



iSHY

**Article Contributed by: [Ted Duncan](#)**

CAUTION!!! ANY surplus firearm should not be fired before being checked out by a qualified gunsmith. At the very minimum, its head space should be checked before firing.

To ignore this warning is to risk serious injury or death.

During the time that I have been collecting guns I have noticed an odd phenomenon.

Occasionally, seemingly out of nowhere, a firearm that had previously been scarcer than hen's teeth, maybe something you never even heard of before, will begin to show up in gun shops, at gun shows and in the ads of Shot Gun News.

Out of the blue this rifle will become as common as fleas on the proverbial dog.

Consider, for instance, the sudden appearance and availability of large numbers of **MAS 36** and MAS 49-56 rifles a couple of years ago. There were never any of them around and then, suddenly, bunches of them seemed to come from nowhere and the gun shops were all full of them. Then, just as suddenly, they petered out again and you hardly see them anymore. Time will pass and some other collectable military rifle (like **Romanian SKS's**) will suddenly appear, they'll be around in large quantity for a while and then they'll be gone. Somehow, supplies of surplus rifles seem to come in and go out with

the tide, each moon cycle bringing in some new collectable rifle from....somewhere.

About ten years ago we were invaded by a military rifle that came in like just like these others. You didn't ever see any of them around, and then, suddenly, there were hundreds, indeed thousands, of them around. But this particular rifle stirred up the one of the biggest controversies that the gun community (or at least my little world) had seen in a long time.

The rifle I'm referring to is the .308 Enfield 2A and 2A1 built at the Ishapore Armory (*R.F.I. or, Rifle Factory India*) in India.

The unpleasantness it brought with it came to be known as

The Great Exploding Receiver Controversy.

It all began when these Indian made copies of the venerated **British-built Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) rifle** began showing up in large numbers at gun shops and gun shows. Somebody remembered seeing a warning in an NRA publication about a Lee-Enfield "something or other" having "some sorta" horrible problem that caused the gun to blow up in the shooters face, causing disaster, disfigurement, death and taxes. To some military rifle collectors, because the Ishapur Enfield was built in India, and India is a "third world country", the 2A and 2A1 rifle just HAD to be the rifle that the NRA was talking about.

After all, went the popular thinking, any rifle built in India just HAD to be no damn good.

"Enlightened gun experts" would scream their cautionary, but unconfirmed (!), tale to any and all. Because of these dire warnings, a number of gun clubs and at least one public range in New Jersey would not permit the R.F.I. rifle to be fired on their property. I'm sure that it was worse in other parts of this country.

This controversy quickly spread to the internet where great pitched battles raged. *"A man would be a fool to shoot one of these Indian Rifles...just look at what happened over there at that gas plant in Bhopal, India. It was in 1984, 6,000 people died, countless more were injured. Those Indian engineers couldn't pour urine from a boot if the instructions were written on the heel"*.

I read it over and over again.

On the internet, in an Enfield "FAQ", one of the "*Enlightened*" plainly wrote that several of these rifles had been made with "*cast iron receivers*" (!!!) and reported that "he wouldn't shoot one of these "bombs" on a bet".

Another "*Henny-Penny gunsmith*" claimed after checking several 2A and 2A-1 rifles he found that their head space was out of spec. From this examination, this "*expert*" deduced that the receivers had "stretched". "*These rifles are talking (!!!) to us*" was his warning.

Bull Dinky!!

I wrote to the author of the Enfield FAQ and asked if he could produce one of these "*cast iron receivers*". Just ONE!

I never heard back from him.

After lengthy emails with the "*gunsmith*" he admitted that he had no "*before shooting and after shooting*" data to determine the growth rate. He had just checked the head space of a couple of Indian made 2A and 2A1 rifles and found that the head space was a bit loose. He also went on to say that the head space of the rifles that he had checked had not increased after his initial measurement.

Head Space, indeed.

After listening to all of the cussin' and moanin' I figured I do a little research and find out what the real story was.

I found that the warning from the NRA was with regard to throat erosion in some .303 No. 4 Enfield rifles, NOT .308 Ishapores. It was noted in the NRA warning that a number of these No. 4 rifles had barrels that had burst due to erosion caused by corrosive ammo. I was unable to find the original article but a reprint of it appears in the NRA publication, "*British Enfield Rifles*". The article is called "*Surplus Enfield Warning*". I guess it's a bad title - you actually have to READ the article to get the whole story!

To the best of my knowledge the NRA has NEVER issued a warning about the .308 Ishapore 2A or 2A-1.

[Ian Skennerton](#), who has written several books on Enfield Rifles, has told me that he has never heard of any catastrophic failure of an Ishapore 2A or 2A-1.

A call to Navy Arms, who has imported and sold a large number of these rifles, informed me that they have never seen a catastrophic failure of the receiver or barrel of a Ishapore Rifle.

None of the internet "*experts*" ever replied to my many attempts to find out what information that they may have had to support their claims. And nobody has shown me one of these rifles with a cast iron receiver. NOT EVEN ONE!

Just as a historical side note: Yes, in 1984 a chemical disaster DID occur in Bhopal, India. And, yes, over 6,000 people died and a lot more were injured.

But (*and as I like to point out, a BIG ol' butt*), the factory was built, owned, and operated by Union Carbide Corp. That's right, the AMERICAN Union Carbide Corp! American built, owned and operated. The courts over there found Union Carbide guilty of negligence and forced them to pay damages.

After 10 years of posting requests for information about ANY failure of a .308 Ishapore 2A or 2A-1 with several researchers of Lee Enfield Rifles on the internet I have come up with Zero, Zip, Nada.

So, upon the conclusion of my research, I invited several of these "range experts" to put their considered opinion to the test. In the interest of SCIENCE I would back up my research by placing myself at risk and shouldering and firing any number of these Indian built rifles. AS LONG AS they would back up THEIR conclusions by standing at the 100 yard line of a firing range holding a target against their chest. Just so's we can see who falls first.

Having said this, I still would like to hear about any PROVABLE claim of failure of an Ishapore Rifle. After all, its best to keep an open mind about these things.

You don't know what you don't know. Ya' know?

That same good research put a number of good quality R.F.I. 2A and 2A-1 rifles into the hands of happy gun owners. It pays to do your homework. Just like Sy and Marci Sims say on the television, "*An educated consumer is our best customer*".

To explain the development of this rifle I will refer to information found in THE LAST LEE-ENFIELD, The Indian Rifle 2A and 2A1, by Lt. Col. Robert W. Edwards, USAF (*Retired*).

During the early 1960's India got involved in a couple of border wars against China and Pakistan. India did poorly enough in these encounters to require a re-thinking of tactics and equipment. It was found that the .303 Enfields that had been the standard service arm of the Indians

were no match for the SKS and the PPSH used by the Chinese. Therefore, in early 1963, the Indian Army adopted the Ishapore Rifle, 1A SLR (*Self Loading Rifle*), their version of the

FN FAL, and began production of this rifle at the government rifle factory at Ishapore (*I'm lead to believe that "Ishapur" is another accepted spelling*) near Calcutta.

Although some small changes were made in their version, the 1A SLR was virtually the same as its counterpart found around the world. It was even chambered in .308 NATO. This caused a small problem.

Although production was fast enough that front line troops would receive the new self-loader in good time, the Indian Territorial Army (*their "reserves"*) was too large to equip with the new rifle. Also, keeping the old [.303 Enfield](#) could lead to supply headaches of the wrong rifle - wrong bullet kind. Their first thought was to upgrade the [No. 1 Mk. III SMLE](#). However, due to chamber pressures created by this cartridge, re-fitting the .303 turn-bolt rifles already in service was unacceptable. A virtually new rifle, the 2A, was needed to handle the .308 load.

I quote Lt. Col. Edwards:

"...the Defense Ministry opted to use existing (*production*) equipment to produce a new rifle based on the proven Lee-Enfield design. The resulting Rifle 2A is a masterpiece of innovation and adaptation. Using high grade EN steel and more advanced heat treatment for the receiver to handle the additional pressure generated by the 7.62mm round, a new barrel, a 12 round (instead of 10 round) magazine, and a buttstock with a higher comb to handle the additional recoil, the Rifle 2A is - in all other respects - a [No. 1 Mk III Lee-Enfield](#). It should be noted that at no time was this rifle ever intended for use as a first line infantry weapon (*the lessons of 1962 had been learned well*) but was always intended for issue to police, paramilitary, and line of communication personnel. The 2A began to enter service in 1964.

Almost 30 years after their introduction to the Indian Army, some of these rifles became surplus and somehow found their way to America.

And that's when The Great Exploding Chamber Controversy began.

The R.F.I. 2A (*and 2A-1*) is an interesting rifle, it retains all of the lines of the [No. 1 Mk III SMLE](#), yet it has all of the upgrades: it is chambered for .308 NATO, it has better

steel in the receiver, a 12 round magazine and a redesigned butt stock to suit the new cartridge. Kids today would call it RETRO. One of the best characteristics of this rifle is that so many of them were made and they have been held in such low esteem by British Arms collectors you can free to modify or "tart one up" without fear of being accused of sacrificing a priceless relic.

Navy Arms shortened up a bunch of them, put on that sexy flash hider and sold them as REPLICA Jungle Carbines. They also made up a bunch of "*Tanker Carbines*", modeled after the mythical M1 Garand Tanker Carbine. I guess a good story, told well, IS worth hearing twice.

**Gibbs Rifle company** still offers several versions of this rifle, including the sexy **Quest II Extreme Carbine** listed in their Sport Specialty lineup. Other retailers offered Col. Cooper style scout rifles with black plastic stocks and scope mounts. Each of them fun guns indeed!

I have to acknowledge that some retailers refer to these replica carbines as **No.7** or No. 9 Jungle Carbines kinda making a link between the replica and the authentic No.5 Jungle Carbine. But I think that it has always been done with a smile and a wink, after all, everybody knows that there's no such thing as either a **No.7 (or No.9) Jungle Carbine** or a Lee Enfield Tanker carbine.

Right????

At one time, there was a huge number of these rifles around, so many there was even an internet site known as The Ishapur Forum that was dedicated strictly to them. Guys that frequented that web site referred to these RFI rifles as

"Ishy's"

But like all good things that come to an end, the vast supplies of R.F.I. Enfields seem now to have dried up.

When they were plentiful, I bought two of them. One is a full size and the other is a (*replica/fake*) Jungle Carbine. I prettied both of them up, redid their stocks and their metal bits. I love them both, they look just like their 100 year old British cousins and shoot real well. And I just love the RETRO aspect. Its kinda like having a brand new 1930 Model A Ford built in 2003 with new technology and parts.

I'd give you a full range report but you really don't have to do one on these rifles. Just check out the data from a .303 Enfield SMLE. Its all pretty much the same stuff: They

kick real hard and shoot high at 100 yards! You have to replace the front site blade with the same tall one you would put in the Brit built SMLE.

I see that these rifles are still on active duty over in India. Every time some natural catastrophe or other disaster in India makes the TV news here in America, you can see some Indian GI or Police Officer carrying one of these rifles. I KNOW that it will gag a number of those people who viewed the Ishy with contempt and suspicion when I say I wouldn't be surprised if one day the R.F.I. 2A and 2A1 Enfield beat out the venerated AR 15- M16 for the title of the "*Military Rifle In Longest Use*".

Oh, yeah.....ANY surplus firearm should not be fired before being checked out by a qualified gunsmith. At the very minimum, its headspace should be checked before firing. To ignore this warning is to risk serious injury or death....

Now go to your room and do your homework!!!

[Ted Duncan](#)

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