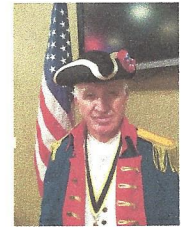




The American Revolution

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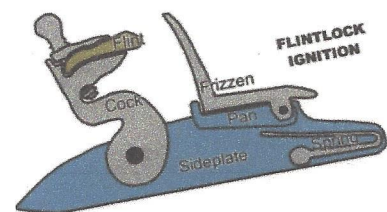
Authors, Dr. Patrick D. Hollis and Major Stuart G. Hoyt,
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The Militia

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Major Hoyt's fifth generation grandfather, Enoch Hoyt, of Penacook, New Hampshire (Became Concord, New Hampshire) during this time period, related accounts of frequent Indian depredations. He told of how very dangerous it was for hunting parties to venture into the woodlands. On one such expedition two young men, John Stark (Later a Colonel at Bunker Hill) and Robert Rogers (Later founded Army Ranger Corps) were assailed by a war party and taken as captives. Later, against all odds, they both escaped and returned to their homes.

The primary firearm carried by a militiaman was a flintlock, smooth bore, musket, issued by the British Army and affectionately known as a "Brown Bess." The "Brown Bess" fired a 72 caliber round lead ball, weighing about one ounce. This was shoulder artillery. The "lock" was the trigger and hammer mechanism, the wooden shoulder piece was the "stock," and of course the long tube was the "barrel."



A Flintlock Musket, Lock Mechanism

Later, American slang would incorporate this technology into a phrase, "I bought it, lock, stock and barrel." The "Bess" was loaded by pouring a measured amount of powder down the barrel, followed by a lead ball, and soft

cloth pushed down with a ram rod. This operation was performed, while the hammer was in a half-cocked, safety position. Sometimes, due to the heat of the barrel or compression of the ram rod, a gun would spontaneously discharge. As a result another colloquial expression slipped into our language. He or she, "Went off half-cocked," meaning they lost control. All muskets had a small depression on the lock, which bore a tiny hole down inside the barrel. When the depression, known as the "pan," was filled with black powder, it would connect the powder of the pan with the powder inside the barrel. The hammer falls forward against the frizzen, causing sparks, which ignites the powder in the pan and instantly burns through to the powder charge inside the barrel. Sometimes, due to moisture or stopped up connections between the pan and barrel, the gun would ignite the powder in the pan without firing. Yes, we have an expression for that also, He or She is just "a flash in the pan."

Even in the hands of trained experts, smooth bore muskets were notoriously inaccurate instruments of war. In order to increase effectiveness, militiamen were trained to group together and fire in unison, therefore increasing the odds of someone's projectile actually hitting a target. The effective range for most volley shooting was about 60 to 100 feet. For an absolutely effective range, that distance narrows to about 20 to 30 feet or about the width of a typical city street. Think of war in terms of curb to curb shooting. Following several volleys and on command, the militiamen were trained to close quarters with the enemy in hand-to-hand fighting. During such episodes, the musket was used as a club, and knives or hatchets were retrieved from their belts. This was "Indian fighting," and they had made us good at it. European armies were used to

fighting in open fields, using large group maneuvers, and formations designed to give tactical advantage and gain field position for maximized fire power. Our next article will complete the description and explanation about America's colonial militia.