



## De Lisle

### A British "Special Purpose" Arm

(Commando Carbine .45 Cal. Bolt Action Silent Carbine)

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Most small arms supplied to troops are considered general-purpose tools. The standard infantry rifle serves well for the vast majority of soldiers. The cook, clerk and mechanic are usually issued the same weapon as the grunt. When a soldier's mission is different, then it is prudent to adapt the standard service arm to fit the requirements of the mission. Sometimes, as in the case of horse mounted cavalry troops the modification was as simple as the alternate (*side of the stock*) placement of sling swivels and a turned down bolt handle. In some configurations the sling swivels were simply deleted. Often Engineer units had rifles with a shorter barrel length. Airborne troops are often issued a rifle that in most respects is standard, except some have a folding or telescoping butt stock.

Some governments made it a practice to issue old, obsolete arms to rear echelon units. They felt these units had little chance of contact with the enemy could make due with rifles that while not considered new designs, were still functional.

The above examples are very basic adaptations of standard arms to fill *mission requirements*. It doesn't take a lot of thought or effort to move swivels, adjust barrel lengths, or fit different stocks. However, when a rifle is considered a "special purpose" tool, then more planning is required to deliver a product that can fulfill the mission.

The term “special purpose”, as applied to firearms, denotes an arm designed within certain parameters. Sniper rifles issued to field infantry units are a perfect example of wide parameter, special purpose arms. A standard infantry rifle, specially selected for accuracy, is fitted with a side mount and scope. The bolt handle may have to be turned down, and often the metallic sights are removed. Such a rifle will handle 99% of infantry sniper requirements. However, what if the mission requirements are very specialized, with narrow parameters?

### **Personnel as well as equipment can be specialized!**

*During WWII, the Germans were fighting Russia on the Eastern Front. The Russians devised a particular method to keep German troops demoralized and off balance.*

*Russians were known for large, frontal assault attacks. The Germans were used to seeing comrades fall under such circumstances. The flat, vast Russian plains required a unique method to terrorize German soldiers. Here's what crafty Russian planners came up with.*

*At night The Germans would gather around large campfires. The Russians decided on a night aerial assault on the campfires. The newly developed Russian fighter planes were too fast, and too heavy for a silent approach.*

*Their solution was to build fabric covered, WWI Bi-Planes! Additionally, they trained small, thin, females as pilots and gunners. They reasoned that campfires could be seen from a great distance on the Russian Plains. Bi-Planes that were slow and light, with a light crew, had a very long glide path. Once enemy campfires were observed, the pilot would cut off the engine and make a slow, silent glide toward the campfires under cover of darkness. Once in range, the gunner would train her machinegun around the campfires.*

*The effect at night was devastating! The German soldiers were being slaughtered, and had no idea where the fire was coming from. By the time they figured it out, the Russians were out of range, the pilot had cut her engine back on and they were headed for home. German soldiers feared the silent night attacks more than artillery barrages and tanks, where at least, they knew where the enemy fire was coming from!*

*The Russian women in this special unit dubbed themselves the “Night Witches”. They and their planes were truly special weapons with a special mission.*

Suppose that a small, specially trained unit will operate behind enemy lines. Their mission is very specific, they need to hit fast, disappear into the night and leave no residual evidence they were there. They must travel light and silently. They need a short, handy, quiet carbine length weapon. To insure that no residual evidence is left, empty brass can't be scattered about. What weapon could fill such a bill? That was exactly the question the British pondered during 1942.

Where to find a ready-made, short, handy, silent, low recoil carbine for commando uses that wouldn't scatter telltale brass? The answer was it didn't exist at that time. The British realized they would have to build it themselves. It makes sense to use a cartridge already in the inventory. Additionally, it makes sense to use a readily available action and rework it. However the specifications would require more than a simple rework. Thus the De Lisle came to be.

In 1942 William De Lisle and Sir Malcolm Campbell began to develop a weapon that would meet the requirements of the Ordnance Board. By 1943 Prototypes were being prepared at the Sterling factory for submission to the board. It was decided to use the 45 ACP round as it was already in use by the British. They had quantities of Auto Ordnance Thompson's and Colt 1911 pistols.

The De Lisle Commando carbine is basically a SMLE fitted with a M1911 magazine, a spent brass holder that catches the empties as they are extracted and ejected, a 8 .27 barrel and a 2 inch thick suppressor/silencer. A small forestock is under the suppressor. The weight was 8 lb, 2 oz. The rear sight was graduated for 50, 100, 150 and 200 yards. The front sight blade had tapered protecting ears.

Since the 45ACP is subsonic, the De Lisle is truly silent! The suppressor/silencer contains a series of baffles to muffle the sound of a round being fired. The action was reworked to feed and extract the 45 round as quietly as possible. Three factories were involved with building the De Lisle's. Since each specimen is virtually a "One Off", minor differences will be seen in original, individual guns.



Specification	Measurement
Cartridge:	.45 ACP
Length:	37.80in
Weight:	8lb 2oz

Barrel Length:	8.27in
Rifling:	4 grooves LH
Magazine:	8 round removable
Production:	1942-1945

130 De Lisle's were built. They were extremely effective in terrorizing and harassing enemy troops. Often an enemy sentry would just drop in his tracks, dead. His fellow soldiers could not hear or see anything, yet a comrade was dead or wounded. A search conducted to find the shooter found nothing, not even expended brass. Soldiers who were constantly wondering if they were to be the next victim of a silent, unseen enemy became less effective fighters.

While the De Lisle didn't account for large numbers of physical casualties the psychological effect on the enemy was well worth the effort.

### What, another Bi-Plane Story?

*Here is another view on how technology can work in military operations. In this instance, older technology prevails when designers fail to consider all the possibilities.*

*During WWII, the Germans launched the most modern battleship yet, the Bismarck.*

*The Bismarck went on duty and promptly sunk the Hood, a WWI era British Battleship. The Hood was a good design and much loved by the Royal Navy. Unfortunately, the Hood's armor was not thick enough to stand up to the new German naval guns. The Hood was slated for armor refitting; however, it had not been accomplished before it went up against the Bismarck.*

*The Royal Navy went after the Bismarck with extreme prejudice. The Bismarck's Anti-Aircraft guns were fitted with the latest traversing speed controls. The gunner could speed up or slow down the traversing motor to match the speed of an attacking aircraft. Unfortunately, the engineers who designed the speed control had its lowest setting to match the speed of modern WWII fighters and torpedo bombers.*

*The Royal Navy launched obsolete, fabric covered "Swordfish" torpedo bombers against the mightiest battleship in the world. The German anti-aircraft gunners turned the traversing speed controls to the slowest setting. The slowest setting was still too fast. The German guns continually swept past the lumbering Swordfish bi-planes! The torpedo's found their mark and jammed the Bismarck's rudder. Divers sent down to ascertain the damage reported the rudder couldn't be repaired at sea.*

*The Bismarck's commander knew they were in serious trouble. Without the ability to steer the Bismarck could run but it couldn't hide. The Royal Navy Task Force simply out maneuvered the crippled ship, which could only move in one direction. The Bismarck fought back bravely. The Royal Navy shot the Bismarck to pieces and sank it. The Bismarck had an operational life of slightly less than three weeks.*

The De Lisle had a shoulder stock, a barrel & sight radius 3 inches longer than a 1911 pistol; as a result it was very steady and quite accurate.

With only about 130 original De Lisle's made in the 1940's there is little to no chance of finding one at your local gun show. Besides, with a barrel length of only 8.27 inches an original De Lisle wouldn't be lawful to own. However, one can acquire and own a legal recreation of the De Lisle Carbine!

Keystone Arms makes BATF approved De Lisle's which do meet *all* regulations. They have unsuppressed versions that have a barrel jacket to simulate the suppressor. For those holding a Class III license, a suppressed version is available. Of course, all NFA rules apply to sales.

For additional data on the Keystone Arms De Lisle, <http://www.keystonearms.com> contact Joe Manazza Jr.

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For the man wishing to own a very special, "special purpose" rifle, one of these fine Keystone Arms De Lisle recreations is just the ticket.

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