

NZAR ID No: 26, Arm Type: Rifle, Date of Draft (V2) 2/7/2012, Compiled by Phil Cregeen

Pattern: 7.62 mm Self Loading Rifle, L1A1 (SLR), Introduced into NZ Service: 1960, Withdrawn: 1987 to 1990s

Makers: RSAF Enfield, BSA Guns (UK L1A1), SAF Lithgow (Australia L1A1), C.A.L. Long Branch (Canada C1), RFI-Ishapore (India 1A), Fabrique Nationale (Belgium FAL)

Details of Arm:

Calibre: 7.62 mm NATO, Rifling: 6 RH Twist, Barrel Length: 21.0in., OA Length: 45.0 in. (1143 mm),

Action: Gas piston with 20 round detachable box magazine. Weight: 9 Lb 9 oz, (4.34 Kg)

Sights: blade foresight, folding aperture back sight graduated to 600 metres.

Bayonet: (NZART # 59) L1A2, LOA 12 In., Blade 8 in.

Markings: "Rifle 7.62 mm L1 A1" on LHS of body, "AD 5901310" (serial No, 1st two digits = year of manufacture) on RHS of body.



Typical NZ surplus SLR

As a consequence of the adoption of the 7.62 x 51mm cartridge by NATO in the early 1950s, Britain abandoned its development of the .280 calibre EM2 rifle and adopted the FAL (Fusil Automatique Legere) developed by the Belgium firm of FN (Fabrique Nationale) in 1949. Initially a steering committee was set up comprising of members from Britain and Canada to plan trials and adaption of the rifle for manufacture under licence in these two countries and in 1954 Australia decided to adopt the FAL and joined this committee.



FN FAL (Lithgow SAF Museum)

In 1954 Britain ordered 5,000 FAL (designated X8E1 & X8E2) and Canada 2,000 FAL (designated EX1 & EX2) for evaluation and troop trials. 20 FALs were also sent to Australia. The main difference between the two types of trials rifle was that the 2 variant had an optical sight. Initially the FN FALs supplied were selective fire but most of the trials

rifles were modified by inserting a stop pin to make them semi automatic only. As evaluation and troop trials were undertaken the factories prepared for local production, first converting all metric measurements to inches and then designing various modifications deemed necessary by the Commonwealth countries. The object being that parts manufactured at each factory should be interchangeable with those from another Commonwealth factory, however those made in India are not interchangeable as their rifles were “reverse engineered” from both inch L1A1 and metric FAL.

Production of the new rifle got under way in Britain and Canada in 1955 and Canada issue the first C1 rifles in October 1956, Britain commenced full scale production at Enfield and BSA in March 1957 and Australia followed in October 1958. Lithgow deliveries of L1A1 commenced in March 1959. Ishopore production commenced in 1963



Later production Lithgow L1A1 & L1A2 bayonet

New Zealand Service

New Zealand decided to adopt the L1A1 in September 1958 and ordered 15,000 from SAF Lithgow. The first batch for New Zealand were manufactured in 1959 and delivered in 1960 with the order finally completed in 1965. In addition to the Army the RNZN and RANAF also adopted the L1A1. It remained the main service issue arm until replaced by the Styer Aug commencing in 1988. In 1987 a batch of 2,500 were withdrawn and offered for sale locally by tender, however subsequent sales were to overseas buyers and many surplus rifles were destroyed by orders of the government in the 1990s.

In service the carrying handle was frequently removed, it was issued with Trilux optical sight to some troops. There were a number of variations of furniture including black plastic and laminated wood.



L1A1 with plastic furniture, Trilux sight and L1A2 bayonet

New Zealanders are believed to have first used the SLR in 1957 serving in Malaya, where they were supplied by troop trials X8E1/5 FALs by the British army. In Vietnam NZ troops carried the L1A1, occasional fitting the 30 round L2A1 or Bren L4 magazine for extra fire power, while the SAS favoured a homemade forward pistol grip.



SLR Modified by NZ SAS note 30 round magazine & additional pistol grip



NZ Infantry- Vietnam 1971-note 30 round L4 magazines.



Malaya 1957 lead man with trials X8E1 rifle

Typical Marking:



Designation: Rifle 7.62 mm L1A1



Serial No: AD YYXXXXX

The first 1,000 rifles received in 1959/60 were marked NZ on the body above the magazine, but this practice was discontinued.

