

# Snider in New Zealand an overview

by Phil Cregeen

The story of the Snider in New Zealand is somewhat confused, as many of the official records detailing their purchase were lost when the Parliament Building was burned down in 1907, however an outline of its use may be gleaned from the various reports submitted to Parliament and contained in the Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives.

The Snider Long Rifle and the army version of the Snider Short Rifle first saw service in New Zealand with the 18<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Regiment of Foot commencing in March 1868, as reported in the *Daily Southern Cross* 14 March 1868.

The Hay Pattern (medium) conversions being only 3 inches shorter than the long rifles were also considered unsuitable for the bush but were issued to the Armed Constabulary on a temporary basis.

In March 1870 a reply from the New Zealand Commissioners in London indicated the following: there were no Snider Cavalry Carbines available from RSAF Enfield as they had all been issued to Imperial cavalry, however they could be ordered from the London Small Arms Co or the Birmingham Small Arms Co at a cost of 63 shillings each with a delivery time of 10 or 12 weeks respectively. A suitable saw back bayonet with 18 inch blade was available as supplied to the Royal Irish Constabulary.



**Top: Snider Long Rifle, Middle: Snider Medium (Hay) Rifle, Bottom: Snider Short (Sword) Rifle** Photo J Osborne

In February 1869 500 of the Hay Pattern Medium Rifles purchased by New Zealand in 1865 were returned to England for conversion to breech loader by the Snider Patent, these arrived back in New Zealand in November of that year and were issued to the Armed Constabulary (established 1867 to 1886). Also in February the Governor General requested of the home government, that 2,000 Snider Rifles be transferred from Imperial troops to New Zealand when the troops were withdrawn. In fact 1,832 converted rifles were sent out from England and the balance (168) supplied from Imperial stores in Auckland free of charge. Of these all were long rifles except for 100 short (sword) rifles. The Commissioner for the Armed Constabulary complained that long Snider rifles were found to be unsuitable for the NZ bush and it was proposed that 1,000 be exchanged for Snider Short Rifles, meanwhile the 100 Short Rifles were issued to the Armed Constabulary. He also recommended that 1,000 Snider Cavalry carbines with saw back bayonet be ordered.

The new 0.45 inch Martini Rifle had yet to be adopted by the British Army and had not gone into production, however a decision on future orders of rifles should await the outcome of the decision on this rifle.

In September 1870 the New Zealand Government requested the supply of 10,000 long and medium Sniders from Britain to arm the Volunteer Force but in January 1871 the reply from Britain indicated that none were currently available, but could be supplied on repayment at a later date when Imperial needs had been satisfied.

The Joint Committee on Colonial Defence recommended in 1871 that the most suitable rifle for issue in New Zealand would be the Snider Short Rifle with 18 in saw back bayonet for Infantry and Artillery in the North Island, for cavalry the Snider Carbine and for the South Island the Snider Medium Rifle.

In March '71 Volunteer units in Poverty Bay and Napier had been issued with Snider Rifles, however most of the Volunteer Force was still armed with the Enfield Rifle and the breech loaders (Calisher & Terry?) of the cavalry were in a poor condition. In July the Commissioner for the Armed Constabulary reported that the old breech loading carbines (Calisher & Terry?) had been replaced by Snider long and medium rifles in January but that these were too long for bush fighting. He recommended the purchase of 700 Snider carbines and bayonets at a cost of £3,000 and the rifles being made available to the Volunteers and Militia.

By mid 1875 600 Snider Carbines had been imported to replace the medium rifles of the Armed Constabulary but they were supplied with sword bayonets, which were unsuitable for bush fighting and so they were issued to the Artillery. Subsequently 700 Short Snider rifles arrived with saw-back bayonets and were issued to the Armed Constabulary. These were the bar on band Pat 58 type, one disadvantage that was noted was it was not possible to "pile arms" with them. Although the new bayonet was considered handier as a weapon, it was not considered much use as a saw or chopping implement. And while the Short Rifle was considered superior for general use in New Zealand it was not felt to be a better range rifle.



**Top: Snider Artillery Carbine Mk III BSA 1878 contract.**

**Middle: Constabulary Carbine, Tisdall 1872 contract fitted with saddle ring.**

**Bottom: Yeomanry Cavalry Carbine Mk III, BSA 1880 contract, leather sight protector and 2 piece rod in butt.**

*Photo: P Cregeen*

By 1872 the situation with arms for the Volunteer Force had continued to deteriorate, although 500 Snider carbines had been ordered but not yet arrived (Tisdall contract). In contrast the arms of the Armed Constabulary were in good condition but the Hay Pattern medium rifles were found to be inaccurate due to the fact that no correction had been made to the sights to allow for the different trajectory of the Snider round and shorter barrel following conversion.

A report by the Committee on Colonial Defence recommended in 1873 that all Colonial forces be issued with the Snider rifle as quickly as possible.

Sniders on issue to the Volunteer Forces increased steadily, reaching a peak of 8,184 in 1882, (Fig.1) with a total national stock on issue and in store including Armed Constabulary of about 12,000 of all types. In 1887 a further 3,000 Sniders were ordered to replace worn out arms, from observation of surviving examples these appear to have been WD surplus arms. A return of Small Arms for 1887 (Fig 2) provides an indication of the quantities held in New Zealand by type.

*Return of Small Arms and Ammunition.*

<i>Rifles, &amp;c.—In Store and on Issue—</i>						
Snider (all sizes)—On issue	...	...	...	...	...	8,184
	In store	...	...	...	...	2,997
Enfield—In store	...	...	...	...	...	10,553
	On issue	...	...	...	...	914
<i>Ammunition—</i>						
Snider—In store	...	...	...	...	...	1,206,218
Enfield—In store	...	...	...	...	...	429,127

**Fig. 1 Return of Arms for the Volunteer Force dated 1 June 1882**

By 1890 the Snider was considered obsolete and it was recommended by the Defence Committee that they be replaced by 8,000 modern arms. Unfortunately there was still some uncertainty about the suitability of the new .303 magazine rifle and so nothing was done about replacing them until orders were placed in 1894 & 1895 for Martini Henrys, quickly followed by .303 Martini Enfields in 1897. The Snider remained in service with some units beyond the end of the century and were recorded in use by some Volunteers in 1902. The Education Department continued to provide Snider carbines for school cadets to drill with.

In July 1907, (reported in the *Evening Post of 19 May 1909*) 7,000 Snider rifles (long, medium and short rifles) and 3,000 Snider carbines together with other obsolete arms were sold by tender to a Manchester firm for £6,000 and shipped to England onboard the *SS Mamari*.

In all of the above there is scant evidence of the Snider being used in armed combat in New Zealand, although it is probable that some were involved in the campaign against Te Kooti in the Uraweras from 1868 and in the final battle of 1872. They were carried by the Armed Constabulary Field Force & Militia at Parahaka, Taranaki in 1881 but on this occasion no shots were fired. Twelve Snider rifles were involved in an armed conflict between members of the Uriroi hapu at Poriti near Whangarei in 1888, in which 3 were killed and another 3 wounded.



**SNIDER BAYONETS**

- Pat 53 Socket, used on Long and Medium rifle.**
- Pat 58 Sword used on Artillery carbine & Short rifle.**
- Saw-back 1st type used on Artillery carbine & Short rifle.**
- Saw-back 2nd type used on Artillery carbine & Short rifle.**
- Note: a 3rd type of short 18 inch saw-back was used on bar on band Short Rifles.**

*Photo: P Cregeen*

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*Except where stated otherwise, all the above information was obtained from the Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives at: <http://atojs.natlib.govt.nz>*

*References:  
577 Snider Enfield Rifles & Carbines by I Skennerton  
British & Commonwealth Bayonets by I Skennerton and R Richardson*

	On Issue	In Store	Total
Snider Art. Carbine	3,264	120	3,384
Snider Cav. Carbine	2,339	104	2,443
Snider Long Rifle	316	1,144	1,460
Snider Medium Rifle	16	230	246
Snider Short Rifle	6,068	740	6,808
Cadet Carbines, (conv. Snider LR) 100			100

**Fig. 2 Return of Small Arms dated 1887**  
*Source: British & Commonwealth Bayonets Pg 362.*