



Kalashnikov was born in Kurya, Altai Krai, Russia to Aleksandra Frolovna Kalashnikova (née Kaverina) and Timofey Aleksandrovich Kalashnikov. In 1930, his father and most of his family were deprived of property and deported to the village of Nizhnyaya Mokhovaya, Tomsk Oblast. In his youth, Mikhail suffered from various illnesses and was on the verge of death at age six. He was attracted to all kinds of machinery, but also wrote poetry, dreaming of becoming a poet. He went on to write six books and continued to write poetry all of his life. Kalashnikov's parents were peasants, but, after deportation to Tomsk Oblast, had to combine farming with hunting, and thus Mikhail frequently used his father's rifle in his teens. Kalashnikov continued hunting into his 90s.

After completing seventh grade, Mikhail, with his stepfather's permission, left his family and returned to Kurya, hitchhiking for nearly 1,000 km. In Kurya he found a job in mechanics at a tractor station and developed a passion for weaponry. In 1938, he was conscripted into the Red Army. Because of his small size and engineering skills he was assigned as a tank mechanic, and later became a tank commander. While training, he made his first inventions, which concerned not only tanks, but also small weapons, and was personally awarded a wrist watch by Georgy Zhukov. Kalashnikov served on the T-34s of the 24th Tank Regiment, 108th Tank Division stationed in Stryi before the regiment retreated after the Battle of Brody in June 1941. He was wounded in combat in the Battle of Bryansk in October 1941 and hospitalised until April 1942. While in the hospital, he overheard some fellow soldiers complaining about the Soviet rifles of the time.

Seeing the drawbacks of the standard infantry weapons at the time, he decided to construct a new rifle for the Soviet military. During this time Kalashnikov began designing a submachine gun. Although his first submachine gun design was not accepted into service, his talent as a designer was noticed. From 1942 onwards Kalashnikov was assigned to the Central Scientific-developmental Firing Range for Rifle Firearms of the Chief Artillery Directorate of the Red Army.

In 1944, he designed a gas-operated carbine for the new 7.62x39 mm cartridge. This weapon, influenced by the M1 Garand rifle, lost out to the new Simonov carbine which would be eventually adopted as the SKS; but it became a basis for his entry in an assault rifle competition in 1946.

His winning entry, the "Mikhtim" (so named by taking the first letters of his name and patronymic, Mikhail Timofeyevich) became the prototype for the development of a family of prototype rifles. This process culminated in 1947, when he designed the AK-47 (standing for *Avtomat Kalashnikova model 1947*). In 1949, the AK-47 became the standard issue assault rifle of the Soviet Army and went on to become Kalashnikov's most famous invention.

From 1949, Mikhail Kalashnikov lived and worked in Izhevsk, Udmurtia. He held a degree of Doctor of Technical Sciences (1971) and was a member of 16 academies.

Over the course of his career, he evolved the basic design into a weapons family. The AKM (Russian: – Kalashnikov modernized assault rifle) first appeared in 1963, was lighter and cheaper to manufacture owing to the use of a stamped steel receiver (in place of the AK47's milled steel receiver), and contained detail improvements such as a re-shaped stock and muzzle compensator. From the AKM he developed a squad automatic weapon variant, known as the RPK (Russian: – Kalashnikov light machine gun).

The common characteristics of all his weapons are simple design, ruggedness and ease of maintenance in all operating conditions.

Approximately 100 million AK-47 assault rifles had been produced by 2009, and about half of them are counterfeit, manufactured at a rate of about a million per year. Izhmash, the official manufacturer of AK-47 in Russia, did not patent the weapon until 1997, and in 2006 accounted for only 10% of the world's production. Kalashnikov himself claimed he was always motivated by service to his country rather than money, and made no direct profit from weapon production. He did however own 30% of a German company Marken Marketing International (MMI) run by his grandson Igor. The company revamps trademarks and produces merchandise carrying the Kalashnikov name, such as vodka, knives and watches. Ultralux Marketing is official holder of the license for production and distribution of Kalashnikov branded watches.

On 17 November 2013, Kalashnikov was hospitalized in an Udmurtian medical facility. He died on 23 December 2013 at a hospital after a prolonged illness.

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