

# SOLDIER



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George Cross winners join growing ranks of Afghan idols





**Revolutionary rifle:** An Urgent Operational Requirement, the semi-automatic, gas-operated L129 A1 Sharpshooter is the first new rifle to be introduced to the British Army for 20 years. WO2 Ian Smith, who was involved in the weapon's trial and procurement, insists it is more accurate, robust and reliable than the SLR. Picture: Steve Dock

## Sharpshooter slays Service stalwart

**A**S the technical officer responsible for, among other weapon systems, the new L129 A1 Sharpshooter, I thought it prevalent to comment on some of the comments made by Erik Blakeley in last month's issue (*Talkback*, March).

The rifle is indeed similar to the AR10 in outward appearance as it is based on the Stoner design of weapons, which originated in the 1950s and was the concept behind the 5.56mm version of the AR15 Assault Rifle. This weapon did eventually morph into the M16.

There are several takes on this design by other manufactures, with the most up-to-date being the L129 A1 from LMT [Lewis Machine & Tool Company], which the MoD has procured through open competition against alternative systems, including other AR10 variants.

The Sharpshooter has a stainless steel, match grade, cut rifled barrel that is at the core of its accuracy and performance and is currently not found on any other weapon of this type.

It has a one-piece upper receiver which means that the upper picatinny rail is full length and unbroken, and the weapon can be stripped and reassembled without having

to remove the sights and breaking zero.

I do not see that it is odd that we buy a modern version of a rifle that is very reliable, accurate and robust.

To date, there is no other rifle in existence that incorporates the Stoner design which has achieved the level of accuracy and adaptability as this one.

How is reverting back 30 years to a rifle that will have to be modified to be something it was not designed to be (accursed M14s) a good idea?

We have brought in a modern rifle that was designed to fully fill a capability gap that has arisen due to the operational theatres that we work in.

Even if sufficient stocks of the L1A1 (the SLR for those who either don't know or remember) existed, the weapon is nowhere near as accurate, robust or reliable as the new rifle. And yes, I have fired them back-to-back on the same range on the same day.

In my view, rose-tinted spectacles have no place in modern warfare and readers should remember that just because they used the weapon 20-30 years ago and thought it was great, capabilities have moved on.

The L1A1 has had its day, it has no place

on the modern battlefield modified or not, so please let it rest in peace along with the fond memories of those that used it! – WO2 Ian Smith, LWPB, Abbey Wood.

### PS...

I'D like to add my three pence worth to the recent letters on calls for a left-handed rifle.

As a left-handed ex-soldier who served in the Royal Corps of Signals (1970-76) I used the left-handed version of the venerable SLR.

Today's assault rifles are the primary offensive weapons of modern fighting soldiers. To enter a conflict with a weapon that puts left-handed soldiers at a disadvantage is a cause for concern.

Between 13 and 15 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom is left-handed. Along with this comes ocular dominance – left hand/left eye. No amount of training is going to change that.

Surely in the 21st century we should be able to equip our soldiers with a weapon that can be fired left-handed. The Germans, Spanish, French and Austrians seem able to do this, why not us? – Les Johnson, Tyne and Wear.

## Give British veterans a slice of American pie

**DURING** my career I have enjoyed several deployments and personal holidays to the USA and have been impressed with the facilities – be it hotels, gyms or welfare offices – afforded to serving American personnel, their veterans and overseas soldiers such as myself.

Although I understand we cannot emulate the same level of social infrastructure as America, I feel we should be striving to match the commitment to welfare and recreational services for our own deserving veterans. Has there been any consideration given to allowing ex-Service personnel an

ID card of some sort?

Such a document could then allow access to military facilities post service.

I understand that there may well be security issues with such arrangements but I am sure some sensible controls could be implemented. I would love to be able to buy cheap tickets to Disney when I am 80! – WO2 J Lane, AAC.

**Cdr Graham Jardine (RN), Pensions, Compensation and Veterans, responds:** The subject of veteran's identity cards has been raised previously and considerable

work has been undertaken to identify the best option to satisfy the many requirements that the introduction of such a scheme, underwritten by the MoD, would raise.

Following careful consideration the MoD is investigating issuing a veterans' variant of the national ID card. This position is strongly supported by the various ex-Service organisations. As far as recreational facilities are concerned, there are no plans to change current MoD policy in order to allow veterans routine access to Service establishments.