

SHOOTING

Jack O'Connor



WALNUT IS THE traditional wood for gun and rifle stocks. It is about the right weight to make a gun or rifle balance nicely. Very heavy wood tends to make a rifle or shotgun butt-heavy and muzzle-light, and light wood results in a gun that is butt-light and muzzle-heavy.

Walnut is strong and it is not brit-

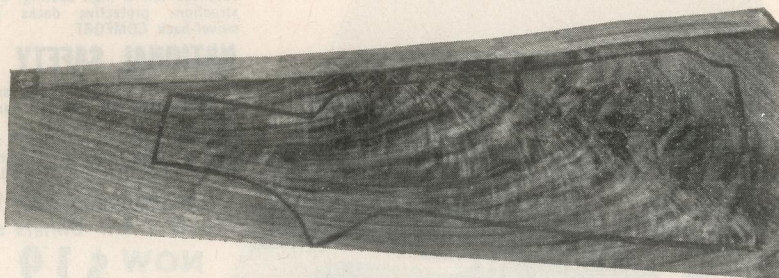
tle. If properly inletted the stock of good walnut does not batter and split from recoil. Walnut is the "right" color in that the long-continued use of walnut for gun and rifle stocks has made walnut-brown traditional. In addition the better grades of walnut are handsome without being flashy.

But, sad to say, walnut is becoming scarce, and as it gets scarce it becomes expensive. The plainest sort of American black walnut, the kind used on standard-grade factory rifles and shotguns, is getting so expensive that the cost of the raw blanks from which factory stocks are made has become a real factor in the price of a finished gun. The situation is so serious that attempts are being made to substitute

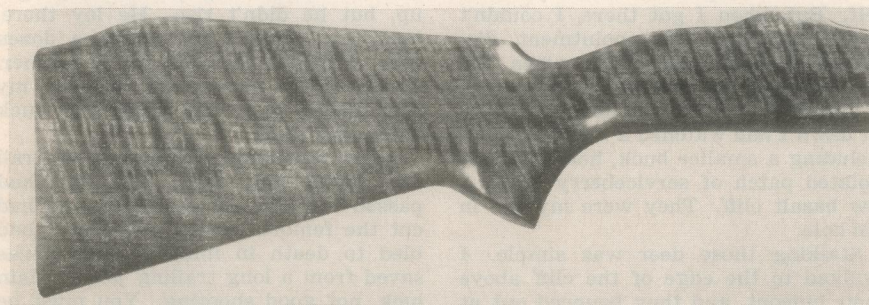
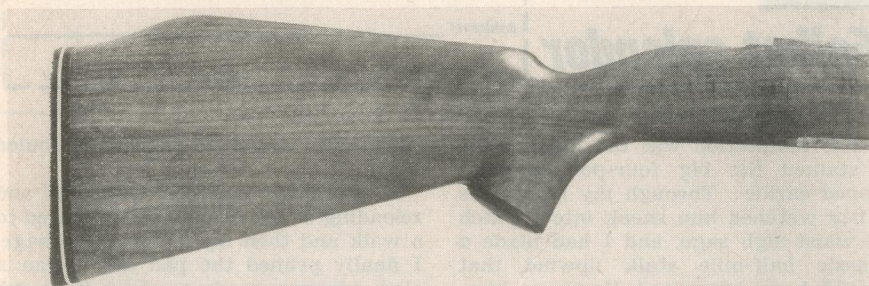
other woods—beech, mahogany, and maple, among them.

Walnut is in great demand not only for gunstocks but also for furniture and paneling. My own study, in which this article is being written, is paneled in walnut veneer. Two bookcases are made of solid walnut planks, and chests of drawers and cabinets are combinations of solid plank and veneer. The two beams across the ceiling look like solid 6 x 6-in. timbers, but they are made of thin planks cunningly joined. Although most of the walnut used in the room is very thin veneer glued to cheaper and less handsome wood, my study used up quite a bit of walnut. It is but one of many thousands of such rooms in the United States. Walnut

Wood for Gunstocks



Beautiful blank scored to best advantage for a shotgun buttstock



Top, least expensive straight-grain American black-walnut stock. Middle, straight-grain American black walnut with fiddleback. Bottom, figured American black walnut

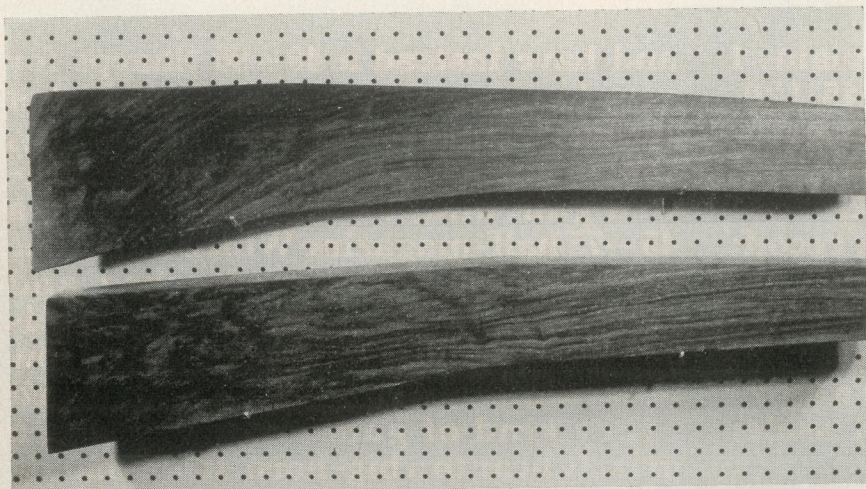
has an elegance that few woods can match.

There are two principal kinds of walnut—the thin-shelled "English" walnut and the thick-shelled American black walnut. I've read that the thin-shelled walnut trees were originally native to Iran and northern China, but that they were imported into Greece and Italy long before the Christian era and from there were introduced into various parts of Europe. Everyone is familiar with "English" walnuts, with their thin shells and large, bland meats. The nuts of the black walnut are very different. The shell is thicker, harder, and the meats smaller. To me the flavor is infinitely better.

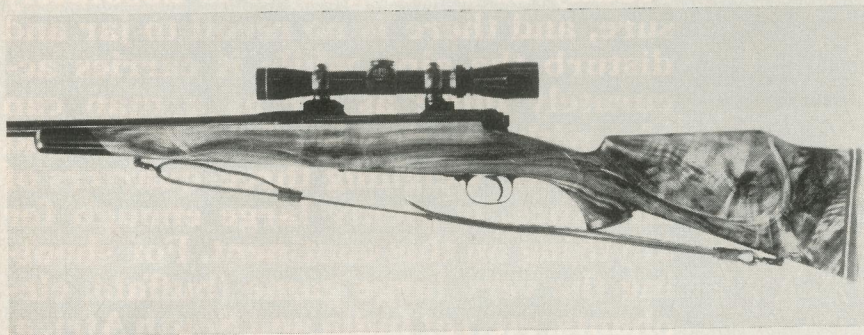
The woods of the two varieties are almost as different as the nuts. Both are good gunstock material, but for the most part good "European" walnut is lighter, harder, has smaller pores, more contrast between dark and light portions, and a richer color. The best European walnut will take and hold very fine, sharp checkering, whereas most American walnut being somewhat softer and more open-pored tends to fuzz up under the finest checkering.

My .375 Magnum is stocked with a handsome piece of Iranian walnut, of which more later. The wood is so fine-grained and so hard that the 26-lines-to-the-inch checkering looks almost as if it were cut into plastic. A well-finished piece of fine European walnut has a depth and sheen no other wood can match.

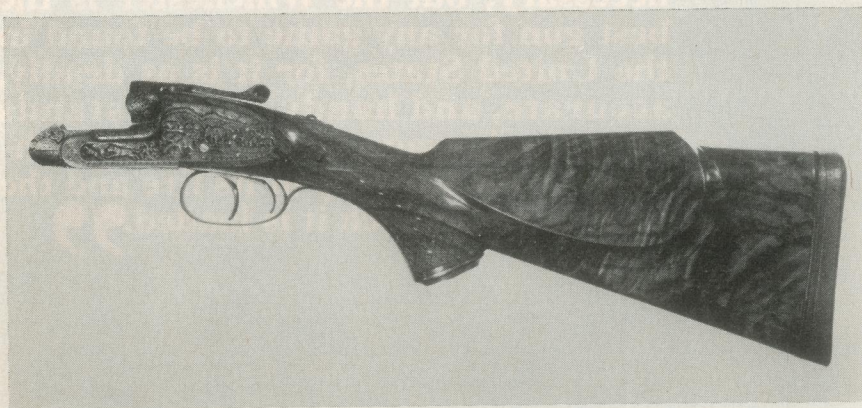
Because more fine European walnut



Two French-walnut blanks. Top blank is shy on contrast in fore-end. Bottom blank has excellent figuring and is worth \$100 in France and \$200 in the United States



A fancy myrtle-wood stock by Earl Milliron. Wood from Gould's, Coquille, Oregon



Buttstock of Bob Lee's British double rifle is of the very finest French walnut



This birdseye maple stock would look better stained or suigi finished (charred)

is cut, cured, and sawed into gunstock blanks in France than in any other country, good European walnut is often called "French" walnut. Attempts are made to give walnut various characteristics according to the European countries in which it was grown. English walnut was supposed to be rather light in color and plain of figure, according to some authorities, and dark in color according to others. Italian walnut is reputed to be dark and well figured, and so on.

Actually walnut, whether American or European, thick-shelled or thin-shelled, varies according to the soil in which it grows and the amount of water it has. Trees that grow in rich well-watered soil grow faster, have softer wood with larger pores than trees that grow in drier, rockier, less fertile soil.

Joe Oakley, who probably cuts, cures, saws, and ships more wood from American-grown "thin-shell" trees than any one else, says that in the Sacramento Valley of California the poorest wood comes from well-watered walnut groves and the best from ornamental trees in the yards of residences, as these were watered less and the soil was less fertile. The very finest walnut comes from mountainous country that is rocky and fairly dry as the trees then grow slowly.

Much fine wood comes from the uplands adjacent to the Rhone Valley in France, from the Caucasus Mountains of Russia, from Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain, and Turkey. I have seen a great deal of furniture made in northern India from local walnut that was beautiful in color and figure. So far I have not heard of any gunstock material coming from India, but if the wood is properly cured I don't see why it should not be good.

Along in those innocent days before World War I and even during the 1920's and 30's the custom in the gun trade was to call rather light European walnut without much contrast "English." If it had a good deal of contrast with long, dark streaks it was generally called French. The fanciest with black, medium, and light brown and sweeping, fancy figure in the buttstock was usually called "Circassian" and presumably it had been cut in the Caucasus Mountains in the Russian province of Circassia.

Whatever it was called most of the wood probably came from France. Before World War I some very beautiful walnut did come from Circassia but since the communists have taken over Russia, little walnut has got into the ordinary channels of trade, I have been told.

A catalog put out in the late 1920's by Griffin & Howe, the New York gunsmithing firm, says that all the gunstock wood it used was "Circassian." In ordering a stock, the customer could specify whether he wanted his wood to be light in color, medium, or dark with

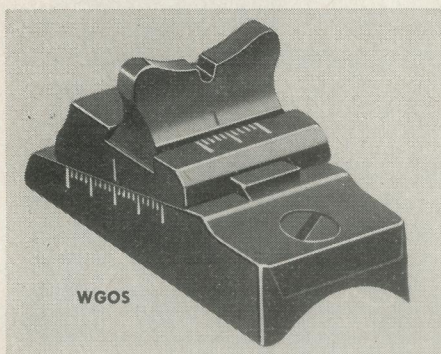


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wavy, cloudy, or "plain." I am rather doubtful whether much of this wood, or any of it for that matter, ever saw Circassia, but it was undoubtedly excellent wood.

I was in the Griffin & Howe work rooms in the middle 1930's and drooled over the handsome stock blanks. In those days, as I remember, Griffin & Howe used to charge from \$75 to \$100 for a stock from one of those handsome blanks. Today, a stock blank of that quality sells for from \$75 to \$150 and a top stockmaker charges from \$250 to \$400 to make it into a finished stock.

The best American walnut is very good. Good American black walnut is better stock material than mediocre French walnut, but the best American walnut is not as good as the best European wood. Black walnut is heavier, softer, more porous, has less contrast, and it doesn't finish up with the glow and sheen of good European wood.

The pieces of American walnut most sought after are cut where roots and branches come out. Many are the names applied to the various types of figure in American walnut. Tiger stripe, basketweave, fiddleback, feather, and burl are some of them. I do not believe that Winchester ever used European walnut for stocks of even their finest Model 21 shotguns. I have a veteran Model 21 in 12 gauge with two sets of barrels, a gun that I have used in Africa, Scotland, and Spain as well as in the United States.

I ordered the Model 21 when I was at the Winchester factory at New Haven, and I was allowed to pick out the blank used in the buttstock. It is a very handsome piece of nicely figured crotch American walnut. Ithaca also used fancy American walnut for their top-grade doubles, but the highest-grade Parker, Smith, and Fox guns were stocked with European wood.

Black-walnut trees grow in many areas of the United States in more or less temperate climates. I remember walnut trees in canyons in Arizona mountains when I was a boy. I believe these were native. I am told that there are native black-walnut trees in canyons at lower elevations in Idaho, where I now live. Walnut grows in Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Texas, and California, and in the lower tier of the Midwest. There is a great deal of black walnut in the Missouri Ozarks, where the stockmaking firms of E. C. Bishop & Son and Reinhart Fajen are both located in the same little town of Warsaw.

Like European walnut the best black walnut comes from trees that have had to shift for themselves in fairly arid and not particularly fertile soil. These have grown slowly and are harder and have smaller pores than wood from trees that have had more rapid growth. The cheapest grade of black walnut is soft, has no figure or color contrast, and is straight grained. Most of the stocks on the old 1903 Springfield sporters and military rifles were wood of this sort. It was good, strong, stable wood, but

it was certainly nothing to make the wood-lover jump for joy. It was so porous that when given a straight linseed-oil finish it turned almost black.

California has been the source of much excellent walnut—the native black walnut called "claro" and wood from thin-shelled "English" walnut trees. The Claro I have seen is for the most part good wood. Some of it seems rather soft, but much of it has good color contrast and is hard enough.

Much of the wood used on Browning shotguns and rifles is California "English" that has been shipped to Belgium. I understand that in some instances rifle blanks made from good California English-walnut trees have been shipped to France and then returned to the United States as genuine French walnut. The man who gets a good stock blank gets a good stock blank whether it has grown in France or in California.

Good walnut is now expensive for two reasons. The first is that it is getting scarce. It takes a long time for a walnut tree to mature, and the supply of wood has been depleted by two world wars and the manufacture of millions of military rifle stocks. Apparently for military stocks trees were simply cut down, sawed into blanks, cured, and worked and no attention was paid to figure, color, or density. One of the most beautiful pieces of French walnut I have ever seen was in the form of a military stock on a Model 98 Mauser. The second reason good walnut is so expensive is that there has been a tremendous demand in both the United States and Europe for walnut to be used in fine furniture and in veneer for paneling.

Walnut buyers have gone wherever walnut grows. In 1959 when I visited in Iran and hunted ibex and wild sheep there, an Iranian gun-nut friend told me of a gunsmith who had a good supply of dry Iranian walnut. I bought a flitch (a large piece of wood not yet sawed into blanks). I think I paid about \$15 for the flitch, but it cost me over \$100 for air express. It was magnificent wood, beautifully figured and colored and hard as flint. The gunsmith told me he had had it for 35 years, and the sides of the flitch showed they had been shaped with an axe. Al Biesen got enough wood out of it to stock a Winchester Model 70 in .375 Magnum and a Winchester Model 21 shotgun.

But European walnut buyers heard there was some good wood in Iran. They descended on the country with hot little hands full of liras, francs, and marks and went away with the wood. A couple of years ago Prince Abdorreza, brother of the Shah, decided to try to round up some first-class Iranian walnut for a couple of stocks. He had a grim time finding any.

It is the same story almost everywhere. For some years after the war the better-grade Spanish shotguns were generally stocked with magnificent Spanish wood. I have a Spanish 28 gauge I got in 1953 or thereabouts. The wood in the buttstock would knock

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your eye out. When I made a tour of the Eibar gun factories in 1967 I was told that getting good wood is more difficult every year. British and Belgian makers of fine guns make trips to the walnut dealers in Paris and in the Rhone valley to pick over the wood. High-grade Italian shotguns are almost always stocked with very fine wood. I have three top-grade Berettas, two over-and-unders, and a side-by-side. The wood in all three buttstocks is sensational.

Another reason walnut stock blanks are expensive is that there is a long and expensive lag-time from the day the tree is cut until that happy hour when the dealer can realize on his investment by selling the blanks. Turning a mature walnut tree into stock blanks requires equipment, patience, and knowledge.

A friend of mine here in Idaho is a prosperous retired farmer who is also a lover of good wood and a skilled cabinetmaker and gunstocker. He says he knows of many fine old walnut trees that have been cut down and made into firewood or left to rot. Sawmills do not want to handle the trees, as sawing hard, tough wood 3 ft. thick is not easy, and many of the logs have nails, spikes, and staples imbedded in them and can ruin expensive saws. Anyone who handles walnut generally must have his own facilities for sawing and curing.

I have never cut down a walnut tree and made it into gunstock blanks, but from what I read the tree should be grubbed out well down into the roots since some of the most spectacular wood comes from the portion where the roots branch out from the trunk. Some say to soak the log in water for a month or two, then let it season in the open. Others say to season under shelter for a couple of years. Then the log is cut into planks about 3 in. thick. These should be seasoned under cover for a year and then sawed into stock blanks. These can then be kiln-dried or stored in a warm dry place for a year or so.

The ends of the blanks should be sealed with wax or asphalt paint so they will not crack or split as they dry. A stockmaker usually has from 20 to 50 blanks in the process of drying out. He weighs them carefully, marks weight and date, and when they stop losing weight he assumes they are dry.

A shortcut is to saw the tree trunk into planks and then into blanks immediately and then slowly kiln-dry the wood. I have heard that this process makes the wood brittle and "punky," but whether this is so or not I cannot say. As can be seen from the foregoing account, no one simply saws down a walnut tree, saws it up, sells the blanks, and at once becomes rich.

The best walnut rifle blanks should have the grain running parallel to the grip and in such a manner that the full strength of the wood fibers in the fore-end cannot warp against the barrel. If there is a lot of fancy figure it should be in the butt. Good blanks for shotgun buttstocks, because smaller pieces of wood are involved, are more common

than first-rate rifle blanks. Fore-ends and buttstocks on high-grade double-barreled shotguns should be carefully matched, but they often are not. But whatever the figure and the color, wood for gunstocks should be strong, hard, and stable—meaning that it should take and preserve fine checkering and do little warping.

Walnut is the traditional wood for stocks, and in most opinions the most beautiful; but it isn't the only suitable wood. One of the handsomest of all woods, if a fine piece is obtained, is myrtle. The tree is an evergreen of moderate size which grows near the coast in Oregon and northern California. Much of it is used for bowls, candlesticks, and other things turned on lathes, but some is sold in the form of stock blanks. The best is very good.

I have seen myrtle that looked like maple, myrtle as plain and without figure as pine, myrtle that could be mistaken for fine French walnut, and beautiful wood that could be only myrtle—wood with wonderful figure and streaks of dark brown-black, and in some cases green. Myrtle is generally not as stable as walnut. Really good pieces are rare, but a good piece is top stock material.

In many ways maple is one of the best stock woods. It is hard, strong, and about the right weight. When cured it is quite stable, and it takes fine checkering well. Much is as plain as pine, but some is found with figure—birdseye, tiger tail, shell flame, and so on. All of it is just about white.

The late Alvin Linden, a famous Wisconsin stockmaker, used to scorch maple with a blowtorch, a process used in Japan and called the "suigi" finish. The wood is actually lightly charred and turned black and brown. I once finished a maple stock with linseed oil with a little burnt umber in it. I thought it looked pretty good. Some gun fanciers like the raw, yellow look of straight maple, but such a stock brings me down with chills and fever.

Apple and cherry have been used for gun and rifle stocks, and so has pear. I have been told that all of these woods are strong, hard, and take fine checkering but are more brittle than walnut. What I have seen is almost without figure. I once saw a handsome stock made of rosewood, but rosewood stock blanks are seldom seen, and I understand the wood is brittle and on the heavy side. Birch is used for stocks and in many ways it is good wood, but it is light and has to be stained. Birch I have seen has very little figure.

Another wood that has come into use since World War II is screw bean mesquite, a wood that grows on the Southwestern desert. It is a very strong, very hard, very tough wood, but heavy and apt to be plentifully supplied with worm holes that have to be filled. It is suitable for rifles for heavy magnum cartridges. It has considerable figure, but not much contrast and it has a sort of a liver color that I do not find endearing.

Every year I hear the lament that really fine wood is no more. Yet there

always seems to be fine wood for those willing to hunt it up and pay for it. Before the war a rifle blank of good, hard American black walnut with some figure could be bought for about \$5 and a beautifully figured blank for \$20 or \$25. Not long after the war I bought one of the most beautiful myrtle blanks I have ever seen for \$35.

Before the war a good piece of straight-grained, hard, properly cured blank of French walnut with some contrast could be bought for \$10 or \$15, a fine blank with good contrast and long, sweeping dark lines in the buttstock for from \$25 to \$35. For \$40 or \$50 it was possible to get a chunk of French walnut of real exhibition grade. Today, just about any sort of a French-walnut blank will cost \$25, even though it has about as much color and figure as pine.

The kind of a blank that formerly cost \$15 or \$20 now costs from \$60 to \$75, and lovers of outstanding wood will now shell out from \$100 to \$250 for an outstanding blank without batting an eye. I recently weighed a fine rifle blank a friend purchased last summer in France. He paid \$105 for it and it weighed 8 lb.—about \$13 a pound. That's not as costly as diamonds or caviar but a lot more expensive than the finest beef!

With the price of skilled labor being what it is today, the cost of the finest wood is not out of line. Having a \$5-an-hour stockmaker lavish his skill on a \$10 chunk of wood does not make too much sense. If a blank is strong, properly cut so the grip is not weakened and the wood of the fore-end cannot exert strong pressure against the fore-end, thoroughly dry, and stable, it is a good blank no matter what the color and figure are like or what sort of a tree it came from. If in addition the blank has good color and contrast and is handsomely figured it is a jewel!—*Jack O'Connor.*

Getting the Range

with
JACK O'CONNOR

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The Sturm, Ruger Company has been concentrating on turning out their M77 bolt-action rifles in .243 Winchester and 6 mm. Remington calibers. Rifles in .308 should be coming out of the factory in good numbers by the time you read this, and M77's in .22/250 will follow. The .284, and 6.5 and .350

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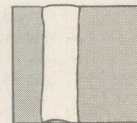
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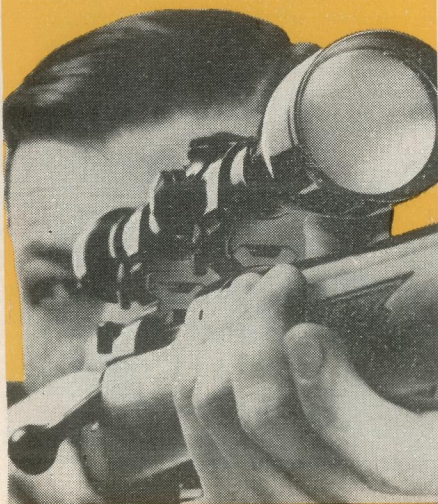
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Remington magnums should get under way in July, Ed Nolan, sales manager, believes.

Demand continues high for the Ruger No. 1 single-shot rifle, Nolan says, but much handwork and attention to details keep production down. Since demand has been for the rifles with 26-in. barrels, the 22-in. barrel has been dropped.

New Cartridge Book

The first edition of *Cartridges of the World* came out in 1965. This is the second, and it has been updated to some extent. When he undertook it Frank C. Barnes, who put it together, laid out for himself a staggering job—to list, picture, and give ballistics for and a brief history of the sporting and military cartridges current and obsolete, American and European. Sections are: current American centerfires, obsolete American centerfires, wildcats, military cartridges both black and smokeless, British sporting cartridges, European sporting cartridges, pistol and revolver cartridges, American rimfire cartridges, shot shells. In addition the book contains chapters on components, reloading, and so on.

All the cartridges are pictured, some with halftone illustrations and some with line drawings showing case dimensions. This book is one that every serious student of the history of cartridge development should own. In it he will find cartridges he never dreamed of, and he will also discover that many ideas he thought new are actually quite old. The book is paper bound, contains 378 pages, is published at \$6.95 by the Gun Digest Company, 4540 West Madison Street, Chicago, Illinois 60624. It is also available from sporting-goods dealers and bookstores.

Winchester Mannlicher

The Winchester Model 70 with Mannlicher-style stock was announced some time ago, but only recently have I got my hands on one. With its gracefully shaped buttstock it is one of the best-looking Model 70's in recent years. Stock has a cheekpiece and Monte Carlo comb. The 19-in. barrel is bedded in a full-length stock. A metal cap encircles the end of the forearm at the muzzle. Checkering is hand done, sharp and clean, 18 lines to the inch.

The butt is fitted with a black recoil pad of the same type used on the Model 70 Deluxe rifle. The stock contains bases for quick-detachable sling swivels, which are furnished unattached with each gun.

The receiver is drilled and tapped for standard Model 70 sights. These are not installed but come separately packaged with the gun. Removable plug screws are fitted to provide the barrel a clean, streamlined appearance when scope is mounted.

The Mannlicher model is chambered in .243, .270, .30/06, and .308. The one I have been playing with is a .270. It shot surprisingly well, and like most .270's with well-bedded barrels it

grouped 130 and 150-gr. bullets pretty much the same at 100 yd. There is, of course, a velocity loss in a 19-in. barrel—the amount depending on the powder the cartridge is loaded with.

The Mannlicher-stocked Model 70 is supposed to weigh around 7 lb., depending on the density of the wood in the stock, and the caliber. Rifles of smaller calibers weigh more since the hole in the barrel is smaller. The review copy .270 weighed 7½ lb. The .243 should weigh slightly more, the .30/06 and .308 less.

Remington Plant

A new plant for production of sporting ammunition is being built by Remington near Lonoke, Arkansas. The cost of the project along with the related modernization and improvement of the Remington ammunition plant at Bridgeport, Connecticut, will be about \$25-million.

Plans call for production of rimfire ammunition and centerfire military ammunition at Bridgeport, and centerfire sporting ammunition at Lonoke. Production of shotgun shells and ammunition components will be split between the two plants. Remington executive offices and research facilities presently situated in Bridgeport will remain there. Both plants will warehouse products not produced locally.

Plans call for construction of the new plant to start immediately. Initial production is expected in mid-1970, with full production scheduled for 1971. When it is in full production, the Lonoke plant is expected to employ 800 to 1,000 people.

Leupold Buys Nosler

A controlling interest in the Nosler Bullet Company of Bend, Oregon, has been bought by Leupold & Stevens Instruments, Inc., makers of the Leupold scopes. The Nosler bullets are made with a partition that controls the expansion of bullets. They have won an excellent reputation in the game fields and also for accuracy. John Nosler, designer of the bullet, will continue as president of the firm.

Savage 164

The Savage/Anschutz Model 164 sporter is certainly one of the classiest .22 caliber bolt-action sporters to come along since the fine Winchester Model 52 sporter was discontinued. It is a man-sized rifle, a handsomely stocked job which weighs with Weaver C4 scope and Tip-Off mount exactly 6¼ lb. Nicely tapered barrel is 24 in. long and fitted with adjustable open rear sight that folds down and with a ramp front sight with hood.

Stock is of European walnut. Pistol grip is very sharply curved and has a "Wundhammer" swell on the right side. This is a feature worked out by a Los Angeles stockmaker prior to World War I. It is supposed to give the shooter aid and comfort by fitting into the hollow of his palm. It does so only if

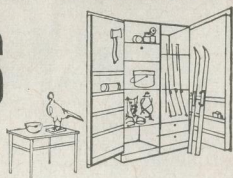
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it is held in the conventional manner.

Fore-end has a schnabel tip. Buttstock has a conservative Monte Carlo comb and cheekpiece. Stock is hand checkered. Buttplate is plastic with white line. I like looks of the Model 164 better than I do the fancier version, the Model 54, which has skip-line checkering and a roll-over comb.

The Model 164 comes with a 5-shot clip for the .22 Long Rifle cartridge. Ten-shot clips are available. The rifle retails for \$87.50. Chambered for the .22 Winchester Magnum, it is called the Model 164-M and sells for \$92.50. The fancier Model 54 with match action sells for \$142.50.

Artists and Guns

I have often groaned in these columns about some of the pictures commercial artists draw to illustrate advertisements and hunting stories. It is a bit disturbing, for example, to look at a picture of a hunter aiming at an indignant grizzly 30 yd. away and note that the guy's rifle is pointed so that it would miss the grizzly by 10 ft.

A book of mine called *Horse and Buggy West* came out in February. It is the story of my life and loves from 5 to 15 as I was growing up in Tempe, Arizona. It is illustrated by an artist. For a chapter telling how I used to cut school and sneak off and hunt ducks on the Salt River, the artist had a picture of a defunct duck and a muzzle-loading gun. I screamed like a cornered catamount, demanded he portray a more modern arm for me to hunt ducks with. I didn't see his revision until the book came out. He'd given me a Winchester Model 94 carbine for my duck gun! A gun's a gun, isn't it?

Trapshooting Film

A new instructional film "Trapshooting with Remington Pros" demonstrates fundamentals of stance, foot and gun position, and lead on 16-yd. singles and doubles targets and on handicap targets. The film is narrated by D. Lee Braun, famous Remington pro and author of an excellent book on skeet shooting. Demonstration shooting is done by Bob Andrews and Dick Baldwin, both Remington professionals. In addition there is instruction for left-handed shooters by Dick Baldwin, who is a natural southpaw.

The film is made with the gun-camera device used in a previous film "Skeet Shooting with D. Lee Braun." The gun-camera permits the viewer to see as if he were behind the gun himself the swing, exact lead, and follow-through used by the Remington pros to break trap singles, doubles, and handicap targets from all five stations.

The film, as well as the film on skeet shooting, was produced by Larry Madison Productions, Inc., New York. It is 28½ minutes long. Prints are now available free of charge for viewing by interested groups from Modern Talking Picture Service, Inc., 1212 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10036.

STARVATION WILDERNESS

(continued from page 52)

back. We had left the bark on the logs. As soon as our stove warmed the place, big black spruce beetles came out from under that bark. If they got on us, they bit like the dickens, and I was more afraid of them than I would have been of a bear. I'd seen bears all my life, but spruce beetles were new to me.

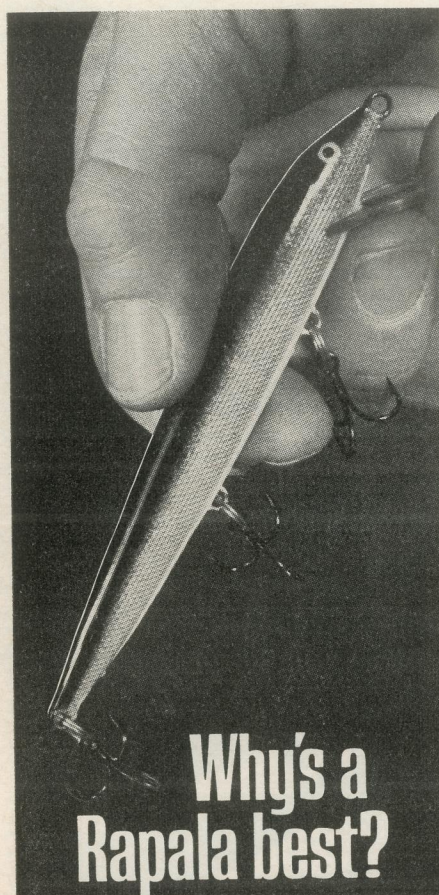
It was still too early to start trapping, so Walter went off each day to look for game and fur sign and locate the muskrat lakes. It took only a few of those trips for us to realize that we had picked the wrong place for winter headquarters. Walter found little sign of fox, lynx, or coyote, and the nearest lake on our side of the river was 10 miles away. This was not the place that had been described to us by the two trappers back at Fitzgerald, and I could see that Walter was very worried. He'd sit in the evenings, thinking hard, and he didn't even hear me when I spoke to him.

We had built a tiny, cranky canoe, nine feet long. We used willow trunks for the ribs and frame after hewing them flat on one side. Walter sawed the planks, a quarter of an inch thick, out of a birch log with a crosscut saw. They were only six or eight inches wide, and it took a lot of them to complete the job. Then we covered the planking with canvas and put on four coats of paint, and we had a serviceable one-man canoe. After one trip in it, with Walter and the baby, I decided that it was not a family craft. From then on, I promised myself, I'd stay ashore until we got a better boat.

We made that one trip, down the Slave, to look for muskrat country. Four miles below our cabin we found a lovely clear creek running in, and stopped to catch jackfish. We tried fishing from the canoe, but it wasn't safe, so we got out on the sandy shore to fish from the beach.

I decided I'd use two lines. I stuck one pole in the ground and picked up the second, and when I turned around I had a nine-pound pike on the first rig. I dropped my outfit and grabbed the other one, but when I started to haul my catch in, the second pole started to slide toward the water. I had a seven-pounder on that line. I yelled for help, but before Walter could get my second fish in he was fast to a four-pounder of his own. We fished with one line apiece after that. I caught 18 big jackfish about as fast as I could take them off the hook, and Walter did as well. When we loaded them into the canoe and started back upriver, the gunwales of the canoe were barely an inch above the water. It was then that I resolved not to go out in it again.

I made jackfish booyah, a favorite dish of ours, for supper that night. Booyah is a common term all through the North Country for soup or stew, incidentally. I suppose it comes from the French bouillon, or maybe from bouillabaisse, the famous fish stew of France. To make jackfish booyah, you



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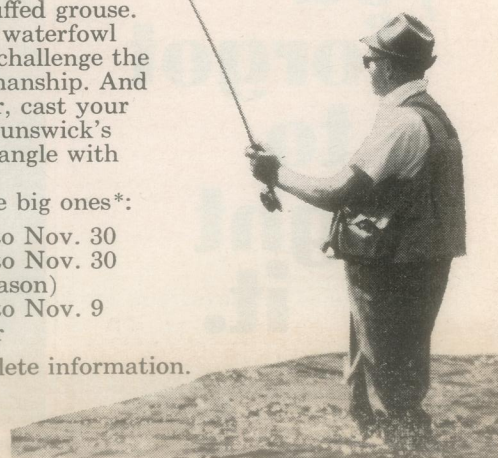
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