

# How I Learned GUNSMITHING

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #80 —

Gunsmithing, at its most basic level, is simply the thoughtful use of hands, eyes and brain to disassemble and reassemble a firearm, and to shape and finish wood and metal parts – but how does one learn to do those things? My library has over 100 gunsmithing books; I've read them all, but you can't learn gunsmithing by reading books or watching videos – you gotta do it, with your own hands, eyes and brain.

Just after we opened the gunshop in 1977, a young man walked in and asked if we needed a gunsmith. Since we'd had many gunsmithing inquiries, a deal was made for the Company to buy the equipment and provide counter services – while the "new gunsmith" did the bench work.

The relationship didn't last long; we had the equipment and Customers' guns, but no gunsmith. That's when I started learning gunsmithing – polishing and bluing metal,



*First pass on the master lines is an early step in the checkering process.*

and bluing metal, installing recoil pads, opening magazine wells and ejection ports on 1911s, installing red ramps and white outline sights on S&W revolvers, plus cleaning and general repairs.

We discontinued gunsmithing services in 1979 and except for minor work on personal guns, I did no serious gunsmithing for the next 25 years; but then we decided to create a 'first class' stock refinishing kit. The first thing was to identify the best materials and processes, and the only way to do that was to start refinishing gunstocks. I did sixteen in total – mostly single shot .22 rifles, experimenting with all kinds of finish remover, sandpaper, stock sealer and filler, finishes and polishing materials. You can learn a lot if you refinish that many stocks.



*During the GunTec filming years, we build a Nearly-Perfect Safari Rifle from start to finish -- truing up the action through finishing and checkering the stock.*

Next we needed a checkering kit, but I didn't know how to checker. Checkering isn't difficult, but learning to checker was my most frustrating learning experience. The breakthrough was learning to hold the checkering tool like the back end of a pool stick – just pushing, not guiding, and applying about the same amount of downward finger pressure as I do on my razor, when shaving.

---

**"...we needed a gunsmith."**

---

The GunTec filming years from 2005 to 2012 were a great learning experience. I had two good gunsmithing teammates, Ryan Fischer and Bob DeWitt. We would choose filming topics based on what we wanted to teach our viewers, rather than what we knew how to do; so, before we filmed some projects, we had to do them once for ourselves and then once for the camera.



Larry Potterfield

GunTec Filming Studio  
MidwayUSA  
Columbia, Missouri  
December 2012



*Final assembly of a Winchester Model 21, converted from pistol grip to straight grip stock, with the stock refinished, checkering extended and trigger guard straightened and lengthened.*