

NZART ID No: 84, Arm Type: Rifle, Date of Draft (V1) 16/7/2012, Compiled by Phil Cregeen

Pattern: Magazine Lee Metford Mk II & II *, Introduced into NZ Service: 1900, Withdrawn after WW II

Makers: RSAF Enfield, ROF Sparkbrook, BSA & Co, LSA Co.

Details of Arm:

Calibre: .303 in, Rifling: Metford 7 grooves 1:10 in. LH Twist, Barrel Length: 30.2in., OA Length: 49.5 in. (1257 mm),

Action: Bolt with 10 round detachable box magazine. Weight 9 Lb 4 oz, (4.18 Kg)

Sights: barleycorn foresight, leaf back sight 600-1800 and bed 200-500 yds, long range aperture and dial 1600-2800.

Bayonet: (NZAR #52) Pattern 1888 Length OA 16.7 in (424mm), Blade 12.0 in (305mm), MRD 16.5 mm,

Scabbard 12.5 in (317mm).

Markings: Makers name and date on RH butt socket, NZ Issue marks on Butt tang or LHS of Breech.



Magazine Lee Metford Mk II Enfield 1893

The Magazine Lee Metford Mk II was introduced in LOC 7404 dated 30 January 1892. This change in Mark came as a result of a number of changes from the Mk I, most significant being a lighter barrel, an increase in magazine size from 8 to 10 rounds and improvements to the design of the bolt and bolt-head. The Mk II did not include a safety catch. Production of the new rifle did not get underway immediately; however by 1894 all factories were producing large quantities of the Mk II rifle, for example BSA 600 per week and LSA 400 per week.



The Lee Metford was advanced to Mk II* by LOC 7879 dated 22 April 1895, by the addition of a safety catch to the bolt cocking piece, as had been incorporated in the design of the Lee Metford Cavalry Carbine. Mk II* rifles were only manufactured at Enfield and Sparkbrook.

Top: MLM Mk II Bolt

Bottom: MLM Mk II* Bolt, also MLE Mk I & I*

With the change from black powder to cordite in 1891 it was found that the existing Metford rifling of the magazine rifle (MLM MKII) was not as efficient as the new Enfield rifling which had proven to be successful in the Maxim machine gun. The square profile Enfield rifling was found to give a higher muzzle velocity and a longer barrel life with smokeless powder. As a result of this change to Enfield rifling the magazine rifle became the Magazine Lee-Enfield Mk I in 1895. Production of Magazine Lee Metford ceased in 1896.



Makers marks



NZ ownership pre WW I



Proof and NZ ownership marks post WW I

NZ Service

Defence Reports of the late 1890s frequently do not differentiate between Magazine Lee Metford and Magazine Lee Enfield, often simply referring to Magazine Rifles. However from observed rifles with NZ marks it is apparent that some found their way to this country probably with troops returning from South Africa (1901) or in consignments of Lee Enfield Rifles (1914). It is worth noting that when MLM barrels wore out they would have been replaced with Enfield barrels and Marked E on the knock form.

At the end of the 19th century (1898) NZ forces were armed with the single shot Martini Enfield .303 rifle and carbine and the first five contingents of soldiers sent to South Africa in 1899 and 1900 were armed with the ME Artillery Carbine. However from June 1900 some members of 4-10 contingents were re-equipped with MLE or MLM issued from British stores in South Africa.

The 1902 defence Report states: "all Mounted Rifles and Corps are now armed with the magazine rifle". 1903 Small Arms Returns indicated 18,785 MLE rifles and 1,478 MLE carbines held by NZ. Although rifles purchased and issued by NZ were marked NZ with a unique number and year, some retained by returning soldiers from South Africa (particularly the 7th contingent) were not NZ marked. From 1906 to 08 these were withdrawn from the Mounted Rifles and replaced by Short Magazine Lee Enfield Mk I & I*.

Typically these early rifles are marked on the butt tang NZ/ 846/1901. The example above appears to have been taken on charge post WW I, as this is the form of marking from 1918.

A Return of Arms for 1913 shows 16,398 MLE Mk I* on issue to Territorial and Senior Cadets, while 2,935 MLE Mk I* had been sold to Defence Rifle Club members. These figures would include MLM Mk II.

The 1913 defence Report stated "an order for 15,000 MLE Long (Mk I & I*) has been placed with the War Office.....15,000 MLE rifles (part worn) have also been obtained from Canada." These are marked E 14 and C14 respectively on the butt tang. These two shipments arrived in December 1913 and January, February and March 1914. Of the English rifles 5,000 were new and the remaining 10,000 were refurbished, these were issued to the Territorial Force, while the Canadian rifles went to the Cadets.

The NZ Expeditionary Force was equipped with MLE rifles, with the exception of the NZMR who had SMLE Mk III sighted for Mk VI ammunition, on its departure overseas to fight in the First World War, however, they were exchanged for SMLE Mk III in Egypt in March 1916.

In 1919 MLE Mk I & I* held in store were reported as being converted to charger loading and sighted for Mk VII ammunition, however no rifles have so far been observed converted to CLLE at this time.

In the 1920s many of the New Zealand MLE were re-barrelled, the new barrels supplied by BSA came complete with BSA commercial receivers, and so many NZ marked MLE are found today without Ordnance Board markings and simply BSA Co on the butt socket and the BSA stacked rifle logo on the knock form, these rifles have serial numbers prefix PB and QB and are sighted for Mk VII ammunition and marked HV on the barrel.

The MLE/MLM long rifles saw further use arming the Home Guard in WW II. (Typically marked: 1 HG 1801). 1200 MLM were issued to Home Guard in 1941.

NZ Marked MLM MK II observed to 16 July 2012.

NZ Marked					
Arm	NZ Marked	Maker	Dated	Serial No	Other marks
Lee Metford Mk II	^NZ 2985 / E13	Sparkbrook	1894		
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z	BSA &M Co	1895		
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z 23774	LSA Co	1894		
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z	Sparkbrook	1893		
Lee Metford Mk II	^NZ 16693/ 1901 S	BSA	1894		
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z	BSA & M Co	1894		
Lee Metford Mk II	^NZ 17892/ 1901	BSA & M Co	1893		
Lee Metford Mk II	NZ	Enfield	1896		
Lee Metford Mk II	NZ 7982/E14	LSA Co	1894		N^Z (LHS breech)
Lee Metford Mk II	NZ 796 /E14	Enfield	1895	5595	N^Z (LHS breech)
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z (LHS Breech)	Enfield	1893	4891 C	
Lee Metford Mk II	NZ 355	Enfield	1897	6512	
Lee Metford Mk II	^NZ	Enfield	1892	7677B	
Lee Metford Mk II	NZ	Enfield	1897	7899	1 HG 1801
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z 3356 /E13	Enfield	1896		N^Z(LHS Breech)
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z 845/ E 13	Enfield	1894		
Lee Metford Mk II	N^Z 3704/ E14	LSA Co	1894	9953 B	

Acknowledgements: John Osborne, Noel Taylor

Photographs: Phil Cregeen

Reference: .303 MLM and MLE Small Arms Identification Series by Ian Skennerton

NZAAA Gazette Dec 1999 article-The Long Tom in NZ Service by Noel Taylor

NZAHAA Gazette Mar 2009 article – Arms of the NZ Mounted Rifles during the Boer War by John Osborne

Appendix to the Journal of the House Of Representatives (AJHR)