

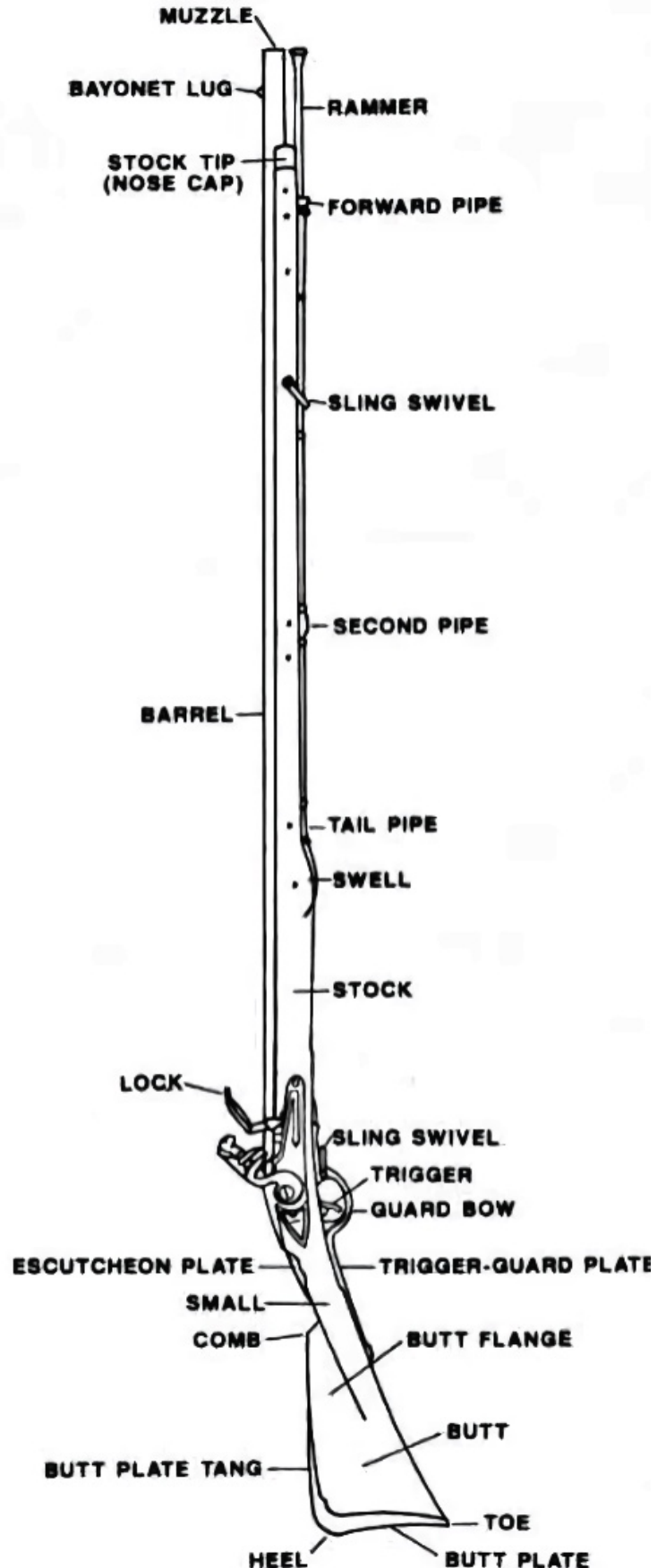
# Loading and Firing a 'Brown Bess' Musket



The 'Brown Bess' muzzle-loader musket required twelve steps to load and fire; however, later some reduced this number to ten, as follows:

1. Reach in the cartridge box with leather casing; it had a long flap to make sure the black powder within the cartridges remained dry. Remove one of the cartridges and bite down on the tail of the cartridge to tear it open.
2. Half cock the musket by pushing back on the hammer with flint attached (called a dogshead). Push the frizzen forward, opening the pan (or flash pan) and pour a small amount of black powder from the cartridge.
3. Pull the frizzen back, shutting the pan – the metal lip of the frizzen is now vertical. The weapon is now primed and the musket may be turned around without spilling the powder out of the pan.
4. Hold the musket with the muzzle pointing up.
5. Pour the rest of the powder from the cartridge into the barrel.
6. Insert a lead ball into the barrel.
7. Push the cartridge paper (called wadding) into the barrel.

At this stage – steps 6. and 7. could be considered part of step 5., especially if



the ball were still wrapped in the cartridge and not held separately. This would reduce the steps to ten instead of twelve.

1. Remove the ramrod from its storage pipe beneath the barrel (called the channel) and ram the wadding and ball down the barrel to the other end (breech) where the spark will take place. The charge is now properly seated.
2. Replace the ramrod in the channel.
3. Lift the weapon and pull back on the dogshead, fully cocking it.
4. Raise the musket to a firing position.
5. Fire the musket

Soldiers either loaded their weapons individually or as a unit prior to a volley.

### ***NB***

It is believed by some that when a soldier bit off the tail of the cartridge, he held the ball in his mouth. After pouring the black powder from the cartridge down the barrel, he would spit the musket ball into the muzzle, stuff in the wadding and ram it all home. This is myth derived from fictional novels. One problem with this notion is that after the weapon had been fired, the barrel would be so hot that a soldier would have to lay his lips on the muzzle to spit the ball down the bore, burning his lips severely.

*Source* [Loading and Firing a Brown Bess Musket in the Eighteenth Century – Revolutionary War Journal](#)

April 2021