any hardware store). After letting it sit for about 5 minutes, I wipe it off with a non-abrasive

cloth. Acetone will not hurt the glue. I repeat this process 3 or 4 times or until I get the depth of cleanliness I am looking for. When satisfied, I wipe the piece of wood down with a good, high concentrate, denatured alcohol. This neutralizes and removes all traces of the acetone. Neither the acetone nor alcohol will affect stock markings or Waffenamts. This is about all that can be done to these types of laminates. In so far as the red glue type, I begin by stripping off the larger deposits of grease and grime with a dry rag and some flat instrument. Once most of this is off, I spray the piece liberally with Dow Basin Tub and Tile Cleaner, the "scrubbing bubbles" stuff. There isn't a better cleaner to get rid of 50+ years of grime, grease, and human sweat (I mean after all, it's used to clean showers in truck stops!). Once applied I let the bubbles sit there and do their job for about 10 minutes, and then quickly rinse it off with a light spray of hot water. I repeat this several times. You won't believe how much crud will come off. A word to the wise though: Once stripped of oils and grease, the markings and waffenamts will be vulnerable to the water, the wood will swell and the markings will be blurred or lost. I keep the markings liberally greased to protect them during the cleaning. If you have some very persistent areas, a dab of common dish detergent and a sponge will usually solve them. When finished, rinse the piece well with hot water and allow it to dry. I usually let them stand at room temperature for a couple of days.

A couple of notes before I continue: You are not soaking the stock in water, just rinsing it. If done properly, the stock will not warp. I never use oven cleaner as some collectors do, as this leaves a greenish hue to the wood. A good collector can spot that a mile away. Also, none of this cleaning will remove the original stain, if present, as oven cleaner and other harsher petroleum distillate solvents tend to do.

At this point you have some options:

- (a) If you desire to stain or re-stain the piece, do so now.
- (b) If removing dents, do so now (see below).
- (c) If removing those pesky Russian serial numbers, do so now (see below).

By now you should have reached the original finish, which I leave alone. The piece will look dry and nasty at this point, and you will be saying to yourself, "Oh hell.....what have I done". Don't despair, were not done yet.

Russian re-works: Before you do anything, you have to strip the stain off. I use any of the common paste paint strippers. Brush it on, let it sit and then wipe off the stain and lacquer. Make sure you do this repeatedly over the serial number. When this is done, you should be able to see most of the waffenamts that were covered up by the finish. I have been surprised many times! Now, what to do is grease the area all around the SN, leaving the number area as unfinished bare wood. Then I soak the hell out of that area with drops of hot water. I repeat this process many times. The numbers will rebound about 1/2 of their original depth. I then take a wet cloth and run a hot iron repeatedly over the same area forcing the steam from the cloth into the numbers. Now, I let the area dry and see what I have left. If still present, I sometimes.....gulp!elect to sand that part of the stock and try to match the finish to the rest of the stock. This is best done when you remove the bolt take down disk. When happy finish as below.

The same holds true for dents: remove all traces of finish, clean with the "scrubbing bubbles", soak with hot water, and steam out the remaining depth. I rarely have ever had a dent I couldn't do something with without sanding. However, this process is a great deal more difficult with the hardwoods.

I clean the stock take down disk with naval jelly and a bit of steel wool. Works perfect every time. You do not need to remove it from the stock to do this. They were originally left "in the white". Just remember to use gloves and oil it well when you are finished.

Now is the time to finish the stock. Whatever you use, the secret is to rub it in, over and over again. And then rub in some more. At the end, buff it with a soft cloth to a nice sheen. I like bees wax or common axle grease tinted with iodine (to accentuate the red of the glue). Some folks like boiled linseed oil, silicon oil, lemon oil, etc. The bottom line is use whatever you like best. I am against modern finishes, such as polyurethane or shellac, as the originals were not done this way. They were sanded, maybe stained, and issued to the troops. Whatever oil or grease finish they acquired, was by accident or use. German soldiers, I have learned, were very apt to protect their rifles/stocks with whatever lubricant they had access to: primarily sunflower oil or common motor oil.

I do not have any advice on stains, as I leave the original finish intact in most cases. The bottom line is that we all want originality. It is quite nice to acquire a 100% original gun with a perfect stock. But sometimes you must restore a firearm the best you can. Or sometimes a quality gun and stock just needs a good cleaning. In either case, this is how to go about it. I hope this helps.