



National Treasure?

Pete Moore considers the attraction of the Lee Enfield Service rifle

When I floated the idea of a story on Lee Enfield No.4 Service rifles past the Editor, he was adamant that it should not be a history lesson, as that area has been done to death. I agreed, as there's so much hard information in print and on the web already.

Dinosaur

All service rifles of this type are really dinosaurs by today's standards. Most were invented in the late 1900s and have seen at least one, if not two world wars, plus all the conflicts in between. In doing so, they have been thinned out by natural attrition and the surplus arms markets. However, there is no denying the jingoistic attraction of being able to own a piece of history, especially one made and used by your own country.

The Lee Enfield No.4 (all marks) and the earlier Short Magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE) are all about that. I suppose the heyday of this equipment for sport shooting was from the 1950s up to the early 2000s. Rifles were generally of good condition and plentiful, as was military surplus ammo. Occasionally, gems would turn up, like Peter Sarony (Armalon) locating a batch of unissued, Fazakerley, No.4 Mk 2s in the late 1990s. Made up until the 1950s, these were the pinnacle of the marque. I remember reviewing one and being

impressed, as I had never seen a pristine example. I bought it for not a lot of money, with another £100 buying me 1000 rounds of Greek HXP, Mk 8Z-type ball ammo to feed it. Those were the days!

Fulton's fettle

Back then, there were loads of competitions for Enfields etc. and companies like Fultons of Bisley did a roaring trade in making them shoot. Better triggers, aperture sights, and general fitting and fettling could improve things significantly. Plus, the NRA ran the Trafalgar Meeting, which is all about classic arms of this nature. Later, LERA (Lee Enfield Rifle Association) appeared, which as the name suggests dealt with this sort of hardware, and they have a following and even their own class in disciplines like Service Rifle.

Plentiful product

Being a Section 1 firearm, surplus military bolt-actions were plentiful

and as cheap as chips, with a lot of options - the British Lee Enfields, French MAS 36, Swiss Schmidt Ruben K31, Russian Mosin Nagants, German 98K Mausers, US 1903 Springfields, and Swedish M96 Mausers to name a few.

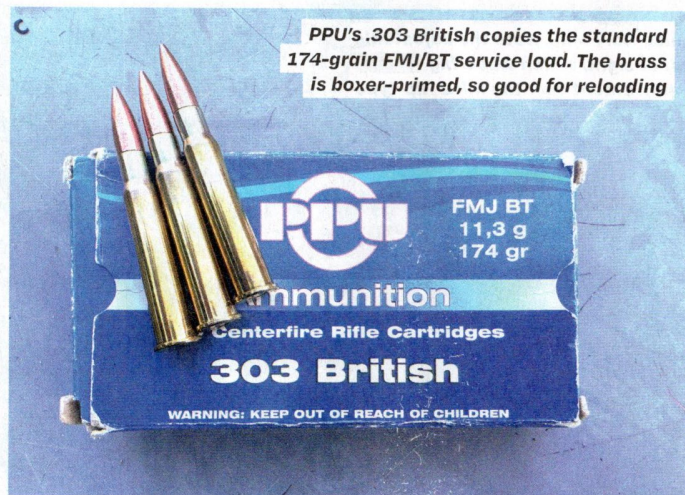
Henry Krank was one of the major players and offered a diverse range of older military calibres from PPU's (Prvi Partizan) range of ammo - .303 British, 7.92x57, 7.5 French, 7.5 Swiss, 6.5x55 SE, 6.5 Carcano, .30-06, 7.62x39, and even 8x33 Kurz. Smart move, as when military surplus fodder dried up, there was still a good supply of factory ammo for your shooting. Plus, you could reload.

The well is nearly dry

Let's face it, military surplus rifles have very much run out in terms of quantity, quality, and choice. This is sad, as future generations of shooters will be denied this avenue of our sport. So, the



Note the basic Mk2 L-flip sight, safety catch, and rough war finish



PPU's .303 British copies the standard 174-grain FMJ/BT service load. The brass is boxer-primed, so good for reloading



The rifle had a 10-round capacity and in service, came with two magazines. Here we see two full stripper clips on a canvas bandolier



Stripper clip, inserted prior to loading. This rifle is the earlier SMLE, but the system is identical

question is - does someone who has never owned or shot a self-loading rifle or handgun, really give a damn about some clunky, old, second-hand war horse?

You could say these disciplines and guns are an old man's sport and you'd probably be correct! Well, your Editor, Ed Jackson, had a crack with a K98 Mauser a while back and had a great day. He said it was fun, but would not consider owning one, as he has a more modern mindset about shooting.

The 100

It was with some interest that I saw a press release from Henry Krank recently, stating they had just received a mixed shipment of 100 Lee Enfield rifles (mainly No.4s). I picked a 1943, Canadian-made (Long Branch Arsenal) No.4 Mk 1, to test the waters. Kranks described it as follows: "Enfield No.4, 2-groove rifling, with matching numbers, woodwork in good condition, metal work in good

condition, blued and parkerised, bore in good condition, price £640".

Long Branch

This is a later WWII production gun, attested to by its 2-groove rifling, a simplified bolt removal system, and a basic Mk2, L-flip, aperture rear sight, which offers just two settings (300 and 600 yards). All done to speed up manufacture and save materials. The fit and finish were as described and not too bad for the period, plus the bore looked tidy.

If you're buying a No.4 as a shooter, then the Mk2 sight is not all that. At 50 yards and using 174-grain, boat-tailed, FMJ mil-spec ammo from PPU, it was shooting 8" high and 4" left, with 2-3" groups. At 100m, it was off the paper, and I had to aim a good 14" lower and 4" right to compensate.

Push

Zeroing adjustment is on the front sight only, which is

accomplished by a series of interchangeable elements, offering different height blades for elevation. Adjusting the windage is a simple matter of pushing it left or right, and you can even buy a tool for the job that is certainly more precise than a hammer and brass punch! The tool is the more sensible option, as the barrel of the No.4 is free-floated within the forend, and whacking it near the muzzle is perhaps not the best idea.

If you want more sophistication, get a version with the flip-up ladder/leaf rear sight. Marked up from 200 to 1300 yards, you can dial in the range easily, and folded down you also have access to a fixed battle sight. It's possible to buy these and retrofit them. Plus, there're a host of dedicated dealers out there, with pretty much every No.4 spare and accessory you could need. So, get onto the internet.

Cock on closing

The action is a bit clunky and cocks-on-closing, so requires a bit of extra effort. The safety catch is a rolling lever on the left and it is well-positioned. Feed is from a 10-round detachable box magazine, but the rifle was designed to be loaded through the top using 2 x 5-round stripper clips. Being

A nice No.4 Mk2. Note the adjustable ladder sight, which was a big improvement over the Mk 2 flip-type



rimmed, the .303 ammo must be set into the clips in a sequence - two rims up, three down, or vice versa, otherwise you will get feed jams. You need to practice this!

The 2-stage trigger was not bad, with a longish first pressure followed by a reasonable break of around 4-5 lbs. The furniture was walnut (beech was used in later models) and shows a scant semi-pistol grip, a butt with a low comb, and a metal butt plate. The forend fully encloses the barrel, except the last 2".

Slug it?

Kranks supplied PPU 174-grain ammo, and I added two reloads using Sierra 150 and 180-grain soft tip bullets, Ramshot propellants, and Lee dies. Reloading data is available, but some companies seem to have dropped the .303 British from their listings, which is perhaps an indication of its status.

Given most rifles of this type have been used and maybe abused, thoughts go to bore condition

and diameter. If your gun is shooting acceptable groups, then be content. However, you can slug the bore to determine the actual size, to see what suits. Some shooters will use hard-cast lead with a copper gas-check sized to the bore. I used this type in my 1944 Mosin Nagant carbine, sized to 0.312", and it worked well at shorter ranges.

Punchy

I have always found the No.4 with service ammo to be quite kicky. This is not helped by the metal butt plate and low/wide comb that really slaps you in the cheek. So, be aware. Also, do not be seduced by the No.5 Jungle Carbine. Without a doubt, the prettiest of the Enfield family,

its reduced dimension and hard rubber butt pad make it quite unpleased to use for longer periods. Plus, accuracy is not that good, given how barrels were cut down and in the main, badly finished at the muzzle.

Decision time

So, is a Lee Enfield No.4 for you? On the plus side, it's a piece of living history and pleasingly tactile to use. On the minus, recoil is noticeable, iron sights only, and as a surplus item, quality and ability will vary. The good news is there are lots of spare parts, and given the barrelled action is sound, then you can build yourself a nice rifle.

My thanks to Henry Krank & Co. for supplying the rifle and ammo. The majority of No.4s on offer seem to be of the Long Branch type (as described), but there are a few with aftermarket target sights, and as always, the condition varies, so I'd advise going to see what's on offer. Prices generally (depending on condition), seem to vary from around £550 to £800.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Name: Lee Enfield No.4 Mk I, Long Branch 1943

Condition: Fair/Good, Used

Calibre: .303 British

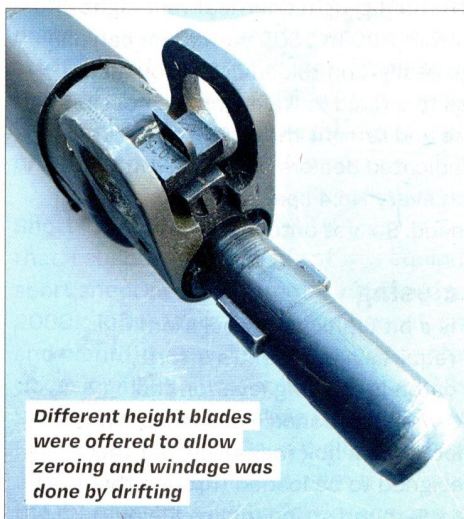
Capacity: 10 (DM)

Barrel: 25.5"

Weight: 9.2 lbs

Length: 44.5"

Contact: Henry Krank & Co Ltd - www.henrykrank.com



Different height blades were offered to allow zeroing and windage was done by drifting

A generic No.4 Mk2. These days the condition will vary, so be aware of what you're getting

