

Musket Smooth Bore Pattern of 1858 and 1859

by Michael Hunting

In January 1857 rumour control started when it was suggested by a worker at the Dum-Dum musketry depot near Calcutta that the British had deliberately greased the new Enfield rifle cartridges with cow and pig fat thus, at a single stroke, greatly distressing both Muslim and Hindu troops. Relations between the British and some sections of the Indian population had been simmering for some time and this revelation about cartridges which were beginning to be issued to sepoy is said to have provided the spark that set alight the Indian Mutiny.

Fighting soon broke out and, after terrible loss of life on both sides, a state of peace was eventually declared in July 1859.

On 1st November, 1858, Queen Victoria's Proclamation announced the transfer of authority from the East India Company to the Crown.

Clearly lessons needed to be learnt from the Mutiny, not only in respect of how we ruled India but also in terms of the military steps we should take in order to ensure that British troops were never again in such danger of being threatened by the native soldiery (sepoys) who would continue to be in the majority, numbers wise.

The issue service rifle of the day was the Pattern 1853 .577 calibre Enfield. Although we may view this historic arm today as 'a quaint historic piece' it was, in its time, the equivalent of today's SA80, or AK47, or M16. As the mutineers were defeated, military thinking was that native troops should not be issued with the 'state of the art' rifle but should, instead, be equipped with an inferior arm in terms of range and effectiveness.

In order to adhere to the official policy of not highlighting the difference in arms carried by British and sepoy troops it was decided to introduce an arm which, from casual observation would look like a Pattern '53 Enfield rifle but which was in fact a smooth bore musket. With an effective range of 50 yards as compared to the Enfield rifle's 500+ yards there would be 'no contest' if soldiers armed with the new smoothbore musket came up against men armed with the rifle.

The musket, smooth-bore, Pattern of 1858, with a calibre of .656, was developed specifically for issue to native troops in India. If you were inspecting items for sale at an arms fair you could

easily walk past a stand and from a casual glance be forgiven for not noticing that what appeared to be a standard Enfield rifle was, in fact, a smooth bore arm. At 25 yards it would be almost impossible to tell the difference.

The Pattern 1858 musket differs externally from the Pattern 1853 rifle in that the rear sight is a simple V with no provision for adjustment. Close inspection of the muzzle reveals a smooth bore of .656 calibre. It was soon discovered that the barrel was too weak

and could be prone to burst. The following year the Pattern 1859 musket was introduced. Externally it looked the same as the Pattern '53 rifle except that the rear sight was, as in the Pattern '58 musket, a simple V and the foresight was of a basic triangular shape. The barrel was much stronger than the model of the previous year. A bayonet was produced to fit the barrel and, whilst this looked virtually identical to a P53 bayonet, the diameter of the socket was greater in order to fit on the bigger circumference (now strengthened) barrel of the musket.

Whilst it is not

known how many of the P58 muskets were produced it is thought that around 14,000 of the P59 arms were put out at Enfield. If you look at the lock plate you should see a capital I and broad arrow.

I was on the lookout for a percussion musket (any type) at a Birmingham Arms Fair around a year ago and was fortunate enough to pick up a Pattern '59 Enfield Musket. Technical details of this arm are:

- Bore: .656
- External diameter of barrel: .838
- Weight of ball: 384 grains
- Lockplate: TOWER over 1865 with broad arrow above a capital I

I took this arm to last year's Trafalgar Competition at Bisley and shot it in the 50yds musket match. It shot really well but, imagine, if you will, my disappointment when my friend Bill shot it and did much better than me by getting a great group in the black and as a result he got 1st place in the event. What a star!



*Note the difference in the rear sights:
Upper picture is a Pattern 1853 Enfield Rifle
Lower picture is a Pattern 1859 Enfield Musket*