

On Musket Tools

Greg Renault

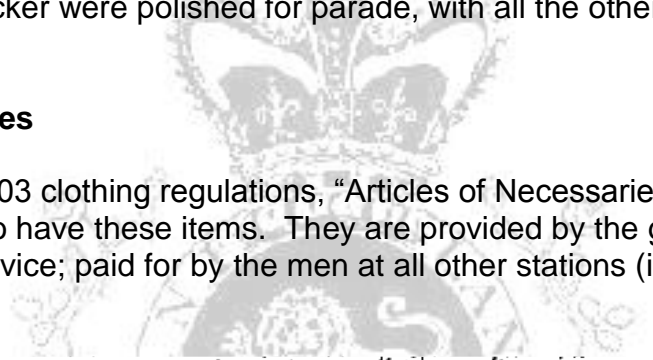
The basic tools for cleaning and maintaining a soldier's musket—the brush and picker, worm, and turn screw (musket tool)—were not optional items of kit, worn whenever and wherever a soldier preferred. Rather, they were required equipment, worn in a prescribed manner, and tracked at regular inspections and returns.

These items were:

- Treated as necessities, paid for by stoppages
- Brush and pricker were worn suspended from belt plate; worm and turnscrew were carried in the cartridge box implement pouch
- Brush and pricker were polished for parade, with all the other brass

Required necessities

Schedule 2 of the 1803 clothing regulations, “Articles of Necessaries for Infantry”, notes that all soldiers are to have these items. They are provided by the government to soldiers on home service; paid for by the men at all other stations (i.e., by pay stoppages).¹



ARTICLES OF NECESSARIES.	
Furnished in the first Instance at the Expence partly of the Colonel and partly of the Public.	One regimental great coat.
These Articles with oil, emery, and brick dust, are allowed for by the Public to the extent of 2s. 9d. per Annum, for effectives, in corps at home: on other stations they are paid for by the men	Turnscrew, brush, and worm.

The same schedule applied to the Embodied Militia.² It appears this applied as well to militia in the Canadas:

*Outfit issued to the Lower Canadian Select Embodied Militia:--For each Man: 1 pair military shoes, shoe and cloth brushes, knapsack with straps, neck stock, flannel shirt, stockings, greatcoat slings, pricker and brush, turnscrew, worm, knife and fork, spoon, razor. In addition, moccasins were issued to the 4th Battalion.*³

Brush & pricker suspended from the bayonet belt plate

This was specified in an 1807 general order:

*15 June 1807 - Loose coarse canvas trousers to be worn on marches at night and on fatigues; brush and prickers provided and attached to bayonet belt.*⁴

It appears that either chain or buff leather straps were used to suspend the brush and pricker. Below are details from a period image by Atkinson of recruits at drill. Note that while cartridge boxes are absent, they do have bayonets and belts, and that the pricker and brush appear to be suspended by chain from the bayonet belt plate.⁵



However, most period images depict the pricker and brush suspended from the bayonet belt plate by buff leather straps:⁶



One period source stipulates the dimensions of these straps:

*"Picker and brush to be suspended by two buff straps 8 inches [long] and ¼ inch broad."*⁷

Charles James, in his popular compendium of information for regimental officers, notes that officers are to monitor this arrangement at inspections:⁸

This should scarcely ever be done. They will likewise see that the brushes, prickers, turnscrows, and worms, are in good order, and properly fixed. The prickers and brushes are sometimes hung beneath the breast-plate, especially at inspections. In some regiments they are placed under the outward cover of the cartouch-box. We should humbly conceive, that the first is the best mode, because the article is more easily got at, especially in the hurry of a field day.

From this we also may infer that the worm and turncrew would likely have been carried in the implement pouch on the cartridge box (along with, in some regiments, the brush and pricker).

Polished with the rest of the brass

Cooper of the 7th, a veteran who served in the Peninsula and North America, tells us that

*To be tolerably fit for parade required three hours' work. His pouch, magazine and bayonet scabbard were covered with heel-ball like his cap. The barrel of his musket; the outside and inside of the lock; the bayonet, and the ramrod, must be polished like a razor. In addition, to the above, he had to clean white leather gloves, cap and breastplate; his great coat must be neatly rolled up and be exactly eighteen inches long. When blankets were issued, they had to be folded to suit the square of the knapsack. Many other things required polishing besides those already mentioned, as the gun brasses, picker, and brush and bayonet tip, etc. etc.*⁹

Brush and pricker



Original prickers¹⁰



Original British Army brush and pricker, ca. 1820.¹¹



Repro AWI brush and pricker¹²

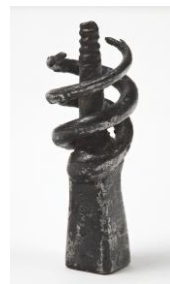


Repro 1812 brush and pricker¹³

Worms



Excavated site of 1814 Brit encampment
Nottingham, MD¹⁴



AWI excavated West Point¹⁵



Private collection¹⁶



Saratoga battlefield¹⁷

Turn screws



1812 excavated Ft. Erie.¹⁸



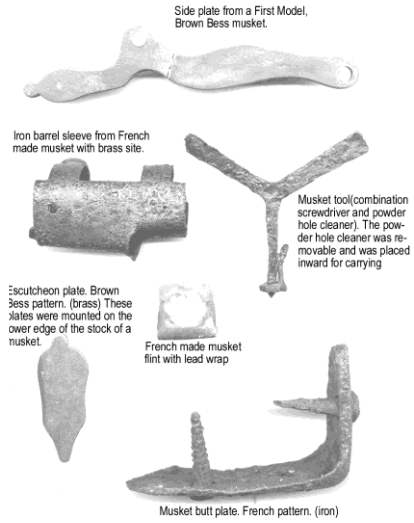
AWI British & colonial turn screws, & worm¹⁹



1812 turn screws, Niagara²⁰



Saratoga battlefield²¹



Original AWI turn screw with worm still attached²²



Repro AWI turn screw & worm²³



Repro 1812 turn screw & worm²⁴



Repro turn screw & worm for Baker Rifle²⁵

Notes

¹Schedule No. 2, *Articles of Necessaries for Infantry, in Regulation for the Clothing and Appointments of the Army, dated 22 April, 1803*, in War Office 15 April 1807, *A Collection of Orders, Regulations, and Instructions for the Army; On matters of finance and points of discipline immediately connected therewith* (London: Egerton, 1807), p. 456.

The utility of these items was noted thirty years earlier by Cuthbertson:

XII. It is absolutely necessary, that every Soldier should be furnished with a Worm and Turn-key, else it will be impossible for him to clean the inside of the Barrel of his Firelock, in the manner which ought to be expected; or to manage the Screws about the Lock, without having recourse to his Bayonet: a practice which must be forbid, otherwise, the edges will be always full of notches, and by that means, have a most unsightly appearance: and to render matters ready and convenient to the Soldier, in the cleaning of his Firelock, Screws should be made to the points of all the Ram-rods, to fix the Worms on.

XXIX. A picker being often useful to a Soldier, for cleaning the touch-hole of his Firelock, in the fireings, one of strong wyre should be fixed, by a small chain, to the front edge of his Pouch-belt, as close to the Pouch as possible, but never to hang in view, as it might be troublesome, in raising the flaps of the Pouch, to take out a Cartridge.

Bennett Cuthbertson, *A System for the Complete Interior Management and Oeconomy of a Battalion of Infantry* (London: J. Millan, 1779), pp. 67, 72.

² The same schedule of Necessaries, for embodied militia, is found in the 9 August 1803 circular, *A Collection of Orders, Regulations, and Instructions for the Army*, p. 465.

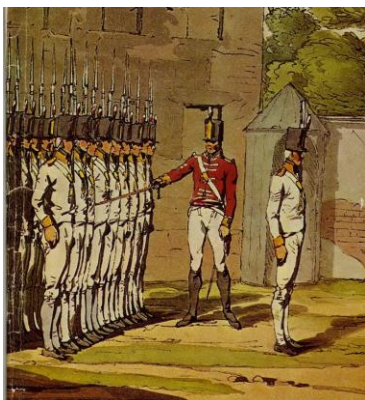
³ *L.C. Legislative Journals*, quoted in L. Homfray Irving, *Officers of the British Forces in Canada During the War of 1812* (Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Military Institute, no date).

⁴ Quoted in Rene Chartrand, *"A Scarlet Coat": Uniforms, Flags and Equipment of the British Forces in the War of 1812* (Ottawa: Service Publications, 2011), p. 50. Cf.,

The picker and brush is to be fastened on the bayonet belt, between the holes for the studs of the breast plate.

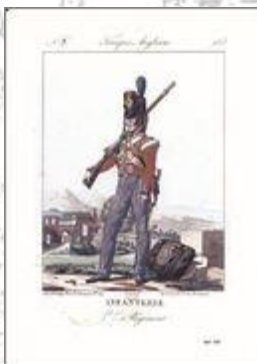
Bradford, Col Lord, *Standing Orders for the use of the Shropshire Militia* (Stonehouse: W. Gray, 1813), 60.

⁵ Ca. 1807. Fuller image below:



Detail, "Soldiers Drilling", aquatint etching. Print states: *Drawn & Etched by J.A. Atkinson./ London Published Jany. 1. 1807. by William Miller. No.49, Albemarle Street & James Walker 8 Conway Street Fitzroy Square.* British Museum print number 1849,1208.658. Cuthbertson (1779) also recommends the use of chain to attach the pricker. *Op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁶ Details are from the following period images:



1. 52nd Regiment, Charles Hamilton Smith, ca. 1812-14. Reproduced in *Wellington's Infantry: 1812-15* (Greenhill).
2. 5th Regiment, Genty, *Troupes Anglaises* No. 3, 1815.
3. 28th Regiment, Genty *Troupes Anglaises* No. 4, 1815.
4. Royal Marine, Charles Hamilton Smith, 1812.
5. Scottish Regiment, Genty *Troupes Anglaises* No. 5, 1815.
6. Scottish regiment (detail), ASK Brown collection.

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7. Unknown (detail).
 8. Unknown.

Images 1-3, 5,6 posted by Paul Durant to

http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/Brush_and_Prick_Pick_about443.html

He posted the seventh image to

http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/Mess_Tin_about800.html

However, the Rifles are shown using chain attached to their waist belts:



9. Rifle units, Genty, *Troupes Anglaises* No. 1, 1815.

⁷ Regimental order of the 56th Foot, quoted in Pierre Turner, *Soldiers' Accoutrements of the British Army* (Crowood Press, 2007), 53. Noted by Paul Durant, 20 March 2016 post to http://2nd95thrifles.myfastforum.org/Brush_and_Prick_Pick_about443.html

⁸ From the detailed description of company inspection found in Charles James, *The Regimental Companion; Containing the Pay, Allowances and Relative Duties of Every Officer in the British Service* (London: Egerton, 1811), p 175.

⁹ John Spencer Cooper, *Rough Notes of Seven Campaigns in Portugal, Spain, France, and America, during the Years 1809-1815, by John Spencer Cooper, late Serjeant in the 7th Royal Fusiliers* (London and Carlisle, 1896), quoted in Antony Brett-James, *Life in Wellington's Army* (London: Tom Donovan 1994), p.221.

¹⁰ Online listing, International Military Antiques
(<http://www.ima-usa.com/brown-bess-type-musket-flash-hole-pick.html>)

¹¹ Online catalogue, McPheeters Antique Militaria
(http://www.mcpheetersantiquemilitaria.com/09_guns_parts/09_item_025.htm)

¹² Copied from an original featured in George Neumann & F. Kravic, *Collector's Illustrated Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, (Stackpole, 1975), 269, fig 1. Cited Avalon Forge online catalogue (<http://www.avalonforge.com/MainFieldGear.htm>).

¹³ My reconstruction, based on the information in footnotes 6 and 7 above.

¹⁴ http://warof1812archaeology.blogspot.ca/2013_02_01_archive.html

¹⁵ NYHS Object Number INV.5925.171-172. A portion of the threaded turnscrew blade appears to have broken off in the worm. This also seems to be the case with the items illustrated by notes 18 and 21 below.

¹⁶ Posted by “Adrian” on British Militaria Forums
(<http://britishmilitariaforums.yuku.com/topic/12148/Tools-for-the-Brown-Bess-#.Uuq9gPvQLxU>)

¹⁷ Identifier: SARA 1701, Saratoga National Historic Park, National Portal to Historic Collections
(http://www.nationalportal.org/artifact_landing_paging/40634?page=7)

¹⁸ Excavated site of 1814 Ft. Erie siege. Ft. Erie Museum. Author’s photo.

¹⁹ Excavated, no source given
(http://www.historicalimagebank.com/gallery2/main.php/v/album02/album21/album48/RWg3_American_Musket_Tools.jpg.html).

²⁰ Identifier: 969.245 (B,C) Image courtesy of the Niagara Historical Society & Museum.
(<http://images.ourontario.ca/1812/71292/data?n=5>)

²¹ Identifier: SARA, Saratoga National Historic Park, National Portal to Historic Collections
(http://www.nationalportal.org/artifact_landing_paging/40634?page=5)

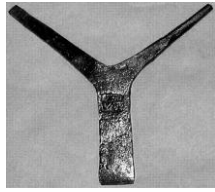
²² Camden battlefield artifacts (<http://www.battleofcamden.org/guns.gif>).

Jymm Hoffman clearly notes that on original turnscrews the tapered blade is threaded to retain the worm:

After many request to reproduce these, I started to study as many originals as I could and colleagues started sending me photos and tracings of as many originals they could examine as well. There have been a few misinterpretations about musket tools found during archeological digs. For example, some thought the narrow leg of the tool would be used for pushing pins out of the stock in order to remove the gun barrels. This was due to a couple of musket tools being found in such poor condition that the threads were either completely gone or very hard to discern. One colleague had taken a trip to examine the collection in the Tower of London. He reported to me finding many musket tools in new condition, all of which had worms attached to the narrow and rounded third leg. I have since obtained a reprinted copy of Timmons Tool catalog from the 18th Century. Indeed, the Y shaped gun tool in this catalog is shown with a worm attached, as well as other gun tools with worms attached. The conclusion we have made is it was simply a way to store the worm so it would be harder to lose. Several of us do discredit the idea of using the narrow leg as a pin punch to remove the barrels and promote the idea that the common soldier would have been discouraged to do this for fear of losing the small pins while in the field. We also agree that this tool is more than adequate to change flints and remove the lock from the stock for basic cleaning. More than this would risk losing valuable parts that would be too difficult to replace.

Jymm Hoffman, *British Musket Tool*, online article, Pittsburgh Area Artists Blacksmith Association (<http://paaba.net/Projects/ZMusket.htm>). This article is in the “Projects” section, and includes instructions on how to forge a turnscrew. Dimensions: 3” x 3 ½”; wide blade 9/16”,

narrow blade $\frac{1}{4}$ "; threaded blade $\frac{1}{4}$ " at base, tapering to blunt point. It appears that these reproductions are available from Roy Najecki (<http://www.najecki.com/repro/Musket.html#Mtool>).



Hoffman repro forged turncrew



Turnscrew, Roy Najecki online catalogue

So the turncrew should **not** look like the repro below, which has the narrow leg designed to be used as a pin punch, and thus is too narrow to be threaded for the worm:



²³ Avalon Forge online catalogue, op. cit.

²⁴ Twist Historical Reproductions
(http://www.historicaltwiststore.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=226)

²⁵ Online catalogue, Peter Dyson Co.
(https://www.peterdyson.co.uk/acatalog/BAKER_RIFLE_Accessories.html)

Toronto
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