

Pattern: "Gun, Vickers .303 inch" or "Gun, Machine .303, Mark I", water cooled Medium Machine Gun;

Introduced in NZ Service: 1916, Withdrawn: 1973

Makers: Vickers Ltd, Erith and Crayford Works, UK in WW I; Colt, USA in WW I (30-06 calibre); SAF Lithgow, Australia 1929 on; Vickers- Armstrong Crayford Works in WW II.

Calibre: .303", Bore: 6 groove RH twist 1 in 10", Barrel length: 28.4 in. OA Length: 43.0 in.

Weight: 33 Lb bare, 84 Lb with tripod,

Type of Action: Short recoil with muzzle gas boost-full auto; Cyclic rate: 500rpm; Magazine: 250 round fabric belt .

Sights: Tangent aperture sight graduated to 2,900 yds. for Mk VII ammo and to 3,700 yds for Mk VIIIz ammo.



Right and left view of a 1942 Vickers Mk I on Mk IV tripod



Vickers Mk I in action WWI

Note Auxiliary tripod Mk III attached to water jacket, this could be used when advancing in support of an attack.

Developed from the Maxim Machine Gun the Vickers MMG Mk I was introduced into British Service in November 1912 by LOC 16217. By inverting the Maxim lock the Vickers gun was made lighter and more reliable than its predecessor. At the start of WW I the British Army had only 109 Vickers MMGs. Early production was made at Vickers' Erith Works but by December 1916 Crayford Works was also producing the Vickers and by the end of WWI 75,242 guns had been produced. Note the smooth water jacket was introduced in 1918. As the air war developed the Vickers was modified to arm allied aircraft by converting to air cooling and synchronising the gun to fire through the propeller this became the MK I* and later variants. (See NZAR 187). Due to the static nature of the war in France in WW I the Vickers Gun was used primarily in the sustained fire and indirect fire rolls laying down barrages on enemy positions; with more mobile warfare in the Second World War direct fire was more common. In WW II an additional 11,828 guns were produced with much repair and refurbishment work carried out at RSAF Enfield with components also made by sub contractors. 7,071 US 30-06 calibre Vickers were supplied to Britain as Lend Lease in WWII and a 1,000 were converted to .303 at Enfield. In WWI the Vickers used the .303 Mk VII cordite round or MK VIIz (nitrocellulose powder) supplied initially by the US. In WW II Mk VIIIz ammunition giving a greater range (4,500 yds) was used exclusively for Vickers guns, with sights graduated to 3,700 yds, however due to differing barrel wear rates Mk 8 rounds could not be used in a gun that had previously used MK 7.

New Zealand Service

New Zealand Forces entered WW I with older Maxim MGs. Following the Gallipoli campaign the NZ Machine Gun Corps was formed in Egypt in early 1916 armed initially with Maxims augmented with and later replaced by Vickers from British stores. Three Companies each with 16 MGs were assigned one to each of the NZ Brigades making up the NZ Division, a fourth and fifth Company were formed in October 1916 and February 1917. These Companies saw action in France and Palestine. In the inter war period the NZ Army Rifle Association was established in 1923 and Machine Gun (Vickers & Lewis) shoots became a popular activity for both Territorials and Cadets.

In WWII the 27 (Machine Gun) Battalion 2NZEF was formed in late 1939, each Company with 12 guns (48 total) supplied from SAF Lithgow, Australia. They saw action in the Greek campaign in April 1941 going on to serve in Crete, the Western Desert and Italy, firing nearly 9 million rounds in the fighting in Italy. In the Pacific theatre the two NZ Infantry Brigades were each supported by a Vickers Machine Gun Company formed in 1943 and saw action on Guadalcanal, Mono, Vella Lavella and Nissan Islands. NZ Schedule of Small Arms, 31 March 1944, shows 877 Vickers guns on hand. It should be noted that Vickers guns were also mounted on many vehicles, such as Universal Carriers and also trucks used by the Long Range Desert Group, both for ground support and anti aircraft fire.

Post WWII saw a return to service competition shooting, the Vickers being deployed on wharves in 1951 during the waterfront strike, but not used. They remained in service until 1965 when they were replaced by the 7.62 mm GPMG, although some were reported being fired at Trentham Camp as late as 1973.

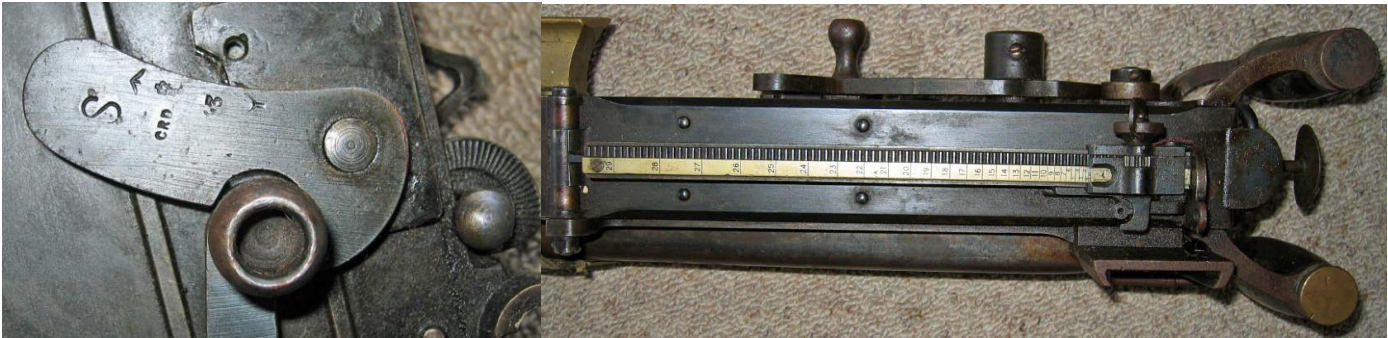


This gun was made by Vickers Ltd March 1915 at the Erith Factory (Eastern London). The gun would have been issued to NZ Forces in France during WW1 and returned to NZ after the War. The Enfield marked cloth and brass belt is also from the same period.



N Z ^ A / 536 /serial No L 686

Underside of lock marked N 10351 and 536



Cocking lever locator

Sights graduated to 2,900 yards.



Belt made at Enfield



Muzzle attachment, foresight & hose connection, drain plug

Acknowledgements: Rod Woods, N Taylor, J Osborne

References: *The Grand Old Lady of No Man's land-the Vickers Machine Gun* by D L Goldsmith
.303 Vickers by ID Skennerton.