

NZAR ID A12 WHY IT IS NOT THE “NEW ZEALAND” CARBINE By Phil Cregeen ©2012

Because New Zealand was the only British Empire Colony to adopt the **Carbine, Magazine, Lee Enfield; fitted to take the pattern 1888 sword bayonet** it has been dubbed the “New Zealand pattern Lee Enfield Carbine” and as a consequence many 20th Century collectors and historians have assumed that it was made especially for New Zealand. My contention is that this is incorrect.

Since the introduction of the Pattern 1853 Enfield Rifle Britain had provided a carbine version of the service rifle for its artillery troopers, namely: Pat 53 Artillery Carbine, Snider Artillery Carbine, Martini Henry Artillery Carbine and Martini Enfield Artillery Carbine, all fitted to take an appropriate bayonet. It is therefore logical that with the introduction of the Lee Magazine rifle in 1888 that a carbine would be provided for artillery. And so it was in May 1900, announced in the List of Changes # 10220 as the “Carbine, Magazine, Lee Enfield; fitted to take the pattern 1888 sword bayonet”.



Why did it take twelve years to be introduced and why did Britain not adopt this carbine? In the late nineteenth century there were many who still believed that a single shot carbine was adequate for personal protection and this was adequately provided for the artillery in the form of the .303 Martini Enfield Artillery Carbine. By the time RSAF Enfield was ready to start manufacturing the new magazine carbine in 1901 experience gained in the South African War (Boer War) of 1899 to 1902 had already lead to the conclusion that a shorter magazine rifle, that would be suitable for all infantry, artillery and mounted troops was required. This lead to the introduction of the **Rifle, short, magazine, Lee Enfield** in LOC 11715 dated December 1902.

So why did New Zealand adopt this carbine? I would like to suggest that it was a case of ordering what seemed like the best thing to do at the time. In 1898 and 1899 New Zealand was in the process of rearming its forces with the .303 Martini Enfield rifle and carbine, having ignored the advice of its Commanding Officer to buy magazine rifles. Then in October 1899 came the Boer War and New Zealand sent its first contingent of Mounted Rifles off to South Africa armed with the new (to them) Martini Enfield Carbine. By July of 1900 the Commander of the Armed Forces reported to Parliament that nearly 1200 carbines had been sent to South Africa with various contingents and that with the large increase in the Volunteer Force not all troops were yet armed with the .303 rifle. However he hoped that these would be recovered or replaced by the Imperial Government and in the meantime magazine rifles were on order from England (AJHR 1900 H-19).

Thus in 1900 New Zealand had been stripped of its .303 Artillery Carbines and the Government had at last woken up to the need to arm its troops with magazine rifles and carbines. At the time that the order for magazine arms was placed the new Lee Enfield magazine carbine had just been announced in the List of Changes, so it seems logical to me that this is what New Zealand ordered to rearm its artillery troops.

From a report in the Auckland Star of 14 August 1901 we know about 380 Lee Enfield carbines (fitted for Pat 1888 bayonet) had been sent from Wellington and issued to the Auckland Naval Artillery Companies, Devonport Submarine Miners, the Coastguard Artillery and A Battery. It could be assumed that the defence forces of the three other major New Zealand ports were similarly issued with these carbines.

By July 1901 sufficient magazine rifles had been ordered to equip all forces with a small reserve, in the same year New Zealand received 1,000 Lee Enfield carbines with a further 500 in 1903, plus an additional number of spares and replacements. By July 1903 all corps had been armed with the Magazine Lee Enfield and the Lee Enfield Carbines had been withdrawn from adult forces and issued to cadets. (AJHR 1903 H-19)

It should be noted that to date, no documentary evidence has been found that supports the ordering of these particular carbines. However the conclusion that may be drawn from the above is that the Lee Enfield carbine issued in New Zealand was not a special order to a particular New Zealand staff requirement, but simply a carbine that was available at the time that New Zealand needed replacements for those sent to South Africa. The reason that other Empire forces did not procure it is that it was superseded by the SMLE before the need arose.

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References: The Lee Enfield by Ian Skennerton

List of Changes in British War Material 1900 -1910

Last of the Dust Cover Lee Enfields by D Munro, J Milligan, N Taylor –Collector Annual No 30

Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR H-19) <http://atojs.natlib.govt.nz>

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