



Live Fire

At our Authentic Weekend I talked with a number of shooters that had never fired in B.A.R. live-fire matches, and would like to share with you what I talked about. First, I believe that if you are going to interpret a musketeer of the Revolution, you should have practical, first hand knowledge of loading and firing your musket live at a target. So, I believe you all should live-fire your musket once and a while so you can accurately relate this to the public.

The B.A.R. requires that muskets be loaded from foil (aluminum or tin) cartridges. There are several reasons for this. First, it is nearly impossible to mistake a foil cartridge for a blank paper round, which means our tacticals are safe from this error. Secondly, when you ram the foil, it actually acts as a scraper, cleaning some of the fouling from the barrel, making your musket a little easier to load a number of rounds in succession. And thirdly, we do it because it is a B.A.R. regulation, and keeps us within our insurance requirements.

I'm going to share how I roll cartridges and get ready to shoot. These aren't the only ways to do it, but they have worked for me for 30 years. What you need to roll live rounds is;

- aluminum foil** (buy good foil, if you get cheap stuff it tears too easily)
- copper tube**, 6"-7" in length, and slightly smaller diameter than the ball you use
If you use a wooden dowel, the foil tends to collapse when you remove it.
- powder measure**, if your measure has a funnel, it makes pouring easier

- powder can spout**, optional, but makes pouring from the can easier, usually made from a spent brass rifle shell
- wooden cartridge block**, from your cartridge box
- lead balls**, make sure these are pure lead. Balls cast from tire weights or other Alloy metals are hard, and difficult to pull if need be.
- BLACK POWDER** the unit uses GOEX or SCHUETZEN brands. **DO NOT** use black powder substitutes such as Pyrodex. You will be creating a very dangerous situation. The two brands used by the unit are readily available. Use ONLY FFg or FFFg granulations for cartridges.

1st cut your foil cartridges out using the pattern diagram included. You can cut squares, but then the seam of the cartridge runs straight down the side instead of spiraling around the cartridge, which I believe is a little stronger

2nd lay your former (copper tube) with a ball at one end, on the cartridge. (see the diagram). Make sure to leave enough foil beyond the ball so you can twist it closed.

3rd roll the former and ball up in the foil, making sure you keep the ball tight against the former, and roll it tightly in the foil. Twist the ball end shut.

4th remove the cartridge w/ ball from the former, and put it in your cartridge block. When you have a block full, the measure your powder charges and load each round. Fold down the tops, and you're ready to go.

I don't use any lubricant on the cartridges, although so folks do. I've found it just made a mess for me, and if you have the right sized ball, lubricant isn't necessary. (Bore Butter is the brand named used by some shooters, if you're inclined to try a lube). Now you're ready to shoot.

Live Firing Tips

- Never step off the line to load your musket or with a loaded musket. If you have a problem, notify the range officer.
- Although at B.A.R. matches it is permissible to prime before you load, if you prefer not to (as I do) it is also permissible to prime from a horn with less than 2 oz. of powder. Make sure you return the horn to a safe place on your person before you fire.
- If you have a "hang fire", or if only your prime goes off, continue to Hold your musket on the target for several seconds before lowering it.

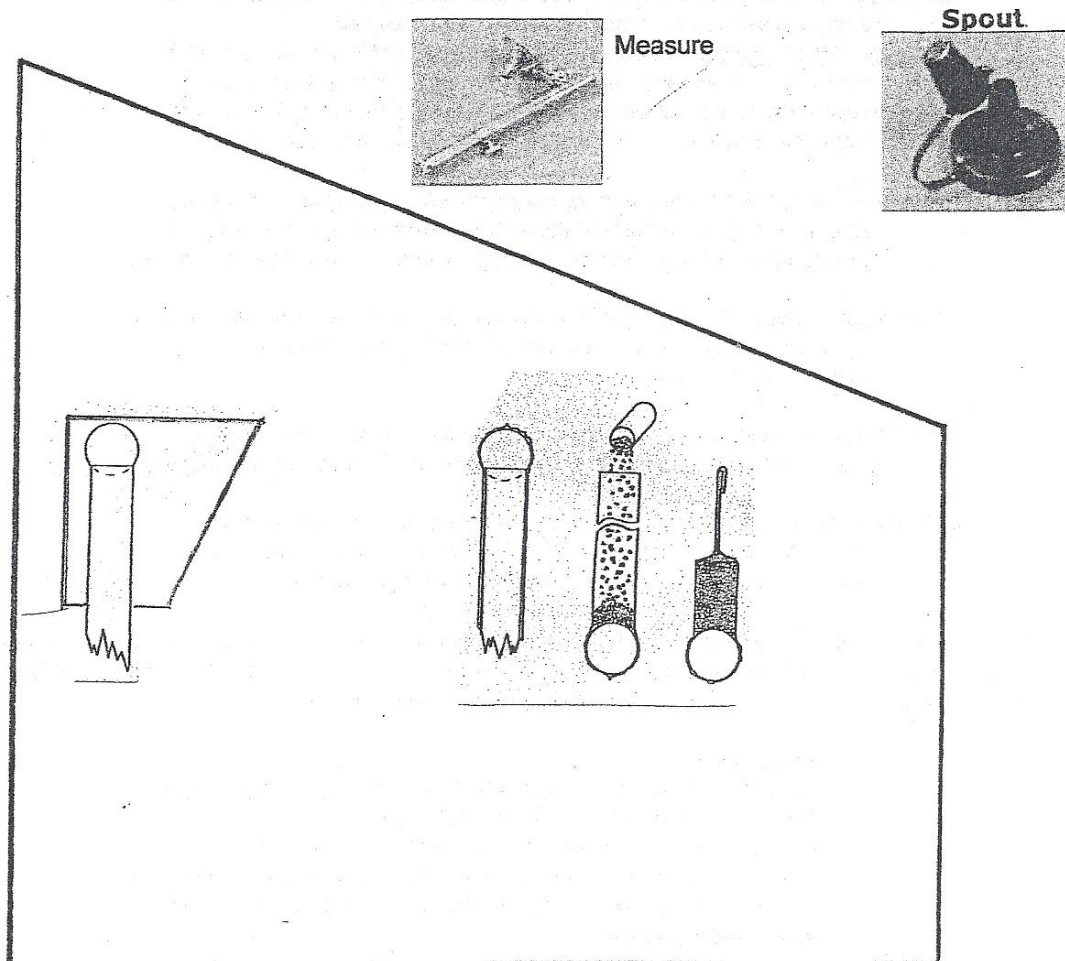
- If the foil bothers your dental work, tear the top of the cartridge off with your fingers.
- Always start your shooting day with a CLEAN musket. It makes things work better.
- **Ball Size.** Trying to shoot a ball too large is a common problem that That can take a great deal of fun out of your shooting, so I recommend that you start with the following ;

.75 cal. Musket – No larger than .735, but many very experienced shooters use .730 or .715. (I shoot a .730 in my .775 musket, with good results).

.69 cal. Musket – No larger than .662, but I recommend .648, .620, or even .600. (many of the Navy Arms French muskets seem to have a choke several inches from the muzzle, and a smaller ball works better. *Never* use .678. I guarantee you'll get one stuck, and your shooting day will be over.

Precast round ball are available from many sources, including Dixie Gun Works, Track of the Wolf, and The Log Cabin Shop. If you can't find the ball size you want from these folks, it might not be made. If you want to cast your own, make sure that you use pure lead. Tire weights, or other such metals may, and probably do, have tin and other things alloyed with them that will make it very difficult to get a ball puller in if need be. Save this harder metal for casting buttons.

Powder Charge Your charge will vary with your musket, but I recommend you start with about 65 grains of FFg. Shot this charge till you get all the rounds going in about the same place at about 35 yds. If you're consistently low, add 5 grains and keep experimenting until you get a charge that puts the ball where you want it. If you are priming from the cartridge, take this into account and add 5 grains.



A final note on live-firing. Don't be embarrassed if you don't know something. There is no problem in not knowing. **The problem is not knowing and NOT ASKING for help.** We have many experienced shooters at our shoots, and they are glad to help by sharing what they know.