

SELECTING A NEW SNIPER RIFLE

Testing and evaluation is well underway to select a new sniper rifle for NZ Army. For six weeks during April and May 2017, four rifles were tested in a variety of situations and scenarios at Waiouru. Six snipers, two each from NZSAS, 1RNZIR and 2/1RNZIR, fired 10,000 rounds during the testing period. All weapon systems delivered a high level of accuracy.

The new sniper rifle will replace the current rifle (Accuracy International – Arctic Warfare), which is reaching the end of its service life. The current rifle is 7.62mm calibre effective to about 800m whereas the replacement rifle in .338 Lapua Magnum will be effective to 1500m greatly increasing the range and lethality of our snipers. The new rifle will provide an overmatch capability to meet any current battlefield scenario our snipers are likely to be involved in.

Major George Tweedy, project manager for the sniper rifle replacement, says the ability to apply precision individual fire on a high-value target reduces the risk of collateral damage in a battlefield scenario while also helping achieve physical and psychological domination of the battlespace.

“Our snipers need to be able to fire once and achieve their mission. We have highly-trained snipers and we have to provide them with the best weapon available to us.”

The evaluation can be broken down into four areas: technical evaluation, integrated logistic support, operational evaluation and human factors assessments.

Technical evaluation

Acoustic signature – acoustic signature refers to the ability of the rifle shot to be heard. All rifles were tested with sound suppressors.



Flash detection – the ability for the enemy to detect the sniper’s location from seeing muzzle flash.

Projectile energy – the amount of energy the bullet has when it reaches the target. This is especially important for long-range targets.

Accuracy and consistency – the ability for the rifle to hit the intended target to 1500m, this was measured by a one round hit on a human-sized target. Consistency refers to the rifle’s ability to group rounds on the same target at the same distance.

Operational evaluation

This is largely concerned with how sniper personnel operate with the rifle. Each weapon was tested in a range of firing positions – standing, kneeling, sitting, prone, and with tripods – this is to simulate all the different manners in which a sniper may have to use the weapon in an operational scenario. This evaluation also considers the ease in which the sniper can use their weapon (skills and drills).

Integrated logistics support

The ease and cost of maintenance of the weapon is another key area to consider as the chosen rifle needs to be able to be maintained throughout its service life. The ability for the capability to be supported both in training and when deployed is also key.

Human factors

Each rifle tested weighed between 7–10kg with all its associated kit fitted. Human factors looks at what effects carrying and using the rifle has on the sniper’s body especially as large calibre weapons have significant recoil. During field testing each sniper wore a heart rate monitor and

GPS so data could be collected throughout the whole process – from sniper stalk through to shot fired.

Defence Technology Agency had an important role in the testing and evaluation process. They gathered data on each of the evaluation segments and their analysis will form a significant aspect of the recommendation of which rifle NZ Army should purchase.

“We anticipate being able to make an announcement on the replacement sniper rifle in August, with Introduction into Service starting in 1st half of 2018,” says Major Tweedy.

Snipers have a very important role.

The sniper can be defined as a soldier who is a trained marksman, highly skilled in fieldcraft and target detection and who delivers long-range precision fire at selected targets from a concealed position.

Their tasks include: killing enemy personnel, killing enemy snipers, destroying enemy equipment, providing battlefield information or commentary and assisting in the direction of other direct and indirect fire assets.

Snipers are capable of effective employment across the full spectrum of conflict. Snipers can also operate from two-person up to four-person teams as required for the task or availability. Snipers can work as a detachment of six which includes a JNCO team leader in command; however, the key building block still remains as the two-person team.

A detachment may be attached to a combat team and, if necessary, can break into teams to facilitate the senior commander’s intent. A sniper team consists of a team leader, who is responsible for the conduct of the sniper mission and a sniper No 2 who assists the team leader.

