

TG 6 Matchlock and flintlock muskets

*Text that follows gives information for teachers.
These notes could be used in literacy or history activities.*

Matchlock muskets

Matchlock muskets were used during the Civil War in England. They are a good example of a gun that used the 'black powder'. Muskets fired a lead ball whose velocity was in the region of 300m/sec. They were fairly accurate when firing at a block of men at 100 metres range, and one could be reasonably confident of hitting a particular man at about 30 – 50 yards. A good musketeer would be able to fire 2 to 3 shots per minute. ¹

To load and fire a gun

- First the pan was filled to the brim with gunpowder and the pan closed.
- The butt of the gun was then placed on the ground and a measured 'charge' of gunpowder poured down the barrel. The butt of the musket was then tapped on the ground to compact the powder.
- The lead ball (bullet) was then put down the barrel.
- A piece of wadding was then inserted and rammed down with the ramrod or scouring stick, until it was on top of the charge and ball.
- The gun was then ready to 'fire'. With the musket held in the firing position, the lighted match was placed between the jaws of the serpent with the lit end nearest the pan. The 'match' was made from a piece of flax soaked in saltpetre and kept lighted at both ends.
- The pan remained closed, but the musketeer had to check that the lit end of the match would enter the pan by pulling back the trigger.
- The pan cover was then opened with the right hand and on the order 'give fire' the trigger was pulled back, the serpent was brought down into the pan, the match ignited the priming powder, which would in turn ignite the main charge and 'fire' the Musket expelling the bullet. ²

Flintlock muskets

A later development was the Flintlock Musket, which was easier to use but more expensive to produce. The flint was brought sharply down into a metal tray containing gunpowder which was ignited by the spark produced as the flint struck the tray. The advantage of this weapon was that there was no need to keep a match lighted in order to fire it. ³

¹ www.farifax.org.uk/main/soldiers/musket.htm

² www.vincent.demon.co.uk/Jeff

³ <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~crossby/tech/musket.html>