

The Scout Rifle Has Run It's Course

CPT Daniel A. Beach
US Army, Retired
Hammers4Hunting.com
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The purpose of this paper is to put forth the argument that the scout rifle has been overcome by firearms development, and optics advancements. Slaying sacred cows never makes the messenger popular. Just ask Galileo. But hey, the science on flat earth vs. round earth was “settled”. The catholic church said so. Therefore, shut up, or we’ll start your wiener roast. Read through my points and hear me out. Then you can decide for yourself after considering the merits of the scout rifle platform, and the matters I put onto the table.

Progressive snowflakes – you may want to go get your bubble wrap suits on now.

A disclaimer or two. I studied under Col. Cooper at Gunsite in 2002. Instructors for Team Kansas were Pat Rogers, Louie Awerbuck, Ed Head, and one other lost to time. My “I love me wall” in my office has a photo of me sitting beside the Col. in his Sconce. This article is not about attacking him. It is about taking his awesome hard work on rifle design and use, and dragging those forward into a new era. In his day, we did not have Chinese Walmart container ships full of low Power Variable Optics (LPVO), nor red dots. The AR platform (AKA, Legos for adults) had not exploded into the most popular rifle in America. BLANTIFA did not assault and attempt to burn down the federal courthouse in Portland for months at a time. In other words, things have changed. We have more and better tools to take onto the battlefield, whether that is a genuine one, or your local neighborhood, or really just your hunting location. There is a much greater chance you will need to take tools onto the battlefield near you soon.

Specific to my background so you might frame where my comments come from – I started my military career at the Uncle Sam's Community College (West Point) in 1980 wearing OD fatigues and black boots. It was quite nice when the Army issued brass defectors for us southpaws to use when firing M-16s. I rose to the cadet rank of brigade command sergeant major, a position selected by the TAC NCOs. In 1984 I completed the last Cavalry Officer's Basic Course taught by the Army at FT Knox. I rendered a three-year tour of duty patrolling the East-West German and Czechoslovakian borders from Schweinfurt& Coburg with Bravo Troop, 3/7Cav and 4/4Cav. I served as a platoon leader twice and as B Troop executive officer. Back through Knox for more schooling and out to FT Bliss to serve as the S-4 for 3/3 ACR. I left active duty in JAN90. The fight in the sandbox kicked off in August. (Curses!) The rest of my 21 years of service included a 14-year break in service, reserve and guard time. I commanded HHC/2CAB/137IN during a mobilization and hazardous duty deployment to Djibouti. I finished my service in the Operations shop, 35ID, before retirement in 2105. Three times over

the course of my 21 years, my NCOs came to me and asked me to resign my commission in order to serve with them as an NCO. My civilian training courses with weapons number: one at Gunsight, two with Gabe Suarez, and six with Clint and Heidi at Thunder Ranch.

What is a Scout Rifle? Is it the ultimate American idiocy to quest after one rifle to do everything? Is it a specialized dueling weapon for elitists? An antiquated, inferior weapon that now needs to be relegated to stand beside the M-1 Garand and K98 Mauser? (Hardly seed company, these two rifles.) Let us take a look.

One way to define the term is to let you see what the attendees of the past scout rifle conference in 2015 at Gunsight had to say in describing the scout rifle. I extracted these final day comments from Richard Mann's work, The Scout Rifle Study, pages 185-6.

- A practical, always in reach, rifle for a man needing to protect and provide for himself.
- Defensive oriented and suitable to a reasonable range of 400 yards.
- Not intended for high capacity firepower
- Fast and handy for quick, emergency situations
- Light and small enough for ATV, horse, foot
- Should be a utility rifle set-up for both quick work at short ranges, and capable of accurate practical shots at longer distances
- A 300-yard capable and compact rifle capable for any purpose
- A self-defense, hunting, and a back-up rifle for when things go wrong
- Light enough and short enough to be fieldable for long periods of time and across any environment you need to traverse
- The Scout is an observer – the rifle is secondary, but should allow the scout to continue observing. It should be heavy hitting enough to take care of the shooting and get back to scouting.
- Used as an outside the home and trail protection tool, short, light, and maneuverable, with high ammo capacity. Also, an in-the-corner, ready to go weapon. It has enough power to provide protection from critters that might bite, rugged enough to function through a little mistreatment.
- Rifle suitable for big game up to moose, out to about 300 yards or beyond that can be employed for survival or defensive purposes, from contact to 300 yards out. Action (bolt, semi-auto, etc.) does not matter.
- A light, short versatile utility rifle. Should be usable for defense in field or home. Target size and weight with the operator's skill and ability level. Should be capable of first round hits in 10 inches or so, out to about 400 meters.

Now let us examine the enigma of the scout rifle by hearing what the creator of the platform, Col. Cooper, developed as criteria. These also were taken directly from The Scout Rifle Study, page 186:

- Low magnification forward mounted scope for close and/or moving targets and both eyes open shooting – in QD mounts
- A bolt action
- A push-feed
- Employ a high quality and reliable detachable magazine

- Employ a tang safety
- The minimum capacity in the gun of 5 rounds. The rifle should have a blind box magazine unless the expected use is for the military.
- Extra ammo carried on the gun – 15 rounds
- The rifle should have a single load capability
- The rifle uses a 3-point sling
- BUIS with QD mounts – night visible front and aperture rear
- The rifle should be robust
- The rifle should be chambered in .308WIN - 7mm-08, .338 Federal, .358WIN, .243WIN acceptable
- Overall length of the rifle should be 37 to 39 inches long – short enough for the user to carry the rifle at the wrist so the muzzle is at least 4” off the ground
- It should weight 6.5 to 7.5 pounds – lighter is better – user holds rifle out at arm’s length vertically at the wrist for 30 seconds as a test.
- 1-4x optic with 3-400 yard hashmarks for chosen cartridge
- The scope should employ an illuminated reticle
- The rifle should employ a good trigger with a 3-4 pound pull weight
- The stock should have an adjustable or compact LOP.
- A 16-18”, medium contour barrel is strongly encouraged.
- The scout rifle should not use a flash suppressor.
- It could possibly carry a bipod.
- The rifle should be weather resistant.
- The rifle should employ a polymer stock.

Tertiarily, let’s examine the principals for constructing a scout rifle that Col. Cooper spelled out. Richard Mann listed them on page 60 of The Scout Rifle Study. These emerged from Mr. Mann’s thorough study of Col. Cooper’s papers and were dated 1998. All bold words are my emphasis.

1. The most important thing about the scout is that it is a **general-purpose rifle**.
2. The most outstanding characteristic is **handiness**.
3. It is **light, compact, and friendly**.
4. It will put ‘em where you point ‘em from arm’s length out to a range too great for any sensible attempt.
5. The essential characteristics of the scout rifle are compactness and what may be called **shootability**.
6. It is easy to carry, convenient to pack into a boat, car, or airplane, powerful enough for any target short of pachyderms, and easily provisioned throughout the world.

7. It is ideally adapted to the snapshot, and quite able to group well into the vital zone of a 200 pound target out to around 400 paces under field conditions.
8. When it comes to kicking and climbing, and running and jumping, leaping in and out of hunting cars, and quick selection of position, the scout begins to shine.

How, then, could such a well-defined idea have run its course? To answer this question, I will first address the underlying philosophy or premise of Col. Cooper's rifle. Then we will examine the status/validity of each characteristic. Next, we will walk through specific rifles manufactured today and see how they stack up to the Col.'s ideas. Last, we will see where these efforts take us.

Col. Cooper's idea or vision of a "scout" who would carry this pattern rifle doesn't exist any longer. There is no spot for a "Churchill", Burnham, or Kit Carson, on the modern battlefield. No Soldier takes a horse, a vehicle or his LPCs (Leather Personnel Carriers) and wanders about the battlefield alone reconnoitering. Armies fight as organized groups. Solitarily strolling about a battlefield is an invitation to a Darwin award. "Friendly fire" or literal minefields could easily lead to garnering this award.

Guerrillas all over the Roman (American) Empire engage an AR-wielding enemy with SMLE bolt guns even today. However, was this really what Col. Cooper envisioned? If I am going to defend myself or fight, I will reach for the 25 round-magazine fed AR-10. For the same reason one chooses a Glock 19 over a .38 revolver, many would select an AR-15 with 30 rounds in the magazine over a 5 round Mauser clone fashioned into a scout rifle. The normal capacity magazine enables the rifleman to manipulate/reload the rifle less. Therefore, he or she can stay focused on slaying bad guys.

As to the matter of self-protection, the scout rifle is a distant second choice. Wolves travel in packs. Were I to defend my home from a mob of BLANTIFA rioters tossing Molotov cocktails, my first choice for a tool would be an AR-10 in .308WIN – 16" barrel, 25 round magazines, a LPVO with lit reticle, and the horrid (cue the sinister music) FLASH SUPPRESSOR! This would be a vastly superior tool to the 5-round capable scout rifle for self-protection. Could I drop a few of the communists with a scout rifle – sure. Let's be honest, however. The scout rifle is an outdated and superseded level of technology for self-defense. The ergonomics of the AR platform at least equal the handiness of the scout rifle. A magazine with 20 or 25 rounds means ¼ of the reloading activity over a scout rifle.

Shooting more, and reloading less, would be a fine way to stop the home invasion that initiates with a "UPS Driver" getting the front door to open so the stack of his hoodlum buddies against the wall can rush the homeowner. Thinking you can defend your home with a bolt gun against a squad of thieves is wishful thinking. The Kenosha Kid would have been hard pressed to have protected himself as well as he did if he had been manually cycling a bolt vs. the AR doing this for him. Defending oneself can be better done with a gas gun than with a bolt action. Why do you think the left is rabidly and maniacally trying to outlaw ARs?

I would not feel hopelessly disadvantaged if I had my .308WIN scout rifle to use against gun confiscating ATF thugs with AR-15s. It certainly wouldn't be my first choice, however. I do believe that there is component of "the Warrior and not the weapon" at play. I recall a story shared by Clint Smith about an Alaskan resident resenting the attention of three "peace officers" with a single shot .30-06 that turned out poorly for all involved. However, I think it reasonable to remove the military and self-defense aspect of the discussion. We are then left with the hunting use of the rifle.

On a safari in Africa, the hunter is ALWAYS accompanied by a Professional Hunter (PH), and at times by a game warden. The PH knows the lay of the land intimately and determines where the hunting party goes. While the hunter may indeed be exploring Namibia or South Africa, he or she is not "scouting". Could a man take his scout rifle on a solitary stalk of elk in Colorado. Sure, he could. (I did.) However, why the 2.5X scout scope vs. a 3-9x40, or a 2-7x36 scope mounted conventionally? The variable scopes would significantly enhance the hunter's chances of slaying the elk across a meadow or valley.

Part of Cooper's design parameters assumed use in Africa on plains game/around the world hunting. The power of the cartridge was to be adequate for dropping a 500-pound animal. However, travel to Africa is now nearly impossible due to the communist Chinese flu. At best, it entails severe risk of becoming quarantined in a foreign nation, being unable to actually go on your safari, or to return to your home. When Delta Airlines and the rest of the carriers cancel all the flights to the Republic of South Africa, it makes it kinda tough to get there. Long swim. "But Beach, this is a temporary thing – we will get back to "normal" soon!" When was the last time you witnessed tyrants give back power to their subjects? I hope you are correct, but I ain't holdin' my breath!

If one is not restricted from using a gas gun due to the inability to travel to Africa (or the rest of the world), then why not use a gas gun when hunting here in the States? Like it or not, the lack of sexy, svelte lines, and, of course, the tradition of Karamojo Bell hunting with a bolt gun, hunting with the rifle you will have to slay communists with is excellent training.

There is another way to examine this world-wide hunting argument. Why not just shoot a .375 Ruger and be done with any worries about dropping an animal weighing 500 pounds? (Public Safety Announcement – shot placement always trumps size of cartridge.) This takes the hunter up to and including the ability to take cape buffalo, hippo, eland, lion, et al. Then again, I was once accused by a member of the class of 1982 of using a sledge hammer to swat flies.

The scout rifle should be the ultimate poster child of a general-purpose rifle (GPR). You know, the Swiss army knife of rifles. To this idea, I first respond with "What real, red-blooded American, owns only one rifle??!" Semi-kidding aside, what constitutes a GPR in Idaho will likely manifest in a manner that is significantly different than a GPR rifle in Germany. (Drilling, anyone?) How about a GPR rifle in the wide-open spaces of WY vs. the woodlands of PA? What does a general-purpose rifle look like in Alaska where genuine large bears and wolves can eat the hunter? A .308 bolt gun would not be my choice for stopping a bear.

In Richard Mann's own shooting test, 6 of the 12 rifles that he used finished AHEAD of the Steyr scout. Another shooting test conducted at Gunsite in the Scout Rifle course returned similar/parallel results. The Steyr scout is Cooper's pronounced culmination of scout rifle goodness! Clearly, there are some issues with the Col.'s weapon specifications, then, if it is finishing in the middle of the pack. Let's go through the specifications and try to determine where the problems lie.

Low magnification forward mounted scope for close and/or moving targets and both eyes open shooting – in QD mounts - When Cooper struggled to define this rifle (1983) there were no red dots or Low Power Variable Optics. Both seem to be a better solution versus the middle of the road 2.5X scout scope. The red dot is king of speed for up close engagements. The LPVO is a superb Swiss army knife for optics. It has evolved from a 1.5-4X20 to a 1-10X, with 1-6X and 1-8X now being common. QD mounts are great – especially if your back-up sight is an identically mounted and zeroed LPVO. However, who would pay the money and do months of planning to go on a safari or elk hunt and not carry the tool to remove a failed optic?

There are two unspoken, dirty secrets regarding the scout rifle's forward mounted scope rail that I need to point out. First, the rails are VERY difficult to successfully/permanently mount on the rifle. On page 119 of his work, Mann cites that the first thing that must be done to a Ruger Gunsite Rifle is to remove the forward optic rail and Loctite it back in place. This is apparently a routine maintenance issue for the rifle. Re-installing the optics rail must be repeated IAW your rifle's propensity to vibrate the screws loose as the barrel flexes each time a bullet passes through the bore. Mr. Mann also indicates that the Savage 11 shares the same propensity to shoot it's scout rail loose on page 125 of his book.

In my personal experience, I have had two XS scout rails shoot off of scout rifles. One was in .308WIN, one in .35WAI (Whelen Ackley Improved). I bedded the .308WIN rail to the barrel with Brownells acra-gel. The .35WAI I bedded with marine-tex. This rail was also screwed to the barrel with two set-screw dimples. It also had an aluminum ring machined to set between the barrel and front end of the rail so the rail could not tip down at the front. One range day consisting of 50+ rounds of prone, seated, kneeling, and standing practice heated the barrel to the point where it softened the marine-tex and the gun recoiled out from under the rail. Of course, this occurred the Labor Day weekend prior to a safari date in May. Good news – due to the scout rail disaster, I found my Ruger Alaskan in .375 Ruger. Bad news – communist Chinese flu cancelled the safari.

If one drills and taps screws to mount the rail to the barrel, this necessitates a thick enough barrel to take the screws and not burst. Then one would likely exceed the weight parameters for a scout rifle. One last possibility would be to solder the rail to the rifle. This necessitates a perfect surface match of steel bases to the barrel. These steel bases would be heavier than the XS aluminum rail. This is possible/practical for a large manufacturer, not so much for a rifle crank building his/her own scout rifle. First one must know the exact contour of the rifle barrel. Then this contour must be perfectly replicated on the bottom of the rail or bases. If one designs a rifle for mass production this is easy to determine and work into the manufacturing process with controlled tolerances. Even then, it is undetermined if soldering will withstand the perpetual firing flex of the barrel's movement. This propensity to shed scout rails throws a

significant wrench in the entire scout rifle concept. Why bother building a scout rifle if it is nearly impossible to mechanically attach the forward mounted rail to the rifle in a durable, lasting manner?

On the subject of optics, a variable optic is an absolute no-brainer. While Col. Cooper did not have access to LPVOs when he was working to find the unicorn/pot of gold/Goldilocks rifle, he certainly could have tried a 2-7x36. The table below demonstrates that the field of view argument is resolved in favor of conventionally mounted scopes. All of the Leupold scopes shown below exceed the FOV of the scout scope. At 2 or 3 power, one can employ even a conventionally mounted scope with both eyes open, by the way. While access to the top of the action as mandated by an M-1 Garand, scope clearance by the bolt handle, or eye box clearance on a dangerous game rifle, are sound reasons for a forward mounted optic, the field of view – the main issue for defining a scout rifle – is no longer a valid reason to construct a scout rifle!

Scope	Low power	Field Of View
3-9X40	3X	33’/11 yards
2-7x36	2X	44’/14 yards
1.5-4x20	1.5X	74’/25 yards
2X20 Scout scope	2X	22’/7 yards

The second unspoken weakness of the forward mounted optic is the washout of the image seen through the scope from the sun reflecting off the glass. I have experienced this several times when hunting with the sun to my back. The light from the sun can wash out the reticle and the target image in the scope if the angles are correct. A conventionally mounted scope is shaded by the hunter’s melon when he brings the scope to his ocular cavity. Not so with the scout scope mounted 8” farther forward. Does this occur frequently enough to make me want to throw my Leupold scout scopes away – nope. Is it a valid issue to have to work around for a hunter stalking game with the sun at his back – yes.

An additional aspect to the field of rifle optics that one may not initially connect the dots on is bolt knobs. Bolt knobs can be problematic for the conventional rifle. Many military Mauser actions feature a bolt knob at 90 degrees. This was done to make it easy for a Soldier filling his pants to find the knob and run the rifle. The vertically presented bolt knob is great for high stress cycling of the rifle, but it is a pain in the fourth point of contact at all other times. The bolt knob catches on things and the action is opened. The bolt knob pokes the Soldier when carrying the rifle. With a forward mounted optic, the position of the bolt knob is immaterial. It never interferes with the scope bell. A conventionally mounted optic, however, causes the need for two things: first, a bolt knob mounted at approximately 150 degrees (viewed from the rear of the rifle) and the shaft often needs to be scalloped to provide scope bell clearance. Second, one loses the superb wing safety on the Mauser, as it will not clear the scope bell as it flips from 270 degrees to zero degrees to 90 degrees under the scope bell.

I, as a southpaw rifleman, have a third issue. I built my .35WAI pseudo scout rifle with a bolt knob that sat at approximately 45 degrees. I grab the bolt with my right hand to run it. Many production bolt knobs are nestled into the side of the stock. This is done to provide a sleek profile for the rifle. The opposite of the military bolt knob at 90 degrees. For a right-handed sportsman or Soldier, the bent or modified bolt knob at 150 degrees is easy to use. Lefties, on the other hand (rim shot please), must grab the bolt knob like the crane game at an arcade. Grasping a 1" ball with your right-hand fingertips under marked adrenaline levels is a tall order. Fingertip dexterity – fine motor skills - go into the toilet quickly during underwear filling times, to stack metaphors.

While a larger bolt knob may be nice for a righty, I submit it is mandatory for a lefty. Assume you must use the scout rifle platform to get that shot of a lifetime. It is your choice – bigger bolt knob, or stomped into toe jam by the moose because you spazzed the bolt cycling of your rifle. A forward mounted optic provides no bolt knob restrictions so I built the .35WAI with the bolt knob at 45 degrees. However, even with the superior, conventionally mounted optics of today, the enlarged bolt knob is necessary.

A bolt action - No one with a lick of sense would take a bolt gun scout rifle onto a battlefield today over a magazine fed gas gun. There are two exceptions. The obvious exception is a trained military sniper. First, the rifle is not a scout rifle, but a rifle designed specifically for long range shooting of enemy Soldiers and/or equipment. However, even sniper teams are moving to semi-automatics now. Sniper teams often deploy in a three-man team – sniper with a bolt gun, spotter with a semi-auto, and security man with a semi-auto rifle with a grenade launcher. Oh yea, and a radio for artillery and a Quick Reaction Force for extraction should they overstay their welcome in a neighborhood. No lone scouts here!

The second exception is the Canadian Rangers that patrol the arctic wastelands of northern Canada. Their worn-out Enfield rifles were recently replaced with the Tikka T3X that smacks strongly of Col. Cooper's influence. Canada selected these bolt guns due to the absolute vacuum of support in these areas. One unit of 1,050 Rangers patrols 2.7 million square kilometers. (Recoil magazine #34, 28NOV17) In addition, they are simple to operate and rugged, thus able to operate effectively in the extreme environmental conditions the Rangers face. Anyone here want to sign up for that?

A push-feed – I can find no indication for the justification of this requirement. Most lists simply give “bolt action” as the requirement, and “short action”. Long action rifles are permitted, but classified as “pseudo scouts”, as they struggle even more to make the draconian weight requirement. I surmise that Col. Cooper selected push-feed to save the weight of the heavier military Mauser actions. Push feeds work fine. I still prefer a Mauser style action. This is an insignificant issue beyond perhaps the weight considerations. The Mauser action would be my 1st choice, but others certainly work.

Employ a high quality and reliable detachable magazine – I 100% agree with this feature. However, Col. Cooper seemed to want a flush mounted magazine. This does make the rifle look svelte. It balances well. Carrying spare magazines is a no-brainer. However, my 2nd, 3rd, 4th magazines would be 20 rounders vs. 5 rounders. I am simply not offended by holding an M1A scout squad rifle model or a scout rifle at the juncture of the stock belly and the front of the 20-round box magazine. Or, if trying harder to stay with the scout rifle

requirements, a Ruger Gunsite rifle, or a Savage 110 Tactical's 10 round single stack magazines. The issue of handiness is largely resolved with an AR due to the pistol grip. One must see to it that the weight is kept under control, so no HBAR barrels need apply.

Employ a tang safety – I think this is a splendid feature as it makes the rifle ambidextrous in regard to the operation of the safety. The wing safety of the Mauser does the same. (Hi. My name is Beach, and I am a Mauser fan boy.) Some Rugers have tang safeties, and the Savage 110 sports them. However, massive numbers of hunters successfully employ the Winchester side-swing 3 position safety. CZs and 700s use a two-position rocker. All of these work. The rifleman simply must build muscle memory with his rifle/safety combination. I like this requirement, but I do not see it as a feature that is required.

The minimum capacity in the gun of 5 rounds. The rifle should have a blind box magazine unless the expected use is for the military. Hopefully we have been able to let go of the respect due to Frederick Russell Burnham, DSO, Chief of Scouts, i.e., the military use of the scout rifle. It is ridiculous to propose the use of a scout rifle for the military. Since Soldiers now use rifles with a 30-round capacity, and those seeking self-defense do the same, we are left with using the scout rifle for hunting. Removing the use of the rifle for military purposes, then 5 rounds is wholly acceptable for hunting.

Extra ammo carried on the gun – 15 rounds – I disagree with this requirement. One carries the rifle in the hands when stalking. Ammo on the rifle means you carry more weight with your biceps. The legs could carry that extra weight of the ammo much more easily. An ammunition wallet on the belt also protects the ammunition better than a butt cuff where the cartridges are exposed to impact, sweat, dirt, etc.. An ammunition butt cuff complicates using the rifleman's other shoulder as it places the cartridges into his face while firing. If the ammo is carried in a stock trap, the cartridges would be protected, but again, the arms are carrying weight and also the balance of the rifle would be impacted. Butt trap cartridge storage would be an expensive upgrade to the rifle also.

The rifle should have a single load capability – If we have agreed to set aside the military use for the scout rifle, this matter is a mute point. Nonetheless, Cooper's demand for an ammo cut-off is left over from WWI. This was an era of literal mule trains and infantile trucks struggling to supply the enormous meat grinding machine of the trenches. Tactics and logistics took 4 years to overcome the machine gun and reciprocating artillery piece.

After the next world-wide party, SLA Marshall codified for us through post-WWII research that 90% of the Soldiers weren't really firing their weapons in combat. I myself witnessed the Army change from 2-dimensional plastic pop-up silhouettes to 2&1/2-dimensional foam "Ivan" targets. The point being that Soldiers had to be strongly conditioned to kill their fellow man with the use of more realistic targets. No army of black dots fought against US Soldiers attacking across Europe. (The known distance ranges had targets with the center portion of the scoring rings being a big black dot when sighted upon with the rifle.) The challenge was getting the Soldier to aim and fire his rifle more frequently, not that he did so too often.

Decades later the Army revisited this reduction of firing capacity idiocy with the 3-round burst trigger abortion. Only a REMF (Rear Echelon “Maternal Fornicator”, to be a little polite) can come up with tying a combat Soldier’s hands behind his back so the Soldier won’t “waste” ammo. You may recall the same moron society of ordnance imbeciles instructed John C. Garand to replace his use of the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) 20 round box magazine with an 8 round en bloc. Their reasoning was – you guessed it – so that Soldiers wouldn’t waste ammunition.

A hunting engagement MAY entail the firing of three cartridges. If a scout were to fire three rounds, he could simply reload with one of his additional magazines. He can fumble with single cartridges when matters relax a bit later. Col. Cooper was a great leader and patriot, but he was very wrong about this matter of the cartridge cut-off to the scout rifle magazine.

The rifle uses a 3-point sling – I have to differ with the Col. on this issue. Can a sling enhance your marksmanship? Absolutely. Is it practical to expect to be able to use a sling for marksmanship enhancement while hunting? In my hunting experience, while not massive, but not a beginner’s level, indicates rarely. If perched on a hillside glassing undisturbed quarry, perhaps an opportunity for the 10 seconds needed to get into the sling, and get the Goldilocks status light to come on, will present itself.

After taking Urban Rifle at Thunder Ranch, TX, around the turn of the century, I realized two years ago that, one, it had been a while since I had seriously trained; and two, I had never been trained to FIGHT with the AR platform. “But Beach, you were in the Army for 21 years! You qualified expert with an M-4!” Yes, true. However, these experiences are focused on: a known distance range, bullet beaten berms showing you where the silhouettes will pop-up, and the Soldier standing in a section of up-ended culvert meant to simulate a foxhole. Therefore, he is not heaving from oxygen debt and there are no concussive distractions from artillery or grenades. Besides, one of my Soldiers told me, known as CPT Cold War to my Soldiers, “Sir, we don’t do foxholes anymore.”. Determined to overcome my souvenirs from my service time with Uncle Sam, Sabot (my trusty German Shorthair Pointer service dog) and I set out for Thunder Ranch, OR.

The first day of class the class paused to police up brass and doctor targets. I was carrying my AR-15 African style, or slung across my back muzzle down also. One of Clint’s instructors did a Parachute Landing Fall right in the middle of me, excoriating me for “pointing my muzzle at him” with my weapon slung across my back when I bent over to pick up some brass. What I think was happening was that I was receiving some “I hate all officers, and especially West F*&king-Point grads who are all careerist assholes” attention. Another instructor drew me aside on the next break and taught me how to wear the rifle with the sling around my neck. I simply needed to be taught how to use the better technique of carrying my rifle. That was exactly why I attended the course – to update my warrior skills.

The point here is that the Ching Sling is another archaic left over - a sibling to the magazine cut-off - that has been superseded by a superior way of operating. The AR sling technique gives me better control of the rifle. A Viking Tactics adjustable sling carrying the carbine slung over my left shoulder and around the right side of my ribcage/torso is handy and comfortable. When I move to pick up brass on the range, for example, I easily move the muzzle in a safe direction in order to not cram it full of mud or gravel. I also have a

better response time to bad guy threats, or an animal making a surprise appearance, versus a hunting rifle carried on a Ching sling upon one shoulder. The rifle is right in front of me, in my hands, easily and quickly brought up to a firing position.

Bonus round

- It seems to me to be less fatiguing to carry the rifle this way.
- Another tidbit – the current version of ARs have multiple QD sockets to attach the sling to, so I don't have to pay to have a third sling attachment point buried in the forend of my stock in order to be able to use a Ching Sling.
- Finally, with a Viking Tactics quick adjust sling, I can use the sling to enhance my marksmanship by wrapping it around my arm as quickly as a Ching Sling if the opportunity does present itself.

BUIS with QD mounts – night visible front and aperture rear – In general, I agree here. Let me share details. Back-Up Plastic Sights (BUPS) save weight over Back Up Iron Sights. Magpul makes both. Pick the set that give you warm and fuzzy feelings. My thought process is that they are BACK-UP. They are on the rifle just in case my optic fails. Why carry 1 pound metal BUIs when I can carry BUPS that are 98% as effective as the BUIs and weigh ½ as much? If one REALLY wanted a back-up sight, why not carry a second pre-zeroed optic? How about a red dot in your day pack to back up your Low Powered Variable Optic (LPVO)? Quick Detach (QD) is better than dragging out a torx wrench, but you likely have the torx wrench in your day pack for something else on the rifle anyway.

I absolutely agree with the use of an aperture rear sight. In fact, I drill out the apertures on my Garands to a ghost ring diameter. I lost the chance to bag a bobcat once because I could not get enough light through the target peep sight on my Garand. Other than a large white bead on the front sight, the night visibility may be stretching beyond available product means. I have a tritium front sight post on my M1A, but know of no sporting style front sights that offer this. Was the Col. envisioning using the scout rifle to fight with in combat? Or was he just trying to use that first few/last minutes of hunting light? Unless a custom front sight is made to take the XS M1A or AR-15 tritium lit front sight blade, this requirement goes onto the “not yet possible” list. This matter is a splendid justification for the lit reticle in an optical sight. I would also add that the currently fielded fiber optic inserts do a great job of gathering light in order to be visible.

The rifle should be robust – The Mosin-Nagant action sets the bar here, followed closely by – you guessed it – the Mauser. Nearly all current commercially produced rifle actions are simply cheapened Mauser actions. However, each step down from the Mauser to bow to the bean counters, reduced the ruggedness of the rifle. SMLEs would also be adequate in the rugged department, save for their stretching/generous chamber problems. Will a Savage bolt gun hold up to field use? Millions do so. I will go out on a limb here and say that most modern rifles are robust enough for even Africa hunting tasks normally encountered. This mandate seems a bit too nebulous to have any real meaning.

Perhaps what the Col. was striving to express here is that the rifle should be shaken out through hard testing and use to insure it has had all of its gremlins exorcized? Does it feed 1,000% reliably? Does the floorplate stay closed under recoil? Does the scout rail remain in

place, or shoot loose after 200 rounds? As a definition of “robust”, perhaps he meant insure usability and/or reliability? One usability issue would be to dehorn the rifle! Tearing open your hand on the barrel sight of your rifle doesn’t enhance your hunting experience. I have nearly done so on both of my Ruger Alaskans. My first trip to Thunder Ranch led to me taking a file to the Ruger P90s we had. It seems that Ruger has a penchant for leaving sharp, cutting edges on their castings. However, until I trained with the weapons, I could not detect these sharp edges, nor modify them to obtain robustness and field usability.

The rifle should be chambered in .308WIN - 7mm-08, .338 Federal, .358WIN, .243WIN acceptable - Since we have determined that we have no need to slay eland, and if we need to defend ourselves we would reach for the AR-10 with a 25-round magazine, then we can wholly embrace that the .308WIN is enough gun. As important, it is a cartridge that we could get ammo for! While the 7mm-08 is a bit better ballistic solution, ammo is not as available. However, since we are hunting with the rifle, is ammo availability really such an issue? Since we realistically can’t travel internationally, there are no problems now with the gun-hater baggage people in WE-R-WOKE Airlines “losing” your gear on the way to hunting here in the US. (Alaska possibly excepted.) No need to find .375 Ruger ammunition SOMEWHERE in South Africa. Bring your own ammo and use the cartridge that you want. If you will seek to slay a large bear, build a rifle in .358WIN, or .35WAI, or get one in .375 Ruger. Any of these will slay all critters in North America. They would also, BTW, be able to slay an eland if we ever do get to return to “normal” and go on a safari in Africa again.

Overall length of the rifle should be 37 to 39 inches long – short enough for the user to carry the rifle at the wrist so the muzzle is at least 4” off the ground – I agree with Col. Cooper - shorter is better. The hunting community is perhaps FINALLY, JUST BEGINNING to wake from it’s pub crawl of worshiping velocity ueber alles. The 33” barrel to squeeze 3900 FPS from the 16.5 Blitzkrieg cartridge makes every hunting trip into a medieval pikeman reenactment. At the turn of the last century we had the .30-30 WCF, .416 Rigby, and the .404 Jeffrey. Bullets trundled along at 2,000 to 2,400 Feet Per Second (FPS). Whitetails fell to .30-30 WCF saddle guns, and African animals fell over and died when hit properly by the Jeffrey or Rigby. Sure, faster means flatter trajectories, which equals longer point blank range. At what cost, however? More recoil = more flinch = more missed shots, as well as more blast, and more wear on rifle and brass. If the hunter is adding elevation to their scope for the long range shot with the 16.5 Blitzkrieg, or 6.5 Creedmoor, then probably he or she is flirting with sniping and not hunting. They need to stalk closer.

If one does stop the velocity pub crawl, then why do they need a 33” barrel? Lopping 13” off of that barrel saves a fair measure of weight. Even if it is just bobbing the barrel from 26” to 20” one saves weight, and it is weight at the end of a lever which enhances the balance or handiness of the rifle.

Many modern powders available today can coax quite respectable velocity from the shorter barrels. The poster child example of this phenomenon is the .375 Ruger. It equals the velocity of the .375H&H from a 20” barrel vs. the normal 24” or 26” used for the H&H. While the standard length (.30-06) action used for the .375 Ruger may save an ounce or two in carry weight, the genuine prize is that standard length actions are much less expensive than a MAGNUM length action used for the .375H&H. You see, anything with

MAGNUM in the name means “we can charge this guy \$1,000 more”. ARs with 16” barrels and Mauser actions re-built to sport a 20” or less barrel, are a joy to carry versus their pike-length brethren. They are also significantly easier to weave through brush and vehicles. Shorter is lighter and handier.

It should weigh 6.5 to 7.5 pounds – lighter is better – user holds rifle out at arm’s length vertically at the wrist for 30 seconds as a test. – Lighter is better to the point the cartridge-rifle combination starts to exceed your recoil tolerance. This should not be a problem for most with the .308WIN cartridge and a decent recoil pad. The other aspect of weight is handiness. Carrying a 10-pound rifle wears on the hunter. I know. My first rifle to hunt with was a Garand. Even when filled with the testosterone of my younger days, that was one heavy rifle to still hunt with around Truman Lake in woods of west-central Missouri. You carry the rifle 99% of the time and shoot it 1%. However, don’t take my word for it. Here are some thoughts from the experts:

For bushveld conditions, it is a big advantage to have a rifle that is fast and easy to align, enabling you to concentrate solely on shot placement and trigger release.

Gregor Woods, Rifles For Africa, P.333.

Portability is an issue, and as I get older I note that not only are the mountains getting steeper, the rifles are getting heavier!

Col. Craig Boddington, American Hunting Rifles II, P. 376.

A man will travel farther, hunt over more country, have a better chance of coming on game, and be in better condition when he does if his weapon is light.

LTC Townsend Whelen, Wilderness Hunting and Wildcraft, 1927

Lighter is better for the greatest part here. However, it seems that unless one forks over \$1,500 - \$2,000 for a carbon fiber wrapped barrel, you have about a snowball’s chance of making the weight requirement on a scout rifle.

1-4x optic with 3-400 yard hashmarks for chosen cartridge – This requirement seems to lend credence to my thought that Col. Cooper simply had no access to the LVPO when he first conceptualized the scout rifle. The current trend is to build ever more magnifying scopes. The 1-4x is giving way to 1-6x as prices come down and availability goes up. 1-8x is not unheard of, and 1-10x is the new unicorn of LPVO goodness. The 1-4x gives superb field of view. However, I would trade some field of view for some more magnification. Maybe the 1-6x is the sweet spot?

The Col. and I are definitely in agreement with regard to the bullet drop compensating reticle. Leupold (pronounced loo-poled – the first part sounds like “loopy” – not Lee-uh-poled) fields a few scopes with the Boone & Crocket reticle, and their “Pig Plex” reticle could be useful. In general, though, they save all of their “tactical” reticles for their high dollar categories of scopes. Bushnell hit a homerun with

their BTR-1, 1-4x20. Now it has been upgraded to a 1-6x. Primary Arms fields numerous options with the ACSS reticle. While the three methods of ranging in this reticle are focused towards 2-legged varmints, the bullet drop range marks are there for use on deer or moose. I speculate that if these great optics choices had existed in 1983, the forward mounted optic would have been proven inferior by the Col.'s initial development efforts.

The scope should employ an illuminated reticle – A lit reticle in the scope is a genuine game changer. This was also unavailable when Col. Cooper started seeking the best rifle. The ACOG led the way with the tritium element for low-light use and fiber optic for daylight brightness requirements. Now, reliable electronically lit reticles are common in the market place. The benefits are significant. The dot draws one's eye to the reticle aiming point similar to a red dot. Or it can serve up a bright, visible aiming point for having a (black) cape buffalo (or feral hog) standing in the (black) shade with your black reticle. Motion activation circuitry greatly extends the 2032 battery life. I consider this a technological advancement wholly worth seeking in your scope.

The rifle should employ a good trigger with a 3-4 pound pull weight - This is a pretty low bar for me. I was raised on M16A1 and A2 triggers. You know, something akin to a wood rasp rubbing against 60 grit sandpaper. If you are buying a Savage, or a Ruger, they have very good stock triggers now. If you are re-building a Mauser, put a Timney in it and drive on.

The stock should have an adjustable or compact LOP. – Rock on, Sir! While this is tougher for standard Mauser rebuilds, the inventive use of spacers under a recoil pad can achieve this. Ruger and Savage have figured this out for production rifles. What's more critical is that Savage has also figured out how to get a tailored comb height to align your ocular cavity behind the sights! In absence of the Savage stock, Bear Tooth Creek makes an awesome neoprene comb riser kit for \$25.

A 16-18", medium contour barrel is strongly encouraged. - I find the 20" barrel on my Ruger Alaskans to be awesome. I also have a 16" barreled AR-10 that is noticeably/nicely shorter than the 18" barreled AR-10 beside it. Again, excluding worship at the altar of velocity, usable velocity is attainable from 16-20" barrels. Shorter barrels are stiffer and lighter.

The scout rifle should not use a flash suppressor. – Forgive me, but why the hell not? Is it "ungentlemanly", like minutemen dropping British officers first in every engagement of the War for Independence? Many times, deer movement occurs right at dusk or dawn when light levels are low. Who wants a great big fireball in the dark? That makes for a tough target assessment and follow-up shot. If one DID have to use the scout rifle to defend themselves, why would you want to scream "HERE I AM! SHOOT AT ME HERE!" by having a 2' ball of flash every time you pull the trigger. Shooting and relocating after each shot reduces the rate of fire and could cause more risk to the rifleman. Other than the addition of ¼ pound to the rifle, I can see no reason to omit this item from your rifle. However - No Damned Muzzle Brakes! They enhance flinch. If you are too recoil sensitive to shoot the cartridge you have selected, step down on it to one you can shoot effectively!

It could possibly carry a bipod. – With my apologies to the Col., I just cannot warm up to this requirement. A bipod is added weight to the front end of the rifle that one MIGHT have an opportunity to use. I am already wearing a day pack with firemaking kit, water, spare mags, next layer of clothes, shell layer, etc., in order to be “scouting” or hunting. Why not use that to rest the rifle over if I do get the chance to fire from a supported position? Why carry the extra weight of the bipod with my biceps?

The rifle should be weather resistant. - A stainless action reduces maintenance. Cerrocoat does the same. Absolutely!

The rifle should employ a polymer stock. – Agreed! I submit that the Hogue overmolded stock is a superb choice for the rifle. One can purchase them with pillar or block bedding, depending on your need to feed the accuracy monster. The synthetic stock absorbs some of the recoil impulse. The slight “stickiness” of the rubber coating enhances your ability to hold onto the stock in recoil. The forend and pistol grip shapes imitate the A-Square Coil-Check stock and noticeably reduce perceived recoil. I understand that not everyone wants a plastic stock. God sure grows some beautiful walnut. If the beauty is more important than the atmospheric stability of the stock, go for it! Some laminates are tolerable to plastic haters, and more stable than standard wood stocks. Your choice.

The 1983 accuracy standard was 10 shot, six inch groups at 300 meters. This equates to 2 MOA mechanical accuracy. (A Minute Of Angle is approximately 1.05” at 100 yards, 2.1” at 200 yards, etc.. Generally, the decimals are dropped for practical, mere mortal, daily application.) Americans are over-fixated on “1/10 MOA” rifle accuracy. Nothing ugly, but YOU CAN’T SHOOT THAT WELL, BUTTERCUP! The farther you get from the earth, the shakier the sight picture. Newsflash! THERE AIN’T ANY SHOOTING BENCHES IN THE WOODS! If you are shooting from the prone position, then often times there is grass obscuring your line of sight to the target. If you kneel to clear the grass, you shake more. Can you hold the rifle within ½ MOA, let alone 1/10 MOA, while in a seated firing position? Goodbye ½ MOA rifle! Seated is less accurate than off a bench with sandbags. Standing next to a tree is less accurate than off of your bench with sandbags. The oscillations caused by fatigue, a heaving pleural cavity, the pulse in your shoulder, the fly buzzing in your face, the sweat dripping down your face, your breath fogging your glasses in the cold – these will make you lucky to shoot 2 MOA. That is roughly a 4” oscillation circle at 200 yards. (2.1” to each side of your aiming point) You ALWAYS have a perfect trigger pull also, right? You NEVER flinch or just mash the trigger one way or the other due to excitement? With a vital zone of 8” for a deer, you are still good out to 300 yards while oscillating 3” to either side of the aiming point.

However, can you even pick out a deer at 300 yards? They always stand out in the middle of a 3-football field long open area, that isn’t overgrown with tan-colored Johnson grass so you can see their awesomely colored fur against a contrasting color, right? Don’t get me wrong. I tend towards Whelen’s adage of “Only accurate rifles are interesting.”, but let’s look in the mirror. You as the rifleman/hunter need more practice! Today’s factory rifles many times are superbly accurate, so get that mechanical accuracy where you can. However, let’s get over our fixation on Starret-level accuracy until we earn our spurs and can shoot MOA from FIELD positions.

Now let’s see how some of the commercially manufactured rifles stack up to Col. Cooper’s criterion, and my proposed updates.

Requirements	Ruger Alaskan – MSRP - \$1,280	Aero Precision AR-10 - \$1750	Steyr Scout – MSRP – \$1,749	110 Tactical – MSRP - \$830	Mossberg Scout – MSRP - \$804	Ruger GSR – MSRP - \$1,200	110 Scout – MSRP - \$865
Scout rail W/ QD rings – 1	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail
Bolt Action - 2	Pass	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Push Feed - 3	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Fail	Pass
Detach. Mag - 4	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Tang Safety - 5	Fail	Fail	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail	Pass
5 Rd Cap. - 6	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
15 Rd Ammo - 7	Fail	Pass	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail
Single Load - 8	Pass	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
3-Point Sling - 9	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
BUIS w/ QD - Night front - 10	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail
Robust Rifle - 11	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
.308WIN - 12	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
39” or less - 13	Fail	Pass	Pass	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass
7.5 Lbs. Max - 14	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail
1-4X LVPO w/ hashmarks – 15	Pass	Pass	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail
Lit reticle – 16	Pass	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail
Good trigger – 17	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Adjust. LOP - 18	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
18” barrel - 19	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail	Pass	Pass	Pass
No Flash Suppressor - 20	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail
Bipod - 21	Fail	Fail	Pass	Fail	Fail	Fail	Fail

Weather resist - 22	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Polymer Stock - 23	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass
Totals for Black Flag application of Col. Cooper's requirements	12/23 = 52%	14/23 = 61%	18/23 = 78%	14/23 = 61%	16/23 = 70%	13/23 = 57%	14/23 = 61%
Totals for updated requirements	18/23 = 78%	22/23 = 96%	22/23 = 96%	20/23 = 87%	22/23 = 96%	23/23 = 100%	22/23 = 96%

Notes:

1. All rifles failed for lack of QD rings. The Mossberg was the only rifle that comes with a scope, so I put it as a pass.
2. Flash suppressor: While I would not mandate this, I think all rifles should have one.
3. Push feed: I am not concerned that my rifle failed this requirement. Five of the seven rifles fail.
4. Detachable Magazine: None
5. Tang Safety: Rugers use the side swing 3-position like millions of the "rifleman's rifle, the Winchester Model 70. Are all of these hunters wrong? I have learned to use the side-swing safety just fine.
6. 5 Round Capacity: None
7. 15 rounds of ammo on the gun: extra ammo goes on your belt or in your day pack
8. Able to single load: All rifles but the AR-10 have this capability. For those with detachable magazines, this is immaterial.
9. 3-point sling: The Viking Tactics sling is more comfortable, less expensive, and more versatile than the Ching Sling.
10. BUIS W/QD: The Magpul BUPs are lightweight polymer and fold down flat with pop-up levers to activate. They were not available when Col. Cooper mandated QD BUISs.
11. Robust rifle: None
12. .308WIN: None
13. Less than 39": None
14. 7.5 lbs. max weight: It seems this requirement is simply flirting with CPT America's Unobtanium Shield! Or perhaps everyone simply has to use carbon fiber wrapped barrels?
15. 1-4X LPVO with hashmarks:
16. Lit reticle: None
17. Good trigger: None

- 18. Adjustable LOP: None
- 19. 18" barrel: None
- 20. No flash suppressor: None
- 21. Bipod: Wear it on my back. No tears shed over using my daypack as the bipod.
- 22. Weather resistant: None
- 23. Synthetic stock: None

Now let's examine notes specific to each contestant.

The Ruger Alaskan – MSRP - \$1,280 (I bought mine used for \$750 with a Vari-XIII 2.5-8x36 included. \$600 for the used VX-5HD scope.)

Let's slay my sacred cow first. I stumbled into this Goldilocks rifle through the failure of my .35WAI scout rifle's scope rail. After two years, the romance is going strong. For a production rifle, this one looks like it is the General-Purpose Rifle for me.

- **Low magnification forward mounted scope – in QD mounts** - This rifle sports a conventionally mounted Leupold VX-5HD 1-5x24 with firedot reticle and ballistic solution-etched elevation knob with zero lock for the load I hunt with. Field of view on 1x is 40 yards at 100 yards. It is usable for both eyes open shooting. The rings are Ruger's proprietary flavor, so are not QD. They are, however, quite stout, which is starting to be a salient consideration at .375 Ruger recoil levels. The mandate for QD rings is unnecessary. I am fine with taking out a wrench to remove the VX-5HD if an elephant stomps on it – anything short of that, there won't be a need to remove it with QD rings.
- **A push-feed** – A very strong Mauser replication!
- **The minimum capacity in the gun of 5 rounds.** - If you work really hard and hold your tongue just right, you can get a 4th round up under the extractor to chamber one up the pipe. Really, it is a three-round rifle. It does satisfy the blind magazine requirement, but has no detachable magazine. I am fine with 3 rounds for hunting. Unless you are culling animals, when would one ever need 5 rounds?
- **BUIS with QD mounts – night visible front and aperture rear** – Mine are barrel mounted permanently, so they are better than specification, albeit, dangerous due to lack of dehorning.
- **The rifle should be robust** – Mauser action, stainless steel, synthetic stock. Wrung out on the range and in the woods to get rid of gremlins.
- **The rifle should be chambered in .308WIN** – .375 Ruger has a case sized to the diameter of an H&H magnum cartridge's belt. It carries this size up to the shoulder, yielding a significant powder capacity. Yet, it fits into a .30-06 length action and provides at least .375H&H performance from a 20" barrel. It could prudently be used against anything up to elephant, so I claim a gold star for Swiss Army knife versatility! The original intent of buying this rifle was to replace the .35WAI that shot out from under it's scout rail. Since I was buying a different rifle to go on safari, I upgraded the chambering to a true general purpose cartridge.

Chances are my .308WIN scout rifles can handle the deer in MO just fine. I do use the .375 Ruger for deer hunting here – because I can, and it is good training for elk, bear, moose, or giraffe hunting.

- **Overall length** – It measures 40&5/8”.
- **It should weigh 6.5 to 7.5 pounds** – It is portly at 9.75 pounds with scope and sling. It is, after all, a dangerous game rifle. She is NOT lightweight. She is well balanced. I can hold onto her well due to the rubber overmolding, which is quiet in the woods BTW. It reminds me to do more PT.
- **1-4x optic with 3-400 yard hashmarks for chosen cartridge** – Having a 5X to use doesn’t hurt my feelings one little bit. The Leupold Custom Dial System has the hold overs laser etched into it, and the zero lock prevents accidental rotation of the knob off of my zero setting.
- **The scope should employ an illuminated reticle** – The lit reticle has already been decisive in potting a big doe trying to slink past me in woods so dark that I could only see her silhouette. My duplex reticle was not discernable, but the red-dot was!
- **The stock should have an adjustable or compact LOP.** – It is compact enough for use in winter gear without being too long.
- **A 16-18”, medium contour barrel is strongly encouraged.** – The rifle comes only with a 20” barrel (Alaskan version) or 23” barrel (African model). I have still-hunted with the rifle and 20” worked fine. The cost to shorten the barrel and reattach the barrel band front sight would be stupid expensive, so it ain’t happening!
- **The scout rifle should not use a flash suppressor.** – I have one of the first production run rifles which were not made with the UGLY muzzle brake!
- **The rifle should be weather resistant.** – Hogue overmolded polymer stock nestling a stainless steel rifle. Incidentally, I had been using the exact same Hogue stock for my scout rifle builds already!

One of the mantras of the shadowy, elite, scout rifle inner circle is “Features/specifications cannot be compromised on, no matter the cost!” My Alaskan is a failure as a scout rifle. But it is so handy, even when portly! It serves as my true, world-wide, General Purpose Rifle. Hope springs eternal that I will get to take it to Africa this next scheduled time. It will be superbly suited to the task of pursuing gemsbock, kudu, zebra, wildebeest, and impala. If I can squeeze it in, a giraffe also. It also approaches E Ticket ride status when you fire it, so I really like it. It may stink as a scout rifle, but it is a great stalking rifle for me.

AR-10 – I built this rifle with Aero Precision parts, a Ballistic Advantage barrel, Wilson Combat gas fixed system. It sports a Trijicon 1-6x24 Accupoint. (MSRP \$1,600) The barrel is 16”. Note that the cost to get the optics added to the rifle is SIGNIFICANT. There are less expensive options for optics, but the point here is only one scout rifle comes with an optic – the Mossberg. Adding the optic is a significant additional cost to building a scout rifle – OK – ANY rifle, for that matter.

- **Low magnification forward mounted scope – in QD mounts** - The scope is conventionally mounted. It can be fired with both eyes open. Odd that Col. Cooper never employed the ACOG in his testing. Bindon developed the “both eyes open” aiming concept named for him. Maybe if he had used the ACOG, we could have bypassed all the hassles of the forward mounted rail?

- **Employ a high quality and reliable detachable magazine** – 5, 10, 20 or 25 rounds - PMAGS FOREVER!
- **Employ a tang Safety** – Eugene Stoner got the human element of the AR design right in many ways. One of these was the positioning of the safety selector. I am perfectly fine with this safety arrangement. Mine are ambidextrous, so nothing lost to the tang safety. There can be more than one way to skin the cat.
- **Extra ammo carried on the gun – 15 rounds** – 20 & 25 round magazines.
- **BUIS with QD mounts – night visible front and aperture rear** – They sit nicely under the optics. They are plastic (light), so why bother with removal?
- **It should weight 6.5 to 7.5 pounds** – 10.5 Lbs. OUCH! We are back to the Garand-weight main battle rifle. The 1-6x24 weighs 19 oz.. The optics make this rifle enormously more capable than an iron-sighted Garand. Add in old man eyes and it becomes even more significant!
- **1-4x optic with 3-400 yard hashmarks for chosen cartridge** – The 1-6x24 has a duplex reticle and centered lit dot, but no hashmarks. Maximum Point Blank Range with the zero I have is something like 275 yards with a 200 yard zero. Hold over 10” for 300 yards dead on, and 2’ for 400. Part of being a rifleman is knowing your rifle. I gladly trade the great glass, 24/7/12 year lit reticle, great magnification range, and durability for the missing hashmarks.

Savage 110 Tactical – MSRP - \$830

- **Low magnification forward mounted scope – in QD mounts** – To have full and fair disclosure, the intent for this rifle was to serve as a designated marksman weapon. It sports a 3-18x50, ACSS reticle scope from Primary Arms. I don’t shoot well enough to spend the money on a “sniper rifle”. 1,000 yard rifle ranges are nowhere to be found in my area, so it is tough to practice and attain that level of proficiency. I am much more likely to need this set-up than the Hathcock solution. I also don’t want to spend the scads of money required to get to the Hathcock solution. 3X has a pretty wide field of view. When I use this, it will get carried on my back with an AR-15 in my hands.
- **Extra ammo carried on the gun – 15 rounds** – It takes AICS pattern single stack feed mags. 5 or 10 rounds are made. Easy to carry spares and exceed the 15 spare rounds + 5 in the rifle.
- **BUIS with QD mounts – night visible front and aperture rear** – No BUISS. If the optic fails, it’s mission is over. Bag it and return to post/fight with the AR-15.
- **Overall length of the rifle should be 37 to 39 inches long – 43”**. The shortest barrel this model of rifle comes with is 20”. This one also happily wears a Vortex flash suppressor which adds a good 1.5” to overall length.
- **It should weigh 6.5 to 7.5 pounds** – With the 3-18x50 it tips the scales at 11 pounds. 25.4 oz. of that is the scope, so remove the glass and you have 9.5 Lbs. with sling and an empty 10 round magazine. However, the scope/reticle/cartridge were selected for the specific mission, which to be fair, was not “general purpose” to begin with. A stock 110 Tactical is listed as 7.38 Lbs. with rail and without scope or sights. Close, but no cigar.

Mossberg Scout – MSRP \$804

- **Low magnification forward mounted scope – in QD mounts** – Not in QD rings, but you can change this for \$80. Only entrant that comes with a scope.
- **Employ a tang Safety** – It seems to show a rocker safety beside the bolt shroud.
- **Extra ammo carried on the gun – 15 rounds** – This rifle is reported to take Pmags & M-14 mags! Carrying it with a 20 round Pmags makes this a “Pass”.
- **The rifle uses a 3-point sling** – The rifle sports short sections of Picatinny rail on the forend that could be used for this.
- **1-4x optic with 3-400 yard hashmarks for chosen cartridge** – Available with 2-7x32. This scout scope does not have a lit reticle, nor the hashmarks, but does exceed the 1-4X standard. I have tried one of these Vortex scopes and am not impressed. The clarity around the edges goes into the toilet as you increase the magnification.
- **A 16-18”, medium contour barrel is strongly encouraged.** – 16.25”.

Good luck rushing out to buy one, however! Even before the communist induced gun famine, these were tough to find in the wild.

Ruger Gunsite Rifle – MSRP - \$1200

- **A push-feed** – Who cares, especially since this gun makes weight!
- **Employ a tang Safety** – 3 position side-swing
- **The minimum capacity in the gun of 5 rounds** – Sports 10 round magazines, so bring spares. However, unlike the Mossberg and Savage, Ruger is takes expensive proprietary magazines.
- **BUIS with QD mounts** – Rear aperture detachable with wrench.
- **It should weight 6.5 to 7.5 pounds – lighter is better** – 6.2 lbs. with magazine, no sling, no optic. If one allows ½ pound for sling, 3/4 pound for Leupold 2.5X scout scope and rings it takes the weight to 7.45 Lbs..

Updated measurement against the criterion yields 23 of 23 for 100%!!!! While the Ruger Gunsite Rifle was rolled out as “their interpretation of Col. Cooper’s concepts”, it sure seems to nail the criterion!

Savage 110 Scout – MSRP - \$865

- **Extra ammo carried on the gun – 15 rounds** – Uses Pmags.
- **BUIS with QD mounts – night visible front and aperture rear** – The rifle comes with a nice aperture sight that is not QD.
- **It should weight 6.5 to 7.5 pounds** – This pig fails before you add the scope and rings.

- **The scout rifle should not use a flash suppressor.** – If Savage had not employed surplus muzzle brakes off of Wehrmacht Panzer Abwehr Kannonen 40s, their rifle might have made weight!!!! Holey Schnikes! Are you kidding me!?!? Who needs a muzzle brake to ameliorate the “ferocious” recoil of the .308WIN??!?!?

Steyr Scout Rifle – MSRP- \$1,749

- **Low magnification forward mounted scope – in QD mounts** – The rifle handles scout mounting, or conventional mounting of your optics. \$1,750 and no scope, whereas Mossberg is less than \$900 with a scope!
- **Extra ammo carried on the gun – 15 rounds** – For MORE money.
- **BUIS with QD mounts – night visible front and aperture rear** – Steyr has excellent recessed pop-up sights.
- **A 16-18”, medium contour barrel is strongly encouraged.** – The barrel is listed as 19”. Would I refuse to buy the rifle for this reason, heck no. But, why 19”? Mr. Mann theorizes on page 69 of his work that it was to extract 2700 FPS from a 150 grain bullet. Really?! The deer or two-legged varmint will never be able to tell 2700 FPS from 2675 FPS just for the sake of meeting the specification of an 18” barrel.
- **It could possibly carry a bipod.** – The only one in the race with a bipod.

So how does the fulfillment of Col. Cooper’s quest for the perfect general purpose rifle measure up to his criterion? Black flag pass through – 18 of 23 for 78%. With optics purchase (after your kidney sale to buy the rifle in the first place), it nets 4 more pass marks hitting 22 of 23 for 96%.

So where does this wearying examination take us? Nearly all of the rifles examined meet most of the requirements when applied reasonably. 87% was the lowest score for the genuine scout rifle contenders. This was the Savage 110 Tactical that was purposefully set up as a designated Marksman rifle as opposed to serving as a scout rifle. Some of the scout rifle requirements are overcome by technologic advancement (Ching sling, QD BUISs, forward mounted optic). All of the rifles cost much less than the Col.’s specially designed Steyr. Is 95% of the desired capability for ½ of the money adequate?

I place the following requirements into this category: **Nice, perhaps, but unnecessary.**

- QD Scope rings
- Push feed action
- Tang Safety
- Ammo carried on rifle
- Single load capability
- Ching Sling
- QD BUISs
- Flash Suppressor

Some of them smack of mandating pink polka dots on your underwear material – they just don't matter. Tang Safety, Push feed action, ammo on rifle, QD rings. These are personal preferences. If I have Cat in the Hat underwear, does it hold my gear in an inferior manner? (And now make me politically incorrect!?) Doesn't carrying extra ammo in a belt-mounted wallet keep weight off of the gun, thus keeping it light and handy? A standard should exist to have some form of back-up sights on a scout rifle, but the flavor of these sights is my business. In some cases, my physical abilities will dictate what may work for me, but be unnecessary or tedious for another rifleman. The easiest illustration of this is comparing a 20 year-old set of eyes and a 50 year-old set of eyes. The Magpul pop-up BUPSS are fine with me. However, I am STRONGLY considering moving to the idea of toting a pre-zeroed back-up SCOPE in my day pack and leaving the BUPSS off. If you have an extra \$1,500 burning a hole in your pocket, then one could buy the carbon fiber wrapped barrel to make the Savage squeak under the weight requirements. You would, of course, then break the length requirement because the barrel is not available in an 18" length. If you want these specific sights or sling that Col. Cooper wanted, super! If you don't, then get it the way YOU want it. It is your rifle, after all!

If I may use an historic illustration - tell me Tovarische, how did those Panther and Tiger tanks (very expensive in terms of production costs and materials) fare vs. the "good enough", but much less expensive, and much more numerous, Shermans and T-34s? Perfect can be the mortal enemy of adequate. However, it is still (moderately) a free country, so you can spend as much as you want to attain perfection. I am not seeing \$1,500 in my wallet for this ultimate light-weight barrel.

Some of the Col.'s requirements are simply wrong or unnecessary:

- The abolition of a flash suppressor - It is stupid to exempt an item that brings significant stealth advantages to the rifleman. If there is no military use of the rifle and I am only hunting with the rifle, then quit dictating the color of my panties! Less flash at dawn or dusk is good. Protection of my muzzle crown is critical to maintaining accuracy of the rifle, which is a by-product of having a flash suppressor screwed onto the end of the barrel. We have not even examined the use of a suppressor, which is considered by many nations to be much more "polite" for hunting.
- The single load capability - Victorian. A sibling to fighting the minutemen on roads in square formations. Adds expense to the platform for a backwards idea.
- The use of a scout bolt gun in the military - Outside of the Canadian Rangers in the frozen arctic wilderness shooting polar bears with their Tikkas, there is no practical use militarily for the scout rifle.

In a hunting use, the geographic area, as well as the animals pursued and present, should drive the chambering. Recoil tolerance must also be examined. World-wide hunting, for at least the foreseeable future, is somewhere between kaput and severely restricted. Ammo is nowhere to be found in stores. Therefore, the argument that .308 Winchester or .375 H&H can be found the world over is a red herring. Pick your favorite cartridge, build the rifle, take your ammo stash with you and go hunting.

I genuinely believe that if Col. Cooper had had access to today's avalanche of LPVOs, the scout rifle may never have seen the light of day. Or perhaps the scout rifle would have made an appearance in a nascent, developmental form, and then been superseded by a light, handy carbine with an LPVO. Touched on in one capacity or another, in this discussion have been:

- 1.5-4x20 Leupold with firedot reticle
- 1-6x24 Trijicon Accupoint
- 3.5X Trijicon ACOG
- 1-5x20 Leupold VX-5HD with firedot reticle
- 1-4x20 Bushnell BTR-1

Any one of these would splendidly meet the optics requirements the Col. struggled with. Aren't we blessed to have such a target rich environment of optics solutions!

If one starts from the Col.'s principals and moves forward, then most of the rifles examined here would do the job – and I must opine that they would do it admirably. Could it be fairly said that the real diamond to be harvested from Col. Cooper's work on the scout rifle is the description of a general-purpose rifle? Perhaps the Holy Grail payday to this cerebral effort in examining rifle design would be to capture Col. Cooper's PRINCIPALS regarding what makes a scout rifle. I glean from his principals the following salient characteristics:

- General-purpose rifle
- Handiness
- Shootability
- Compact

For a hunter that grew up eating red meat and has done a few thousand push-ups, wouldn't an 8lb. rifle still be considered handy? If a rifle doesn't make the weight cut-off, do we discard it? Again, aren't many of the rifles examined checking these principal boxes? In the worst case (my Ruger Alaskan) applying these principals makes it a better rifle even if it doesn't cross the finish line as a scout rifle. A promising topic for future examination would be the impact of straight-pull Savage or Blaser actions on this playground of rifle construction.

The real lesson to be learned is, while the scout rifle has no reason to exist any longer, the principals for a General-Purpose Rifle are very valuable for application to rifle design and building? Thank you, Col. Cooper, for working so hard to teach us what makes a handy, usable rifle. Your 1998 principals could perhaps be seen as a useful "Commander's Intent". However, I find it destructive to the practical use of a rifle to be hand-tied by a set of outdated mandates in order to gain admittance to an exclusive club. Give me the mission and get out of this Cavalryman's way.

So, where does this bring us to? I submit the thoughts below for your consideration.

Employ whatever cartridge the hunter wants or needs to use – Remember our prior discussion in the paragraphs above:

1. The rifle will not be used for military applications because the military long ago left bolt actions far behind. Large capacity magazine fed, full-auto capable rifles are the norm across the planet now.
2. Self-defense requirements are significantly better addressed by the civilian version of the above.
3. At least for the immediate future, hunting kudu, zebra, and gemsbock is off the table. This means gas guns are in play, and ammo is a “bring your own” matter. Right now, with the shortages, you are not going to find any ammo in any store anyway! Finding ammo in a store right now is tougher than finding a leader in DC with a spine!

.308 or 7mm-08 would be great, but 9.3x62 would be a superb Swiss Army knife cartridge. I really like .35WAI, but it requires a full-length Mauser action, whereas the .358WIN would handily fit into a VZ-24 Mauser action (or an AR-10) that is slightly shorter, more common, and less costly vs. a full-length K98 Mauser action. The .375 Ruger would seem superb for Alaskan residents pursuing moose and big bears.

Lighter is better up to the point perceived recoil overcomes marksmanship or negatively impacts ruggedness and dependability

- The Mauser action is known for reliability. Most modern production rifles are up to hunting requirements. However, as the first Steyr scout rifles had soft primer strikes, modern manufacturing can have hiccups, so do your homework. If something does break on the rifle, can you get replacement parts, and can you install them? Will your scout rifle shoot out from under it's scout rail again? The Mosin-Nagant is a sack of hammers. Go from there.

Here is my recipe for your Goldilocks, or General-Purpose Rifle:

- Get a reliable 16-20” barreled rifle in the cartridge you determine to meet your target servicing needs.
- Make sure it takes detachable magazines of some form.
- I suggest you get it with a synthetic stock – the more adjustable the better. It's your rifle though, and walnut is beautiful. Laminates can capture some of the wood's beauty, so they sit on the fence for this issue.
- Choose Cerrocoating, a nitride or stainless action.
- Have some form of back up sights – either a spare scope in your day pack, or pop-up BUPS.
- Put a Viking Tactics adjustable sling on it, or the one that tickles your fancy.
- Conventionally mount a LPVO on it. If your operating area has wide-open spaces consider a 2.5-10x40 or a 3-9x40.
- GET OFF THE BENCH – shoot prone, kneeling, sitting, standing, off sticks, of tree limbs – as much as you can afford the ammo.
- Tweak as needed! Wring it out through hard, protracted use to get rid of all of it's gremlins.
- ENJOY! Only shoot game in season and bad guys!