

*This excerpt from “The Outdoor Wire” issue of March 2<sup>nd</sup> by Jim Shepard examines the controversy brought to the forefront by Jim Zumbo. Article Credit also to Dick Metcalf, Group Technical Editor for Intermedia Outdoors, publisher of Petersen's Hunting and Guns & Ammo*

## **A REASONED LOOK AT THE AR-15 QUESTION**

At the core of the controversy that continues to rage across the shooting community, inflaming virtually everyone involved in shooting or hunting, is the much-maligned AR-style rifle. Other military rifles, including AK and FN/FAL derivatives, have had their time under the microscope, but it was Eugene Stoner's AR battle rifle design from the 1950s that ignited the furor which effectively ended the 40-year career of one of the nation's best-known hunting writers.

Since Jim Zumbo's blasting of the AR-style rifle and its owners, the simple question, “Are AR-style rifles suitable for hunting?” has been debated with fiery rhetoric and hot-blooded passion across the web, television, radio, and café tables across America.

Granted, there has also been a significant amount of accompanying Second Amendment debate, but the Second Amendment facts pretty much speak for themselves: any additional regulation on firearms opens floodgates that all firearms owners should fight to keep closed.

Our reporting on this unprecedented furor generated thousands of messages from readers. Like the debate itself, many were unfettered rants by gun owners incensed that “one of our own” would blindside them. Others were more reasoned. Of those messages, one in particular caught our attention.

Dick Metcalf, the Group Technical Editor for Intermedia Outdoors, publisher of Petersen's Hunting and Guns & Ammo as well as several other shooting and hunting magazines, sent us a head's-up that the forthcoming May/June edition of Petersen's Hunting would coincidentally feature an article entitled “Hunting with AR Rifles” dealing factually with what had unexpectedly become an extremely controversial topic.

“It was on its way to press before all this happened,” Metcalf said, “and was originally intended for those hunters - and writers - who it is now apparent share Jim Zumbo's basic opinion. They were the primary intended audience for the article; which is now, perhaps, a day late and a dollar short.”

Indeed, if it had appeared just two issues earlier, it might have prevented one of the great career meltdowns in journalism.

From that correspondence with Metcalf, an unprecedented arrangement between Intermedia and our services has emerged. We believe Metcalf's dispassionate and knowledgeable examination of AR-style rifle hunting demands immediate distribution.

This feature appears in both Friday editions of both The Outdoor and Shooting Wires with the aim of cooling the inaccurate rhetoric still being exchanged between two groups that should be moving in lockstep: shooters and hunters.

So, you ask: are AR-style rifles suitable for hunting?

Answering that question, Dick Metcalf begins his article with a simple statement that should get even the most hidebound hunter thinking before blasting “black rifles”:

“Virtually every type of centerfire hunting and sporting rifle in existence started off as a military weapon. The classic lever-action deer gun, long the most popular type of hunting rifle in America, began as the Henry Rifle of the Civil War era, designed to bring rapid fire against the enemy. The lever-action was succeeded in universal popularity by the bolt-action, still the standard hunting rifle of today, which we owe to Paul Mauser's classic battle-rifle design. Remember the converted surplus “Sporterized Mausers” that were the most economical route to a good hunting gun for most ordinary shooters from the 1920s to well into the 1950s?

“Now another military-origin rifle design is moving rapidly into prominence in the hunting and sport shooting world: the AR15 .223 and AR10 .308. And, like its predecessors, the AR platform is meeting resistance, even outright opposition, from many hunters who are personally wedded to earlier gun designs.”

As Metcalf observes, that should come as no real surprise. After all, when the lever-action first began to be used for hunting, “traditionalists” whose idea of a “real” hunting gun was a single shot muzzleloader “dissatisfied the need for a repeat-fire tool.” Ditto the bolt-action military surplus rifles whose Mauser action is the base from which many now “traditional” hunting rifles evolved.

That same resistance is there for “black gun” AR rifles. This despite the fact it is today the rifle of choice for top-level civilian marksmanship competitions and is available in a variety of chamberings from the .223 through the popular .308 hunting caliber (the original design caliber) to the beefy .458 SOCOM, .50 Beowulf, and Hornady's new .450 Bushmaster.

That adaptability is only one of the many desirable characteristics of the AR platform. It is “assembled” rather than “fitted.” That means a few tools and off-the-shelf components give shooters with a “modicum of ability” with hand tools the wherewithal to assemble their own uniquely-tailored rifle. Customization of a standardgrade AR - again with readily-available parts - can result in a rifle that can shoot minute-of-angle with factory ammunition out to 500 yards. That, Metcalf observes, is shooting “as well as the best other hunting rifle you can buy.”

Technically, he observes, “It makes all the sense in the world that military rifle designs have always been inherently appropriate for hunting.” They are, he writes, “designed for rugged reliable function and durability under extreme conditions, which translates automatically into use under even the most extreme field hunting use.”

“They are also designed for reasonable weight, portability, and ease of fast handling by people who may be carrying substantial other heavy gear and wearing bulky clothing. They have an inherent capability for followup shots. And they must be accurate, against targets of the same basic dimensions and same range of distances typically encountered by hunters.”

Another point he raises is the fact that widespread military service helps familiarize millions of Americans with their functions and capabilities. All in all, he writes, the AR “in particular is a superb hunting design, due to its lightweight synthetic and corrosion-resistant alloy construction.”

Another strength of the AR is the ability to change upper receivers to achieve different chamberings and/or barrel lengths. Legally, the serially-numbered “lower” is the actual “firearm,” Metcalf writes, “making an AR nearly as versatile as a T/C Encore.”

Metcalf's article goes on to discuss various chamberings for the AR that give excellent results on anything from varmints to the largest game animals. In fact, Metcalf says, “I can't think of anything better to have in hand than one of these were I to have to beat out a thicket for a wounded bear” when speaking of the .458 SOCOM or .50 Beowulf versions.

In closing, Metcalf observes that if you “oppose others using a hunting tool that doesn't ‘look right’ to you, you are standing on the same political platform as the California state legislature.”

“Hunters,” he writes, “should not do the anti-gun, anti-hunter groups' work for them.”

We agree, and we thank Primedia and Dick Metcalf for caring enough to share their work with us. As always, we'll keep you posted.

--Jim Shepherd

Intermedia Outdoors has posted Dick Metcalf's article pre-publication in its entirety on both the Petersen's Hunting and Guns & Ammo websites. You can read the full article for yourself at either [www.huntingmag.com](http://www.huntingmag.com) or [www.gunsandammomag.com](http://www.gunsandammomag.com)