

4(T) Or Not 4(T) That Is The Question

A brief discourse on the No4 Lee Enfield snipers rifle
From the collectors perspective

By

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The armed forces of Gt. Britain and her commonwealth entered the Second World War equipped with the same sniping rifles with which they had finished the great War, some twenty one years earlier; namely the (as of the nomenclature in 1926) Rifle No 3 Mk1 "T)", or in common parlance the Pattern 14 rifle fitted with the Pattern (or 'Model' as it is marked on the telescope tube) 1918 telescopic sight. The complete equipment was becoming rather long in the tooth, being essentially a copy of the Mauser 1896 rifle sporting a slightly modified copy of the First War Hensoldt light telescope sight; the two being mated together by two-piece claw mounts.

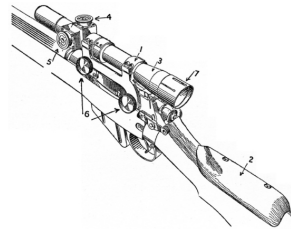


FIG. 16. The British Sniper's Equipment.
1. Bracket or Holder. 4. Range (Deflection) Drum.
2. Clamp Bolt. 5. Deflection Drum.
3. 30 in. 30 Telescope Sight. 6. Clamping screw.
7. Eye shield.

In fact the British issue did represent an improvement over the German in one respect, in that both range and deflection adjustment facilities were present within the telescope itself thus obviating the need for worm screws and adjusting keys on the rear mount in order to obtain lateral corrections. However, even allowing for this the deflection adjustment method was clumsy and not easily carried out with any precision, being a job for the zeroing range rather than the battlefield: a movement of one increment of the deflection ring at the objective end of the scope resulted in a five inch movement on the target at 100 yards, and at the same time the vertical zero was likely to be affected, thus requiring re-setting once deflection had been corrected.

As is always the case during peacetime the military establishment was run down (this was as true in the 1920's and 30's as it is now). However there were one or two enterprising designs produced for consideration by the army as possible replacements for the rifle No. 3 (T). The Ainley rifle of 1937, which was itself a highly modified derivation of the P' 14 rifle, was developed, though not proceeded with beyond trial production of six rifles.

Concurrently through the inter-war period, a replacement was being sought for the standard No. 1 service rifle. The SMLE had acquitted itself magnificently in the trenches of Ypres, Gallipoli and the Somme during the Great War, but it had become widely appreciated that its production was complicated, time consuming and hence costly. Further, whilst accuracy of the standard rifle was generally satisfactory, it was not of the standard required for a dedicated Snipers rifle. Indeed it had been found in the latter stages of the First War that the Pattern 14 rifle fitted with the fine adjustment rear sight shot more accurately than the SMLE fitted with a telescope! Trials with the No. 1 rifle led to the Mk V which was produced in some thousands for troop trials, and then further refinement, onto the Mk VI. By 1930 the "Rifle No 1 Mk VI" had appeared, and it looked to all intents and purposes like the later No. 4 rifle. However it still possessed a low rounded left receiver side wall. This was subsequently "beefed up", and by 1931 the Rifle No. 4 (trials) had evolved, of which 2500 were manufactured through the early to mid-1930's for evaluation purposes in the hands of the troops. The rifle was virtually identical to the later standard issue No. 4, apart from the possession of a magazine cut-off and very minor differences to some of the smaller parts such as the rear sight, cocking piece and foresight protector.

The new rifle was less time consuming to produce than the old No. 1 service weapon, used standard rather than "Enfield Inch" screw threads, and also made a far better platform for a telescopic sight. Its body was stronger, with flat slab-sided walls, ideal for a scope mount attachment, the bolt was refined, with an internal rather than external guide rib, and the barrel was rather heavier than that of its predecessor. All of this was conducive to the pinpoint accuracy required of a snipers rifle.

It would be nice to say that the transition from No. 4 Trials to the dedicated No. 4 (T) was a smooth and rapid progression, which unfortunately it was not. Quite simply the financial purse strings were still drawn tightly shut, and the trials batch of No. 4's were not augmented by any further production, the SMLE soldiering on as the standard arm, with the P' 14/Model '18 still the standard sniping equipment throughout the 1930's.

Luckily once war broke out the situation did change, and it changed rapidly, with the inevitable clamour to provide:

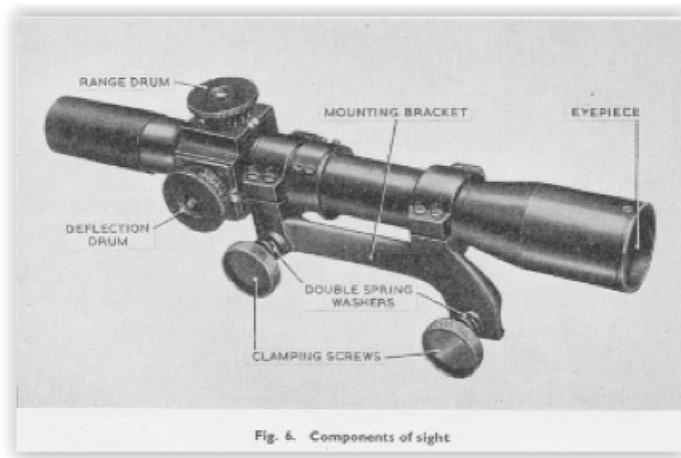
- More SMLE's in the first instance
- Large scale production of No. 4 rifles in the longer term, so as to be able to augment and ultimately replace the SMLE.
- To field an effective and workmanlike snipers rifle, built on the No. 4 action, with which to replace the P' 14/Model '18 equipment.

There had been a few experiments with mounting systems such as a modified P14/Model '18 claw system adapted to the No. 4, and a Griffin & Howe rail fitted to the receiver side wall – in both cases involving trials No. 4's. However these never came to anything, and the recently adopted telescope No. 32 Mk I which had been developed for use on the also recently adopted Bren LMG, was mated to the new service rifle. This still left the problem of finding a suitable mounting arrangement, but within a period of a few short months the Bren "stem" (bracket) was modified to fit twin body pads which had been designed to be screwed and soft soldered to the left receiver side wall of the No. 4 rifle. All of this development work, as well as the early conversions, were effected on these early 1930's dated trials No. 4 rifles, at Enfield, as UK and North American production of the new rifle did not get into full swing until the second half of 1941. By this time the design of the new sniping equipment had been just about finalised, with first issues of the No. 4 (T) probably being made to Royal Marine Commando units in late 1941.

As has previously been alluded to, during the 1930's 2500 'Trials' No. 4 rifles were produced for evaluation purposes (the name 'Trials' comes from the troop trials which were conducted with these weapons). These were the only No. 4 rifles

available at the time of the development of the new snipers' rifle. It should, therefore, come as no surprise, that the first No. 4 (T)'s were built on these early "pre-production" arms. Holland & Holland were not yet involved, the conversions being effected at RSAF Enfield itself. It would seem that the trials rifles, having been manufactured at Enfield, were then put into store at Weedon, and subsequently sent back to Enfield for the sniper conversion work to be carried out. A figure of 1403 Enfield converted rifles is often quoted, though there is some uncertainty as to whether all of these fourteen hundred weapons were trials rifles, or whether this total may eventually have included some early run-of-production rifles from Savage, Maltby or BSA.

The No. 32 telescope was at that time, known by the design specification CIA(FC) EXP 1082. It had been developed with the intention of fitting it to the new Bren light machine gun, though this was not ultimately proceeded with. Between September 1940 and March 1941 there were minor progressive refinements to the telescope mounting system until the first telescope sighting No. 32 Mk I appeared from United Instrument Company, a division of the famous Vickers Company, and whose factory was located in York.



The early rifles feature trials actions which are instantly recognisable: the most notable features being the provision of a magazine cut-off, button type cocking piece, waisted foresight protector, and Enfield markings on the left side of the butt socket. The most commonly encountered year date in the author's experience is 1931. Some of these early features did survive on production rifles and it is not unusual to encounter early BSA, Maltby, or Savage rifles with, for example waisted foresight protectors (usually marked SM 41 or 'S'), or button cocking pieces. Additionally early forends are relieved on the right side at the rear, to allow clearance for the magazine cut-off. This feature obviously survived for some time during production as these forends are not uncommon in walnut, birch and beech.

The first rifles to find their way into the hands of the troops appear to be trials rifles issued to the Royal Marine Commandos, probably around November 1941. At least one trials No. 4 (T) has been found bearing a letter 'N' stamp on the butt socket, reputedly indicating Naval property. According to one source these rifles were issued without cheek rests, which were subsequently retrofitted as available. It should be noted that the ubiquitous triangular swivel which replaces the front trigger guard screw was not approved until late 1944, so that production rifles dating from before this time would have had the swivel retrofitted as supplies came to hand. The authors have seen occasional examples of early production rifles that appear never to have had the swivel fitted. All in all though, one can safely say that by late 1941 the rifle No. 4 Mk I (T) had arrived on the scene. It was undoubtedly the best snipers rifle to come out of the Second World War, and would soon be proving exactly that.

NOTES ON RIFLE NO. 4 (T) PRODUCTION & MARKINGS.

It is generally accepted that all manufacturers of the No. 4 rifle except (probably) for Fazackerly supplied weapons for conversion into sniping equipments, and the authors will provide a brief list of identifying features/markings of the rifles converted from each factory. First, however, a little more on the controversy over exactly who converted the early (1941-42 dated) rifles. The fact that Enfield effected all of the trials rifle conversions is not generally disputed (though the authors have heard of one reputedly genuine trials No. 4 (T) that bears a S51 Holland & Holland stamp on the butt!). What is more contentious is whether Enfield only converted trials rifles, or whether they also converted some early run-of-production rifles as they became available, but before Holland & Holland took over in 1942. However having seen and examined quite a number of No. 4 (T)'s and L42 A1's over the years, we tend to have the opinion that the only rifles converted by RSAF Enfield were the trials rifles, with a single known exception of one Savage made conversion that exists in Canada, & which bears an Enfield examiner's mark to the front body pad, Trials rifle style. Scrutiny of many rifles has revealed a number of 1941-42 Savage, Maltby and BSA rifles which bear S51 butt stamps, which is not (with the possible exception of the single rifle referred to above) present on trials rifle butts. Further, all trials rifles bear an Enfield examiners mark on the front top flat of the front body pad. This has been found thus far without exception on all of the trials conversions, yet has never, to our knowledge, been encountered on any other No. 4 (T)'s save for the one other exception located in Canada referred to above.

Having stuck our necks out, we would be delighted to hear from other sources who can demonstrate differently, as only thus will the situation be clarified.

MARKINGS BY INDIVIDUAL RIFLE MANUFACTURER

Note: All rifles bear a telescope number stamped on the butt wrist. This is common to all rifles (except the few rifles issued without scopes) and so not mentioned specifically under each manufacturer.



*Top number (33586) is the rifle serial number, and 28606
(on the flat of the buttstock) is the scope number*

ENFIELD (TRIALS) PRODUCTION.

Rifles manufactured for troop trials during the 1930's. Most 'T' conversions noted dated 1931 or 1933, though a few known with later 1930's dates.

Serial numbers are all 'A' prefixes followed by a number up to a maximum of approximately 2500, e.g. A0794, A1684 and A2215.

Markings include a small Enfield examiners stamp on the top front flat of the front body pad. 'T' markings on the receivers are very variable and many are not marked at all. It is quite likely that those that do bear a 'T' have had them added by judicious armourers at some point after entering service. There is no apparent consistency of marking.

'N' had been noted on the left side of the butt socket on at least one rifle and may indicate as alluded to earlier, Naval ownership.

'S' is absent from the magazine cut-off blocks.

Comments: Multiple Enfield examiner's marks are the norm on trials rifles and are present at the body rear on either side of the bolt way. The Royal Cypher, SMLE style is situated to the left side of the butt socket. A cut-off slot is present with or without the cut-off itself. Rifles were originally issued with a 'waisted' foresight protector, and early SMLE style 'button' cocking piece. The rear sight and rear sight plunger arrangement is slightly different to those of production No. 4's. Letters are marked on the underside of the bolt handle. (This is also sometimes seen on early production rifles, particularly those made by ROF Maltby). These often state 'SBN' followed by a number..... and may represent steel batch numbers.

It is likely that parts to hand would have been utilised by Enfield when assembling the trials rifles, and some have been noticed with the transverse No.1 Mk VI style striker keeper screw.

ROF MALTBY PRODUCTION

Thus far the authors have only encountered 1941 (and one isolated 1942) dated rifles converted to 'T' specifications. Serial numbers generally indicate that only early rifles were sent for conversion, and have either no letter prefix, or are in the A or B series. E.g. 16330, A18006, B17954. All rifles so far encountered in original condition appear to have been converted by Holland & Holland. (551 marked butts are found even on 1941 dated rifles). Enfield examiners marks, when apparent, appear to be located on the right rear body under the point where the bolt handle joins the bolt body. The presence of the receiver sidewall 'T' and the butt socket 'TR' is inconsistent, with most observed rifles bearing neither but some with one or the other marking present. The 'S' mark encountered on the (redundant) cut-off block of the later run of production rifles is also absent. Our impression concerning the receiver markings is that they had not at this stage evolved into the typical or 'standard' markings as found on BSA Shirley rifles of later 1943, 1944, and 1945. Occasionally Maltby rifles have been noted fitted with 2 groove barrels which appear to be original.

BSA SHIRLEY (B, M47, M47/C)

BSA was numerically by far the greatest provider of rifles for the conversion programme, and was probably the only provider for rifles made from 1943 onwards. (Though some early Savage rifles may have been partially converted by Holland & Holland near the end of the No.4, (T) conversion programme in 1945 or early 1946. (More on Savage rifles later)).

Typical manufacturer's markings vary according to when a rifle was made, BSA using the following markings:

- 'B' from 1941 till some point in 1943
- 'M47' during part of 1943
- 'M47/C' from later 1943 onwards

The serial numbering system changed during the lifetime of production of the No. 4 rifle at BSA, with early rifles (1941 and 1942) having four digit numbers with or without a letter prefix, such as 0299, 1500, A2619 etc. By 1943 serial numbers consisted of a two-letter prefix followed by a four digit number. Interestingly the first letter of the prefix always seems to be A, with the second letter working its way through the alphabet e.g. AM4189, AR5185, AU6768 etc. It is thought that by New Year 1944 the AV range had been reached, as AV block rifles have been observed, some dated 1943 and some dated 1944. However early in 1944 serials changed again, to consist of five digit numbers starting with the number '3' initially without, but thereafter with, a single letter prefix e.g. 31159, B30538, H37486, R31894. This system continued till the cessation of No. 4 rifle production at BSA, and the latest production block of 'T' conversions that we have encountered is the 'X' prefix block, dated 1945. Note that although assembly of No. 4 (T)'s continued at Holland & Holland until April 1946, no 1946 dated rifles have been observed, although some of the last batch of Kershaw No. 32 Mk 3 telescopes bear a 1946 date (& some are 1945 dated). In rifle production transition from 1944 to 1945 date seems to have occurred at approximately the 'P' & 'R' prefixes, as rifles have been encountered in both of these serial number blocks sometimes bearing 1944 & sometimes 1945 dates.

The receiver sidewall 'T' is universally present on all M47/C marked rifles (with the exception of a few 'less telescope' partial conversions), though is usually absent on B 1941/42 marked rifles, and is more often than not absent on M47 1943 rifles. Its presence starts to become more consistent at around the AS/AT production blocks of 1943. Not infrequently early rifles will

be found bearing a non-standard style or size of 'T' on the side of the receiver. We consider these rifles were more likely than not to have had this marking added after issue, by ordnance personnel. The 'TR' marking is usually present on all M47 1943 rifles onwards and is sometimes present even on 1941 dated equipment. The 'S' mark on the cut-off block is found again generally on most rifles from 1943 onwards, though could quite legitimately be missing even on a later rifle if the weapon's rear sight required to be replaced upon conversion to 'T' specification.

The now well recognised 'D6E' examiners mark is generally present on the left rear body adjacent to the bolt-way on rifles from some point in 1943 onwards. (It is generally present on M47/C marked rifles). It has also been noted on the knox-form on 1941 dates BSA rifles, and occasionally on non 'T' converted BSA rifles. This last finding is curious, yet could be explained if such rifles were accepted for conversion, duly marked, but then the conversion was never effected. The S51 mark of Holland & Holland is almost universally present, even on 1941 rifles. The only exceptions one would expect would be the 100 .22" calibre rifles that BSA converted, apparently for training purposes, in August 1944. Parts were supplied by Holland & Holland, but the conversions were effected at the BSA factory, and these rifles were supposedly fitted with No 32 Mk2 telescopes. It is also believed that the receivers were marked B44 rather than M47/C 1944. Barrels were sleeved rather than solid, and it is thought likely that they were numbered from 1 to 100.

Finally, some late rifles, such as those 1945 dated weapons in the 'X' prefix block, have been noted with small broad arrow stamped onto the lower aspect of the side of the front body pad.

SAVAGE PRODUCTION

All Savage made rifles subsequently converted to No. 4 (T)'s appear to be of early manufacture, being dated 1941 or 1942. There has been more controversy as to whether only Mk1 rifles were converted, or both Mk1's and Mk1"s. Similarly, arguments amongst collectors continue as to whether one or two batches were converted, and if so, when. Many feel there were probably two distinct batches of Savage rifles converted by Holland & Holland, (though all using early rifles); the first being fitted with No. 32 Mk 1 telescopes alongside contemporary British rifles produced by BSA and Maltby, and being amongst the early Holland & Holland conversions. The suggestion that there may have been a second batch of rifles converted later, stems from the fact that a quantity of predominantly Savage made rifles (but also a few BSA) have turned up on the civilian market, mainly in the USA, and often in transit cases, stencilled to the effect that they were issued 'less telescope'. It has been suggested that these rifles were converted but not fitted with the telescopes near the termination of the sniper rifle conversion contracts in 1945 or early 1946. We are not aware of any documented evidence to support or refute this belief, but some have doubts as by sometime in 1943, the classical TR, T, D6E markings had evolved, so one might reasonably expect these to be present on late conversions. They are not, at least not in our experience, and we remain open minded about when exactly these "scopeless" Savage rifles were converted.

The fact that only early production American rifles were converted, does however, explain the scarcity of Savage Mk1* (T) rifles. They certainly exist, but only in small numbers as it seems the case that supply of Savage rifles for conversion probably ceased coincidentally shortly after the changeover in production from Mk1 to Mk1* rifles. Indeed the highest serial number of any Savage No. 4 (T) that we have examined, is in the 15C range, and all Mk1* rifles that we have owned, seen, or heard of are in the 12, 13, 14, or 15C blocks.

Another unusual finding noted on two 14C Savage rifles was the presence of two grooved barrels. These were most definitely the rifles' original barrel. Perhaps they simply slipped through the net?

LONG BRANCH PRODUCTION

Long Branch, a suburb of Toronto, was the only location outside the UK to set up No. 4 (T) sniper rifles. However, in the main, specifications were the same as for UK converted rifles, with two notable exceptions being those rifles fitted with the C No. 32 TP (Lyman Alaskan) and C No. 67 telescopes. Additionally, further independent experimentation was carried out on the rifle and scope combinations, but none of this reached production status. Assembly of No. 4 (T)'s commenced in December 1942 and continued steadily throughout the war, until the last rifles were completed in December 1945. This gave a grand total of 1141 equipments. By no means, all of these rifles were produced for Canadian 'home' use, and 500 – 600 equipments were produced under contract for UK forces. It is stated that those rifles intended for Canadian issue were stamped with on the top of the receiver ring. Certainly some rifles bear this mark, though how consistently it was applied is uncertain.

All telescopes were produced by Research Enterprises Ltd., of Sherbrooke, Quebec, and supply of these instruments was always the rate limiting factor in the 'T' conversion process. The vast majority of equipments followed the British patterns precisely, although the Canadians did produce one minor hybrid of the No 32 scope: the C No 32 Mk1A, which in UK service would simply have been an early production Mark 2. It possessed 1 MOA range and deflection adjustment, though still retained the separate eye lenses , rather than possessing the self-contained 'cell' found on the later British Mk2's and all Canadian designated Mk2's. It would seem that in Canadian service, to qualify as a Mk 2 telescope the device had to have both 1 MOA clicker plates and the ocular lens cell, whereas the British were less fussy – 1 MOA adjustment alone was good enough!

Markings, perhaps not surprisingly, do not follow British tendency. Nearly all Canadian rifles examined bear a receiver sidewall 'T', although, whilst two different sizes have been commonly noted, neither bear the 'serifs' of the British style 'T'. Some are approx. 1/8" high and others approx. 1/16". Again with equipments being set up on a different continent and with different personnel, it should not surprise the tyro to find that the 'D6E', 'TR' and 'S' marks were not employed on Long Branch 'T' conversions. Canadian examiners marks are present on the knox form of the barrel, together with a rather unique stamp in the shape of a Maltese cross, present on key non-interchangeable components. 'TP' and 'C No 67' bearing rifles also possess examiners marks on their mount bases, together with rifle serial numbers on the centre 'flat' of the top mount assembly.

A Few Points for No 4 (T) Collectors

Cheek pieces may be:

Beech – most commonly, (and identified by the pale 'flecks' in the wood).

Walnut – on Canadian rifles

Ash – observed commonly on 1944 produced M47C rifles

Forends: Serial numbers of British set up No. 4 (T)'s are generally stamped along the forend, rather than around the camber of the wood, as is found on standard No. 4's. The numbers are located at the muzzle end.

Type of woodwork: With the exception of the Trials rifles, early production T's such as ROFM and B 1941 rifles, were stocked up in beech not walnut, though the wood is darker than the typical post-war 'blonde' beech, and often does superficially resemble pale walnut. Early Savage rifles were stocked in a curiously 'orange' coloured wood, which is in fact birch, but suitably stained to give it this characteristic orange/brown colour.

Foresight Blocks: Whilst it is stipulated that only split blocks should be used, in practice, many rifles were converted still bearing their solid blocks. This is a particular common finding on 1944 dated rifles.

Rear Sights: Savage sent many spares to Long Branch when the former factory completed its No. 4 contracts in mid-1944. Hence Canadian No. 4's, including No. 4 (T)'s will often be encountered bearing Savage made parts, the rear sight being a common example. Also, we have found a number of BSA made rifles, usually dated 1943, fitted with Savage made rear sights, which appear to be original. Most of these rifles do not bear the 'S' on the (redundant) cut-off block. It appears that a batch of Savage made rear sights were supplied to Holland & Holland, for fitting to otherwise satisfactory rifles, but which had been supplied equipped with the Mk2 ("battle") sight. This finding has been confirmed by the discovery of wartime memo's referring to the supply of a quantity of Savage made sights to Holland & Holland for use on needy rifles in the conversion process.

CONCLUSION

The No. 4 (T) snipers' rifle had an illustrious service history, having coped with the adversity of commando raids on occupied Europe, hard use in the mountains of Italy, the heat and humidity of the Far East, and of course, the great battles across Northern Europe, the low countries, and on into Germany during 1944 and 1945. Subsequent service use included the Korean War and innumerable minor conflicts until it was finally replaced by the rifle, 7.62mm L42 A1, in 1970. A final accolade being that the L42 A1 was itself, essentially the No. 4 (T) sniper's rifle converted to 7.62mm NATO calibre. Thus the success of this sniping system continued until the L42 was placed in War Reserve Stores in 1992, upon its replacement by the L96 rifle. However some of these L42A1 rifles were sold off in the mid 1990's & so are still giving sterling service on numerous ranges around the world, alongside their No4 (T) cousins. Fortunately for their new owners their targets no longer shoot back!