

KNOW YOUR ENFIELD

THE SNIPER RIFLE

NO.4 MK1 (T)

More historic military metal, courtesy of NIGEL GREENAWAY

EARLIER THIS year, Laurie Holland's articles on the Mosin-Nagant, in particular its affordable sniper derivatives, prompted me to write a series on the Rifle No.4 Mk1 (T), which many consider to be the finest sniper rifle of World War II. Laurie hinted that the price of a No.4(T), as I shall refer to it from now on, would be at least £1,000 above that of a Mosin-Nagant sniper. Nowadays the total price is more likely to be £1,750-£2,500 for a complete rifle with scope, and if you start adding scope tins, leather slings, lens-caps, scout regiment spotting scopes and wooden transit cases, the price will be even higher. All this has resulted in a veritable cottage industry of mismatched rebuilds, ranging from genuine rifles with the wrong scopes and mount brackets all the way through to outright fakes where the only genuine item is the No.32 sniper scope.

A good No.4(T) and good handloads will shoot to just over one minute of angle and will regularly hit an 18" wide Fig. 11 at 1000yd. These rifles were seeing action as recently as 1970 in Northern Ireland, and there were certainly some still in use alongside the replacement L42A1 sniper rifles as they entered service. The No.4(T) had an illustrious service record and is probably still the rifle to beat in the Classic class of the McQueen sniper competition.

As a 14-year-old cadet at school, I was introduced to firearms in the shape of a .22LR No.8 rifle. I soon progressed to shooting a No.4 rifle and heard all the horror stories about the kick of a .303, which proved to be quite unfounded. I spent the next four years, two or three times a week, being taught how to shoot by a Great Britain National Rifle coach. Since then I have had a long-term affinity with the No.4, and it was always an ambition of mine to acquire the 'Rolls Royce' version.

My personal experience of shooting a No.4(T) dates back to 1986, when my future wife lent me £500 to buy the complete equipment schedule you see in the picture: an all-matching, 1944, BSA made, No.4(T) complete with its No.32 Mk3 scope and leather lens caps in their metal case, sighting telescope, No.8 Mk1, all contained in the wooden chest, Small-Arms, No.15 Mk1. At the time it was my intention to use it in Practical Rifle competitions because I could not afford a Springfield Armoury National Match M14 and scope, which would set you back about £2,500 at the time. But what a wise investment that proved to be, especially after the 1988 ban on centrefire semi-auto rifles!

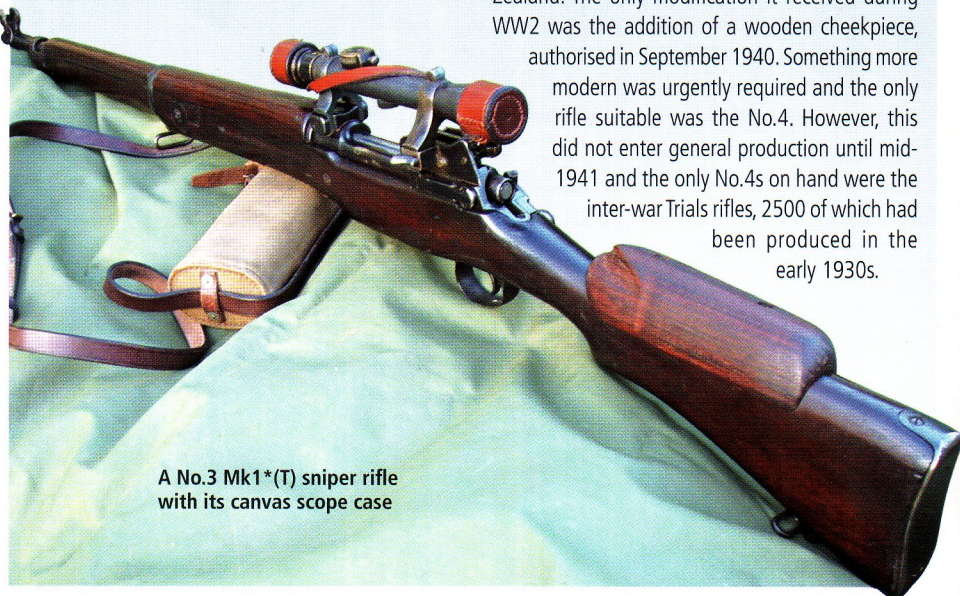


The complete No.4(T), along with a selection of wartime books and manuals

I used the No.4(T) to win the inaugural South London Rifle Club 600yd sniper rifle competition (now part of the Trafalgar meeting) against stiff opposition from that year's Royal Marine sniper cadre. It was the start of a long friendship with the late Pete Bloom, as it was he who donated the scout regiment spotting scope as an annual prize. I've been a dedicated student of British sniping and sniper rifles ever since.

World War 2 – introduction of the No.4(T) sniper rifle

At the start of the Second World War, the art of sniping had all but been forgotten. Britain was equipped with a sniper rifle from the previous World War, the original P14 Mk1*(T), redesignated as the Rifle No.3 Mk1*(T) and fitted with the Model 1918 telescopic sight. Two thousand of these were produced but many had been sent overseas to Australia and New Zealand. The only modification it received during WW2 was the addition of a wooden cheekpiece, authorised in September 1940. Something more modern was urgently required and the only rifle suitable was the No.4. However, this did not enter general production until mid-1941 and the only No.4s on hand were the inter-war Trials rifles, 2500 of which had been produced in the early 1930s.



A No.3 Mk1*(T) sniper rifle with its canvas scope case

RSAF Enfield used approximately 1,403 Trials in the conversion to No.4 Mk1 (T) sniper rifles. It is now thought that some of these early Enfield conversions may have also utilised some early run-of-production rifles from Maltby, Savage and BSA. Between September 1940 and March 1941, a design for a telescopic sight and mounting bracket was finalised. This was based on an initial design dating back to 1939, when it was envisaged that these scopes would be fitted to Bren Light Machine Guns! Hence the windage or deflection drum on what became the No.32 Mk1 scope was located on the left side, so that it would not foul the Bren magazine.



A close up of my 1941 dated scope tin

sniper rifles was placed with Holland & Holland, and the rest, as they say, is history.

No.4(T) Combat Record

In 1993 I decided I would start researching firsthand accounts of WW2 British snipers, because very few books had been written on the subject. Sniping is a very lonely form of combat and many surviving veterans seemed destined to take their stories to the grave. I ended up collecting tales from many conflicts: WW1, WW2, Korea, Aden, Northern Ireland and the Falklands. Here is one that involved the No.4(T).

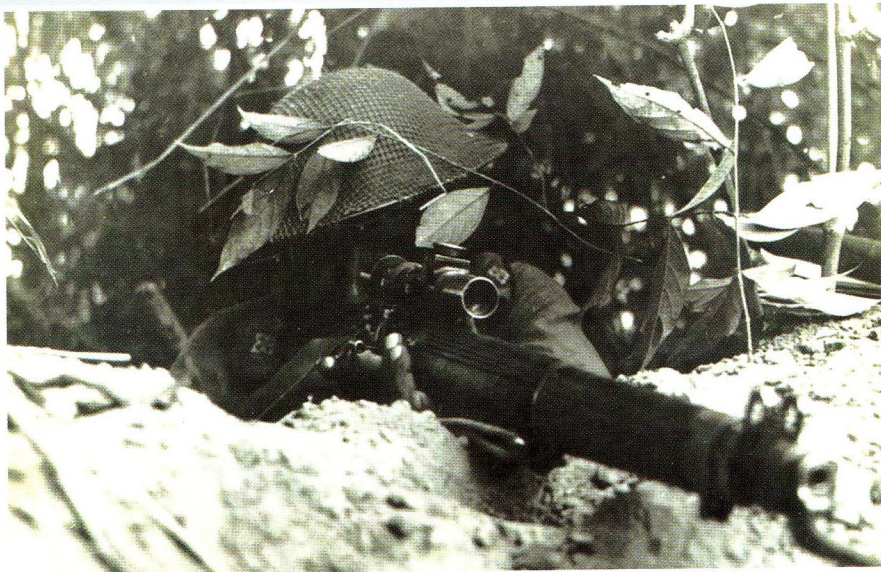
Sgt Tom Nowell MM of the Duke of Wellington's regiment never told his daughter about his wartime experiences as a sniper. During our correspondence of letters and questionnaires he unfortunately suffered a heart attack, and while he was recuperating in hospital his daughter saw my letter and asked what it was about. She encour-

suggestions along the lines of 'Tell me about the longest shot,' or 'Is there a humorous story?' I ended up with both in the yarn he sent.

The sniping in Korea was often at long-range from hilltop to hilltop, and the valleys in between were no-man's land. Tom had observed a dozen enemy soldiers carrying supplies, including jerry-cans full of diesel or petrol, up the side of one hill to reinforce a position. The distance was over 1000yd so they thought they were safe. Tom, observing this activity, realised that he would be lucky to hit more than one before they went to ground, so he decided to call up support from local tank and mortar units. However, these units wanted an accurate grid reference and Tom had no map, even though they all knew where 'Pheasant Hill' was.

In mounting frustration Tom decided he would shoot a tracer round into the middle of the group, so that the observers from the other units could spot the fall of shot and direct their own mortar and tank fire. Setting his sights to 1000yd, aiming slightly high and with adequate lead, he shot at the man carrying diesel – or was it petrol? The tracer arched across the valley, penetrated the victim's leg and carried on into the jerry-can, which proceeded to ignite and send up a ball of flame – it was definitely petrol. While his comrades tried to douse the flames by flinging dirt at him, life got a whole lot worse as mortar and 105mm high explosive tank rounds started to fall around them. Tom was congratulated for his brilliant target indication, and so ends a long-range story with a dose of black army humour thrown in.

Those who used the No.4(T) praised its toughness, reliability and accuracy. Yes, it was a bit heavy and the scope was not as good as a German optic, but it was more soldier-proof and had windage adjustment on the scope instead of the mount. But before you all rush out to buy a piece of sniping history and invest £2000 or more, a little research might be in order to distinguish between a right one and a wrong 'un. Next month I'll cover all the manufacturers of the different marks of No.32 scope, and all the relevant rifle, scope and mount bracket markings.



An unusual picture of an Indian soldier on the Arakan front – unusual because sniping with a bayonet fitted is not conducive to long-range accuracy! Picture courtesy of Nigel Hay

The official introduction date for the supply of the No.4(T) to the military was February 1942, but supplies of the Enfield converted rifles were issued to the Commandos in November 1941 (I have a scope tin dated 1941 which supports this). I recently examined a Trials No.4(T) and its current owner was told that it had been used by a Commando on the St Nazaire raid of March 1942 – although I wonder what use a sniper rifle would be in the middle of the night and in a built-up area where the average engagement distance would be measured in tens of yards rather than hundreds!

Another vital addition to the No.4(T) was a leather two-piece 1907 pattern sling as seen on the American 1903 Springfield rifle. The wooden cheekpieces were not initially fitted to the Enfield converted rifles, but were subsequently retrofitted. The triangular sling-swivel that replaced the front trigger-guard or bedding screw was not fitted until late 1944, but again, many were retrofitted later. In September 1942 a contract for 12,100 of the new

aged him to write back to me, and he eventually ended up writing a book. In my attempts to elicit stories and rekindle old memories I would make



Sgt Tom Nowell took this picture of his sniper squad during training in 1951, not long before they departed for Korea in 1952