

The Scarce Type 94 Nambu “Last Ditch” Variation

By Dan Larkin

The collector-identified Type 94 Nambu “Last Ditch” variation refers to those very late production examples beginning in mid-20.6 (1945.June) where the standard configuration features were totally abandoned as production ceased. Like the identified Type 14 Nambu Last Ditch variation, the primary Type 94 Last Ditch identification feature is that they are “parts guns” made-up from whatever parts were available. Like the Type 14, sequential external serialization still occurred, but, very few (if any) internal parts match the frame number. Some may even lack internal parts such as the recoil spring bushing and external parts such as the side plates covering access to the frame locking block machining area. A few Type 94 Last Ditch frames are unblued (left “In-The-White” – ITW) as are some other internal and external parts. Collectors have reported five examples without external markings (both blued and ITW finishes).ⁱ (The unmarked examples could also be considered a separate sub-variation.) These fully-functional Last Ditch guns were all thrown-together from available parts as production ceased at the Kokubunji Factory.

Later 1944- and 1945-production (Showa 19 and 20) Type 94s with wood grips and/or square cocking knobs are often described as “last ditch” when referring to their appearance and production features. The “last ditch” term is not appropriate for those examples, as the changes were simply for production expediency. The bakelite-to-wood grip change occurred in 19.7 to save resources and time (bakelite is a plastic resin), and the round-to-square cocking knob change occurred over the 20.1 to 20.3 period to save part machining time. Even the very late “Short Grip” variation common in 20.5- and 20.6-date guns is nothing more than a production expedient with fewer required machining steps. The finish appearance of guns produced starting in later Showa 19 received less attention to detail than on earlier examples – again, a time-saving production step. However, the Japanese “continued to maintain surprisingly high standards of inspection and quality control until at least late June” [1945].ⁱⁱ Therefore, all Type 94s produced up until very near the end of production in 20.6 were of a standard configuration for the production period and should be termed “Standard Production.”

The final factory acceptance mark for this period is “NA” (名) which is found stamped just to the left of the serial number. Beginning in mid-20.5 production, the “NA” (名) mark is sometimes missing. It is not found at all on guns produced after mid-20.6 (the period where Last Ditch guns are first found). Insufficient data exists to correlate the absence of the final inspection mark to guns and their features prior to mid-20.6. More individual specimen inspections are needed. (If you own a 20.5-date or later Type 94, please contact me via email to provide specific information: danlarkin@suddenlink.net)

Two Type 94 Last Ditch examples are shown. The first is a 20.6-date which also has the Short Grip variation and the scarce modified (shortened) bakelite grip. This example only has two parts matching the frame (magazine and sear). The bluing is very thin and turning brown in spots. The second is one of the very rare examples with no external or internal part markings. It has the standard grip length with wood grips (an older frame with the U-shaped rear sight machining from 19.12 and earlier is used). The bluing on this example is very weak, and the finish color is almost entirely a brown-tone.



A few 20-date examples have been reported with out-of-the-ordinary features. Crude modifications to the safety and cocking knob have been noted (the originality of these changes is unknown). Three unserialized examples are reported with a “19-dot” yearly date code (no month number is stamped). These and similar examples should not be summarily assigned the Last Ditch label unless they are parts guns and in the later 20.6-date production period.

Unlike Type 14 Last Ditch production which lasted almost two months over a period of around 1,000 examples, Type 94 Last Ditch production lasted for only part of one month over a period of around 300 examples. This number projection could change with the advent of new information. However, the Kokubunji Factory Type 94 production draw-down was planned, and standard configuration practices continued into very late production. Therefore, the reported number of Type 94 Last Ditch production examples should remain low.

All Last Ditch Type 94 Nambus are scarce and carry a value premium. It should be noted that, although Last Ditch guns are found in 20.6 production, not all 20.6-dated guns are the Last Ditch variation. However, all 20.6-date guns, whether they are Standard Production or Last Ditch, also carry a value premium for being produced in the last month of manufacture. Unmarked Last Ditch examples carry an additional value premium for being so rare. Regardless of sub-variation, Type 94 Last Ditch examples exhibit the final state of Japanese pistol production. They are highly-prized by Nambu pistol collectors, and they should be considered a significant addition to any collection.

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ⁱ Source of all data and summarized production notes in article: Daniel M. Larkin, “The Larkin List #23”, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Harry L. Derby, III and James D. Brown, Japanese Military Cartridge Handguns 1893-1945 (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2003), p. 219.