



# The Blew Regiment London Trayned Bandes

Part of

**The Cittie of London Brigade of the Sealed Knot**

## Procedure For Safe Musketeering

*"Praise Be To God, And Pass The Powder"*



## Loading and Firing a Musket

At all times you must remember that the musket YOU are using is a firearm and that the purpose for which firearms were invented was to kill people, a job that the muskets we use can do just as well if used in a careless or dangerous manner as the modern SA80 that is used by the British Army to day. Never point a musket directly at any one. Never fire at any one closer to you than 15 meters (20 meters for cavalry), and always be aware of where the muzzle is pointing.

## **Loading**

There are variations on this, but these are the MINIMUM procedures for safe use.

### **Make ready**

This is the order you will hear most when on the battlefield. It is the condensed and simplified version of what is to follow. When this command is given you must follow it up to the second part of this section.

These commands or a variation of them are what you will tend to use at drill displays and living histories and will show why they are condensed into the command given above. At all times when loading care must be taken not to allow the muzzle to drop and point at the head of the musketeer to your left.

### **Open your pan**

Hold the musket in the Port position balanced in your left hand. The match should also be in this hand, making sure that the lit end is well away from your hand and anywhere else that it may damage. With your right hand open the Pan Cover.

### **Clean your pan**

Using the little finger on your right hand clean any deposits left by the previous shot or, if this is the first shot, any oil left from the last cleaning.

### **Prime your pan**

If using cartridge take out a cartridge using your right hand, bite off the end and spit it out then pour a little powder in to the priming pan. If using bandoliers take up the priming flask in your right hand and pour a little in to the pan, return the priming flask to its place. If using a flask take hold of flask, press leaver tip flask release leaver prime your pan

### **Shut your pan**

### **Cast off loose powder**

The musket should be turned so that the lock and pan are angled towards the ground and the stock should be tapped on the back to remove loose powder.

### **Blow off loose powder**

The musket should then be lifted to just below the chin and two or three quick "blows" given to remove any remaining powder grains. Taking care to ensure that the pan is angled away from your face so that if it does fire the flare will be away from you.

## **Cast about your piece to your left hand**

The musket should still be held in the left hand with the match, allow the Butt to swing down to your left-hand side but it should not be placed on the ground. You must ensure that the muzzle is pointing away from yourself or other members of the block. The musket should be upside down with the pan pointing downwards.

## **Search out your charge**

Find the next full bottle on the bandoliers.

## **Handle your charge**

Take the next full bottle of powder on the belt and lift it clear of the rest.

## **Open your charge**

Needs little explanation.

## **Charge your musket with powder**

Pour the powder down the barrel from the full bottle.

## **Wad your piece**

Take a piece of paper toilet from your pouch, make sure that you don't screw it up too tightly as it is surprising how far it will fly and just how much damage it will do to someone if it hits them.

## **Handle your scouring stick**

Using fingertips only, just in case of premature ignition, grip the scouring stick sometimes called the "ram rod" and pull the first three inches from its slot in the underside of the stock. Never put your hand over the end unless you are into body piercing.

## **Remove your scouring stick**

Take the scouring stick from the muzzle and hold it near the middle forward of the barrel but in line with it.

## **Reverse and shorten to a length**

Turn the ram rod through 180 degrees and place the end against your chest. Slide your hand down towards your chest leaving about 9 inches between your hand and your chest.

## Ram home your charge

Using fingertips only put the short end into the barrel and push the wad down onto the powder, once the wad is on the powder give it three firm taps to make everything secure. If you do this with a tight wad every time you will feel recoil and you will know that your musket has fired.

## Put back your scouring stick

Return the ram rod to its place below the barrel.

## Give rest to your piece

Return the musket to the port position.

## Cock your Match

With the musket still in the port position, place the lit end of your match in the fork like opening in the serpent and adjust the fit so that it grips the match firmly but not too tightly, you don't want it to fall out at an inopportune moment. As you gain in experience you will notice that the matchcord has a natural curve or bend to it and if you place the match so that the bend angles down towards the pan the next step will be easier. Keep hold of the unlit end with your left hand leaving enough slack for the serpent to pivot freely. This stops the match from falling to the ground if blown out of the serpent when firing.

## Try your Match

Making sure that the pan cover is closed, carefully pivot the serpent and match back to check that it falls in the centre of the pan when the trigger is pulled if it doesn't adjust and try again until it does. This is the reason you were so careful to ensure that there was no loose powder left in the pan area or on the pan cover.

## Guard your Pan

Place your right hand over the top of the pan to prevent any sparks from the match falling onto the pan cover. Some muskets have a moulded cover handle to make this easier.

## Blow off your Coals

With the match in the serpent, lift the musket so that the serpent is just below your face but angled away from you so that if it does go off the flare from the touchhole is away from you. Carefully blow on the lit end of the match to ensure that it is glowing brightly and has formed a sharp point or cone with no loose bits or ash on the end. Take care-if you have a loose pan cover it may now blow off and injure your face.

## Firing

### Present your Piece

Stand with the left foot 18 inches forward of and at a slight angle to the right foot. The musket should be lifted up to the firing position with the butt tight against the right shoulder and balanced in the left hand, leaving your right hand free to carry out the next steps in the firing procedure. NOTE at all times you should aim above the heads of anybody in front of you. You must also be aware of any one moving into your field of fire from the left and right-hand sides.

### Prepare to give fire

This command has four separate actions.

1. With your right hand open the pan cover.
2. Move your right hand back and place your right forefinger on the trigger.
3. With your left forefinger check that the ramrod is where it belongs under the barrel. Look at the ramrod and tilt the musket towards the sergeant so he can see the ramrod.
4. Check visually that no one has wandered in front of you within the 15/20 meter no-fire zone. Steps one and three can be done simultaneously.

### GIVE FIRE

Firmly pull the trigger with your right forefinger; this lowers the match into the priming powder igniting it which will, in turn, ignite the main charge firing the musket. Once you have done this and the priming has ignited there is nothing you can do to stop the musket going off, so if there is any doubt as to whether it is safe to fire DON'T, it is better to hold your fire than risk the smallest chance of causing an injury to anyone. Could you sleep if you blew someone's face off?

### Dismount

Once you have fired wait until your sergeant shouts this command before you move, then lower the musket from the present back to the port and step back to your place. Sometimes different manoeuvres put the other ranks into kneeling or stooping positions as well as standing to fire a volley. Don't move until you are told to, this gives him chance to check that everyone who is going to fire has done so and that there are no misfires. If you do have a misfire shout misfire and make sure that the person in command knows you have a misfire.

Of course you are expected to load while moving forward and backwards as well as loading while kneeling

## **Misfires**

There are three basic types of misfire and all of them are potentially dangerous.

### ***Flash In The Pan***

This is by far the most common misfire. What this type of misfire involves is the priming in type of the pan ignites but for some reason the main charge fails to detonate. This can be caused by a number of reasons, too little powder in the pan, too coarse a grade of powder used for priming, or a blocked touch hole to name the three most common. The way to clear this is to, after getting permission to leave the body, allow a minute to ensure that is not going to fire then carefully, using your picker and a gloved hand, prick the touch hole to ensure that it is clear. Re-prime the pan (using a teaspoon not a full priming flask) with a suitable amount or grade of powder. If all goes well when you repeat the firing procedure the musket should fire. If it fails to fire repeat the procedure. If it again fails to fire you may have the second most common misfire.

### ***Blockage***

This is where the musket is completely blocked and no amount of pricking and re-priming will get it to go. This is often caused by too little powder in the barrel causing the wadding to obstruct the touchhole. If you get this type there is nothing you can do about it on the battlefield, apart from pouring water into the pan and down the barrel in hopes that it will reach the charge to prevent it going off. Don't trust this too far, as a good tight wad can be practically watertight. To clear it properly you will have to wait until you get back to the campsite where you will have to "worm out" the charge. Worming out evolves the use of the corkscrew like implement you should find in your cleaning kit. After attaching the worm to the end of the cleaning rod, carefully push the tool down the barrel until you feel it hit the charge then slowly turn the worm clockwise whilst pressing down so that, like a cork screw, it screws into the wadding. Once you feel you have a good grip on the wadding gently pull it out of the barrel. Repeat this until you get no more paper out then clean the gun in the normal way.

N.B. be care full not turn the cleaning rod anti-clockwise as you may unscrew the worm and get this stuck down the barrel as well! If you do manage to do this ask your musket officer or an experienced musketeer to help you.

### ***Hang Fire***

The last, and thankfully the rarest, type of misfire is the "Hang Fire". This is where the powder in the priming pan, for some reason, fails to ignite explosively and instead, just smoulders for few seconds, then fires. If you can see a glow in the pan and maybe a few

embers then you probably have a hang fire. The length of time you have to wait is very hard to predict but I personally have had one that lasted almost thirty seconds. All you can do when you have a hang fire is wait in the 'Present' position and hope it will fire eventually. The average time is only about ten seconds. Unfortunately it is very hard to recognize a hang fire and, until you have had one, they are very hard to describe.

If you are not sure as to if you have fired or not then if you move your musket gently up and down you should get smoke both from the muzzle AND the touch hole. This only happens when the barrel is clear and there is nothing to stop the flow of air through it.

## **Touch Firing**

You should only touch fire if your serpent has been damage it is an unsafe way of firing for you are not looking at where you are firing. Putting yourself, members of the block and persons outside the block in risk.

## **Club Musket**

This is the method of attack used when the enemy has got too close to safely shoot at them or an objective has to be taken. All you do, if your musket is unloaded, is reverse it and use the butt as a club to lay into them. Do not leave the block to fire off, in order to join in. Simple as 'Club Musket' may seem, the following points should be remembered in order not to actually hurt anybody. Drop your match on to the floor for the followers to pick up. A lit piece of match in someone's powder bag could ruin his or her, and your, day. If you are using a rest you can drop it or take it in with you. Pull all blows. A musket is a heavy weapon at the best of times and the butt usually has a steel plate on the end so, when using it at club, avoid the head and groin. A swing looks effective but can be hard to control so it is safer to use a prodding action but avoid contact with the face and limbs. It is better to avoid contact at all but if you do remember that your opponent may be recovering from surgery. Injuries to bones and faces can be severe from even the lightest blow. Hold the musket by the Barrel so that the Pan is facing towards you i.e. between you and the other side of the musket, this will help to stop the Serpent or Lock becoming entangled or damaged whilst in contact with your opposition.

## **Officers & N.C.O.**

Officers & N.C.O. are not blameless; god like beings with all knowing all seeing powers. They are mere humans just like you and they can get just as excited and carried away as the next person. This means they can be, and often are, wrong. It is up to YOU to act as a second set of eyes and ears for them. If they give an order that puts you, other

members of the society, or members of the public in any danger, politely refuse the order and point out to them why you have done so. It is, after all, your license and liberty which is at risk if you follow a stupid or dangerous order, as well as theirs.

## Musket Care / Maintenance

Like a car, a musket needs regular maintenance and cleaning in order for it to continue to work without problems and, again like a car, a well-maintained musket is a safe musket. Black powder is made up of three ingredients: Carbon, Saltpetre and Sulphur. These, when burnt, leave a corrosive residue which must be removed after each day's use. Prompt cleaning of the musket after use is the only way to prevent corrosion damage. A good powder solvent should be used to dissolve the residue, as boiling water will not remove it all by itself. A good brushing should then be done to remove any final deposits. The barrel should then be wiped out with clean swabs to remove any lingering moisture, until the swab comes out clean. A light coating of gun, or light machine oil, must then be applied to both inside and outside of the barrel to prevent rusting. The stock needs to be treated occasionally with a light coating of Linseed Oil. This protects the wood work from moisture and keeps it slightly supple just like a cricket bat.

## Code of Conduct for Musketeers

It is the responsibility of each individual to follow and to make sure that he / she has the knowledge and ability to adhere to this Code of Practice. It is the responsibility of the Commanding Officers and their nominated officers to provide training and guidance and also to enforce the rules as set down in the Rules of Engagement.

Musketeers must have the correct licenses and have passed the Musket Competency Test before firing a weapon at any battle or display. The law (Firearms Act, Explosives Act, etc.) and the S.K. rules will be obeyed at all times.

No musketeer will draw or use any weapon or gunpowder whilst under the influence of alcohol or other substances.

All musketeers must have a thorough knowledge of:

- The correct loading procedure.
- The correct method of firing by using the lock.
- How to recognize and safely clear a misfire.
- How to carry a loaded musket.
- 17th Century and the S.K. musket drill.

Powder must be carried in either:

- Measured cartridges, which are to be carried in leather, double thickness or canvas snap sac. The bag should close in order to protect the contents from stray sparks.
- Bandoliers that are made of wood with tight fitting tops, which must be flash proof. Loose loading from a flask should be discouraged.

**All muskets must have a working lock, trigger guard and pan cover.**

**Muskets must be cleaned after each use.**

**Muskets must be kept in good repair i.e. make sure that the pan cover is tight fitting, the stock is in good repair, the ramrod is of the correct length and material without any cracks, splits or metal tips etc.**

**Musketeers are reminded that before giving fire a check must be made to ensure that the ramrod is located in the correct place in the bottom of the stock.**

**A musket must never be aimed directly at a person or animal. The recommended minimum safe firing distance of 15 meters for infantry and 20 meters for cavalry should be adhered to. Also a watch must be maintained that no one enters the field of fire from the flanks.**

**All stocked weapons must be fired from the shoulder, care should be taken to see where the musket is aiming and that the face is protected from any flashback.**

**No weapon shall be loaded off the battlefield except under the direct order of a responsible officer for the purpose of organized training and then only in an approved area. Weapons must be unloaded before leaving the battlefield.**

**Musketeers will not engage in hand-to-hand combat with a loaded musket.**

**Musketeers must only use muskets with barrels that are in current proof. All modifications or alterations, including brazing, etc. carried out on any barrel invalidate proof. The barrel must be submitted for re-proofing in accordance with Gun Barrel Proof Act if any alterations are made.**

**The proof load for each musket should never be exceeded.**

**No propellant other than gunpowder to UN 27+28 will be used in any weapon. Projectiles must not be fired.**

**Treat all guns as potentially loaded and THINK SAFETY.**

To be a good musketeer takes a lot of time and effort, but most of all self-discipline - "don't do as others do". Do what you know is right. Keep this in mind and you will have years of safe fun as a

***MUSKETEER IN THE BLEW REGIMENT L.T.B.***

*Article contributed by Steve Rabbitts*