

Flintlocks of the American Revolution

We wish to thank Ron Glidden, Whitcomb's Rangers, for contributing this piece.

In the flintlock ignition system, the flint is held in screw-tightening jaws of a pivoting "cock or "hammer" that snaps forward when the trigger is pulled to hit a hardened steel striking surface called the frizzen. The resulting sparks drop onto the priming powder in the flash-pan, which sends a flame through the touch-hole to reach the main charge. This was the ultimate firearms system of the 18th century!

English Military Muskets: Commonly referred to as the "Brown Bess". The .75 caliber musket saw numerous changes between 1730 and 1778. Its variations included the Long Land Patterns with a 46" barrel and wooden or steel rammers; the Sea Service Musket with a 37" barrel; and the Short Land Pattern with a 42" barrel and steel rammer. The Short Land Pattern being the newest was in common use by the British during the Revolution. In contrast, the Americans frequently used the older Long Land Patterns dating back to the F&I period.

French Military Muskets: These government muskets were made at three royal arms manufactories at St. Etienne, Charleville and Maubeuge. The Model 1777, commonly referred to as the "Charleville" had a 44-3/4" banded barrel and was .69 caliber.

Fusils: Light, smoothbore shoulder weapon of smaller size and caliber than regular infantry weapons. Commonly issued to officers.

Carbines: Reduced bore size, but not always reduced barrel length. Commonly issued to dragoons, sergeants, and grenadiers.

Blunderbusses: Shortened shoulder stocked firearms with flared muzzles that often fired multiple small shot. Short range of limited use during Revolution. It was determined that the flared muzzle had minimum influence on the shot pattern.

Wall or Rampart Guns: Heavy barreled, large bore semi-shoulder weapon that fired a longer range than the infantry musket. Often mounted on swivels on a parapet of a fort, or on a ship's deck.

Fowlers: Civilian hunting guns capable of shooting multiple projectiles of small shot (bird shot), a few larger projectiles called buck, or a single round lead projectile called a ball. Fowlers normally had stocks running the full length of the barrel. These stocks were sometimes cut down to allow for the addition of a socket bayonet.

Trade Guns: Commercial guns made in Europe for sale in the American Colonies for the fur trade and frontier settlement.

Jaeger Hunting Rifle: Developed as a big game weapon in Central Europe. Short, large bored, and heavily stocked. Predecessor of the American Rifle.

American Long Rifle: Long barreled, small bore impressively accurate at long distances. Origins in Pennsylvania. Later used on frontiers of Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. Used in the American revolution by companies of southern riflemen, but did not see extensive use in the northeast until after the revolution. Northeast hunters needed larger calibers for the game still available in New England. For military purposes, the musket had two advantages over the rifle. The musket's smooth bore could be loaded up to four times faster than a patched ball in a rifled barrel. In addition, while effective at long range, rifles were not capable of utilizing a bayonet - a fact that proved deadly to many riflemen facing a British infantry charge.