

NZAR ID 158, Arm type SMG, Draft date 8 July 2011, Compiled by Phil Cregeen

Pattern (Name) Sterling Mk4 L2A3, Introduced into NZ Service 1959, Withdrawn 1989.

Makers: a. Sterling Engineering Co, Dagenham, United Kingdom (New Zealand Purchase)
b. ROF Fazerkerley, United Kingdom. (British Military Production)

Calibre: 9 mm x 19 Parabellum, Length: 710 mm (27.95 in), Barrel length: 198 mm (7.80 in)

Weight: 2.70 Kg, (5 lb 15 oz), Rifling 6: grooves RH twist, Magazine: 34 rounds

Rate of fire: 550 rounds/min, Selective Fire: Full Auto or Single rounds , Open bolt

Sights: flip over 100/200, Bayonet: No 5 Mk 1, LOA 298 mm. Blade 201 mm, MRD 22.5 mm



Sterling SMG 9mm Mk 4 (L2A3)

Sterling Development

While George Lanchester had been manufacturing Lanchester machine carbines at Sterling Engineering in Dagenham, his co worker George Patchett had been busy working on a design for a new machine carbine. Using the Lanchester as a base he set out to improve many of its shortcomings and produced his first prototype in 1942. The main features of the early Patchett guns was a central pistol grip, detachable trigger group with improved fire selector and a folding butt, although the Lanchester barrel, bolt, magazine and sights were retained. Early comparative trials in late 1942 and again in 1943 were encouraging and development work was allowed to continue with many improvements being added.

In January 1944 the General Staff issued a new specification for future small arms and it was soon noted that the Patchett was close to meeting those requirements for the new SMG. On 12 January 1944 an order was placed for 20 Trials guns and these were subsequently tested in June of that year. Following the success of these initial trials a further batch of 100 guns were ordered for troop trials in September 1944. These early guns were designated MK I and had a straight magazine attached at 90 degrees to the left side of the body and fitted a No 5 bayonet. While troop trials continued, so too did George Patchett continue with improving his gun. The most noticeable of these was a new curved magazine with roller followers which was patented in May 1946 and a magazine housing angled at 82 degrees to the body, which made the gun a Mk II.

Troop trials with the MK I Sterling proved it to be a good reliable gun, however in the years following the war there were large stocks of Sten guns and little political desire to spend money on a new SMG. Although available commercially there are no records of any commercial sales of the Mk I. In the post war years improvements continued to be made which include a double return spring and modifications to the magazine with curved ribs and a round section spring which reduced friction.

In 1951 the Ordnance Board evaluated four competing machine carbines: MCEM(Australian) No2, Madsen, BSA and Patchett. From these trials the Patchett came out the clear winner and the Board recommended it's adoption for the British Army.



Patchett 9mm Machine Carbine Ex No 78

The **Patchett 9mm Machine Carbine Mk II** was formally introduced in May 1953 and the first government contract for 300 guns for the British Army, to be marked PATCHETT 9m/m M/C Ex No 01 to 300, was placed in July of the same year. Subsequent orders increased the numbers to 2800 by January 1954 although these were not marked Ex. Towards the end of the military contract the designation was changed to L2A1. During the period 1953 to 55 Sterling manufactured commercial guns mainly for sale to foreign governments, from November 1953 these have serial numbers prefixed KR and range from 1000 to 2730, the last Mk II; early commercial Mk IIs have no prefix. By No KR 2722 the PATCHETT name had been replaced with the STERLING squared logo. Also later production guns incorporated improvements that would lead to the Mk III.



Sterling Mk II No KR 2725 with butt folded, embodies many of the MK III features.

The **Sterling SMG 9mm Mk III (L2A2)** was adopted in February 1955 but had a short life being declared obsolete in March 1956. A total of 1570 commercial guns were made by Sterling and another 2879 supplied to the British Army. Many Mk II guns were retro fitted with Mk III parts, such as a strengthened butt, improved return spring cap, cocking handle and breach block, most parts being interchangeable. Up until this time some 4,000 Lanchester barrels held in stock had been used in the Patchetts and Sterlings, these were now superseded by an improved purpose made barrel. British military L2A2 guns have serial Nos prefixed US 55A _____ (55 indicating their only year of manufacture), commercial Mk III have serial Nos KR 2731 to 4301 the last manufactured in June 1956.



Sterling Mk 4 L2A3

In September 1955 the **Sterling SMG 9mm Mk 4 (L2A3)** was adopted by the British Military. However Sterling were not to get the contract to supply the full needs of the British Army, because the government had secretly set up the Royal Ordnance Factory at Fazakerley to manufacture the bulk of the order. In fact Sterling only received 14% of the British Military order manufacturing a total of 15,250 L2A4 guns (serial prefix US) while Fazakerley made 163,475 guns (serial prefix UF). Sterling commercial production for foreign governments amounted to 195,644 guns with serial prefix KR or S. Finally the Sterling replaced the

STEN in Army and RAF service and eventually in 1972 the Lanchester in the Royal Navy. Improvements in the Mk 4 included a further strengthened butt assembly, simplified rear sight and ejector, robust foresight protectors, and improvements to the trigger assembly. In service the Mk 4 proved to be a well liked and reliable gun and saw service with many commonwealth and foreign armies around the world. It was also manufactured under licence as the C1 SMG by Canadian Arsenals Ltd, Long Branch, Canada (30,000) from 1959 to 1969 and in India as the Machine Carbine 1A at SAF Cawnpore (1,000,000) from early 1960s to 1990s.

New Zealand Purchase

The NZ Cabinet approved the purchase of 2000 Sterling Mk4 on 14 Jan 1959 at the cost of 25 Pounds each.

1968 saw the beginning of the replacement of the Sterlings with M16A1s for Infantry Units.

1989 saw them completely withdrawn from service from the NZSAS and RNZAC and replaced by MP5s for the NZSAS and the Steyr Carbine for the RNZAC.

All NZ Sterling Mk4 L2A3s were KR Prefixed, making them Sterling Commercial sales, and were also given an NZ prefixed number at the time of arrival.

Comments on the Sterling from a retired New Zealand Soldier:

In the early 1970s in an Infantry Battalion all those holding command appointments from Section Commander to OC had SMG's as you had other tasks to perform and kit to carry. Also personnel like signals also had them. I recall the last time I carried one was as a Section Commander L/Cpl at the 1970 Annual Camp. Useful as you could fold in the butt and sling it around the neck being smaller and lighter than an SLR, freeing up hands for map reading etc.

Although the Infantry Battalions got M16's, for some years Service Units were still armed with them. Also the Armoured Corps had them for years. I recall as a Company Commander about 1983 at Tekepo one of my soldiers picking one up in the field. A Scorpion Commander had dismounted and gone forward on a recce, placing it on the ground whilst lying there with his binos, then returning to his CRV (T). Later realizing its loss he returned to look for it, to no avail. We had a few free beers once out of the field on that one!

The Armoured corps used them for drill, the Guards being in black overalls with the SMG butt folded, magazine off holding across the chest, doing the special arms drill of the SMG.

A chap from my football club doing his National Service either 1969 or 70 went to a range practice in Waiouru fired the first round down the range, the weapon failed to eject and jammed, he carried out the IA drill and fired a second round. The problem was he still had the BFA on the SMG causing the barrel with two shots to burst. He was charged and lost his L/Cpl stripes for that one!



Patchett Markings



Sterling Mk II Markings



Marking on Sterling manufactured Mk 4 L2A3, Fazakerley manufactured guns have serial prefix UF



Comparison of Mk 4 butt top and Patchett butt bottom



Two types of 34 Round Magazine-Sterling top, Fazakerley bottom



Sterling No 5 Bayonet

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Reference: The Guns of Dagenham by Peter Laidler and David Howroyd,

Collector Grade Publications.