

## No.5 Wandering Zero?

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Yes, the little No5 rifle. As I said, we still had some in Malaya in the mid 60's plus I'd say, a thousand or so+ that came through our huge Base Workshops in Singapore where from Australia, New Zealand, Malaya, Hong Kong Vietnam and occasionally Fiji Armourers would regularly congregate for various reasons. And a week or so exploring the bustling sights and sounds of night-time Singapore was probably top of the list. But being a young, celibate, church-going, teetotal young lad, I stayed in and knitted scarves and darned socks for the needy. But I digress.

I have to confess that until I was in New Zealand in 1967, I didn't know that in early 1949 the No5 was on the cusp of being introduced as the standard service rifle to replace the No4. I read this while reading an old, little document in the workshop bosses office, ASM Leo Francis ( ...remember him Kim?). The document was about the sale of and introduction into New Zealand of the .22" No8 rifle. The document was aimed at Australia too but I never saw a No8 when I was there, except for an odd-ball owned by ASM Clive Connors at Bandiana. He was another RAEME Armourer ..., who'd probably 'liberated' it when he was somewhere. I did get him some spares sent over in the freight from Malaya, consisting of 1 complete and another all-but complete rifle but I digress again. The document in Leo's office at Ngaruawahia went on to say that the No5 was introduced into British Army service and will eventually supplant the No2 rifle and various others throughout. 'Throughout' probably meant the other odds and sods such as the No7's and No9's plus the little ex US lend lease Mossbergs that you could still see occasionally. It was correct because the No8 did replace them eventually although the RAF Cadets at Abingdon did still have a couple of No7's in 1982. But the No8 was the norm.

Oh, yes. The document said that the No8 rifle had been developed in look, style, feel and weight as a direct result of the forthcoming decision to adopt the No5 rifle as the standard arm throughout the Army. I asked Jock Annandale about it in conversation and he'd obviously heard and read this and commented to me that while it was a laudable idea, the No5 had many problems and while it might be OK in the jungle and as a short range close quarter weapon, it was definitely NOT a rifle for long ranges we'd expect in Europe. This was because once it got hot, its zero went. It was as simple as that. And as you all know, once you start to follow your zero over the target, it's time to stop for the day. That's because YOU are following the zero

and generally, your eyes are going and you're tired. But when it's the RIFLE that's causing it..... And the No5 RIFLE did. He also told me, in words that Warrant Officers are apt to use when a silly suggestion is made, that the notion that the whole of the Commonwealth was going to change, when they were knee deep in perfectly good, almost new No4's was pure , er ....., horse, er ....., manure!

I asked the other Armourers in Malaya, especially the LEP (locally enlisted) Chinese and Malays (known as MOR's ..., Malayan Other Ranks) and they all knew about the rifles going off zero but in the short ranges that they were used, it was academic. So in Malaya they stayed. You could always tell the high mileage rifles, apart from the shot-out barrels because the backsight axis pin retaining pin (longest name of a part on the rifle. The PIN, retaining, pin axis backsight) was always sheared where the bodies had expanded at the rear and sheared it. So, if at the moment of firing/and max pressure/load the body spreads at the rear, especially during a gun battle, I suppose it would upset the balance between the locking lugs, bolt and cartridge seating on the bolt face.

I think I mentioned earlier that when we were doing the big Crown Agents FTR programme, it was priced (so I was told) that if 70 came in, 70 went out and if some were ZF'd (scrap) then they'd be replaced from our ANZUK (I think this was Aust, NZ and UK stockholdings) mobilization stores from the huge ....., and I mean HUGE Ordnance stockpiles close by at Johore Bahru. So we would cannibalise No5's and if necessary, send them out with No4 bodies.

I don't think it was the kick that made them wander off because we would fire hundreds every day in just shorts and boots. No shirts, hats or ear defenders. During this shooting the boss of the Ordnance Stores depot, a nice bloke called WO1 Arnold, (we all called him 'Sir' to be polite), used to bring his son down for days during the school holidays, especially on Bren days and son, age about 15 or so used to load the magazines and shoot the rifles/Brens for function testing first then we got him used to shooting the accuracy tests at the special Armourers target screen. He was quite good too and always mixed in. But we were only a couple of years older than him anyway. His mum was always nice to us, so was dad really, and used to bring a load of bottles of cold Frazer and Neave orange juice and home made things to scoff for break. We had some Brens with front grips that you could use as heavy SMG's, fired from well tucked back in the waist during jungle patrolling and we'd let him fire these at the targets from very close range. God, I shudder at the thought now. If I saw someone doing it now I'd go ballistic ....., let alone allow a young lad to do it! The Small Arms shop 2i/c S/Sgt Beady and the AQMS Dick Shepherd used to think it was a bit of a punishment to be sent on the range for the day

because the No5's used to jump about a bit and crack but when there were a few of us there, we were out of the way

Oh, yes. Back to No5's. Some of them just wouldn't zero so they'd be examined and if necessary, re-barreled or just stripped for spares or scrapped. some were as good as gold. I never did get to the bottom of why they had a wandering zero problem. Just theories but they certainly did. Whether YOURS has or not is a bit academic but while I don't think it had a bad name, it certainly wasn't a myth.