

NZAR ID A33 LEE ENFIELD No 8 AND No 9 .22 TRAINING RIFLES **by Phil Cregeen**

On 7 March 2009 the New Zealand Army disposed of 285 No 8 and 100 No 9 Lee Enfield .22 training Rifles at auction. These rifles had previously been issued to the New Zealand Cadet Force and saved from destruction by a campaign led by New Zealand firearms collectors.

In the post WW II period the BSA Shirley factory developed a .22 trainer based on the No 5 Jungle Carbine. However this was dropped when the No 5 was withdrawn from service in 1947. Instead a trainer based on the No 4 was required. Since the No 5 trainer had been well received some of its features, such as new trigger and bolt, were incorporated into the new design.

The No 8 was produced to meet the needs of a training rifle and also to be used in small bore competition. Although the site picture resembles that of a No 4 and it is built on a No 4 or No 5 action body it bears little resemblance to its .303 parent. The butt has a composite butt plate and more pronounced pistol grip, it is half stocked with a wide fore-end and it has a heavy target barrel. The bolt and trigger are a new design and while the rear sight is the Mk I singer type it is graduated to 25, 50 and 100 yds.



No 8 Mk I

Initially the No 8 was for Land Service only and the first batch of 76,000 was produced at ROF Fazakerley, early rifles were produced on No 5 action bodies while later ones used the No 4 body. Fazakerley rifles have an A prefix to the serial number, however, they have been noted with components marked M/47C the code for BSA Shirley. The No 8 Mk I was introduced in September 1948 and later issued to the RAF and Royal Navy.

In the early 1950s BSA manufactured 3,000 No 8 rifles for New Zealand using both No 4 and No 5 action bodies. These have a DA prefix serial number and are stamped on the left butt socket with date, N^Z and rack number, components are marked M/47C.

The No 9 training rifle was produced for the Royal Navy and was a conversion from No 4 303 rifles carried out by Parker Hale in the late 1950s. The conversion consisted of sleeving the 303 barrel, modifying the bolt head with an offset floating firing pin and longer extractor and removing the magazine internals. The rear sight was marked 25 yds on the side of the slide and the action body stamped .22 R.F. N 9 Mk I followed by P-H and year of conversion. Externally this rifle looks identical to the No 4 from which it was converted and the type of trigger will reflect this as both Mk I and Mk II types were used. The muzzle crown is rounded and stamped PARKERIFLED AGP. About 3,000 single shot rifles were converted in this way.



No 9 Mk I

I have owned a No 8 for the past eight years and have found it to be a reliable and accurate rifle, capable of a 1 inch group at 25 yards, when fired prone. This one was a New Zealand contract model manufactured in 1952 with a serial No DA 174. I was therefore pleased to add a Fazakerley made No 8 to my collection at the recent auction to dispose of the NZCF training rifles. This later one was made in 1951 and has the serial No A 15392.

I first encountered the No 9 in 1961 as an apprentice in the Royal Navy when we had to shoot down tiles with these rifles after completing the assault course. I had not handled one since that time until I acquired one at the NZCF auction. After adjusting the sights I found it too shot well, although it can be a bit of a fiddle to get the rounds into the chamber.

It is no mystery as to how the DA numbered No 8s (NZ contract) came to New Zealand but it would be interesting know under what circumstances that the Fazakerley made No 8s and the No 9s came to be here. What is for sure is that those sold in Wellington on 7 March 2009 will be the last to be disposed of by the NZ Army. So if you are lucky enough to own one of these pieces of Lee Enfield history and New Zealand heritage, look after it.

I am reliably informed that cadet units in Britain are still using the No 8.

Reference: The Lee Enfield By Ian Skennerton

