

THE NZ MARTINI ENFIELD CARBINE FOR CADETS

By

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About twenty years ago I purchased at auction two NZ marked Martini Enfield (ME) weapons. One was the long rifle and the other a carbine that appeared to have been sporterised. The original intention had been to restore the MEC with new wood and a 1888 pattern bayonet boss that had been lying in the deepest recess of my parts box like that most collectors have. Time went on and still MEC languished in a dark dusty corner still speckled with rust and paint under the quick coating of oil I had applied after purchase.

Over the years the more I looked at it the more I felt it was not a true carbine body and had been assembled from parts and would not be worth the restoration effort.

The right hand side of what is clearly a rifle body was marked: -

Victorian Crown
V.R
Enfield
1881
Crown over inverted Broad Arrow (inspectors mark)
III.
I.

And numbered on right hand side of the body (top right) with a four-figure serial number that matched that on the barrel.

The Left hand side of the body was marked: -

Victorian Crown
V.R
Enfield
1896
Crown over inverted Broad Arrow
M.E. .303
I.

The barrel end of the top of the body was marked: -

N↑Z
99

Over stamped with opposing Broad Arrows and SS – denoting sold out of service.

The top rear of the body has the NZ added Rack number 3442 but of a larger size than that noted elsewhere.

The barrel is a standard MEC with the correct carbine foresight and has the same serial number as the body. The other markings include sold out of service marks and DP (Drill Purpose) along with '08 denoting year of manufacture. The sight bridge having a four figure serial number but different to all others denoting perhaps a later replacement.

The final markings are on the Butt with a faded Enfield Cartouche over I & I and sold out of service stamp. The brass butt-marking disk is blank and appears original.



The MEC (NZ) (LP) – note the MEC barrel and how the fore wood has been shortened

So how had this weapon come to be in what appears at first inspection to be in such a confused condition? During research into my article 'The Long Tom in NZ Service' The Volunteers, Volume 26 No 1 page 35, July 2000. I had consulted the various Defence Reports to Parliament contained in H section Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives of NZ (AJHR) from where I formed a picture of muddled Government and Defence thinking on arming our forces.

Reported in 1890 '...the Snider rifle is now obsolete and should be replaced by rifles of a more modern date ... 16,000 are required ...'.ⁱ

1891 reported the purchase in batches of MH (Martini Henry) Rifles 250 + 250 +1 at a cost of 653 pounds (\$NZD 1306) for 250.ⁱⁱ

Under Warlike stores in 1893 purchase from Kynoch & Co 250,000 rounds MH landed cost 1185 pounds 3 shillings and 3 pence (\$NZD2370.33).ⁱⁱⁱ

Reported in 1895 '... Infantry – The Rifle Companies are now gradually being armed with MH Rifles ...'.^{iv}

The following year it was reported '... Small Arms ... the force is now practically wholly armed with MH Rifles and Carbines ...'.^v

However the Colonial Government having secured a replacement for the Snider Rifles with the Martini Henry was under pressure to modernize to the new .303 cartridge weapons that had been on issue in the Imperial Army since 1888 with the introduction into service of the new style bolt action magazine fed Lee Metford Rifle (MLM) and its shortly to be replaced with Lee Enfield Rifle (MLE). The 1898 years report by the outgoing Commandant of the NZ Forces reported: -

The first installment of the new rifle [ME] has arrived in the Colony and the second is on the way. I much regret that it was not decided when new rifles were procured, as recommended in my last report to purchase the magazine arm. No doubt the .303 ME is very much in advance of the .45 MH has regards range shooting but any force we will have to contend with will in all probability be armed with the most up-to-date weapons.

I also regret the triangular bayonet should have been supplied. It is not suitable for this Colony and the short sword bayonet as sent out with the carbines would have been much more useful.

Shortly we will have three different rifles in the hands of Infantry Volunteers, the .303ME, the .45MH and the Snider. I sincerely hope that we may soon get a supply of the .303 rifle sufficient to end this state of affairs and that by the end of next year there will only be one class of rifle in the hands of the troops.^{vi}

By the end of next year the unsatisfactory state of affairs still existed as reported '... All Corps in the North Island now armed with .303 rifle ... sanction given by Imperial Authorities for the Colony to retain all MH arms at present on issue to the South Island until we receive the .303 order ...'.^{vii}

As the current custodian of the above-described MEC my assumption is that the makings of 99 denote the date taken into NZ service i.e. 1899, this rifle was in the second batch that was used to arm the South Island Corps. Of interest it had been purchased from a South Island Auction so appears not to have moved far over the years.

By late 1899 NZ forces deploy to the war in South Africa and hand in their ME & MEC weapons in the field for the bolt-action rifles models MLM & MLE and some carbines which with returning contingents are bought back to New Zealand and taken into service, quickly negating the ME rifles and carbines so recently purchased which were then passed onto the Cadet Corps. As reported in 1904 ‘... all now armed with LE or ME carbine ...’^{viii} With further improvements in 1905 ‘...twenty five corps armed with MLE carbines, (I assume the rare LEC NZ pattern) thirty corps ME carbines and one Corps with MH rifles.

The 1910 report deals with the additional purchase of Short Rifles MKIII for the Mounted Corps and more MLE Long Rifles on order. Significantly for the Cadet Corps ‘... The number of carbines for use by cadets in the Dominion has been augmented by the conversion of one thousand ME rifles, the work of conversion being carried out by local Armourers’ Staff ... In order to cope with the demands of arms for Cadet Corps it has been necessary to equip the Senior Corps with MLE Rifles and withdraw the carbines for the equipment of the Junior Corps... Carbines on issue to cadets: -

MLE	1485
ME	2515
.310 Cadet Pattern	<u>1058</u>
	<u>5058</u> ^{ix}

From the forging it can be seen that the ill judged decision to purchase the ME Rifles lead to a short lived period of in life service with the Defence Force with some later being converted to carbines for the Junior Cadet Corps.



Weapons and Fore ends for comparison, from the top, Martini Henry Mk III, Martini Enfield Mk I, Martini Enfield Artillery Carbine Mk II and Martini Enfield Carbine (NZ) LP

It appears that the 1000 ME rifles on conversion to carbines had their forewood cut down like we see with other long arms that have been sporterised, the long rifle barrel removed and replaced with a carbine barrel of a later manufacture date, in the case of this carbine 1908. Over the years I have noted a number of similar cut down ME fitted with MEC barrels with variations in where and how the fore wood has been cut and shaped, this will have occurred because many different local armourers converted them.

Nowhere have I seen a reference to what this conversion was officially called if ever formalized, so for clarity of identification I'd like to suggest we could refer to it as MEC (NZ) LP (Local Pattern) for use by the Junior Cadet Corps.

As if to further emphasize the folly of the purchase of the ME Rifles & Carbines and the ongoing technical advances in Enfield Rifles it was reported in 1908 '... Mounted Corps in the South Island now issued with the new pattern MLE rifle^x...' and by 1912 '... during the year 8000 MLE (Short) Mk III have been imported ...the Rifles (Short) Mk1 with bayonet pattern 1903 withdrawn from the Mounted Corps have been issued to Senior Cadets.'^{xi} But the ME obsolete and all that it was soldiered on with the Cadet Corps.



Close up of the different fore ends

The Carbine example was at sometime sold out of service as disclosed by the Sold Out Of Service stamps i.e. opposing arrows and the letter S on the Knox Form, however not all were sold. During the 1950's and 60's a lot of the surplus and obsolete military stores and equipment in storage at the Army's Hopu Hopu Camp Ngarawhaia were disposed of by dumping in the Kelm Road Lake nearby.

Over the years this became a popular scavenging place for collectors and in the mid 1970's Ron McLean was able to recover many items including a relic MEC (NZ) LP weapon. The carbine forend was missing however the butt was still in surprisingly good condition but the metal work was well pitted. As a result of the rust the markings on the left hand side of the receiver have long gone but the right side has the usual markings with the date of 1881 and the top N↑Z 1756. The barrel markings are DP (Drill Purpose), R (Replacement) and E (Enfield Rifling). The cocking and trigger mechanism had been removed and a gas axe cut has been made to the receiver and chamber to render unusable. Of recent years the Army has cleared the lake of salvage that was either sold for scrap or disposed of in two container loads at sea.

So to fellow collectors and historians out there look closely at that hybrid sporterised weapon next time you see one, it could be one of those rare MEC (NZ) LP that whilst not as rare as the officially made LEC (NZ), on a local basis, based on survivability could be considered reasonably rare and valuable as it shows an interesting glimpse into the history of NZ firearms.



Two examples of how the original Rifle Forewood shortened by different local Army Area Armourers and the Kelm Lake relic (top), note gas axe cut to the Receiver and Chamber.

ⁱ AJHR, 1890, H10 page 5

ⁱⁱ Ibid, 1891, H55

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, 1893, H 40

^{iv} Ibid, 1895, H 19 page 7

^v Ibid, 1896, H19 page 6

^{vi} Ibid, 1898 H19 page 11 - Arms

^{vii} Ibid, 1899 H19 page 8 - Arms

^{viii} Ibid , 1904 H19 page 4 – Cadet Corps

^{ix} Ibid, 1910, H19, pages 4&5 – Arms & Ammunition

^x Ibid, 1908 H 19 page 6

^{xi} Ibid, 1912 H19 page 8 para 26 Rifles and Ammunition

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Pictures and captions: -

1. The MEC (NZ) (LP) – note the MEC barrel and how the fore wood has been shortened.
2. Weapons and Fore ends for comparison, from the top, Martini Henry Mk III, Martini Enfield Mk I, Martini Enfield Artillery Carbine Mk II and Martini Enfield Carbine (NZ) LP
3. Close up of the different Fore ends
4. Two examples of how the original Rifle Forewood shortened by different local Army Area Armourers and the Kelm Lake relic (top), note gas axe cut to the Receiver and Chamber.

Editors note, the author would be interested in hearing from fellow members regarding details of sightings of similar NZ carbines. He may be contacted by email njtaylor@ihug.co.nz

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