

# MARTINI HENRY IN NEW ZEALAND SERVICE

By Phil Cregeen

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The first recorded use of a Martini Henry was a Prize Rifle presented to Lt A Morrow in 1871 (now displayed at the Auckland Museum) and there are newspaper accounts of members of the Volunteer Force using them in Prize Shoots from 1872 onwards. These would have been Martini Henry Mk I, however most likely bought as private purchase and therefore not considered as "Issued". Royal Navy ships of the Australasian Station operating in New Zealand waters in this period also carried Martini Henry Mk I Rifles and landed them to compete in matches with local Volunteers.

In 1885 two MH Rifles of the latest pattern (Mk III) and two Carbines each with Morris Tubes were ordered by the government from Britain and are recorded in a letter to Rear Admiral Stout entitled War Materials for New Zealand tabled before the House of Representatives.

In his report to the Minister of Defence in 1886 the C in C, Sir G S Whitmore, eludes to the order of an unknown quantity of Martini Enfields, although only Martini Henry were in production at this time. It was reported in the press at this time that a sample of the Enfield Martini .402 had been received by the Defence Dept.

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<sup>Z</sup> 90, has been viewed which indicates that these were the first Martini Henry issued by the government in New Zealand. These rifles appear to have been issued on repayment to Volunteer units.

Newspapers of 1888 - 90 report that the National Rifle Association were lobbying the government to purchase Martini Henry Rifles for Rifle Clubs and also that the government provided some Martini Henrys for international competitions. By this time a number of Martini Henry Rifle Clubs had been formed and the rifles were frequently being used by members of the Volunteer Force.

In 1892 the 57 members of the Honourable Reserve Corp were armed with Martini Henry and reported to be excellent shots by Lt Col Hume NZM Under Secretary of Defence. Also that year 8 Martini Henry Rifles were purchased by the government and 250,000 rounds of MH ball ammunition from Kynoch and another 29,800 rounds from CAC.

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. (See insert on next page)

Also in 1893 a batch of 200 MH (believed to be HRB & Co 1893 manufacture) arrived in August for the National Rifle Association. The NZ Rifle Assn meeting in March 1894 at Christchurch records:

*"I regret to place on record that the 1893 meeting shows the smallest number of competitors the Assn has ever had since 1885. The cause of this is not hard to seek, and must without a shadow of doubt be laid down to the want of Martini rifles. Applications for over 150 rifles had been made from all parts of the Colony, and had these rifles only arrived on time for the meeting the entries would have been greatly added to, unfortunately the rifles did not come to hand, and the*



**NZ Issued Martini Henry Mk IV No 471, short lever, showing 1890 issue marks and also Home Guard service in WW II**



**A HRB Co. Mk III Martini Henry from the 200 that arrive in 1893, these are not NZ marked**

*Assn suffered financially, someone was certainly to blame, as these rifles were ordered in March 1892, were expected by every steamer, and finally arrived in the Colony on August 1893, just 17 months from the order being sent.*

*Showing the demand that existed, I may now say that out of the shipment of 200 rifles that arrived in August not one at the present time remains in store”*

1894 saw the ordering by the government 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 and by 1896 practically the whole force was so armed. It would appear that at this time about 500 carbines of both types were also received, but whether this was in addition to or part of the Rifle order is not certain. However from 1897 the Carbines were withdrawn from the Cavalry and Martini Henry Rifles were issued and the troops became Mounted Rifles.

1898 saw the arrival of the first .303 Martini Enfield Rifles with Martini Henry and Snider still on issue. In 1899 sufficient Martini Enfield .303 Rifles had arrived to equip the North Island Volunteer Corp but the South Island were still armed with the Martini Henry, CAC were supplying the .303 ammunition needs of the colony. By 1902 the Martini Henrys on issue were being withdrawn and in many cases exchanged for Martini Enfield .303 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 rifles and 500 MH Carbines were sold by tender to an English company and shipped to England on the *SS Mamari* along with, 10,000 Sniders and 340 Remington Lees. It was later reported in the press of 1909 that many of these rifles had turned up in the hands of tribesmen on the NW frontier of India and questions were asked as to how this could happen.



**Auckland Rifle Volunteers with their Martini Henry Rifles (and Lady Friends) after returning from the Hokianga Dog Tax War 1898**

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*References: A Treatise on the British Military Martini by BA Templeton & ID Skennerton (AJHR) <http://atojs.natlib.govt.nz/> Papers Past <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz>*

After a very careful consideration of the whole matter of rearmament, I have come to the conclusion that the Government cannot do better than arm its Forces with the Martini-Henry weapon. I am confident that that rifle is quite sufficiently good for our present defence purposes. The ranges which we now have will be generally suitable for target-practice with the Martini-Henry, whereas there are few, if any, ranges to be found in New Zealand which could be made into safe and good ranges for the Magazine rifle. The Magazine rifle may give an advantage to highly-trained men, but it is very questionable whether it could confer any advantage on men not so highly trained. Rather it is possible that the reverse might be the case. The Martini-Henry rifle is a good serviceable weapon, capable of standing a considerable amount of hard usage. The Magazine rifle is much more delicate, and would require very much more care. The expense of the latter is considerably greater than that of the former, and the difference in cost of ammunition is very great, being much in favour of the Martini-Henry.

**Extract from Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives 1893**