

Detailed Cleaning the Rifled Musket *by Bill Rodman*

You have been a reenactor for a year or two, and have finally figured out how to pass the ordinance sergeant's weapons inspection. This means that your "shooting iron" won't blow up in your face, and the exterior looks pretty good. Well, when the season is over it's time to give your weapon a real cleaning. A complete cleaning and inspection will protect your investment and reduce the mechanical problems that can ruin a weekend. And next spring you might even get a smile from the inspector, but I doubt that will happen!

First, you will need the proper tools and equipment. The most important tools that you will need are screwdrivers that fit the screws on your rifle. The blade of the screwdriver must exactly fit the slot in the screw. In some cases, you will have to file down a screwdriver to fit a specific screw on your rifle. Trust me, it is worth the trouble. You will also need a nipple wrench, a cleaning rod (not the one that comes with your rifle, that's a ramrod), a bore brush, a cleaning jag, #0000 steel wool, 600-grit wet or dry sandpaper, a wood or plastic dowel, and bore patches. You will also need cleaning products such as WD-40, gun grease, or some of the non-petroleum products that are on the market. A bore light is also very helpful.

The first step is to field strip your weapon. Remove the tang screw, and then remove the barrel bands. On Enfields, you must loosen the screws on the bands. On Springfields, just depress the band springs and carefully slide the bands over the barrel. If the bands will not come loose, tap them gently with a dowel. Be sure your hammer is on half cock, and carefully remove the barrel from the stock. Don't just pull the barrel and stock apart, as you may split the wood around the tang. If you haven't had your weapon apart before, the barrel may be very tight in the stock channel. Stand the rifle upright, and pull the barrel up and away from the stock. The secret is to take your time and be careful. After the barrel is off, you should remove the lock from the stock. The best way to remove the lock is to loosen both lock screws a couple of turns and tap them with a plastic hammer (or the handle of a screwdriver) to free the lock from its bed in the stock. Continue unscrewing the lock a few turns at a time and insure that the lock is coming free. Again, be sure not to split the wood around the lock plate.

After you have your weapon in three pieces, set the stock and lock aside and go to work on the barrel. First remove the nipple, using your nipple wrench. If you have a model 1861 Springfield or Richmond Rifle, you will also have to remove the cleanout screw. If the nipple won't come out there are a few things you can try. First, make sure your nipple wrench fits your nipple, then soak the nipple and bolster with WD-40 or Liquid Wrench. While the nipple is soaking, tap it gently with a hammer. If that doesn't work, you can apply heat to the nipple, using a blowtorch. Do not overheat the barrel. Note that the torch will destroy the bluing on an Enfield barrel. If the shoulders of the nipple are rounded over you may be able to use vice-grips to grasp the nipple. As a last resort, you can drill out the nipple and remove it with an easy-out bolt extractor. You may want to take the barrel to a gunsmith for this job if you are not familiar with the work.

After the nipple and cleanout screw are removed, place the breach of the barrel in a bucket of hot soapy water and scrub out any powder fouling, using the cleaning rod, jag, and patches. There are two types of cleaning jags. One type has a slot to slip a patch through. The other is sized for the bore, and holds the patch with a friction fit. The friction fit jags do a much better job, but you must be very careful, as they can get stuck in a rough bore. If you have any doubts about the condition of your bore, I would suggest you get a jag sized for .54 caliber, rather than .58 caliber. It is far better to have a jag too small than too tight. It is relatively easy to remove a patch that slips from the jag, but removing a stuck jag can be a real pain. Be sure that all fouling and corrosion are removed from the channel between the nipple and breach. This fouling can be as hard as concrete. Break Free cleaner seems to work well to dissolve these deposits. Dry the barrel and inspect the bore. It should shine like a mirror, If it doesn't, wrap #0000 steel wool around a bore brush and scrub the bore with WD-40. The idea is to remove any rust, and smooth out any pitting in the barrel. After the bore is completely clean, wash it out again, dry it carefully, and lubricate the barrel. I like the non-petroleum lubricants, but that is a personal preference. A good gun oil, such as Hoppe's or Outer's also works well.

After you finish the bore, clean the exterior of the barrel. If your rifle has a bare steel barrel you should soak a piece of 600 grit wet or dry sandpaper with WD-40 and wrap it around the barrel. Carefully sand the barrel from muzzle to breach in smooth strokes to remove any rust or discoloration. After you finish sanding, polish the barrel with auto rubbing compound. The finished barrel should shine when you are done.

If your rifle has a blued barrel, rub any rust spots with a piece of wood soaked in WD-40. Removing the rust will also remove the bluing. These spots can be touched up with commercial cold bluing. Just follow the directions on the container. You should also touch up any nicks on the muzzle caused by the bayonet socket.

The next step is to clean and inspect the lock. Scrub the lock with WD-40 or carb cleaner using a stiff toothbrush. Be sure that all rust and corrosion are removed. After the lock is clean, wash the lock with soap and hot water. Use a hair drier to dry the lock. After the lock is cleaned, inspect it for any defects. First, look for any cracks or broken parts. Then check that all screws are tight. Insure that there is little or no play in the hammer. If there is play in the hammer the lock needs work. In most cases, you will need to replace the hammer, the tumbler, the lock plate, or all three. Spare parts are available from Lodgewood Mfg. or the Regimental Quartermaster. The lock mechanism is rather complex. I would recommend you get help before you disassemble the lock, or take it to a gunsmith for repair.

Finally, check the stock. Look for any cracks or splits in the wood. Minor splits and cracks can be repaired with wood glue and clamps. Check the inletting under the lock plate. Look for places the wood may be binding against the lock mechanism. The wood will shine where it rubs against the metal. Use a small file to remove the wood. Do not remove more wood than is necessary to free up the lock. In many cases, small dents can be removed by steaming. Place a small wet cloth over the dent and heat it with an iron. The hot steam will often raise the dent. Remove any rust or corrosion from the butt plate, trigger guard, and nose cap. On steel parts, use 600-grit wet or dry sandpaper and oil. On brass parts, use Brasso. When the stock is done, wipe it down with linseed oil and finish with a coat of furniture wax.

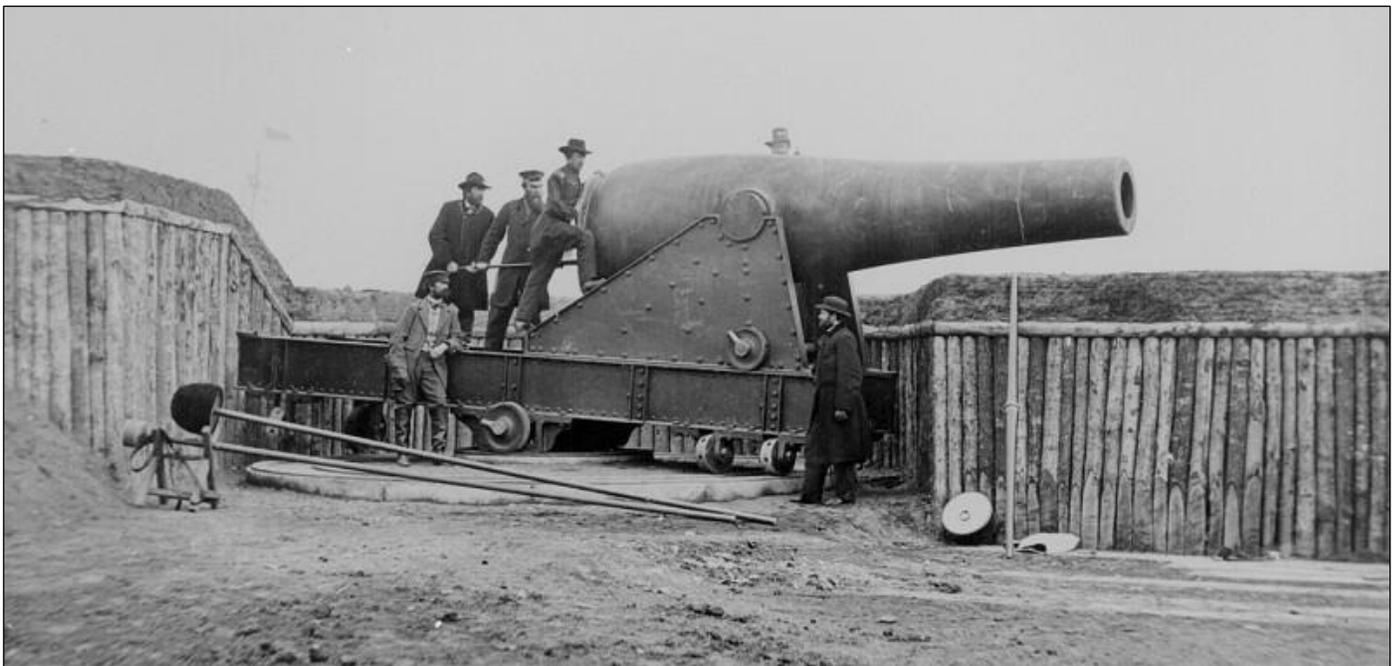
Now reassemble your weapon. First coat the underside of the barrel with a thin coat of gun grease, then carefully install it into the stock. Be sure the tang is seated into the stock. Replace the tang screw and the barrel bands. Do not tighten the tang screw at this time. Coat the threads on the nipple with gun grease and screw into the barrel. Be sure the nipple is seated against the bolster and is tight. If you have an 1861 Springfield, install the cleanout screw at this time. Coat all the internal parts of the lock with gun grease. Be sure that the hammer shaft gets lubricated. Place the lock into the inlet on the stock. Be sure the trigger lever is under the hammer release on the lock.

Replace the lock screws. Tighten both screws equally to insure that the lock is seated in the stock. After the lock is seated, tighten the tang screw, which will pull the barrel down into the lock.

After you reassemble your rifle, test the action. Make sure the hammer is centered over the nipple, and hits square. Insure the half cock works. Put the weapon on half cock and lift it by the trigger. The hammer should not fall. There should be little or no play in the hammer. Put your weapon on full cock, put your hand over the nipple, and pull the trigger. The hammer should fall with no binding.

This is also a good time for maintenance on your bayonet. Remove any rust with sandpaper or steel wool and oil. Make sure there are no burrs, or rough spots inside the socket, that will scratch your rifle's barrel. Clean the inside of the socket with sandpaper wrapped around a dowel. Repro bayonets are poorly made and not very authentic. I would suggest you obtain an original bayonet. Nothing on the market compares to the originals.

There are many different ways to clean muzzle-loading rifles, but these methods have worked well for me. If you have any problems, contact me at wrodman1@aol.com.



**A 15-inch Rodman gun in Alexandria, VA
After you become an expert at cleaning your rifled musket, may be you could step
up to one of these!**