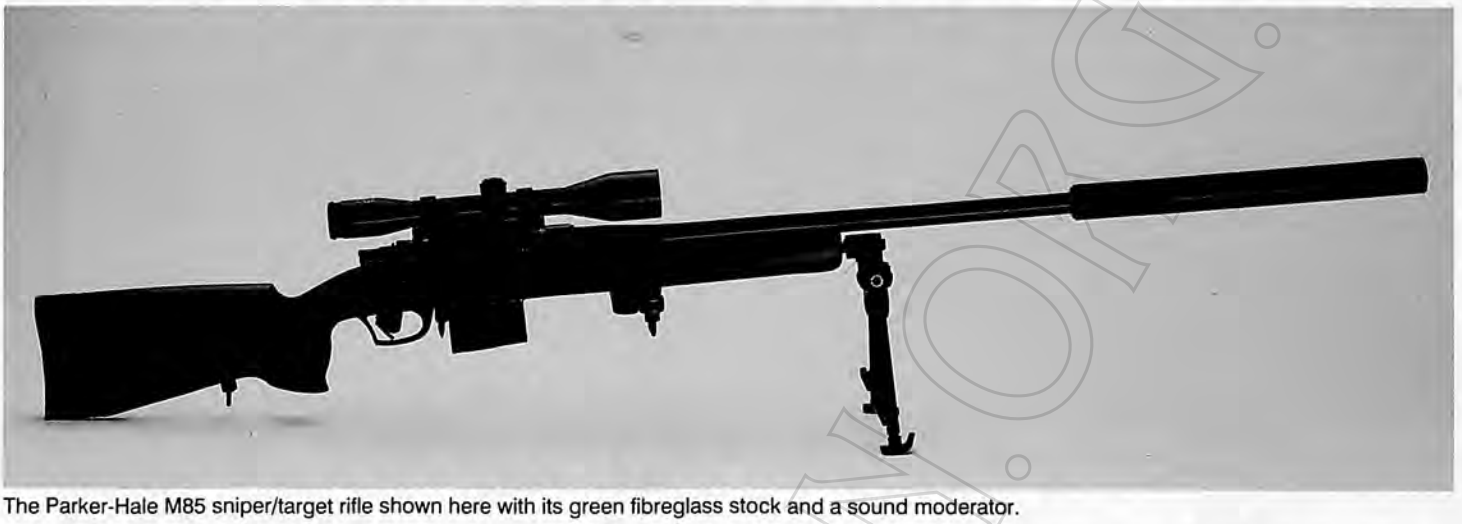
BY J. R. TATE

The Parker-Hale M85 Rifle



The Parker-Hale M85 sniper/target rifle shown here with its green fibreglass stock and a sound moderator.

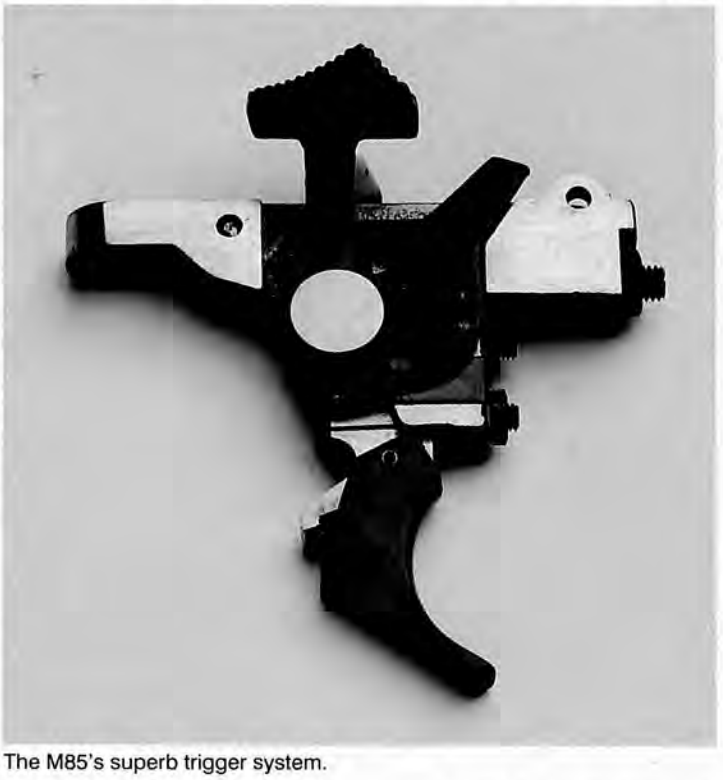
IN 1985, the British Army announced the adoption of a new sniper rifle, after a protracted trial period which resulted in a shoot off between two final contenders. The fanfare was almost eclipsed by the advertising campaign for the unsuccessful candidate. The two rifles in question were the Accuracy International PM, since adopted by the Army as the L96A1, and the Parker-Hale M85. As a result of the trials conducted by the School of Infantry at Warminster both weapons were approved for service by the Armed Forces, having achieved the requirement of a guaranteed first round hit at 600 metres (in the hands of an competent shot, of course) under a variety of conditions, and having survived the rigours of extended use in the field. Since the trials the M85 has been purchased by various governments, including those of Sweden and Malaysia, and agencies such as the Hong Kong police. It is also rumoured that, despite the issue of the L96A1, some M85's have been purchased by British special forces.

Parker-Hale has a long standing reputation for producing high quality sporting arms and target rifles, and has carved itself a useful niche in the military market with their M82 that is currently in service as the standard sniper rifle with the armed forces of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the L81A1 Cadet Rifle. When the British Army published their requirement for a weapon system to replace their venerable L42's, Parker-Hale set about the task of producing the ultimate long range precision, but soldier-proof rifle, using their long experience in both the target shooting and military fields. The result was the M85.

Based on the highly successful M84 Target Rifle, the M85 is a heavy barrelled, bolt action weapon in 7.62 × 51mm (.308 Winchester), fed by a detachable 20 round box magazine. The heavy cold forged barrel is 700mm long with 4 groove, right hand twist rifling with a pitch of 1 turn in 12". Some models have muzzles externally threaded to accept a flash eliminator, and are fitted with a thread protector; the review rifle, however, has a plain, uncrowned muzzle. The chamber end of the tube is machined and threaded for fitting to the receiver, and is free floating from this point forward. The receiver itself is a robust casting, cut away on the right hand side to produce a large ejection port, and underneath for the magazine well. The flat top is machined with twin sets of dovetails designed to accept either a one piece, purpose built 'scope mount or a pair of standard Parker-Hale rings.

Although the rifle is primarily designed for use with telescopic sights, an excellent set of iron sights are fitted for emergency use. The foresight block is mounted on a dovetailed seating at the muzzle. The blade is protected by a pair of stout 'ears', and is adjustable for both windage and elevation. Lateral adjustments are made by moving the whole block, slackening the mounting screw on the side towards which movement is required, then tightening the opposite screw by the same amount. This operation is very simple, requiring only the use of a 3/16" Allen key. Each half turn of the screw will shift the point of impact by 75mm at 100 metres. Elevation adjustments are made by screwing the foresight blade up or down. To do this a hinged locking clip is raised, using a small screwdriver or similar implement, freeing the blade and allowing it to be tightened or loosened as required. One half turn of the foresight represents a 50mm shift at 100 metres. The rearsight is mounted towards the rear of the receiver, between two protective ribs and when folded it is concealed under the telescopic sight. The leaf carries a sliding aperture with its adjusting screw, and is graduated, in increments of 100 metres, matched to standard NATO Ball ammunition (144gr FMJ bullet at a nominal muzzle velocity of 2820 fps).

The bolt is pure Mauser, with its two hefty, forward mounted locking lugs and large, spring steel extractor. An additional rear mounted safety lug is positioned just below the bolt handle. The substantial firing pin is powered by a heavy spring that not only



The M85's superb trigger system.