

Minister's Office,

Ottawa.

March 7th. 1916.

Dear General Alderson,

General Gwatkin has shown me copy of a letter from you of recent date on the question of the Ross Rifle.

I had hoped that this matter had long ago been settled, but from the tenor of your remarks it seems that "the music is still in the air". I am well aware that very few Officers, British or Canadian, know much about any rifle, especially a new one like the Ross. Each naturally gets accustomed to the one he uses, and after a time seems wedded to it. I, therefore, fully appreciate the liking that all those who have never before used the Ross Rifle have for the old Lee Enfield.

It is, also, appreciated that those who have never used the Ross excepting casually in practice, will not readily understand the manner in which the bolt should be opened. The L.E., as you know, for loading has four motions, an upward pull, a backward pull, a forward drive and a downward push. The Ross has but two.

Let us suppose the two rifles jammed, and that it will require a direct pressure to say two hundred pounds each to extract the jammed cartridge case. With a slow heavy pull the Lee Enfield may be opened, but the Ross requires a smart snap with the fingers and the hand, combined with a quick action of the elbow, to exert the necessary pressure.

The Lee Enfield chamber, proof charge -- I enclose herewith a diagram-- was .459 at the base, or practically .460. The Chamber, after proof charge and when finished, was .462 &c. The Ross being much stronger steel, and having proof chamber of .459 resisted fifty-one thousand pounds proof charge, and was finished at about .460.

It is true that the Ross Rifle, with certain ammunition, jammed. It is doubly true that the Lee Enfield, also, jammed. The Late Colonel Parquhar warned me, after his first action, about the jamming of the L.E., and begged of me to instruct all the Canadians to carry oiled rags to clean the bolt every time, &c. &c., or it would jam. The Gordons, the Forty-Second, the Munster Fusiliers -- in fact every Battalion in the British Service -- was, from time to time, more or less out to pieces by the jamming of the Lee Enfield, due to bad ammunition, to dirt, to rust etc. As an observing Officer you must have known this, or at least you should have known it.

At St. Julien two British Battalions sent in to reinforce on the left of the Second Brigade -- I think they were the Durhams and Yorks -- had their L.E. Rifles jam so badly with the bad ammunition that the poor fellows were shot to pieces and retired in confusion and disorder. The same held true of other Battalions armed with the L. E. at St. Julien, at Festubert, and at Givenchy.

You seem to be strangely familiar, judging from your letter, with the list of ten suggestions intended to prejudice the Ross Rifle in the minds of the Canadians. These suggestions

were first worked out at Salisbury. The insidious whispering went on in France. The questions took definite form just before St. Julien, and were continued till after Festubert. At Givenchy our fellows had the L. E. and got a most infernal tramping, whereas at both the other places, where they carried the Ross Rifle, they had been very successful.

It is not worth while, with men who know little or nothing about rifles, to take up these ten points in detail, but some of them are so absolutely absurd and ridiculous that no one, excepting a novice or for an excuse, would be found seriously advancing them. For example:- The question of the open, as against the hooded foresight protector; the ten round magazine versus the five; the lightness; &c. In fact each and every one, to any one informed on the expert aspect of rifles, carried its own condemnation on the face.

However, to meet the conditions of bad ammunition, mud, dirt, &c., we enlarged the chamber of the Ross to .464 &c. I am assured by Official Authorities that the British Government have followed suit and have adopted our size.

But the aspect, which borders on criminality, is the permitting of soft case ammunition, abnormally large ammunition, in short, bad ammunition, being placed in the hands of soldiers who are risking their lives in defence of the liberties we all hold so dear.

There might have been an excuse at the beginning that some routine Officer had passed the ammunition without detecting its faults, but over and over and over again, in spite of the loss of thousands of the boys, this defective ammunition was placed in their hands.

To have one round of any defective ammunition again found with a soldier will be regarded as criminal, not only on the part of the authorities issuing it but on the part of the Officers in immediate command.

I shall not here refer to the "it is and it is not" aspect of the case, nor shall I produce hundreds of documents in the form of letters &c. to show that, from the very outset, the expert British soldier, whenever he found an opportunity, invariably slipped off with the Ross Rifle leaving the L.E. instead. This occurred long before St. Julien, as well as since.

So far as concerns your amateur test with experts like yourself, Sir Max Aitken, Sir George Perley and General Carson, I happen to have the records of this test, and of Official tests both in England and at the Front, and with the exception of this instance of yours, in every other case the advantage with the bad ammunition was considerably in favour of the Ross. I am, of course, speaking of the enlarged chamber.

You are, of course, familiar with the superiority of the Ross in the rifle grenade tests, in which the range of the Lee Enfield with the same length of barrel, and the same charge was considerably less than the range of the Ross.

I have before me, at the present moment, a report from one of the best experts in the British Empire, Captain Ackerman, late of the First Division, Canadians, and he states:

"since the enlargement of the chamber I consider the  
"Ross Rifle the most perfect of the four rifles that  
"I had the opportunity of trying, viz: Mauser (German  
"with no protection for foresight and with open back  
"sight.) Lebel (French- with same sighting apparatus),  
"and Lee Enfield (British- with partially protected  
"foresight.)"

Will you kindly permit me to suggest to you that  
it would be advisable that the Canadian force should not find  
any of the bad ammunition in their pouches or on their persons?

With good ammunition the Ross Rifle has never been  
known to jam and I presume, to be absolutely fair, that the  
jamming of the Lee Enfield Rifle in the early periods of the  
war and up to the present time is, also, due, almost entirely,  
to bad ammunition.

Your emphatic energy concerning what your intentions  
are, if you will pardon me, might better be directed to having  
your Officers of every grade responsible in the premises to  
make sure that none of the defective ammunition again finds  
its way into the Canadian ranks.

Thanking you for your frankness in the memorandum  
to General Swatkin, and wishing every success to the Forces.

Faithfully,

(Sgd) Sam Hughes.

Encl.

Lt.-General Sir E. A. Alderson,  
General Headquarters, Canadians,  
France.