

The Early Short, Magazine Lee-Enfield Rifle as Issued 1902–1932

By Kirk E. Brumbaugh

“The essence of infantry tactics consists in breaking down the enemy’s resistance by the weight and direction of its fire, and then completing his overthrow by assault. Although the enemy may not await the assault, infantry must be constantly animated with the desire to close with him. Troops under cover, unless enfiladed, can seldom be forced to retire by fire alone, and a decision by fire, even if possible, takes long to obtain. To drive an enemy from the field, assault, or the immediate threat of it, is almost always necessary.”

General Staff, War Office, Field Service Regulations,

Part I

(London: HMSO 1909 as amended 1912)

The history of the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) rifle is intertwined with events which set the strategic and



tactical environment in which it was thrust when first issued in 1903. As a “weapons system,” the Lee rifle, designed by American James Paris Lee, had been in British service for over a decade, first as a long rifle (1888), later also as a carbine (1894). Combat experience in the Sudan in 1898, and the Boer War of 1899–1902, revealed the limitations of the rifle and carbine in their then current form and led to a fundamental overhaul of British Army Doctrine and thought on how training, and development of a new rifle, should take place.

Armies are frequently accused of planning for the “last war.” For Britain and Empire forces, the period of 1900 through 1914 demonstrated exactly that. The question of whether training and doctrine are influenced by weapons development, or vice versa, is a “chicken or egg” question. In the case of the SMLE the answer lies somewhere in the middle. By 1899 Britain’s two most prominent soldiers, Lord Roberts of Kandahar (otherwise immortalized by Rudyard Kipling in his poem *Bobs*) and Field Marshal Lord Kitchener of Khartoum (made Minister of War and cabinet member at the beginning of the Great War), were critical of Army marksmanship training and the accuracy of the “long” Magazine Lee-Enfield (MLE) then in issue. The carbine’s (LEC) performance was by this time thoroughly discredited. A universal length rifle for infantry, crew served weapons, vehicles, and cavalry was beginning to be viewed as necessary. This is a trend which all major powers followed during the Inter-War Period 1919–1939.



James Paris Lee



Lord Roberts



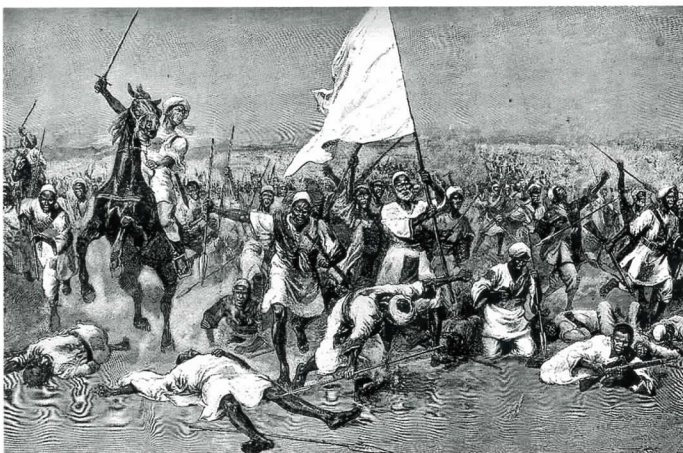
Lord Kitchener

The SMLE was largely developed in response to “lessons learned” reports from the Sudan and South Africa. The Lee rifle and carbine were not sufficiently accurate (tests showed the rifle’s sights as manufactured were off, and shot 12 inches high at 200 yards) to be of value in close combat. Reports also criticized absence of charger-loading capability as the Boers’ Mauser possessed, propensity of the Lee’s butt stocks to work loose, over-heating of the barrel in sustained fire, and inadequate provision for windage adjustment of the rear sight. Inadequacies of the issue Lee rifle and carbine, bad tactics reminiscent of the 1960s movie *Zulu*, and poor marksmanship training led to a series of stinging British defeats at the hands of the Boers. The Boers were descendants of German immigrant farmers who fought largely in independent small units called, “Commandos” and improvised larger units. Their tactics were hallmarked by long-range sniping and close-quarter ambush. In both forms of combat, the Lees were viewed as lacking.

Criticism is one thing, finding a solution that was feasible both fiscally and logistically was quite another. A newly reorganized Small Arms Committee was formed and convened in January 1900 to develop a new service rifle to solve deficiencies identified in the field in a fashion that fit in the

Army’s limited budget. (Britain, it must be remembered, was a sea power. Most military spending went to the Royal Navy locked in a “Dreadnought Race” with Imperial Germany. The Army’s needs were simply a second priority.) Thus, any new rifle should use the Lee action if possible. The Committee tasked the Royal Small Arms Factory Enfield to develop the arm, which as it turns out was already in the works, and by 1901 alternative designs were ready for trials. The trials rifles were of two patterns denominated type “A” and type “B.” Nothing further need be said except that the type “A” rifle as slightly modified was approved as the SMLE Mk I on December 23, 1902. Shortly after the SMLE I was introduced, minor changes to the rear handguard and rear sight resulted in the rifle being “re-sealed” and re-introduced on January 1, 1904. At the same time, training and doctrine were being reviewed. By 1909 new Field Service Regulations (the Manual) were published. This Manual reaffirmed “Fire and Movement” as the established British Army mode of battle. The Manual for the first time fully recognized capabilities of massed infantry fire from machine guns and rifles and gave guidelines for their deployment. The basic maneuver envisioned was for infantry fire from troops using available cover to suppress enemy fire to facilitate an attack over open ground. This was a change from prior doctrine which largely relied on fixed massed troops in the open in defense to attrit enemy charges. The new doctrine had the Sudanese desert and African veldt in mind.

Doctrine evolved correspondingly with the SMLE when it was approved in 1902. Weapons development and improved tactics were incorporated into a new Army structure which evolved between 1906 and 1909. Known as



Charge of the Dervishes at Omdurman



Typical Boer Commando

“Haldane’s Reforms” after its author, Secretary of State for War Sir (Later Lord) Richard Burden Haldane, they modified the Army’s structure into a Modern Divisional Structure, created a standing reserve the “Territorial Army,” and established an Officer Training Corps at Public Schools and Universities in Britain.



Lord Haldane

The Mk I and Mk II

Cond, SMLEs attempted to address major criticisms leveled against the Magazine Lee-Enfield and Lee-Enfield Carbine. The new rifle was based on the identical action as the MLE and MLEC. This led to common use of the Lee action for both new made rifles and conversions of long rifles and carbines to SMLE type.

Outward modifications consisted of charger loading capability via a somewhat complex charger guide milled on the left side of the receiver and a “floating” guide on the bolt-head. It was to be fed from a stamped sheet steel clip holding five rounds which fed into the 10-round magazine. The barrel was 5 inches shorter than the MLE and wooden stocks and handguards fully encased the barrel. The bayonet was

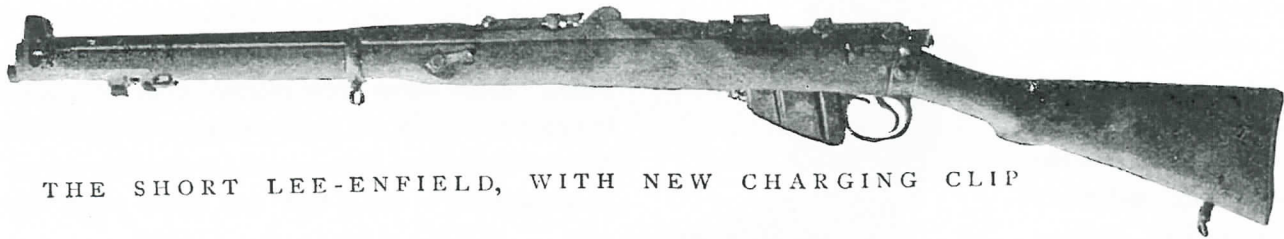
SMLE MK I



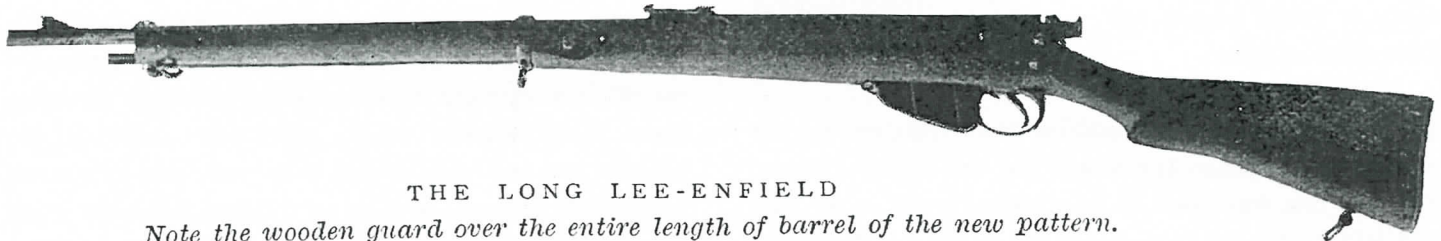
mounted to a steel “nose cap” rather than the barrel (See Appendix 1). The rear sight was protected by a guard consisting of milled “ears” that attached to a single clip rear handguard, the rear sight adjusted for both windage and elevation. “Volley sights” were retained from the previous rifle but recalibrated for the shorter barrel’s change in trajectory. Although provisions were made for a magazine cut-off, it was to be installed in Naval issue and Indian Army issue rifles only.

A new safety reminiscent of the Lee-Metford Mk I rifle of 1888 was fitted to the receiver. A solid buttplate replaced the rifle and carbines’ butt trap. Hidden changes also were made. They included weight relief holes drilled in the wooden butt and bayonet stud in the nose cap, an internal barrel band mounted midway on the barrel, and the barrel forward of the band was free floating to allow for expansion of the fore stock. Because the barrel was free floating, nose caps and fore stocks were not numbered to the rifle. A new cocking piece with thumb removable set screw was fitted and the trigger changed from single-stage to a two-stage to mimic the Mauser. Finally, the butt fastening screw was squared at the tip and aligned with a slot at the back of the fore stock to keep the butt from working loose in service.

Charger loading and the fully wood-encased barrel were to prevent burned fingers and facilitate massed indirect fire at long range. Toward that end, a plate was inletted into the fore stock with a front sight bead. The bead is attached to a pointer dialed to ranges up to 2,800 yards. The rear sight was a flip-up peep. These features were carried over from the long rifle. With ammunition improvements, trajectory and effective range increased (for .303 Mk VII SA it was



THE SHORT LEE-ENFIELD, WITH NEW CHARGING CLIP



THE LONG LEE-ENFIELD

Note the wooden guard over the entire length of barrel of the new pattern.

Size comparison of the Lee Enfield with the new SMLE from a period article.

2,800 yards, although effective range was viewed as 1,000 yards). Lord Roberts toured England to encourage, "as a patriotic duty," the building of new rifle ranges to encourage better marksmanship and accommodate training at longer range. (Roberts got his new rifle ranges, and Army training did increase.) Haldane's revised Army structure



Mohammed Abdullah Hassan "the Mad Mullah"

Commander of the Indian Army, recommended adoption of the SMLE. The new SMLE was first trialed in combat in British Somaliland, a theatre under Indian Army Authority, chasing Mohammed Abdullah Hassan known to British troops as "the Mad Mullah" — a charmer who first introduced beheading into Jihad.

Experience in the field led to alterations and a re-designation of the rifle as the SMLE Mk I*. The SMLE Mk I* saw reintroduction of the trap buttplate to house a pull through and an oil bottle with cleaning jag, sharp edges removed from receivers, removal of the loop secured Magazine, redesign of the Magazine and follower, coin slotted keeper to secure the cocking piece, provision for a sling swivel on the trigger guard (for cavalry use), a strengthened rear hand-guard with double pronged clip, and a spring-loaded centering stud inlayed in the fore stock. Nosecaps and fore-stock were serial numbered to the rifle and an "S" was stamped in

SMLE MK III



were trained for the "Mad Minute" where they were expected to fire 15 aimed rounds per minute. The idea was short periods of suppressing fire. Each soldier carried 120 rounds on him in stripper clips. Lord Kitchener, as then

the fore-stock denoting "stud." As improvements were made, earlier "Marks" were to be upgraded to the service standard, which makes unaltered examples of early SMLEs scarce at best. In the meantime long rifles, carbines, and the other now obsolete arms not capable of being upgraded were continually being withdrawn from service (a lofty goal that was not fully achieved in backwaters of the Empire until after the Great War.)

A bewildering number of variants of SMLE rifles were issued between 1904 and 1914 as the Services tried to keep their SMLE inventory updated. The SMLE Mk I action as slightly modified became the Mk I* and remained unmodified through the Mk I**, a purely naval variant, and the corresponding Mk I*** land pattern. Both were introduced post-1907 and incorporated SMLE Mk III pattern post and notch sights replacing the SMLE Mk I's barley-corn sights. The Army's SMLE Mk IIs (Cond) inventory once upgraded to Mk II* (Cond) incorporated Mk I* improvements. The Army did not re-designate rifles once they were fitted with post and notch sights. (Thus, it is possible to have two variants of Mk I* and Mk II*.) Neither the Army nor Navy re-designated when fixed charger bridges were fitted post-1912, so two variants of Mk I**(N) or Mk I*** exist.

Nor did re-sighting of rifles for Mk VII ammunition necessarily result in re-designig-

Europe. Troops deployed overseas on Imperial service, including India, Africa, and the Middle East were issued with rifles sighted for .303 Mk VI ammunition (See Appendix 2). It would take until 1917 for Mk VII rounds to be in universal issue. The ammunition change and coming of the Great War accelerated attempts to standardize rifles, especially SMLE variants issued throughout the Empire. Invariably, anomalies existed due not only to the existence of two distinct issue cartridges, but also to the pressing of Royal Navy variants into land service. (Ships' stores were stripped of SMLEs and substitute rifles were issued. Most notably U.S. made P14's, Japanese Arisakas, and Canadian Ross Mk III's.) Ishopore SMLE production was sent to France. Indian Army Troops stationed in India were issued with P14s beginning in 1916. Rifle types issued during the Great War are summarized in Appendix 3.

The fixed charge-bridge ushered in new conversions of rifles that the Regular Army and certain Territorial Army Battalions went to War with in 1914. As noted, in Europe the SMLE Mk III and IV (Cond) were sighted for .303 Mk VII SA, everywhere else .303 Mk VI SA was issued. Post-1911, SMLE Mk I*s were re-sighted to .303 Mk VII SA if issued to Regular Army units assigned to the Continent in event of War. They



SMLE MK I**



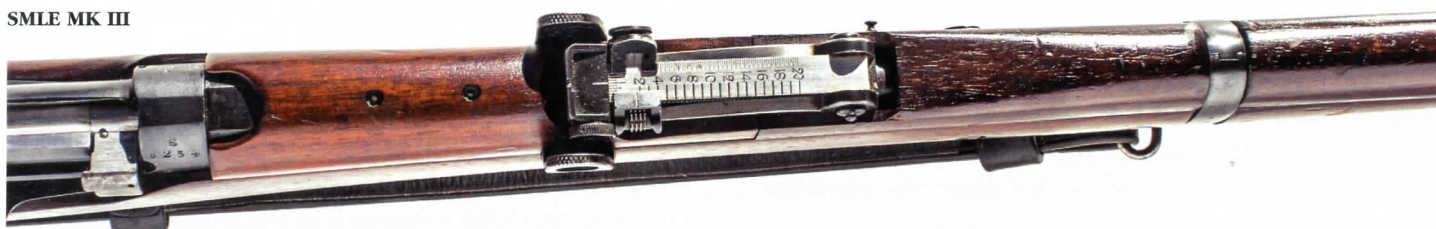
SMLE MK II*** (N)

nation. Thus, a physical examination of volley plates and rear sight beds is advisable. When re-sighted, barrels were to be stamped "HV" for high-velocity, but this was not always done. The SMLE Mk III was introduced in 1907 and featured a fixed charger-bridge, improved rear sights, stronger rear sight guard, and an improved rear handguard. When introduced, it was sighted for SA .303 Mk VI.

At the beginning of WWI in August 1914, Mk VII ammunition was issued only to British Regular and Territorial Army units, and Royal Marines and Naval units stationed in the United Kingdom or which were deployed in

were not re-sighted until a comprehensive overhaul in September 1914 when they were officially re-designated SMLE Mk I***. Receiver markings are not uniform nor are they accurate to type; thus, the safer way to tell is the volley plate, which should be marked "LES 2," and lowered height of rear sight base. Naval conversions as previously discussed followed a separate system.

SMLE Mk Is and Mk IIs (Conds), Mk IIIs and Mk IVs (Conds) in various sub-variants remained in combat throughout WWI. The SMLE was a complicated and expensive rifle to produce. It had over 130 parts, almost all of which were milled. During the War, as battle damaged rifles were rebuilt, they were upgraded and simplified. Fixed Mk III pattern



SMLE MK III



SMLE MK II***(N)

SMLE MKIII* with 20-round Magazine



charger bridges were fitted to Mk Is and Mk II (Conds) and volley sights were removed where damaged, but the rifles' names did not change. Simplifications to the SMLE Mk III were permitted effective January 1916 (although BSA examples dating from late 1915 can be found). The simplified rifle was designated SMLE III*. The Mk III* incorporated numerous simplifications to increase production, necessary as a result of devastating combat losses. The simplifications include elimination of lightening holes in the butt stock and

Howell Semi-Auto Conversion



nosecap, relief cuts to the rear sight "ears," elimination of volley sights, wind gauge rear sight, and provision for magazine cut-off. In addition, the cocking piece was simplified, the swivel at the front of the trigger guard was omitted and

substituted by a "loop" to secure an action cover, and later the marking disc in the buttstock was also eliminated. Both variants of Mk III continued in production through the War in Britain at RSAF Enfield, LSA, BSA, in India at Ishapore, and in Australia at Lithgow. By the end of the Great War, production stood at over 1 million SMLEs of all variations. The SMLE was manufactured from 1908 at the Rifle Factory Ishapore in India, from 1903 at RSAF Enfield, BSA, BSA/Sparkbook, and LSA in Britain, and from 1913 at Lithgow in Australia. In addition to SMLE service rifles in .303, three distinct marks of .22 trainers were made (converted from worn .303 SMLE rifles) and issued, the SMLE .22 Mk III, the Patt 14 No.1 .22, and Patt 14 No. 2 .22. The Great War also stimulated attempts to

increase the SMLE's fire power. Extended magazines of up to 20-round capacity were trialed in 1918. Semi-automatic conversions of the SMLE were privately developed and trialed from 1916 into the 1920s.

SEMI-AUTO CONVERSIONS

Rifle grenades were issued beginning in 1914, and various wire cutting attachments were developed. Twenty-one different sniper conversions were issued. (They were not successful for the reason that the telescopes were offset to the left. By late 1916, the British Army's Sniper School trained only with the Winchester-made Patt. 14s with a special peep sight.)

SNIPERS

Just as the Sudan Campaign and Boer War had revealed short comings of the SMLE's predecessors, so did the Great War stimulate discussion of a new service rifle. The Lee rifle was never universally popular with the Army nor was it with the British NRA which viewed it as less accurate and weaker

Typical Scoped SMLE Sniper



Early SMLE Sniper with Galleon sights



than Mauser's system. Strong elements in both viewed the Mauser system as superior. This influence had led to development of the Mauser-based Pattern 13 Rifle and its rimless .276 cartridge which

replaced. But the War did come and at its end millions of SMLEs, all in .303, were dispersed throughout an Empire which comprised over 300 million inhabitants and covered a quarter of the land surface of the globe (See Appendix 6).

After a brief flirtation with the American Pederson-designed semi-automatic .276 rifle made by Vickers-Armstrong in England during 1931 trials, the Army again sought to address the SMLE's shortcoming.

were trialed in 1913. The design was converted to .303 and manufactured in quantity as the Pattern 14 in the United States by Eddystone, Remington, and Winchester. It is probable that, had War not erupted, the SMLE would have been

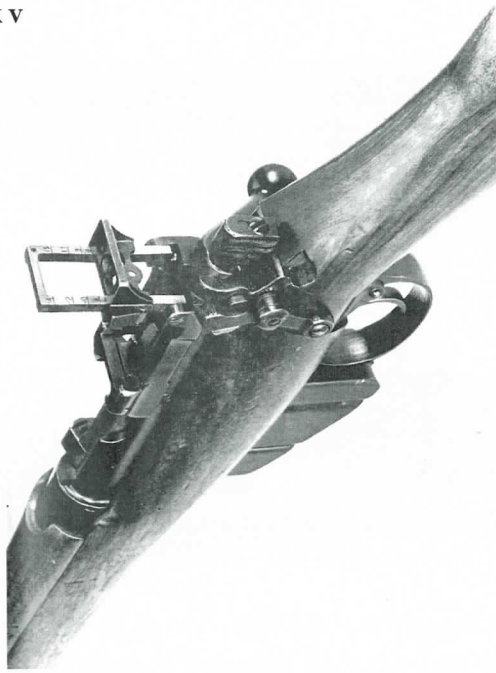
An entirely new rifle and cartridge was viewed as fiscally impossible, and attempts were made to improve the existing rifle. One of the main arguments was that a receiver-



Pattern 13 (top) Pattern 14 (bottom)



Vickers Pederson (w/ 10 round en bloc clip)



A Comparison of the Lee-Enfield Rifle and Carbine With the
Short Magazine Lee-Enfield Rifle

Specifications of the SMLE:

Weight w/o bayonet	8 lbs. 2 1/2 oz.
Length w/o bayonet	3' 8 9/16"
Barrel calibre	.303
Barrel length	2' 13/16"
Barrel grooves	5
Barrel twist	1/10"
Sights leaf	2,000 yds.
Volley plate	2,700 yds.

Compared to the Magazine Lee-Enfield:

Weight w/o bayonet	9 lbs. 5 oz.
Length w/o bayonet	4' 1 1/2"
Barrel calibre	.303**

SMLE MK VI w/ bayonet



mounted peep sight would improve the battle performance of conscripted soldiers. Toward that end, the SMLE Mk V, which was designed to use existing SMLE components to the maximum extent and be adaptable to convert the Mk III inventory to Mk V standard, was introduced in 1922 and rialized.

Over 20,000 were made. In the end, it was not adopted because it was even more complicated to make than the SMLE Mk III. Trials continued, and eventually the SMLE Mk VI, which the No. 4 Mk I Trials rifle was developed from 1931-1933 (hardly a traditional SMLE at all), led to an entirely new bolt-action rifle being developed, the No. 4 Mk I. With the development of the SMLE Mk VI, the age of the early SMLE in British Service came to an end. The Mk III remained in production in the UK throughout the inter-war period at BSA and Enfield. Once WWII began, BSA continued production on MKIII and MKIII* receivers and components through 1943. However, production in England and later North America really shifted to the No. 4 in 1941 and stayed there. Australia and India never made the No. 4 and retained the Mk III into the 1950s. Recently discovered examples show that Ishapore produced the SMLE into the 1980s.

Barrel length	2' 6 3/16"
Barrel grooves	5
Barrel twist	1/10"
Sights leaf	2,000 yds.
Volley plate	2,800 yds.

and Carbine:

Weight (bayonet n/a)	7 lbs. 7 oz.
Length (bayonet n/a)	3' 3 5/16"
Barrel calibre	.303
Barrel length	1' 8 3/4"
Barrel grooves	5
Barrel twist	1/10
Sights leaf (no volley plate)	2,000 yds.

APPENDIX 2

Specification of SA .303 Ball Mk VI With Mk VII Ball Ammunition

The Cordite .303 in SA Ball Cartridge Mk VI was introduced in British service on January 29, 1904. Bull. 215 gr. Bull. length "1.255", 1,970 fps, overall length 3.037" (SA .303 Mk II was 3.05").

On November 3, 1910, a new cartridge — the .303 SA Ball Cartridge Mk VII — was introduced. Bull. wt 174 gr, spire point w/ Bull. length 1.275", Long overall 3.037.

APPENDIX 3

Great War Issue Lees

Army Land Pattern Rifles

Regular Army Standard SMLE Mk III and SMLE Mk IV

Cond

Regular Army Substitute Standard SMLE Mk I***, Mk II*

Cond

Territorial Army Standard CLLE Mk I* and CLLM Mk I*

In August 1915, Navy variants pressed into land service included the SMLE Mk I**, II** Cond, and II*** Cond. Their sights were recalibrated for Mk VII ammunition accordingly.

Naval Variants

SMLE Mk I**

SMLE Cond Mk II**

SMLE Cond Mk II***

(Post-1911 it was recalibrated for .303 Mk VII SA but was not re-named.)

APPENDIX 4

Names of Lee Variants

1888-1926 Rifles

Long Lee Rifles and Carbines

Magazine, Lee-Metford, Carbine	Mk I (MLMC)
Magazine, Lee-Enfield, Carbine	Mk I, I* (MLEC)
Magazine, Lee-Enfield Rifle	I, I* (MLE)
Magazine, Lee-Metford Rifle	I, I*, II, II* (MLM)
Magazine, Charger Loading Rifle	I, I*, II (CLLM, CLLE)

Short, Magazine Lee-Enfields

Short, Magazine Lee-Enfield SMLE (Land)	Mk I, Mk I*, Mk I***
Mk II Cond, Mk II* Cond,	
Mk III Cond, Mk IV Cond, Mk III*, Mk V	
Short, Magazine Lee-Enfield SMLE Naval	I**, II** Cond, II***
Cond	

Trainers

Mk's I, II, III, Patt 14 No 1, Patt 14 No 2, Patt 14 Long	
Post-1926	
Rifle No 1 Mk III (Mk III, III*, IV Cond (SMLE))	
Rifle No 2 Mk IV* (.22 trainer w/ solid barrel and brass catching mag case, No 2 Mk IV - if no case)	
Rifle No 3 Mk I* Patt 14 Mk I*	

Bayonets: There were two distinct variants of bayonet issued with the early SMLE. The first bayonet, the Patt.'03, was of the same length of the Long Lee's Patt. 88 bayonet, meaning that the overall length of the SMLE with bayonet was 5" shorter than the MLE with Patt. 88 bayonet fixed. Criticism of the supposed disadvantage of the short rifle and Patt '03 bayonet against potential foes led to adoption of the Patt. '07, which when fixed gave the SMLE the same length as the Long Lee-Enfield and Patt "88 bayonet. The Mk VI and No. 4 Trials rifles were issued with cruciform bladed spike bayonets.

Pattern 1903	Blade length 12"
(Approved December 14, 1902)	Overall length 16.8"
Pattern 1907*	Blade length 17"
(Approved January 30, 1908)	Overall length 21.8"

*The Patt. '07 bayonet was designed based on Japan's Type 30 bayonet with a hooked quillon. The hook was later eliminated in 1913. Newly made bayonets and many rebuilt post-1913 either were made without hooks or had them removed.



Magazines: Four different magazine cases, all with a capacity of 10 rounds, were used with the SMLE during its service life. The case variant is stamped on the rib: 2, 3, and 4. (Case 1 is unmarked.) All used a flat "zig-zag" spring. Followers varied depending on whether SA .303 Mk VI or Mk VII was to be chambered. (The follower for Mk VI ammunition sloped upward at the tip to accommodate the cartridge's round nose. The follower used with Mk VII is stamped "3".)

Dial Sight Plates. Dial sight plates were inlaid on the left side of SMLE Mk Is. I through III fore stocks, as well as corresponding conversions, were made prior to January 1, 1916.

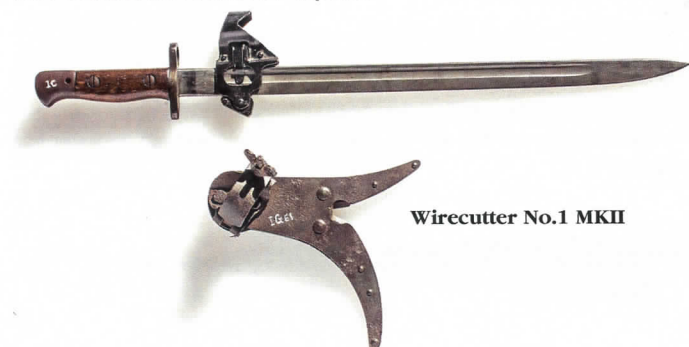
The fore stock was also inlet for a corresponding “flip-up” peep rear sight.

The design was carried over from the Long Lee and varied only in yardage graduations on the plate. When graduated for .303 SA Mk VI, the graduation extended to 2,800 yards and was marked “LES.” Upon adoption and issuance of .303 Mk VII, the graduate was also 2,800 yards, and the angle of elevation was decreased to accommodate the Mk VII’s flatter trajectory, the plate was marked “LES2.”

Wire Cutters

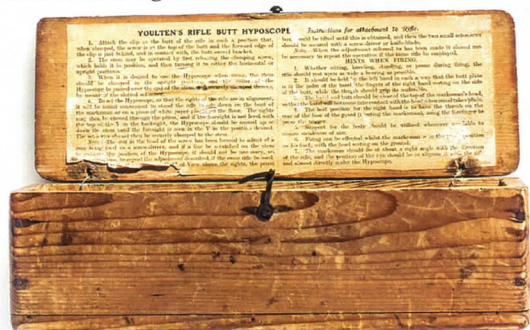
Several patterns of wire cutting devices were developed during the War. The two most common were the Wire Breaker No. 1, which fitted to the P’07 bayonet; and the Wirecutter No. 1 Mk II, which clamped to the SMLE noscap.

Wire Breaker No. 1 on P’07 bayonet



Wirecutter No.1 MKII

Over Trench Sight



No. 3 Grenade



Over Trench Sights

Various methods of sighting to facilitate firing of an SMLE over trenches were made. An example was developed by Youlten. A duplex mirror was fitted to the SMLE’s butt stock. The rifle was fitted and fired from various locally made mountings.

Rifle Grenades

Various patterns of rifle grenades were made for the SMLE. The No. 3 is a common type and clipped to the SMLE noscap prior to firing.

APPENDIX 6

Rifles held in British inventory in 1924, on the eve of re-designation were:

SMLE Mk III	252,998
SMLE Mk III*	1,333,865
SMLE Mk I and various other Marks for Conversion	91,118
Patt 1914	764,942
Patt 1914 Snipers	3,521
.22 Trainers of various Marks	11,539

Source: The Lee-Enfield, p. 191, Skennerton, Arms and Militaria Pres (2007)

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Tommy

I went into a public-'ouse to get a pint o' beer,

The publican 'e up an' sez, “We serve no red-coats here.”

The girls be'ind the bar they laughed an' giggled fit to die,

I outs into the street again an' to myself sez I:
O it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy, go
away";
But it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins," when the band
begins to play,
The band begins to play, my boys, the band begins to
play,
O it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins," when the band
begins to play.
I went into a theatre as sober as could be,
They gave a drunk civilian room, but 'adn't none for
me;
They sent me to the gallery or round the music-'alls,
But when it comes to fightin', Lord! they'll shove me in
the stalls!
For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy, wait
outside";
But it's "Special train for Atkins" when the trooper's on
the tide,
The troopship's on the tide, my boys, the troopship's
on the tide,
O it's "Special train for Atkins" when the trooper's on
the tide.
Yes, makin' mock o' uniforms that guard you while you
sleep
Is cheaper than them uniforms, an' they're starvation
cheap;
An' hustlin' drunken soldiers when they're goin' large
a bit
Is five times better business than paradin' in full kit.
Then it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy,
'ow's yer soul?"
But it's "Thin red line of 'eroes" when the drums begin
to roll,

The drums begin to roll, my boys, the drums begin to
roll,
O it's "Thin red line of 'eroes" when the drums begin
to roll.
We aren't no thin red 'eroes, nor we aren't no black-
guards too,
But single men in barricks, most remarkable like you;
An' if sometimes our conduct isn't all your fancy
paints,
Why, single men in barricks don't grow into plaster
saints;
While it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy,
fall be'ind,"
But it's "Please to walk in front, sir," when there's trou-
ble in the wind,
There's trouble in the wind, my boys, there's trouble in
the wind,
O it's "Please to walk in front, sir," when there's trouble
in the wind.
You talk o' better food for us, an' schools, an' fires, an'
all:
We'll wait for extry rations if you treat us rational.
Don't mess about the cook-room slops, but prove it to
our face
The Widow's Uniform is not the soldier-man's disgrace.
For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Chuck him
out, the brute!"
But it's "Saviour of 'is country" when the guns begin to
shoot;
An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' anything you
please;
An' Tommy ain't a bloomin' fool — you bet that
Tommy sees!
- *Rudyard Kipling*