

NZART ID No: 88, Arm Type: Rifle, Date of Draft (V2) 6/5/2012, Compiled by Phil Cregeen

Pattern: Short Magazine Lee Enfield Mk I, I*, I*, Introduced into NZ Service: 1905, Withdrawn ???**

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

Details of Arm:

Calibre: .303 British, Rifling: 5 grooves 1:10 in LH Twist, Barrel Length: 25.2in., OA Length: 44.5 in. (1130 mm),

Action: Bolt with 10 round detachable box magazine. Weight: 8 Lb 3 oz, (3.7 Kg)

Sights: barleycorn foresight, leaf back sight 200-2000 yds. with windage adjustment, long range aperture and dial 1600-2800 yds.

Bayonet: (NZART # 155) Pattern 1903

Markings: Makers name and date on RH butt socket, NZ Issue marks.



Following criticism levelled at the MLE in the Boer war, trials were undertaken in 1901 to evaluate a system of charger loading and a shorter rifle by five inches, which would avoid the need for a separate carbine for Cavalry and Artillery. This resulted in the Short Magazine Lee Enfield Mk I which was announced in LOC 16910 on 23/12/1902. It has a sliding charger guide on the bolt, a nose cap which incorporates a foresight protector and bayonet boss and bar and a top hand guard with rear sight protecting wings. In 1906 the rifle was advanced to MK I* with the introduction of a gun metal butt plate with trap for pull thru, rear sling swivel secured by two screws and a new magazine case deeper at the front. From 1914 the rifle was further modified by altering the sights for the Mk VII ammunition and advanced to MK I***. MLM and MLE rifles were also converted to the SMLE configuration from 1906, with conversion marks on the LHS of the butt socket.

New Zealand Service

In the Defence Report of 1906 it was reported that a consignment of SMLEs (Mk I) had arrived and would be issued to Mounted Rifles. In 1908 it was further reported that all South Island Mounted Rifles had been equipped with the new rifle and that more were on order from England to equip the North Island.



Typical markings: The 05 is considered to represent the year the consignment arrived in NZ Stores or the contract year, however the manufacture date of the left and centre rifle post date this, a satisfactory explanation is still required. RH picture has been upgraded to I***

The Defence Report of 1910 recorded that the SMLE Mk III was on order and by 1912 8,000 of these had been issued to the RNZA, Territorial Field Artillery, Garrison Artillery, Engineers and Mounted Rifles, while the Infantry was armed with the MLE.

In 1913 the SMLE Mk I, Mk I* and Pat 1903 bayonets withdrawn from Mounted Rifles were issued to Senior Cadets. The Small Arms return for 1913 records 1,924 SMLE Mk I (and I*) held in the Dominion.

Since MK VII ammunition was not manufactured in New Zealand until 1917 it is unlikely that any of the SMLE Mk I and I* were converted to MK I*** before this date. Only one NZ marked Mk I*** has been observed (see table below).

NZ Marked				
Arm	NZ Marked	Maker	Dated	Serial No
SMLE Mk I	N^Z 1231/05	BSA	1910	
SMLE Mk I	N^Z 21/05	BSA	1910	
SMLE Mk I	NZ 1128/05	Enfield	1904	
SMLE Mk I	NZ 1818/05	Enfield	1904	E5361
SMLE Mk I	NZ 764/05	BSA Co	1904	S 39424
SMLE Mk I*	N^Z 1217/05	Enfield	1908	
SMLE Mk I*	N^Z 206/27	Enfield	1908	Y7969
SMLE Mk I*	NZ			8133F
SMLE Mk I*	NZ 128/05	Enfield	1902	
SMLE Mk I*	NZ 1589/05	Enfield	1904	
SMLE Mk I***	NZ 123/05	BSA	1905	936

*Acknowledgements: Photographs: Phil Cregeen & John Osborne
Reference: The Lee Enfield by Ian Skennerton
Appendix to Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*