

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

Many moons ago, more than I care to count actually, I found a steel cartridge-shaped object roughly .303 in appearance. It was connected to two (2) .303 drill cartridges, which gave support to the guess concerning dimensions being around .303. Over the years I have put the object in front of almost every collector and weapons buff that I have met. Invariably the response was a shrug of the shoulders and a growl of "I've no idea. Why don't you ask Fred" or some other very knowledgeable character. I tried putting the proposition to the collectors in Europe via the ECRA Journal but had no success there either. The object was placed in my experimentals draw along with the other oddities for which I have no name to apply and there it sat until I visited England again last year in September. On the offchance that maybe the Museum staff in the Imperial War Museum might have some idea I took the item with me and put it in front of the head man of their weapons and artefacts section a very knowledgeable fellow by the name of Mike Hibberd. Getting the usual reply that he had no idea what it was I thought that was the end of that. The gentleman in question did take some Polaroids of the thing at the time and I thought no more of the event.

Some months after I had returned to Australia I received a letter from the IWM with some Polaroid photographs showing the item in its natural habitat. What the Mike had done was to show his photographs to Mr. Herb Woodend in the Pattern room at Enfield and asked "Do you have any idea what that might be?" I believe he simply said, "Yes, it is part of the feed mechanism of a Vickers aircraft "K" gun magazine"



So there you have it. The original drill rounds found linked with the object belong to it and are part of the system. The drum magazine theoretically holds 100 rounds but because of the feeder round and the two drill rounds the magazine actually holds only 97 rounds.

The various chamfers on the object are to permit the thing to run freely inside the magazine



feedways in fact one of the photographs shows the long chamfer on the projectile sitting in the magazine feed slot and lining up neatly with the edge therein. I make the assumption that the feed item and the two drill rounds provide a method of connecting the belt to the system without the necessity of dismantling the magazine or, more dangerously leaving one or two live rounds connected to the feed system. The item betrays its military origin with the

"headstamp" on the base. Obviously there was a Mk I once and taking another guess maybe the 7 on the base represents Mk 7 ball. Unfortunately that is a poor guess as the shape of the object is not like a Mk7 ball cartridge. Maybe the VI lying on its side indicates a Mk VI ball? Who knows?

If anyone out there knows anything about this cartridge I would be only too pleased to here from you with more detail. Wouldn't it be nice if someone could send something written in a textbook?

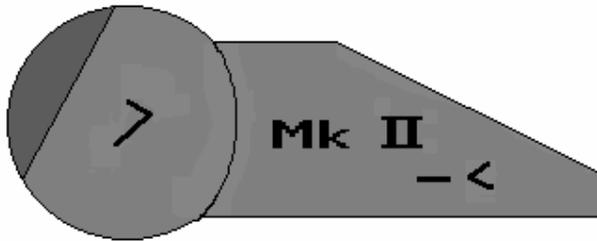
This little victory gives me hope that maybe some of the other items I have sitting in my unknowns tray could one day be identified. Maybe I should write another bulletin showing some of these things.



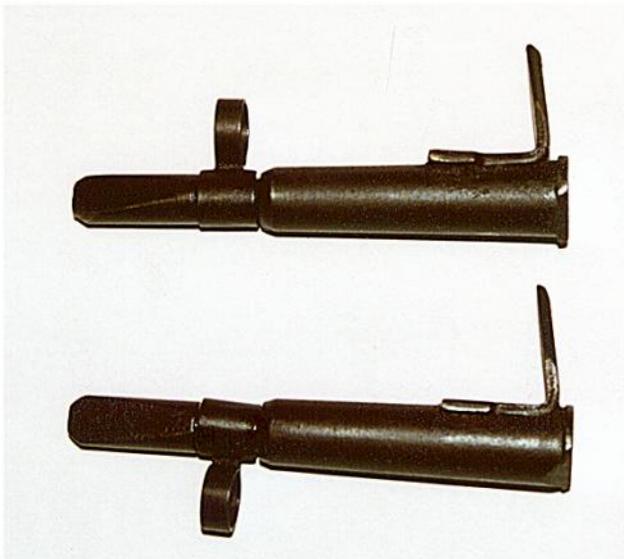
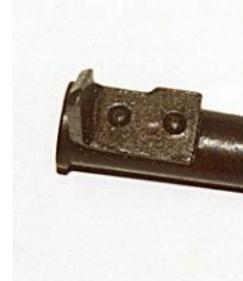
The magazine slot showing the feed device when the magazine is completely empty. Note the chamfer lining up exactly with the slot edge.



The interior of the Vickers aircraft "K" gun magazine showing the feed device in the pathway in which it slides.



The base of the feed device with its "headstamp".



What can I say? No sooner had I put the article in the bulletin when all the people that new about the “thing” came out of the woodwork. Not only did they know all about it but also they had variations of the thing. I am indebted to Barry Temple for information as supplied in his book “Identification manual on the .303 British service cartridge No. 5 Dummy cartridge (2)”. Had I owned a copy of this very handy little book I would have identified the thing a lot sooner. I’m also indebted to Peter Burrow for the photographs of the variations in his possession.

There are two varieties of the thing which, by the way are more correctly termed “Magazine followers”, one for the Bren Gun and one for the Vickers aircraft gun.

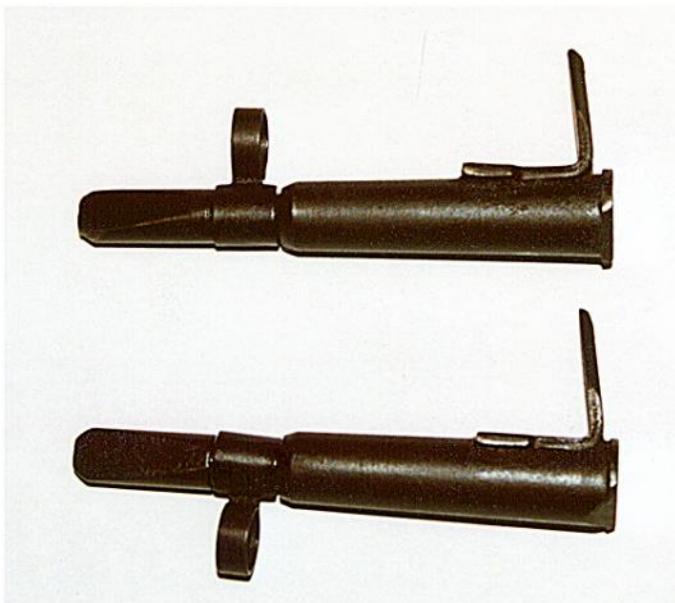
BREN GUN VERSIONS.

This can be identified as a Bren follower by the absence of a link groove as it was designed to be used without any dummy cartridges attached to it. It is described as being used to act as a stop for the spring in the magazine rather than as a follower to apply pressure to the cartridges.



VICKERS GUN.

This is described as a follower linked to two dummy cartridges to maintain the tension on the last few cartridges when they are in the mouthpiece of the magazine. This version would seem to be clearly identified as being for the Vickers by the fact that the link is permanently attached to the follower and should the link be missing the parentage will be shown by the groove for the link.



Generally speaking the followers have different chamfers on the projectile portion although there is probably no significance to these minor variations.

There are also variations in the spot welding fixing the lug to the body. So far the versions seen have been that the Vickers MkI has two small spot welds and the MkII has one large weld.

