

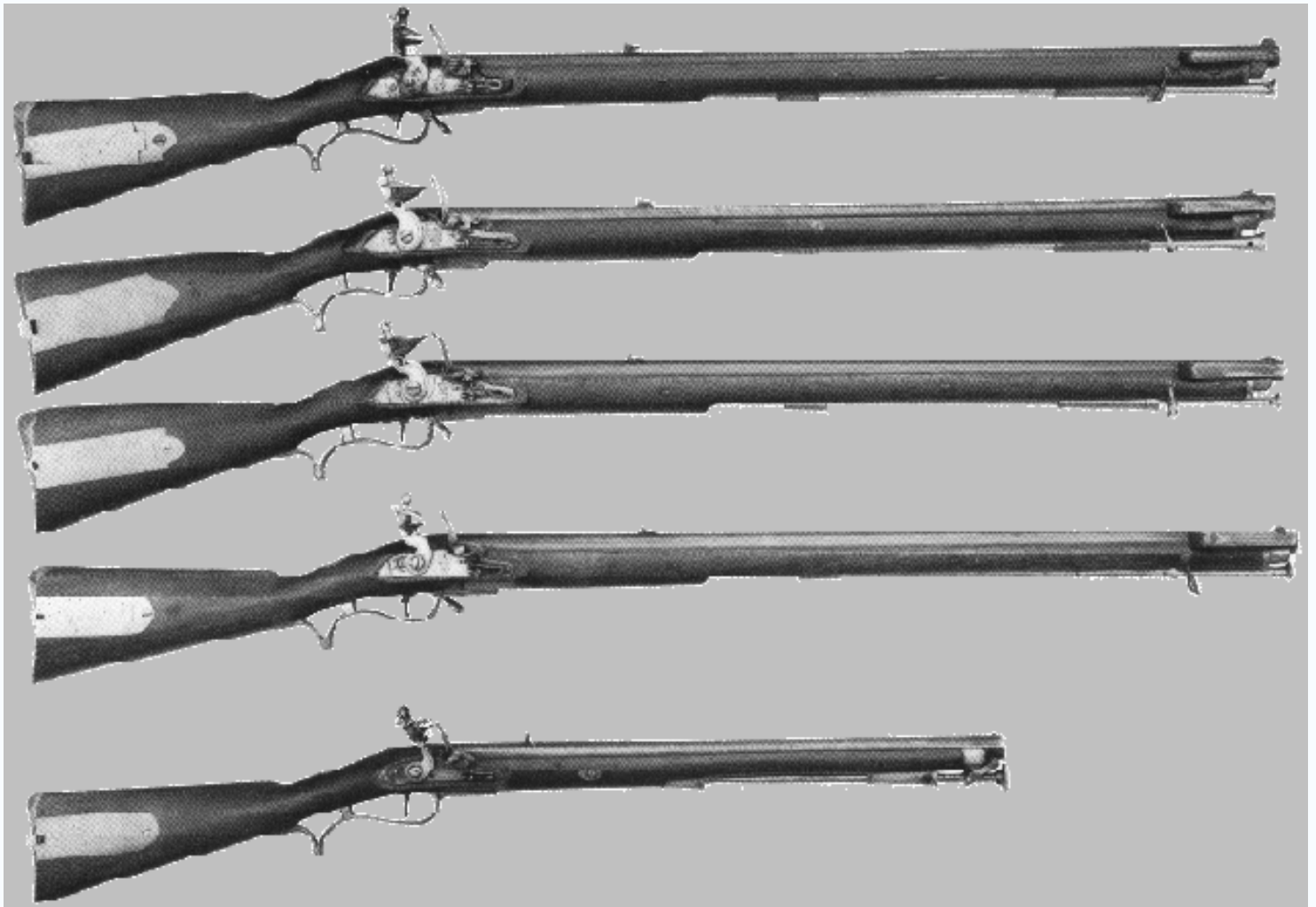
**NZAR ID A21 Baker Flintlock Rifle and Bayonet 1800-1837** compiled by John Osborne MG DTT PhD FSG

Research continues as to the Baker Rifles possible use by visiting British Forces in New Zealand



The **Baker rifle** (officially known as the *Infantry Rifle*) was a flintlock rifle used by the Rifle regiments of the British Army during the Napoleonic Wars. It was the first standard-issue, British-made rifle accepted by the British armed forces.

The Baker Rifle was first produced in 1800 by Ezekiel Baker, a master gunsmith from Whitechapel. The British Army was still issuing the Baker Infantry Rifle in the 1830s.



Several variations of the Baker rifle design

Previously, rifles had been issued on a limited basis and consisted of parts made to no precise pattern, often brought in from Prussia. The war against Revolutionary France had resulted in the employment of new tactics, and the British Army responded, albeit with some delay. Prior to the formation of an Experimental Rifle Corps in 1800, a trial was held at Woolwich by the British Board of Ordnance on 22 February 1800 in order to select a standard rifle pattern; the rifle designed by Ezekiel Baker was chosen. This is remarkable because he is not known to have

produced military rifles before, being involved only in the repair and production of muskets. Indeed, it is not known how much of the rifle now commonly named after him was actually the result of his own work. Numerous parts used in the pattern existed before the rifle was submitted for trial.

Colonel Coothe Manningham, responsible for establishing the Rifle Corps, influenced the initial designs of the Baker. The first model resembled the British Infantry Musket, but was rejected for being too heavy. Baker was provided with a German Jager rifle as an example of what was needed. The second model he made had a .75 calibre bore, the same calibre as the Infantry Musket. It had a 32-inch barrel, with eight rectangular rifling grooves; this model was accepted as the Infantry Rifle, but more changes were made until it was finally placed into production. The third and final model had the barrel shortened from 32 to 30 inches, and the calibre reduced to .653, which allowed the rifle to fire a .625 calibre carbine bullet, with a greased patch to grip the now-seven rectangular grooves in the barrel. The rifle had a simple folding backsight with the standard large lock mechanism (marked 'Tower' and 'G.R.' under a Crown, although later ones had 'Enfield,' but these only saw service after Waterloo), with a swan-neck cock as fitted to the 'Brown Bess.' Like the German Jager rifles, it had a scrolled brass trigger guard to help ensure a firm grip and a raised cheek piece on the left-hand side of the butt. Like many rifles, it had a 'butt-trap' or patchbox where greased linen patches and tools could be stored. The lid of the patchbox was brass, and hinged at the rear so it could be flipped up. The stocks were made of walnut and held the barrel with three flat captive wedges. The rifle also had a metal locking bar to accommodate a 24-inch sword bayonet, similar to that of the Jager rifle. The Baker was 45 inches from muzzle to butt, 12 inches shorter than the Infantry Musket, and weighed almost nine pounds. Gunpowder fouling in the grooves made the weapon much slower to load and affected its accuracy, so a cleaning kit was stored in the patch box of the Baker; the Infantry Muskets were not issued with cleaning kits.

After the Baker entered service, more modifications were made to the rifle and several different variations were produced. A lighter and shorter carbine version for the cavalry was introduced, and a number of volunteer associations procured their own models, including the Duke of Cumberland's Corps of Sharpshooters, which ordered models with a 33-inch barrel, in August 1803. A second pattern of Baker Rifle was fitted with a 'Newland' lock that had a flat-faced ring neck cock. In 1806, a third pattern was produced that included a 'pistol grip' style trigger guard and a smaller patchbox with a plain rounded front. The lock plate was smaller, flat, and had a steeped-down tail, a raised semi-waterproof pan, a flat ring neck cock, and even had a sliding safety bolt. With the introduction of a new pattern Short Land Pattern Flintlock Musket ('Brown Bess') in 1810, with its flat lock and ring-necked cock, the Baker's lock followed suit for what became the fourth pattern. It also featured a 'slit stock' - the stock had a slot cut in the underpart of the stock just over a quarter-inch wide. This was done after Ezekiel Baker had seen reports of the ramrod jamming in the stock after the build-up of residue in the ramrod channel, and when the wood warped after getting wet.

The rifle is referred to almost exclusively as the "Baker Rifle," but it was produced by a variety of manufacturers and sub-contractors from 1800 to 1837. Most of the rifles produced between 1800 and 1815 were not made by Ezekiel Baker, but under the Tower of London system, and he sub-contracted the manufacture of parts of the rifle to over 20 British gunsmiths. It was reported that many rifles sent to the British Army inspectors were not complete, to the extent of even having no barrel, since the rifle was sent on to another contractor for finishing. Baker's production during the period 1805-1815 was a mere 712 rifles, not even enough to be in the "top ten."

The Board of Ordnance, both of its own volition and at the behest of Infantry Staff Officers, ordered production modifications during the rifle's service life. Variations included a carbine with a safety catch and swivel-mounted ramrod, the 1801 pattern West India Rifle (a simplified version lacking a patchbox), the 1809 pattern, which was .75 (musket) calibre, and the 1800/15, which was modified from existing stocks to use a socket bayonet. The most common field modification was the bent stock. Riflemen in the field found that the stock was not bent sufficiently at the wrist to accommodate accurate shooting, so stocks were bent by steaming. As this technique produces temporary results (lasting approximately five years), no examples found today exhibit this



Four Baker rifles and a carbine illustrating variations of pattern. The upper rifle and the carbine have the swan neck cock. More obvious are the different butt boxes. All have the early style sword bar. The sword is the second pattern. The Baker cavalry carbine has no sword bar and has a swivel ramrod.

Acknowledgements & special thanks to several contributors [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Various\\_Baker%27s.gif](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Various_Baker%27s.gif)