

New Zealand Military Long Arms of the 19th Century

An overview compiled by Phil Cregeen (Part 2 Breech Loaders)



Snider Enfield Long Rifle

Snider Enfield Long Rifle has a 36.5 in. barrel of 25 bore (0,577 in) with 3 groove 1 in 78in twist rifling. OA length is 54.2 in and weight 9 lb 2 oz. Following Ordnance Board trials in the period 1864 to 66 to determine a suitable method of converting the large stocks of Pattern 1853 Enfield Rifles to breech loader, the invention of Jacob Snider was chosen together with the centre fire cartridge developed by Col. Boxer. This in its final form involved cutting off the breech end of the barrel and replacing it with a shoe containing a hinged breech block with firing pin that swung open to the right and include an ejector claw, the shoe being screwed into the rear end of the original barrel. The conversion was announced in LOC 1327 dated 18 September 1866 with the ammunition by LOC 1328 dated 20 August 1866 and was generally applied to the 4th Type or model of the Pat 53 with Baddeley barrel bands. The conversion quickly progressed from Mk I to

In the Colonial Government arms return of 26 August 1869 there were no Sniders owned by the Colony, however 2000 Snider Rifles (1900 Long) were supplied from British Stores by September of the same year. Many of these were later exchanged for carbines

In December 1869 the Wanganui Herald reported 50 picked men armed with Snider rifles had been sent from Wellington to Taupo to help combat the Hoahoa uprising. By 1875 the snider long rifle was on more general issue to Volunteer forces within the colony and by 1879 there were 696 on issue or in store, increasing to 1049 by 1892. From 1890 onwards the snider was gradually replaced by the Martini Henry (1895), Martini Enfield (1898) and Lee Enfield (1901), however some Volunteer Rifles corps were still armed with the snider as late at 1902 and in the 1905 arms return 920 are shown still held in the colony.



Hay Pattern Snider Medium Rifle

Mk I* (squared rim to cartridge), Mk II* and Mk II** (larger breech block & cupped hammer) leading to the Mk III introduced by LOC 1759 dated 13 Jan 1869 which included a breech block locking bolt, and steel instead of iron barrel, these Mk III rifles were made new rather than conversions.

The first Snider rifles to see service in New Zealand were issued to a detachment of the 18th Royal Irish Regiment of Foot bound for Wellington in March 1868 and to those serving at Napier by May 1868. According to the Evening Post of the 23 November 1868 they appear to have been used on the range for the first time in November of that year.

Hay Pattern Snider Medium Rifle is similar to the Snider Long rifle but has a barrel length of 33.5 in with a 3 groove 1 in 48 in twist rifling. OA length is 51.75 in and weight 9 lb 9 oz. On 16 February 1869 500 Hay Pattern Medium Enfield Rifles were sent to England for conversion to the Snider Breech Loading Mark III Action these arrived back in NZ in November 1869 and were issued to the NZ Armed Constabulary in Napier and Taupo Districts and the Garrisons on the Napier – Taupo Road.

The breech loading Hay Pattern Snider proved not to have the long range accuracy of the muzzle loading Enfield Rifles, but the Breech Loading Hay Snider could be reloaded and fired much faster than the Muzzle Loading Enfield. The Snider ammunition delivered equally as good ballistics and accuracy from the 30.5” barrel Snider Enfield Short Rifle with 5 groove 1 in 48 twist rifling compared to the 33.5” barrel Hay pattern Snider and with the added advantage the short rifle could be fitted with a saw back sword bayonet which was more suitable for New Zealand’s bush environment.



Snider Lock & Breech



Snider Short Rifle MK II**

Snider Enfield Short Rifle has a 30.5 in barrel of 25 bore with 5 groove 1 in 48 in twist (or 3 groove 1 in 78in twist), OA length is 49 in and weight 8 lb 12 oz. Approved by LOC 1407 dated 28 Mar 1867 to govern the conversion of Pattern 1860 Enfield Short Rifles for sergeants to breech loading on the snider principle, and incorporated the improvements of the Snider Long rifle Mk II**. Pattern 1858 Short Rifles bar on band were also converted. In 1869 a Mk III version was introduced by LOC 1759 dated 13 January governing new manufacture and included a breech locking bolt and steel barrel. These rifles all have steel furniture, although private contract rifles may have brass furniture.

issue to the Armed Constabulary & Police Force. Through the 1880s and 90s Volunteer Rifle Corps were armed with Snider Rifles. From the New Zealand issue numbers observed on the Snider Short Rifles there would appear to have been significant imports in the following years: 1880, 1887, 1888

Numbers increased to 8024 in 1892 and from then numbers declined to 7847 in 1906. In 1907 7,000 snider rifles (long, medium and short rifles) were sold to an English firm and shipped to England.



**Top: Remington Lee Model 1885 service Rifle
Bottom: Cut down to carbine**

A Naval version of the Snider Short Rifle was introduced by LOC 1495 dated 7 August 1867 and governed the conversion of Pattern 1858 Naval Short Rifles. These have gun metal furniture and a heavier profile barrel and weigh 8 lb 15.5 oz. This rifle accepts the Pattern 1858 naval cutlass bayonet.

Like the Snider Long Rifle the army version of the Snider

Remington Lee Model 1885 Service Rifle in .43 in Spanish with 5 grooves RH twist rifling and a barrel length of 32.0 inches having an overall length of 52.0 inches and weighs 8 lb 8 oz. It was based upon a design of James Paris Lee, a Scott who emigrated to Canada as a child and then moved to the USA. Lee entered into a relationship with E Remington & Sons to manufacture his rifles, the first military model being that of 1882. Improvements to the original design were undertaken by Lee and LP Diss resulting in the M 1885. Production of this rifle commenced in mid 1886, but by this time Remington was facing receivership and only about 5,500 rifles had been produced by April 1887 when production was halted. Of this batch of rifles 500 were sold to New Zealand and a further 300 to Britain for trials, these latter rifles leading to the Magazine Lee Metford, following further design improvements at RSAF Enfield.



Snider Mk II Breech

Short Rifle first saw service in New Zealand with the 18th Royal Irish Regiment of Foot commencing in March 1868. In 1875 the Armed Constabulary Force were armed with 700 Snider Short Rifles (bar on band) with saw-back bayonets, these appear to have been a private contract. By 1879 the colonial government had 3345 Snider Short Rifles of both types on issue and in store, of these 1504 were on

Reacting to a threat of attack by Russia in 1887 the Minister of Defence J B Balance placed an order with Messrs E Remington & Sons for 500 repeating rifles plus a spare magazine and 400 rounds of ammunition for each and 100 bayonets. Remington passed the order on to the Lee Small Arms Co. who advised the New Zealand government that the rifles, taken from stock, were ready for shipping on 20 June 1887. The cost per rifle was 69 shillings and 8 pence.

100 rifles were sold to the Honorary Reserve Corp, 350 were loaned to the Rifle Association for 12 months with an option to purchase and 50 retained in Government stores of which 12 to 15 were reported sold by 25 November 1887. Very soon complaints were being received by the Defence Department about defects in the rifle and ammunition. Split and stuck cases were reported as well as blow outs at the breech, causing damage to the rifle. In January 1888 the Chairman of the Rifle Association was asked to provide a report on the rifles and by the end of that month the Honorary Reserve Corp was instructed to return their rifles. On 6 April 1888 the Lee Small Arms Co were informed that the rifles had been withdrawn from service due to unreliable ammunition. The company was asked to take the rifles back and four rifles and a quantity of ammunition was returned and a refund was eventually negotiated.

Most of the rifles remained in store until July 1907 when 340 Remington Lee Rifles were sold with Snider and Martini Henry rifles and carbines to an Manchester firm and shipped to England.

The remaining rifles appear to have been sold off locally, many were converted to "carbine" length, with either a 26 inch barrel or 21.5 inch barrel, and whether this work was undertaken by Army armourers or gunsmiths in the trade is not clear.

In the mid 1870s it was intended to adopt a reduced calibre rifle in .402 in. and this was designated the Enfield Martini. A large number of trials rifles were manufacture, but with the impending arrival of the .303 magazine rifle, the plan was abandoned. The large number of trials rifles were converted to Martini Henry and became the Mk IV which was approved in September 1887. Types A & B were conversions from trials rifles while Type C was new manufacture. The Mk IV differed from previous marks in having a lower butt socket, a stronger extractor, a longer lever and a ramped foresight.

Although Martini Henry rifles had appeared in the colony from 1871 as Shooting prizes and private purchase the first significant government order was not placed until a total of 501 Martini Henry Rifles were ordered in 1889/90 plus 50 Morris Tubes. A Martini Henry Mk IV with short lever marked N^Z 90, has been viewed which indicates that these were the first Martini Henry issued in New Zealand. These rifles appear to have been issued on repayment to Volunteer units.

In 1893 Lt Col. FJ Fox recommended to the Minister of Defence the rearming of the NZ forces with the Martini Henry pending a decision on the new magazine rifle. 1894 saw the ordering of 5,000 Martini Henry Rifles from Britain. By July 1895 2,000 MH rifles had been received and the Infantry were in the process of being rearmed with the

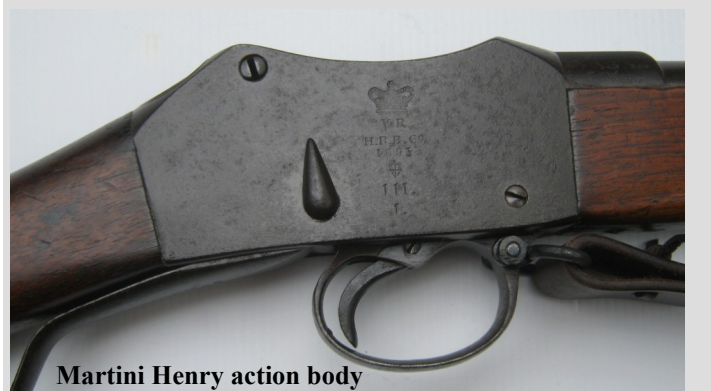


Martini Henry Mk III Rifle

Martini Henry Rifle Mk III with a barrel length of 33.2 inches and calibre of .450 inch with 7 groove Henry RH twist 1 turn in 22 in. rifling the overall length was 49.2 inches and weight 8 lb 9 oz. Following prize competitions and trials to select the best breech loading action and barrel combination, which resulted in the Martini action and the Henry barrel being adopted, production of the Martini Henry rifle commenced at RSAF Enfield in 1869, however the first pattern was sealed in June 1871. Early models included a safety catch on the RHS of the body but this was discontinued from 1874, other distinguishing features are the chequered butt plate and cross pin securing the fore-end and a bronze hinge pin for the breech block. As production continued improvements were made which resulted in the MK II being approved in April 1877, this featured a smooth butt plate, deeper rear sight cap, no butt swivel, rounded edges to the rear of the trigger guard and a cupped cleaning rod. In August 1879 the Mk III was approved, the main differences from previous marks being the method of attaching the fore-end by means of a hooked plate, a longer rear sight bed and a double hump knob form.

Martini Henry and by 1896 practically the whole force was so armed. In 1897 Martini Henry Rifles were issued to Cavalry troops and they became Mounted Rifles.

A Small Arms Return of 1903 showed a total of 4,709 Martini Henry Rifles held in Store. In 1907 the Martini Henrys were considered obsolete and 4,500 were sold by tender and shipped to an English company on the SS *Mamari* along with 500 MH Carbines, 10,000 Sniders and 340 Remington Lees.



Martini Henry action body



Martini Enfield Mk I .303 Rifle

Martini Enfield Rifle Mk I with a barrel length of 30.2 inches and calibre of .303 inch with Enfield 5 grooves 1:10 in. LH twist rifling it has an overall length of 46.25 inches and weighs 8 lb 5 oz. The Martini Enfield Mk I was a conversion of the Martini Henry Mk III rifle and was approved in LOC 8118 dated 4 October 1895. The conversion comprised of fitting a new .303 barrel, breech block, extractor and a top hand guard, other parts were Martini Henry altered as required with the addition of Lee Metford barrel bands, swivels and cleaning rod. The Pattern 1895 bayonet was a conversion of the Martini Henry Pattern 1876 bayonet, but fitted underneath the barrel instead of on the RHS. Conversions commenced at RSAF Enfield in 1895 and continued until 1903 by which time 48,610 conversions had been completed at this factory.

The first consignment of Martini Enfield rifles arrived in New Zealand in 1898 and are so marked. Initially these rifles equipped troops in the North Island while those in the South Island retained the Martini Henry. Further supplies of Martini Enfield Rifles were received in 1899 although by this time the Volunteer forces had increased in numbers due to the Boer War and there were still not enough rifles to equip all troops.

By 1901 the Martini Enfield rifles on issue were being called in and replaced by Magazine Lee Enfields, they were then supplied to rifle clubs. This change of arms had been completed by 1903. By 1907 about 2,400 Martini Enfield Rifles had been sold to Defence Rifle Clubs.

In 1910 a thousand Martini Enfield Rifles were converted to carbine by local armourers to augment supplies of carbines for the Senior Cadet Force. One observed example has a 1912 dated barrel, so this work may have been spread over several years.

A return of arms for 1913 showed 1,124 ME Rifles on issue to Senior Cadets, 2,515 ME Carbines (including converted rifles) on issue to Cadets and 2,607 ME Rifles sold to Defence Rifle Clubs.

Martini Enfield Rifles saw service with the Home Guard during WW II.



Original Martini Henry Mk III marks on RHS



Conversion to Martini Enfield marks on LHS

Research for this work has been undertaken by a team known as the New Zealand Arms Register Team, (NZART) a joint project undertaken by members of the New Zealand Antique & Historical Arms Association Inc. and members of the New Zealand Society of Gunsmiths Inc. aided by many friends from around the world. The ultimate aim being to compile a register of all arms issued to and used by New Zealanders.

Special thanks to: John Osborne & John Carter for Photographs

For more information on these rifles visit:

www.armsregister.com