

Marines given long-range rifle to fight on front line in Helmand



A soldier from 2 Para demonstrates the new Sharpshooter rifle

By Daily Telegraph Reporter

ROYAL Marines serving in Afghanistan have become the first British troops to use a powerful new long-range rifle on the front line, the Ministry of Defence said yesterday.

40 Commando have begun using the Sharpshooter rifle in battles with the Taliban in Sangin, Helmand province.

The new semi-automatic weapon fires a 0.3in [7.62mm] round, larger than the Army's standard issue SA80A2 assault rifle, and is more accurate over long distances.

More than 400 of the guns, the first new infantry combat rifle to be given to personnel in more than two decades, have been bought in a £1.5million urgent requirement. The

marines have been using the new rifles on the front line for a fortnight, the MoD said.

Sergeant Baz Evans of 40 Commando said: "I have fired over 1,000 rounds on the rifle in training; accurately hitting targets over 800m [0.5 miles] away.

"The new Sharpshooter rifle provides quick and accurate fire, with the flexibility of using

it in the assault rifle role as well. It's hoofing." The gas-operated L129A1 carries a 20-round magazine, is just over 3ft [945mm] long and weighs 11lbs [5kgs]. It was manufactured by Lewis Machine & Tool Company in the United States.

Col Peter Warden, at Defence, Equipment and Support, said: "The Sharpshooter rifle is very capable and has been bought

to fulfil a specific role on the front line in Afghanistan.

"It is a versatile weapon which will give our units a new dimension to their armoury. It will complement the SA80A2 by adding to the weapons available to commanders on the ground. The Sharpshooter's capabilities are also complementary to the current sniper system."