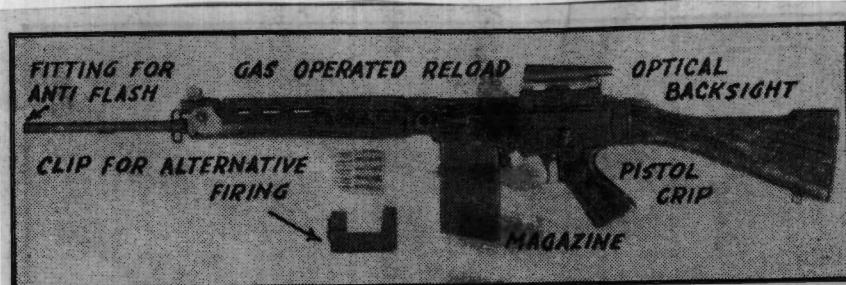


Mr. Stagg



THIS IS THE NEW RIFLE —AND IT'S HEAVIER!

THE new rifle (above) which will become standard for the armies of the Atlantic Pact countries was shown in public for the first time last night when it was demonstrated at the Tower of London. It is the F.N. 0.30 self-loading rifle, which was developed in Belgium.

When all the trials have been completed, it will replace the Lee-Enfield, which the British soldier has known since the Boer War. But the changeover may

take years for the final form of the rifle has still to be decided.

But one thing will disappoint every infantryman—IT'S HEAVIER. The F.N., at 9lb. 3oz., weighs about six ounces more than the present rifle.

The new rifle holds magazine clips of twenty bullets. Set at "automatic" it can fire 650 to 700 rounds a minute. Sixty aimed single shots can be fired in a minute.

Here are some of the other features the British soldier will have to get to know: The F.N. "breaks" like a shotgun for "stripping." It has a pistol grip. The sight is "optical" with a marked lens which allows for instant adjustment for range.

The old iron sight can also be used.

There are few working parts and it is a matter of seconds to take it to pieces after it has been "broken." The cost is £30—double the Lee-Enfield.

Big snag: It is all wrong for really smart arms drill.

D. M. ...

20/1/54.

ARMY DEMONSTRATES ITS NEW "STANDARD WEAPON"

Belgian F.N. .300 Rifle's Radical Changes

From our London Staff

The new Belgian rifle known as the F.N. .300 which is to become the standard weapon of the British Army, was publicly shown and fired for the first time at a demonstration yesterday afternoon at the Royal Fusiliers depot in the Tower of London.

It is in many respects a radical departure from the present .303. In profile the most obvious difference is the pistol grip, which makes this weapon a cousin of the Bren, and it was revealed at yesterday's demonstration that with a slight adjustment by the regimental armourer the Belgian rifle can be turned into an automatic weapon.

Another innovation is the fitting of a piston device which uses the exhaust gases for automatic reloading. Regimental Sergeant-Major D. Maber, who demonstrated the rifle yesterday, said it was the first time that a completely self-loading rifle had been put in the hands of the British soldier.

Left Hand, Right Hand

The rifle is said also to overcome one of the major problems of small arms design in that it can be used with equal facility by soldiers who are left-handed. The ejector slot on the left side is well forward and the cocking handle is on the left. A trial squad of soldiers was issued with the FN recently and told to work out individually the method of loading, firing, and changing magazines that suited them. Half of them worked with the left hand and half with the right in carrying out functions that are only possible with the right on present British rifles.

The rifle was developed in its original form by the Belgian firm Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre of Liège but has been modified and remodified over the past three years at the request of the British and Canadian military authorities, so that it now possesses several dozen features which were not thought of in the original design. The F. N. company is a large manufacturer of sporting rifles and shotguns and this new military model shows some of these characteristics in the way it handles. R.S.M. Maber said yesterday that it comes up to the shoulder more quickly and easily than any rifle the British Army has used hitherto. It also "breaks" like a shotgun and was described by Mr Maber as "a joy of simplicity" to strip down.

The much-vexed question of ammunition calibre for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation nations has now been settled, as was pointed out at yesterday demonstration by Major-General Mar Matthews, of the War Office, who is Director of Infantry. The FN was originally designed to fire the British .280 round but has been modified to take the high velocity .30in. "universal round" which has now been adopted as the standard for N.A.T.O. This ammunition has a velocity 12 per cent greater than that of the present British .303 rifle and the round is 10 per cent lighter. To take a practical example, the soldier carrying one hundred rounds of the new ammunition will be carrying 5.11lb. compared to 5.53lb.

The Belgian rifle weighs 9.2lb., about half a pound more than the present one, but is in some ways more manageable, and is three inches shorter. It can fire sixty aimed shots a minute from twenty-round magazines and has an automatic-fire rate of seven hundred rounds a minute.

The British and Canadian Governments are now making arrangements to manufacture the FN rifle under licence and it is expected that both countries will pay the Belgians relatively little for these rights because of the large share which they took in the work of developing it.

In the meantime, some five thousand rifles have been ordered by the Ministry of Supply direct from Belgium and these will be put through extensive troop trials this year. The first consignments are expected to reach London in July. Under mass production conditions in this country the final cost is expected to work out at about £30, which is double the price of the present British .303 No. 4.

Favourable Impression

Yesterday's demonstration made a generally favourable impression on the journalists and military men present. It would not be possible from such a non-technical appraisal to say that it was superior to the British E.M.2, the new rifle which had been designed to fire the .280 bullet. The War Office spokesmen contented themselves yesterday with saying that it had been every bit as satisfactory as its British and American counterparts in highly technical trials extending over the past three years.

One thing, however, was very clear to the non-technical observer. This was that the difference in weight of ammunition was scarcely a factor to be considered. The present British rifle uses .303 ammunition, which means that the soldier going into battle with a hundred rounds is carrying—apart from his other gear—5½lb. of bullets. The FN cuts this down to 5.1lb. The proposed British EM 2, which Mr Woodrow Wyatt referred to in his question to the Prime Minister in the House yesterday, would save a few ounces more, but the military men at the demonstration seemed to think this hardly a factor worth emphasising.

March.
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20/1/54