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Photos Courtesy of Author

# An Assist *from* Finland

A hunter prowls a Colorado rim in a squall, much as Doug Burris did before killing a World's Record mule deer with his Sako in .264 Winchester Magnum in 1972.

Until the shot, he'd been still-hunting the rim of a Colorado canyon; his plan to pause on a plateau to the north. This part of the San Juan Forest comprised mostly oak brush and held some fine mule deer.

But the rifle's report ahead changed his agenda. At a run, he headed for his chosen vantage point. Moments later, scrambling up onto the plateau, he spied movement across the canyon. At 250 yards, the biggest buck he'd ever seen was making for cover. "I put the crosshairs on his back and touched off my Sako .264." The hand-loaded 125-grain Nosler hit home, dropping the deer instantly.

Wisely, the hunter watched for several minutes before crossing the canyon. Then he raced to his prize. The giant rack had 18 points and measured 41 inches outside—"a record-book buck, I was sure!"

The score would fall just shy of Boone and Crockett's minimum for listing, but those numbers hardly disillusioned him. He would return to this place. Clearly, it held extraordinary deer!



*Since 1946, these rifles have earned plaudits far from their Scandinavian home. Even in the Rockies.*

**A Tikka brought this young lady's Namibian safari to a successful close with a fine red hartebeest.**

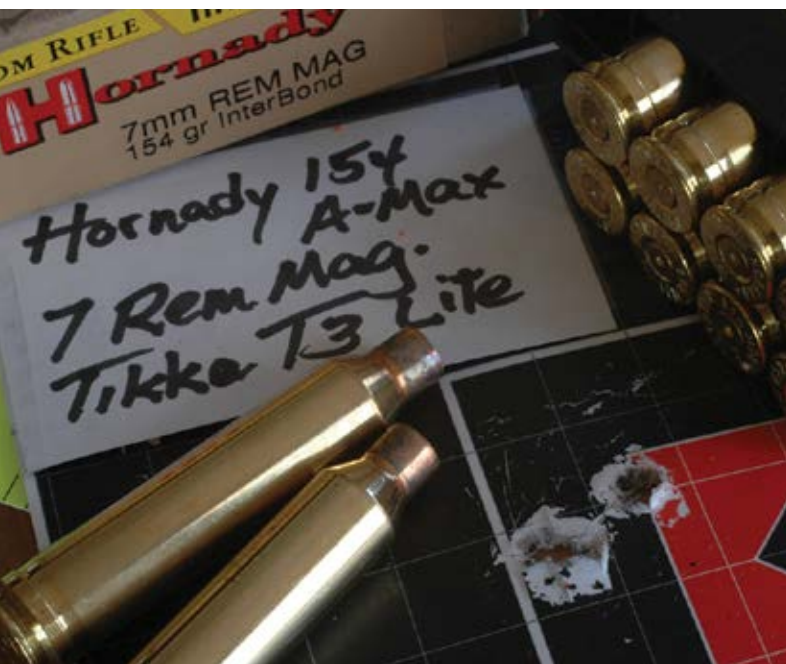
He would carry the same rifle too. Visit hunting camps in the western U.S., and you'll find them awash in Winchester Model 70s and Remington 700s. By the late 1940s, when reliable, fog-proof scopes appeared, iron-sighted lever rifles were rapidly giving way to bolt-actions. In the early '70s, when Doug shot his 18-pointer, some hunters still carried converted Springfields and Mausers. But affordable, scope-friendly commercial sporters would proliferate, while stocks of surplus infantry rifles diminished.

Nationwide, most hunters favored familiar domestic brands, in part because they knew less about imported rifles. Sakos hailed from Riihimäki, Finland, and while they had earned plaudits since Stoeger brought the first of them across the Atlantic in 1946, they were expensive. Also, the advent of short-belted magnums in the 1940s and '50s headlined American names. Weatherby had pioneered with his .257, .270 and 7mm. Winchester's .458, .338, .264 and .300, and Remington's 7mm, arrived between 1956 and '63. Norma introduced its .308 and .358 Magnums in 1960 and '61; but loaded ammunition came later—at high prices. In the U.S., Browning's fine High Power was the only widely known rifle to chamber those two.

Sako was quick to add chambering reamers for Winchester and Remington magnums. It drew the attention of rifle buffs like Doug. The .264 cartridge, too, appealed mainly to enthusiasts. Advertised at its 1959 debut as a brimstone-breathing deer/varmint round that shot flat and teased 3,700 fps from 100-grain bullets, it sold poorly. Gun scribes wailed that it ate throats; deer and predator hunters shied from its loud bark and sharp recoil. What could it do that a .243 wouldn't do more civilly? Three years later Remington cleverly hawked its 7mm Magnum as a deer/elk round with heavier bullets. In truth, these magnums are nearly identical in shape and capacity, neck diameters differing by just .020!



**The Sako '06 Wayne used here is a "loaner" rifle for safari clients. It has taken many, many animals.**



**TOP:** This Sako's petite action is ideally suited to the .222. Its forebears were the first Sakos, circa 1946. **MIDDLE:** Long-action Sakos come in laminated, synthetic and walnut stocks. Here: a .416 Remington, walnut. **BOTTOM:** Wayne punched this three-shot group with a Tikka T3 in 7mm Magnum. It's not unusual for a T3!

I like the .264, have long thought it was unfairly maligned. Hand-loaded 140-grain bullets pushed by IMR 7828 scoot from my Model 70 and commercial Mauser at 3,300 fps with no strain. That's 100 fps faster than initial factory claims, nearly 300 fps above revised listings! New 6.5mm bullets make this neglected cartridge not only better for big game, but a sterling choice for elk in open country.

I digress. Sako chambered for U.S. loads, new and old, popular and not, because it was keen to make customers of American hunters.

Suojeluskuntain Yliesikunnan Asepaja was established April 1, 1919. Its founders decided "Sako" was easier to pronounce (pronunciation is "Socko," by the way, not "Sayko"). The firm's first rifle of note, the lovely Vixen, appeared shortly after the close of WWII in .22 Hornet and .218 Bee—both American small-bore cartridges. A heavy-barrel version and a full-stocked carbine quickly followed. So did .222, .222 Magnum and .223 chamberings. In 1957, Sako expanded its rifle line with the L-57 Forester. Its action was upsized for the then-new .308 and .243 Winchester, the .22-250 joining as a factory round after Remington gave it a home in 1965. The L-57 came in sporter, carbine and heavy barrel versions. Three years later the L-61 Finnbear arrived, its action long enough for the .25-06, .270 and .30-06, short-belted magnums of the day, even the .375 H&H. L-61 rifles also appeared in carbine form, rare now on the second-hand market.

In 1961 Sako introduced the Finnwolf, a hammerless lever-action rifle with a front-locking bolt, a detachable magazine and a one-piece stock. In .243 and .308, it lasted a decade. Its successor, the similar Model 73, went away in the mid-'70s. By that time Sako

had been eight years under new owners and was redesigning its bolt guns. The Model 74 in three action lengths replaced the Vixen, Forester and Finnbear from 1974 until 1978. Then came the "A series"—A1, A11 and A111—short, medium and long receivers. In the mid-'80s, Sako replaced that group with the Hunter, also in three action lengths and with a left-hand option. The Model 78 rimfire was shipping by that time, in .22 Hornet as well as .22 Long Rifle.

The first Sakos wore hand-checked walnut stocks. Beginning in the late 1950s they had glossy finish—as did the highly polished chrome-moly steel. Carefully bedded, Sako rifles were soon renowned for their fine accuracy, adjustable triggers and silky bolt travel. Riflemen weren't as sweet on the dove-tail receiver rails that required costly Sako scope rings. The extractor was much smaller than the 98 Mauser's, but so reliable it would later be copied as a replacement for bolt-face claws.

In 1993 Sako introduced the TRG rifle for long-range shooters. In sporting and tactical form, it had a three-lug bolt with a detachable box. Chambered to .338 Lapua in the Model 42 action and .308 in the more compact Model 22, the TRG would later sire the sophisticated Model 10. In 1997 a new hunting rifle appeared. The Model 75's three locking lugs, a departure from the traditional twin lugs, reduced bolt lift to 70 degrees. A notable and controversial feature was its *lockable* bolt. The twist of a key in the bolt shroud rendered the rifle inoperable (or safe, if you prefer the euphemism). Four receiver lengths accepted a staple of 18 cartridges, .17 Remington and .22 PPC to 9.3x62 and .340 Weatherby. Rifle configurations included a walnut-stocked Battue with

a quarter-rib on a 19-inch barrel. Like the TRG, the 75 had integral top rails dovetailed for Sako's Optilock mounts.

I recall using rifles from Riihimäki at a Finnish rifle range under skies as grim as the visage of the fellow running the targets. "Standing and moving," boomed the Finn, wasting no English. "At the signal."

My crosswire bobbed against a black, implacable paper moose 80 meters away. Then: the buzzer.

*Bang!* I ran the bolt, fired again. *Too slow!* I managed a third with two seconds remaining.

Mercifully, the scoreboard blinked a 9 and two 10s. "Now moving."

On electronic legs, the moose backed behind a barricade. With sweaty palms, I waited. Suddenly it shot along the rail. *Stay on the dewlap! Keep it level! Fire fast!* The rifle bucked just before the moose vanished into the hill. On its return my swing got away. Two final shots, as the moose sped left and right, broke well. Sadly, neither could atone for my one miss

in front. "You must repeat," ordered the Finn, as if telling a child to pick up his socks. I'd get no charity here.

My next volley landed obligingly inside the scoring rings. I was now qualified to hunt in Finland. Local logic: If you're a hunter, you must prove you can shoot like one before entering the woods.

The Model 85 announced in 2006 was less a new rifle than a \$220 upgrade of the Model 75, with a redesigned stock and magazine latch. It has a mechanical ejector, a tab in front of the sliding two-detent safety to release the bolt for secure cycling. Triggers adjust down to 2¼ pounds. The detachable box on my favorite model, the 85 Kodiak in .375 H&H, must be nudged up to release the latch, a clever way to prevent accidental drops without slowing reloads. Crossbolts reinforce the laminated stock either end of the .375's four-shot magazine—which can be topped off through the rifle's generous port. Hooray!

Described as a "controlled-round feed" action, the 85's falls short of meeting the

standard set by the 1898 Mauser. That is, it won't prevent a jam if, with a cartridge on the bolt face, you short-stroke the bolt. But it is a strong, smooth-cycling, reliable action that all but dares you to attempt a jam, whether you choose a top-loading three-shot magazine or a detachable box. Stocks are of carbon fiber on the Model 85 Carbonlight Stainless, walnut on classic and iron-sighted Bavarian versions and laminated wood on the Grey Wolf, Varmint, Long Range and Kodiak. Hammer-forged barrels deliver on Sako's MOA accuracy guarantee across a broad range of chamberings. A .375 gives me sub-minute knots with Federal 260-grain AccuBond loads.

Sako introduced the A-7 bolt rifle in 2009. Two action lengths permitted chamberings from .22-250 to .300 Winchester. Instead of Sako dovetails, it had Weaver-style scope bases. Dropped in 2011, the A-7 was resurrected as the A-7 Roughneck three years later. It offers hunters a less costly push-fed rifle in long range, coyote and big game renditions. Alloy-reinforced synthetic stocks cradle fluted barrels in the most popular dozen of the 85's chamberings. Concurrent revamping of the Model 78 rimfire resulted in Sako's Finfire II. This box-fed, twin-lug rifle in .22 LR and .17 HMR has a checkered walnut stock, a single-set trigger that adjusts to two pounds. Receiver dovetails accept common scope rings. An understudy rifle for hunters who get too little practice with their centerfires!

Over the last three decades Sako has brooked stiff competition—much of it, oddly enough, from another Finnish brand under its own roof.

Tikka predates Sako by 26 years, its manufacturing roots reaching into Finland's tenure as Grand Duchy of

Russia. During WW II, Tikka built sewing machines and sub-machine guns. After armistice, it began producing Models 55 and 65 hunting rifles and Models 17, and then 77 shotguns.

In 1983 Tikka collaborated with Sako on the Model 555 bolt rifle. That venture prompted Sako's acquisition of Tikka—along with Valmet and its six decades of experience building over/under shotguns. By 1989, production at Tikka's Tikkakoski Works had moved to Sako's Riihimäki factory, while Sako-Valmet Oy, Tourula had begun assembling shotguns in Italy.

A new Tikka T3 bolt rifle appeared in 2003. It sold well from the start, even state-side. Excellent design, high-quality components (including Sako barrels) and a list price of just \$549 made it irresistible! The twin-lug bolt, with four major components easily separated by hand, is as delightful for its simplicity as for its smooth travel. And it boasts the 70-degree lift of a three-lug Sako! The trigger adjusts from two to four pounds, with a hex key through the magazine well. The T3 is slimmer than its forebear, the Whitetail, sold in the U.S. from 1999. But the receiver is as stiff, because the ejection port is smaller. Two bolt stops adapt it to short and long cartridges. Rails accept 17mm clamp rings, albeit the rifle is drilled and tapped. Cartridges strip from a sturdy, lightweight polymer box. The recoil lug is a steel stock insert that engages a receiver slot. Eight versions come in chamberings from .204 Ruger to .300 Winchester. The T3 is one of few rifles still offered in .222 Remington, a fetching cartridge that during my youth piled up benchrest aggregates when it wasn't dusting foxes, crows and woodchucks.

In 2016 Tikka refined the T3 action, dubbing it the



Announced in 2003, the T3 is a cleverly designed, modestly priced rifle with accurate Sako barrels.

## Homeland

While Sako, Tikka and the ammunition firm Lapua have brought Finland to the attention of U.S. shooters, it's otherwise a little-known country. Swedish missionaries explored this rugged region as early as 1155 and established Finland as a Swedish protectorate, which it remained until 1809. Surrendered to Russia, it was proclaimed a Grand Duchy by the Czar. Finland became an independent republic in 1919, Sako's debut year. Uneasy peace between Finland and the U.S.S.R. ended when the Soviet Army invaded during the winter of 1939-40. Hard fighting ensued while the Nazis pummeled Europe. Finns lost land to the Soviets but kept their independence. Hostilities ended in 1944.

Eighty percent of Finland is timbered, and 30 percent of its exports are forest products. Woodland and modest farms support herds of whitetail deer, descendants of six animals brought from Minnesota in 1934. By 1960 Finns had begun hunting deer; now they kill 17,500 annually. Finland's only large native predator, the wolf, was considered a threat to children and livestock. It was trapped and shot to extinction by the end of the 19th century.

Hunting in Finland is highly regulated, the game managed by 300 state-sanctioned hunting groups that at the time of my latest visit comprised 2,370 clubs and 140,000 members. A Central Association of Hunters administers 15 conservation districts. While you needn't be a club member to hunt, members get access to the best places. The country's 300,000 moose hunters contribute a great deal to its economy; 84 percent of the 10 million kg (22 million pounds) of game meat sold annually in Finland is from moose!

**NOTE: Beretta now handles Sako and Tikka sales stateside at [beretta.com](http://beretta.com).**

T3x. Additional tapped holes provide more scope-mounting options. A larger port makes single loading easier. Modular moldings at wrist and forend let you change grip dimensions.

All T3s I've fired have been sweethearts. The 19-inch barrel on a .308 carbine nipped groups as snug as .70, and averaged .86 with five types of ammo! Tikkas in .270 and 7mm Magnum kept their shots almost as tight. Bolt-strokes have that greased-piston feel; triggers break like glass rods. Afield, T3s are nimble and sunrise-reliable. One cold morning, a Norwegian hound keen on a track through Scandinavian forest all but passed by another moose. I fired offhand, the Oryx softnose from my .300 punching steam from the off-side. The animal spun, staggered and fell. On another hunt, a bull galloped across my front, through brush too thick for a shot. But by great good luck an alley opened just as he paused on a rise 90 yards off. Again offhand, I fired. Down he went. We finished that trip hunting whitetails. (Introduced in the 1930s, these deer have thrived in Finland.) My T3 felled a doe at 220 yards, drawing mixed reactions from the Finns, who consider 150 a long poke.

The overwhelming preference of Scandinavian hunters, Sako and Tikka rifles have become hits world-wide. A Scottish gamekeeper told me they're his favorites. At one of Namibia's most celebrated safari camps, they await clients traveling without rifles. Doug couldn't have known that in 1972, when he readied his .264 Magnum for a fourth journey to the Colorado

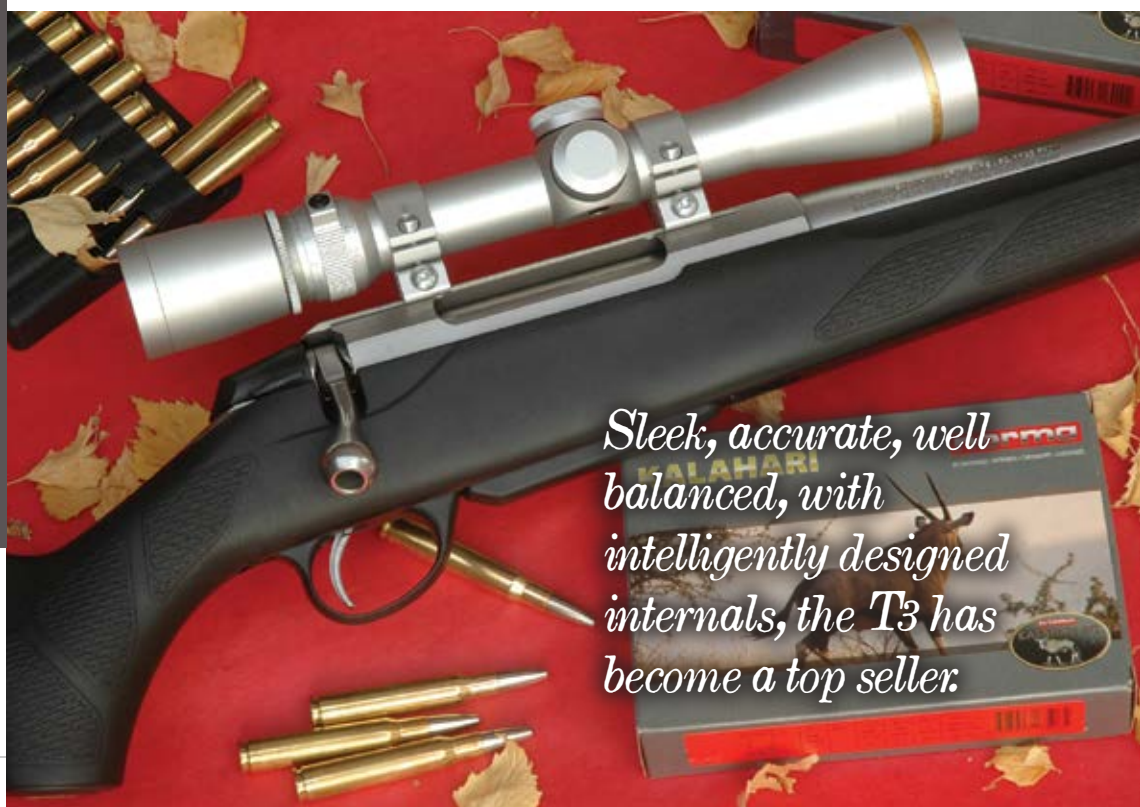
plateau that had yielded his 18-point buck.

The 22-hour drive from Texas spun out fast. The four hunters herded their Power Wagon, towing a Jeep, to their public-land campsite and quickly set up the tents. Opening morning, a gunmetal sky spit lightly. By nightfall two big bucks hung in camp. A heavy-racked animal had eluded Doug.

Drizzle greeted him next morning. Climbing along the rim of a familiar canyon, he spied two fine deer "1,000 yards ahead." For an hour and a half he eased toward them, through oak brush thick and tall enough to deny him another view. Closing, he spooked a doe that crashed away toward the bucks. Though he couldn't see them, Doug knew he had run out of options. He dashed ahead to an opening and threw the Sako to cheek as the bucks bounded away. But now there was a third, even bigger than the others! At 300 yards, Doug's Nosler ripped through that deer's chest. The buck faltered, then fell.

Typical in form, the antlers were high and wide, impossibly deep forks making the heavy beams appear almost thin. The animal's body matched their scale. Not until they were scored did Doug Burris know that with one shot from his Sako he'd taken a world's record deer. In March 1974, it easily earned top billing at the Boone and Crockett Awards Banquet. It was also given the coveted Sagamore Hill Award reserved for trophies of great distinction.

Rifles from Finland have accounted for plenty of game since, but perhaps none more memorable! ■



*Sleek, accurate, well balanced, with intelligently designed internals, the T3 has become a top seller.*