

A WEAPON OF THE PAST? The ZB-30

by
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If I had to say what was the weapons collection highlight of the year for me, then I'd have to say that the finding of an original 7.92., ZB-30 machine gun in deepest Afghanistan did it for me! It wasn't the best or the tidiest but a totally worn out gun that'd seen better days. BUT, it was original. What was even better was we know from its markings that it was sent to the ATTA Turks in 1936 and....., well..., how it came to be in and then involved in a bit of a gun battle in Afghanistan is likely to remain a mystery forever now. Just WHY have I got so hot under the collar about this pretty worn out and nondescript gun is because of its historical link with what eventually came to be the longest serving gun in the British Army and probably, the best loved too. In fact, its shortened name lives on. Yes, it's the LMG or better known to you oldies as the BREN.



The ZB 30 Captured in Afghanistan

In 1927, two guns similar to this ZB 30 were shipped to Britain by the Military Attache in Prague, Major Oxley RE and put into the trials to see what could eventually replace the Lewis gun. After a series of trials and tests from then until about 1935, the 'new' ZB gun, now in .303 form ran the competition ragged. In fact one gun, serial number 12 was required to fire 200,000 rounds pretty well non-stop. Suffice it to say, after 179,000 rounds, the Ordnance Board decided to call it a day and shortly afterwards, the now famous Bren was introduced into service, in August 1938.

So you see, this captured 'BREN' forms the historical start to our complete Bren story....., a revered name in the history of the British Army.

The ZB 30 Left side markings



The ZB 30 Right side markings

But there's more....., a LOT more! The ZB gun was abandoned following the gun battle and seized by a follow-up counter attack. It's historical ancestry was noted by another friend of the collection who was doing what he calls his 'national service' (his TA call-up) in LashkaGar who ordered it be side loaded and returned to Warminster. Once home, it was power washed at the MT bay then stripped and cleaned. To the Afghan tribes, weapon cleaning is not first and foremost in their order of battle and judging from this ZB gun, hasn't featured as a priority since, say, 1937! But I digress. We got it back to mechanically fireable condition but when it came to live firing, it failed And failed again. An even closer examination



showed that during the short gun battle, a cartridge case had ruptured/split and as a result, the next round from the magazine refused to feed. The ruptured cartridge was removed, the chamber and barrel re-examined, gauged and cleaned and.. Yep, you've got it in one. After that the gun fired several full magazines on single and automatic fire, just as she'd performed since the day she was made. Don't you wish they'd made your cars like that?

I must also mention, that as well as having this example of one of the first true commercial ZB guns, the fore-runner of the Bren, we also took on charge two more Bren LMG's that had un-be-known to all, remained silently tucked away at a TA centre in Wales. This was last year...



The ZB 30 compared with the Bren Mk 1

What else have we been up to then? There has been a steady stream of enquiries from the TV and Media about our weaponry and as I expect the Boss, Major Norman has told you already, we have given some considerable time to a TV documentary, due to be shown next year, regarding innovation in war. This time, they featured the little Mk3 Sten gun. Not a great ball of fire but famous in its own little way as it was the cheapest of the Stens and made by Lines Brothers to boot. You know them..... Not too well known as real gun makers but they did make Triang Toys, your old green and red Meccano sets and very probably pop-guns too!



Sten Mk 3

ON the display front, when you pass through, you'll notice that we are making even more use of cabinets for what I call 'specialized displays' and there's another on the drawing boards as we speak.

Another documentary scheduled for syndication in the Autumn/Winter is about the big machine guns, including the famous Bren with the little MINIMI tucked onto the end. And by coincidence, we showed them the captured ZB gun. And while it looks in, er,what's the REME technical term I'm looking for..... er, yes, 'wanting' condition, the old girl didn't miss a beat.

That's about all for this year folks. If you are in theatre and see something that's historic and might surprise and excite me as much as the ZB Bren, we have ways, means and friends who can help.