

Twitter Thread by Dr Matthew Ford

Dr Matthew Ford

@warmatters



A thread about "The Ideal Calibre Panel".

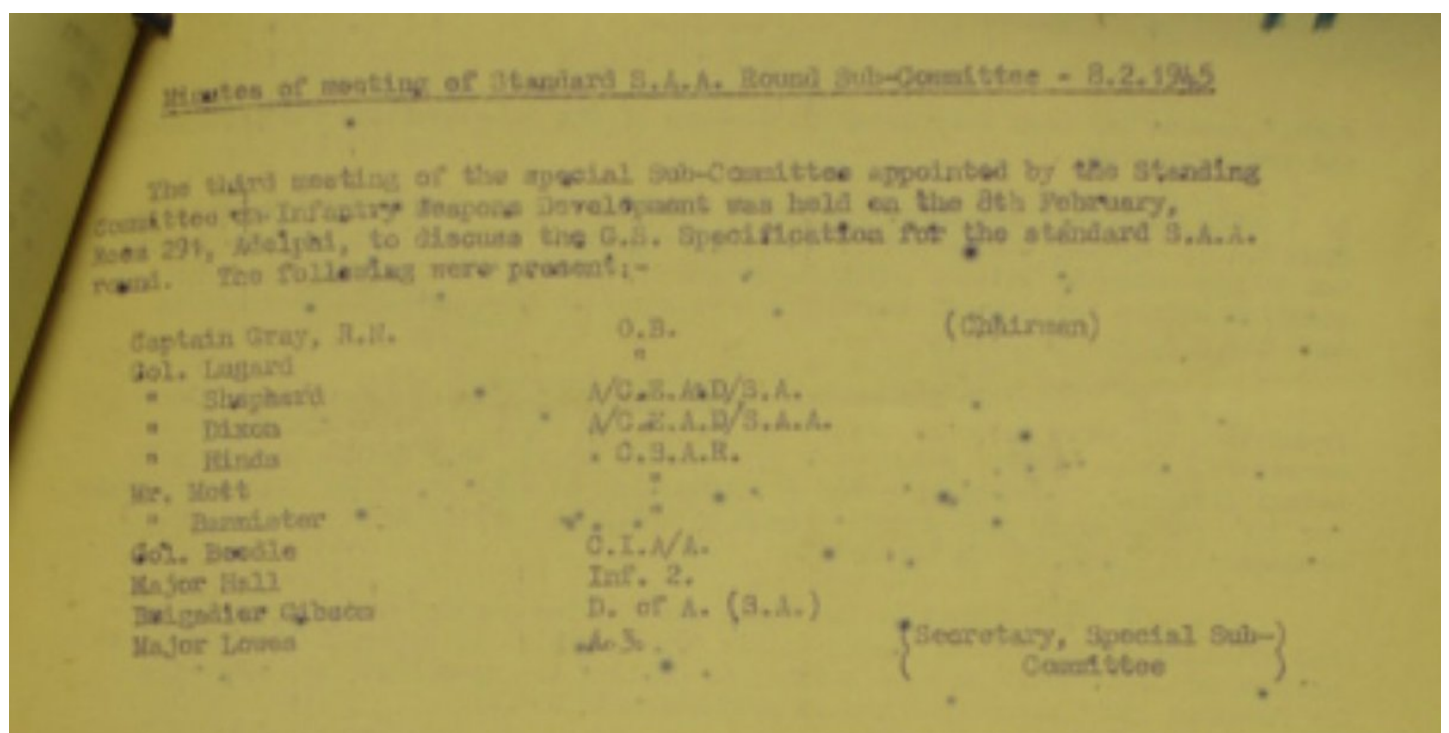
This is the nickname for a panel of people involved in trying to identify the "ideal" calibre for small arms post-1945.

1a/

The Panel came into being following a recommendation of the Standard SAA Round Sub-Committee which met on 8 February 1945.

This was a sub-committee of the Standing Committee on Infantry Weapons Development, that was created following the GS policy to adopt rimless SAA.

1b/



Note the framing as the identification of an "Ideal".

The use of this word is political.

It is designed to push the principal actors who had different views about small arms towards the solution being worked on by Brigadier Barlow and the Armament Design Establishment.

2a/

Thread on Brigadier Barlow here:

2b/ <https://t.co/F7uumzjqBq>

So I said that I'd pick up the story of Brigadier Barlow in a subsequent thread.

Alongside Colonel Ren\xe9 Studler of the US Ordnance Corps, Brigadier Barlow was instrumental in the post-war discussions of small arms ammunition and weapon standardisation.

1/ <https://t.co/enkgmY40W4>

— Dr Matthew Ford (@warmatters) [January 3, 2021](#)

Thread on the Armament Design Establishment and the Design Department here:

2c/

<https://t.co/AEZdpLFYZz>

A thread on the Armament Design Establishment (SA).

If we're going to talk post-war small arms & NATO small arms and ammunition standardisation then we also have to talk about the ADE(SA).

This is a photo of the entire Cheshunt establishment in 1945.

1/ <pic.twitter.com/HHeap7lmq2>

— Dr Matthew Ford (@warmatters) [December 31, 2020](#)

By now I hope you'll recognise that this term also connotes technological determinism.

The framing is designed to get the General Staff and the Americans to accept the technical solutions being developed by the ADE as in some way "inevitable". Better than 7.92/.30'06.

3a/

My thread on technological determinism is here:

3b/

<https://t.co/CRBKjyRQv8>

Before I write on engineers we must do some conceptual ground clearing.

This is important because my gun threads have led to several questions that have a whiff of determinism about them.

So this is a thread on technological determinism & why it is kryptonite for academics.

1/

— Dr Matthew Ford (@warmatters) December 30, 2020

The panel itself was chaired by Dr Richard Beeching an OR worker who went on to shape the late 20th century British Rail Network, closing branch lines and focusing on main routes.

4/

<https://t.co/PzgP3yegnf>

He's even more instrumental than the "Ideal Calibre Panel" which was chaired by the operational researcher Dr Richard Beeching, also of the 1963, Reshaping of British Railways, report that Brits regularly go on about.

2/ pic.twitter.com/4PzcifyZm9

— Dr Matthew Ford (@warmatters) January 3, 2021

The specifications that the Ideal Calibre Panel were working from were stated in a requirements document issued by the Organisation and Weapons Policy Committee of the General Staff from 27 Nov 1944.

5/

The War Office,
Whitehall,
London, S.W.1.
27 November 1944.

57/Ans/3726(Inf 3)

Sir,

I am commanded by the Army Council to inform you that the Chiefs of Staff at their 537th Meeting held on 12th October, 1944, approved the policy of developing a small arms round of the rimless cartridge type which would be best suited to the operational requirements of future small arms weapons of British forces.

The General Staff Specification for such a standard round is attached as Appendix "A" to this letter.

I am, therefore, to request that the development of a standard round in accordance with this Specification be undertaken.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

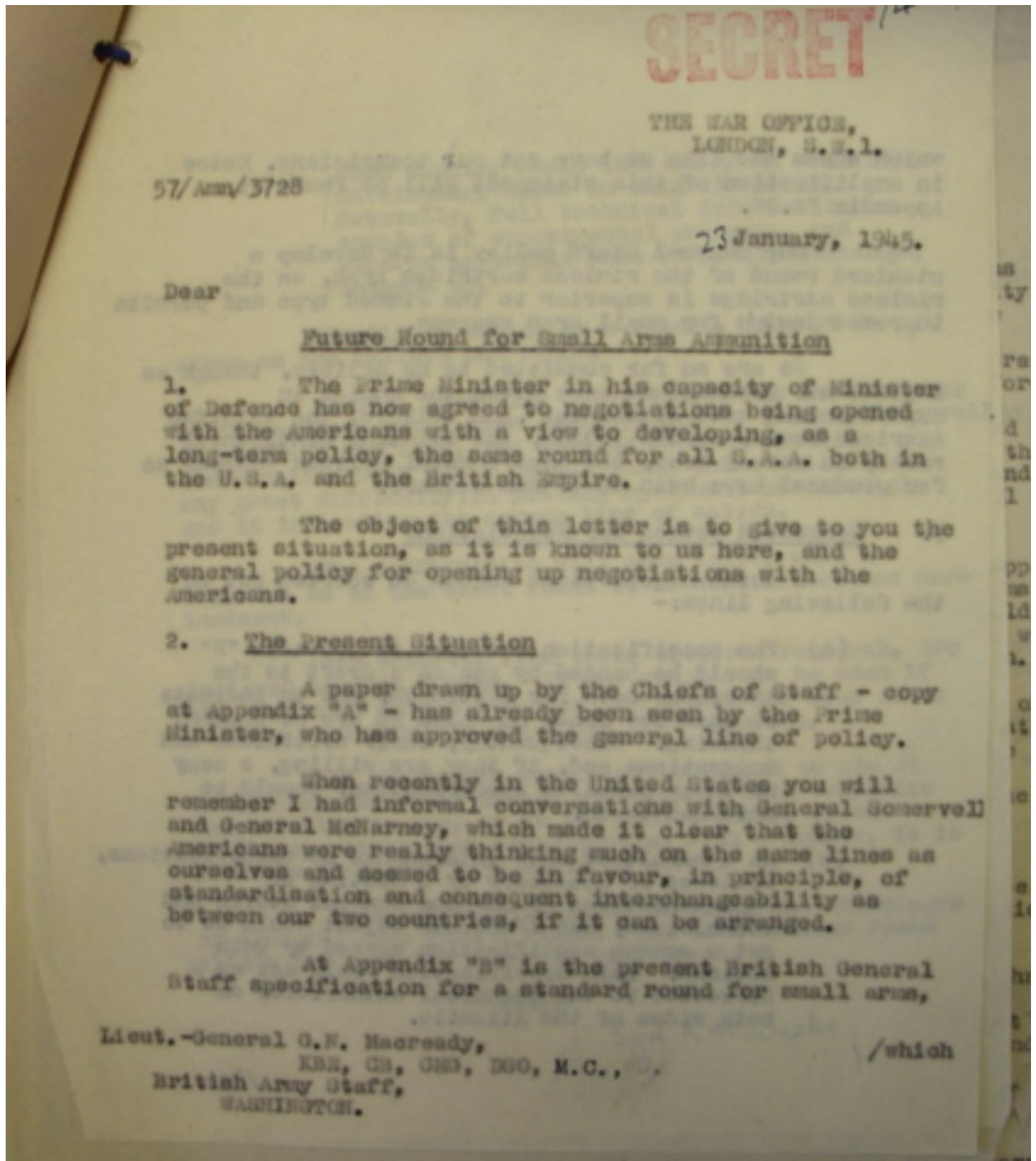
Signed/ G.W. LAMONT.

The Secretary,
Ministry of Supply.

In January 1945, the Prime Minister Winston Churchill takes a direct interest in future small arms.

His position reflects his wartime experience in relation to mass production of SA/SAA. He is keen to tie Britain to the production capacity of the United States.

6/



Note that these letters are From Lieutenant-General Ronald Weeks (DCIGS) to the British Army Staff (pre-cursor to the British Joint Services Mission) in Washington DC.

They are explicitly telling the Americans that the UK is going to design a new SAA round.

7/



(Later Baron) Ronald Weeks is a very interesting character.

Before the FWW he was a technical trainee at Pilkington's Bros Ltd. In 1919 he rejoined, embraced modern commercial & industrial techniques in glass manufacture to become Chairman of the Executive Directors by 1939.

8/

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During the FWW he was mentioned in dispatches 3 times, awarded the MC in 1917, the MC with bar in 1918 and the Croix de Guerre in 1918.

He rejoined the Army and served in the War Office from 1939.

After the War he Chaired Vickers.

9/

As I set out in this mini-thread, the British small arms establishment were against adopting .30'06, fearing that this would end their role in SA design. Instead they favoured experimentation based around 7.92mm.

10/

<https://t.co/6cEZGOySLS>

(A mini) THREAD:

On rimless and standardised small arms ammunition. <https://t.co/SGdLbB1loL>

— Dr Matthew Ford (@warmatters) [January 5, 2021](#)

In his letter to the British Army Staff in DC, Weeks set out how agreement on standardisation with the Americans might work.

What he had not counted on was the sub-committee on Infantry Weapon Development establishing a panel to investigate an alternative to .30'06 & 7.92mm

11/

Some in the General Staff were of the opinion that .30'06 was the quickest and easiest way to adopt rimless SAA. There was experience with it with the P17 Rifle issued to the Home Guard & the Army could easily switch to the M-1 Garand.

12/



In May 1946, cost analysis led the OPCW to recommend the Army adopt .30'06. The CIGS (Montgomery) agreed in July 1946 and the UK was set to adopt the round once the Dominions had agreed.

13/

If Barlow, the ADE(SA) and the new Director of Infantry, Major-General DN Wimberley were to overturn this General Staff policy then they would have to box clever.

14/

They wanted to do this because they saw the benefits of fielding a weapon that was both a machine carbine (SMG in contemporary speak and a rifle).

I set out the reasoning for this here:

<https://t.co/f1rqk05d6v>

15/

A thread outlining my thoughts on Second World War tactics.

For me tactics only makes sense when looked at as a socio-technical system. This thread reflects that way of thinking.

Again I'll be using British examples but there are some US crossovers later on.

1/ pic.twitter.com/RKlZj67rj7

— Dr Matthew Ford (@warmatters) December 29, 2020

In July 1946 the Ideal Calibre Panel still hadn't reported and the SAA rounds being worked on by the ADE(SA) had yet to be a meaningful reality.

In this situation the only hope was to confuse and create uncertainty.

16/

The solution came along in the form of the US Ordnance Corps own SAA the T65 savage round...

What would be the point of the UK adopting .30'06 if the US were looking into a new and advance calibre of their own?

17/

<https://t.co/jOGvYWqtNB>

This smudging of US intentions created the space for the ADE(SA) to bring its own SAA to greater readiness levels which in turn allowed the Ideal Calibre Panel to recommend ammunition with a calibre with a range between .250" and .270" depending on the bullet core.

18/

For anyone who knows about the EM-2 story, however, calibres between .250" and .270" were not the calibres of ammunition taken to the United States for trials.

19/

Instead the ADE(SA) & Brigadier Barlow took a .276" round to the standardisation trials.

Why did he do that? I'll answer that soon...

20/

<https://t.co/jiYNXVdLLK>