

Some Spanish Weapons in the American Revolution

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It is really amazing how little interest general collectors show in Spanish arms during the time of American Revolution, especially with the reasonable amount of research material available.

BACKGROUND

As early as January 1, 1776, "New Spanish" guns were issued to some Massachusetts Continental Regiments.¹

"In 1777, King Carlos III approved four million reales in bullion for the Americans" to purchase arms and uniforms, including 30,000 muskets with bayonets.² "These supplies left French ports" for the Americans "via Bermuda."³ One American historian, Helen Auger, states, "Spain shod and dressed the American soldiers, armed their units the Spanish" M1757, "then considered the best in the world."⁴ In one of his letters, Benjamin Franklin thanked Spanish authorities for "12000 muskets" sent to Boston.⁵

During February 1778, American Representatives in Paris signed two Treaties with the French Government. One was a *Treaty of Alliance* and the other was a *Treaty of Amity and Commerce*, together referred to as the French Alliance, effectively a French Declaration of War against Great Britain.

For the purposes of this presentation, attention is drawn to a little-known separate and secret act included in the *Treaty of Amity and Commerce* between France and its ally, Spain.⁶ Although officially allied with France, there was no official alliance between Spain and the United States. Spain did declare war against Great Britain in 1779 and previously had provided material and financial assistance to American forces,⁷ but still there was no official treaty between Spain and the United States.

In 1779, General Bernardo de Galvez began a campaign along the coast of Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida, eventually resulting in the capture of British-held Pensacola, Florida in May of 1781. Later in 1781, Washington and Rochambeau made the famous trek to Yorktown and the earlier Spanish efforts forced the British to keep military assets occupied in Florida and the West Indies that other-



were available against the French and Americans to the north.

During the American War of Independence, the frontier of New Spain to the south of the American Colonies was militarily active. American assistance came from General Bernardo de Galvez, Spanish Governor of Louisiana, who supplied Americans with financial and material aid.

Spanish aid to the American cause, during the War of Independence, is underrated, probably because Americans were suspicious of Spain's territorial ambitions, but from a practical view point, Spanish aid, regardless of reasons, was an important contribution to the American success.

SPANISH ARMS

Precise dating of Spanish military weapons used in the American War is difficult; there appears to be numerous variations. Even today arms historians are not in complete agreement. Contributing to the difficulty is a relatively low production and very hard use in New Spain, later in the 18th and 19th centuries through the Mexican War, leaving few examples existing today.

For the purposes of this presentation, I have arbitrarily chosen to begin with the latest examples, working towards the earliest. In the interest of time, I am covering only Spanish long arms and a few blades. Spanish pistols are a presentation of their own.

One advantage in reviewing Spanish arms is they usually have numerous markings, although not always easy to decipher or identify.

SPANISH MILITARY MODEL 1752/1791

While not in service, during the American War, Model 1752/1791 was used during important historical events between Spain and the United States in the last decade of the 18th century into the first half of the 19th century. It is important to recognize the features distinguishing this piece from earlier models, as well as similarities (Figure 1).⁸

Measurements: Overall length: 59", Barrel: 43 1/4", Bore: 75", numerous marks.

The general design is similar to earlier models of 1752 and 1757. In 1791, the lock design on Spanish military firearms was changed. The previous lock design was considered too fragile. A major distinction is the flint screw on the cock. On this model, the screw head is a pierced ball, on the Miquelet lock, while earlier models have a ring design. In addition, there are slight changes in furniture and stock configuration from earlier models.

The Spanish Miquelet lock is distinguished by the lock spring positioned on the outside, compared to most mil-

itary flintlocks of the time with the spring positioned inside the lock plate (Figure 2).

In addition, there are slight changes in furniture and stock configuration from earlier models (Figures 3-7).

COMPARISON OF THREE SPANISH ARMS

Wall Gun

Measurements: Overall length: 61", Barrel: 44 1/4", Bore: 15/16" (Figure 8).

Wall and swivel guns were sometimes referred to as *espingoles*.⁹ They were used both on shipboard and in defense of fortified places such as Spanish *Presidios*. This example appears to be designed for use in a fortification

with its rather long design and rest band. Spanish swivel guns were supplied to American forces during the American War of Independence.¹⁰

This piece is an exception to most Spanish firearms and does not have numerous marks, but one at the base of the frizzen, *Alameda*, suggests it may have been assigned to the command of Captain Alberto de Cordoba's Catalonian Volunteers, who reconnoitered the areas of Northern California, including La Alameda and San Francisco, as late as 1796.

This is the only Spanish Wall Gun I have seen with a Catalan stock. Precise dating or determining location of manufacture is difficult. Certain features suggest manufacture in Mexico, but others suggest Spanish origin. The best guess is that both are correct with work done both in Europe and in New Spain. There are firearms with similar features manufactured in the first decade of the 18th century.¹¹

Spanish M1752/1757 Military Musket

Measurements: Overall length: 58 1/2", Barrel: 42 1/2", Bore: 75". Numerous mostly illegible marks.

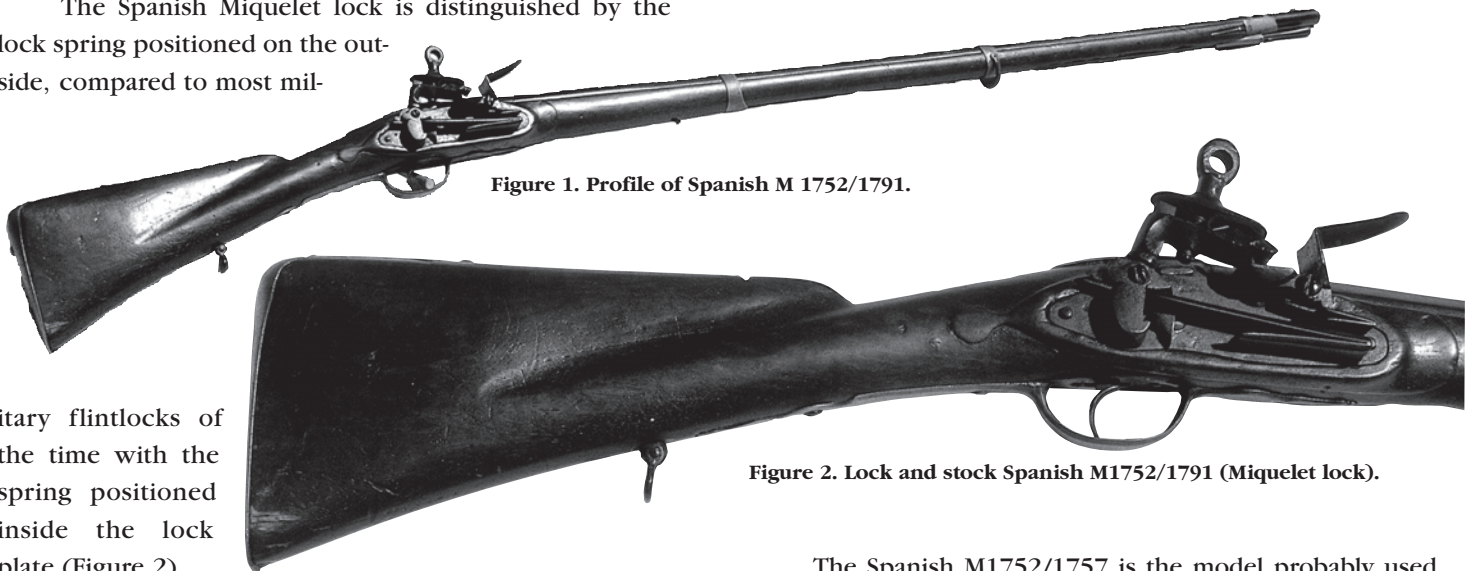


Figure 1. Profile of Spanish M 1752/1791.

Figure 2. Lock and stock Spanish M1752/1791 (Miquelet lock).

The Spanish M1752/1757 is the model probably used by American forces during the War of Independence. While the lock was considered by some fragile, it was well designed and engineered. The stock is walnut and influenced by French and German design.¹²

There are variations in the 1752 and 1757 models, which can confuse collectors and the few specimens extant make thorough evaluation impossible. The M1752 seems to be the first standardized muskets issued to Spanish forces. The musket is distinguished by what is sometimes referred to as the French lock with the lock spring on the inside as compared with the Spanish Miquelet lock with the outside lock spring.

The earliest models are made with iron furniture and wooden ramrods, which were replaced with iron ramrods in 1755. I have



Figure 3. Counterguard Spanish M1752/1791.

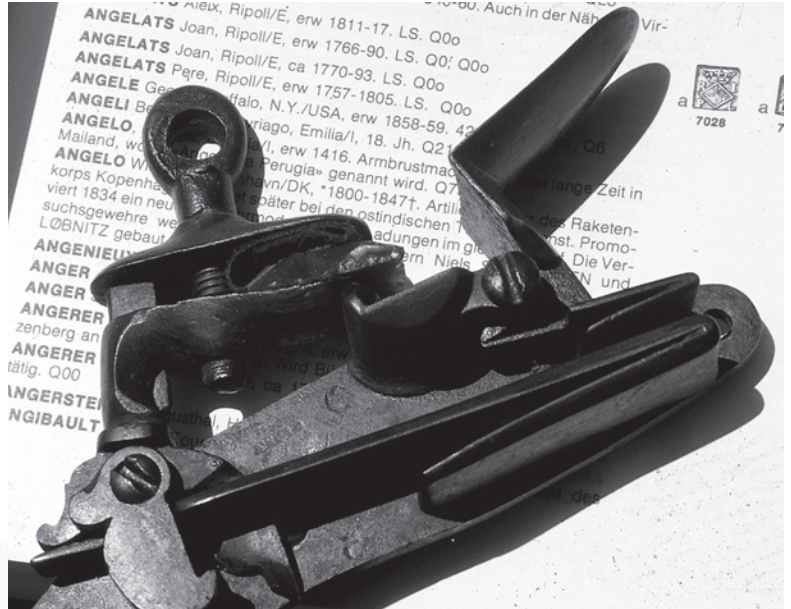


Figure 4. View outside Miquelet lock Spanish M1752/1791.

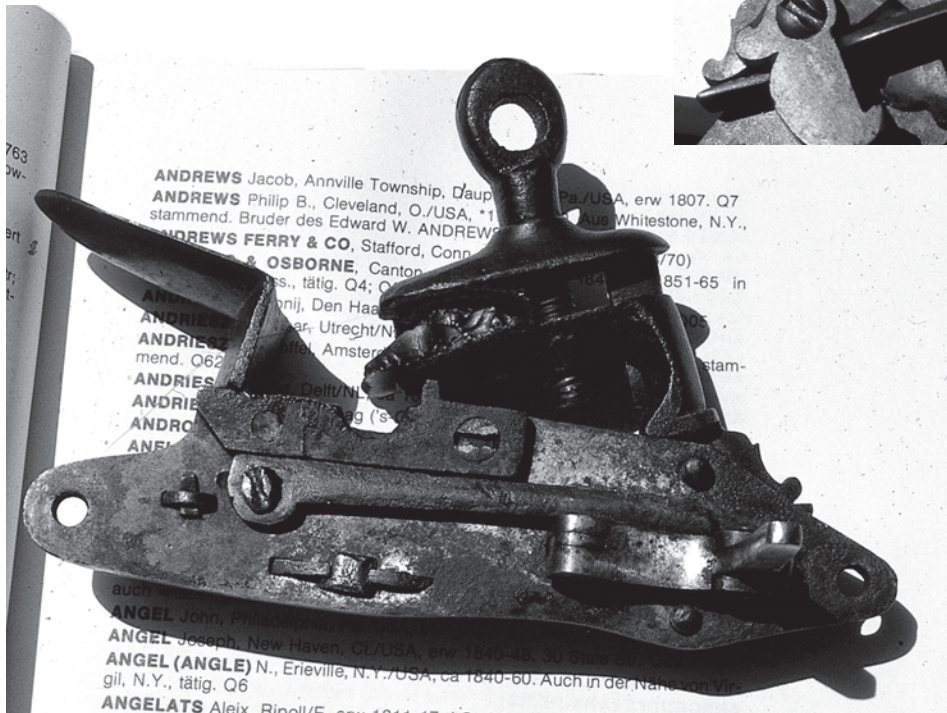


Figure 5. View inside Miquelet lock Spanish M1752/1791.



Figure 6. Top view of barrel and butt tang Spanish M1752/1791.



Figure 7. View of brass trigger guard Spanish M1752/1791.

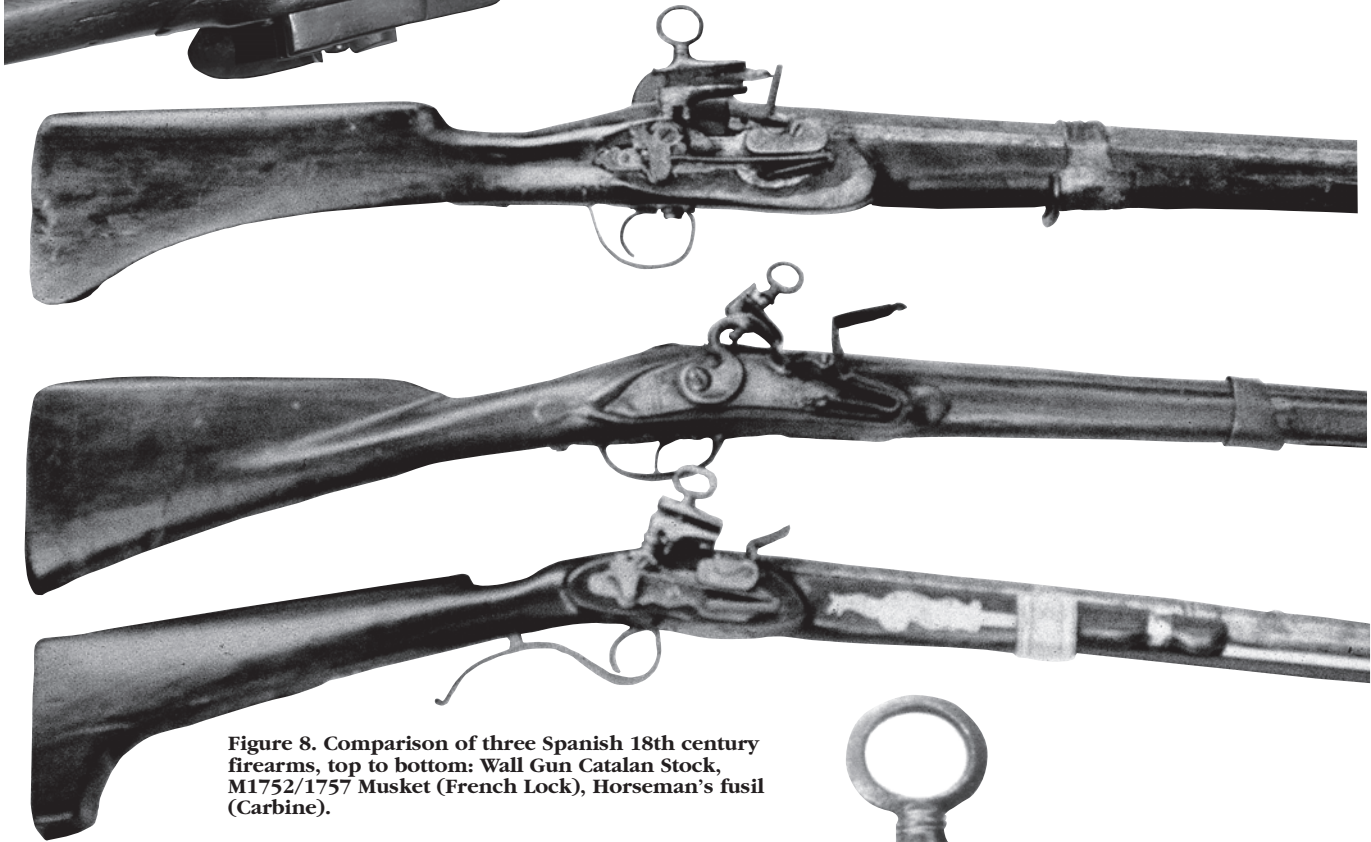


Figure 8. Comparison of three Spanish 18th century firearms, top to bottom: Wall Gun Catalan Stock, M1752/1757 Musket (French Lock), Horseman's fusil (Carbine).

seen one example of the iron-mounted model. Another distinguishing feature is the ring head screw head for securing the flint in the cock. There were few manufactured and they were used heavily during Mexico's rebellion against Spanish control and as late as the Mexican War with the United States. Many were scavenged for parts.

Sometime during the period 1752 to 1757, the furniture was changed to brass and this along with other variations cause difficulty in precise dating.

18th Century Spanish Horseman's Fusil

Measurements: Overall length: 38 1/4", Barrel 25", Bore: .75". Also has a sash bar 7 7/8" long.

The horseman's fusil is a Spanish carbine, sometimes referred to as short escopeta, with a Spanish Miquelet lock

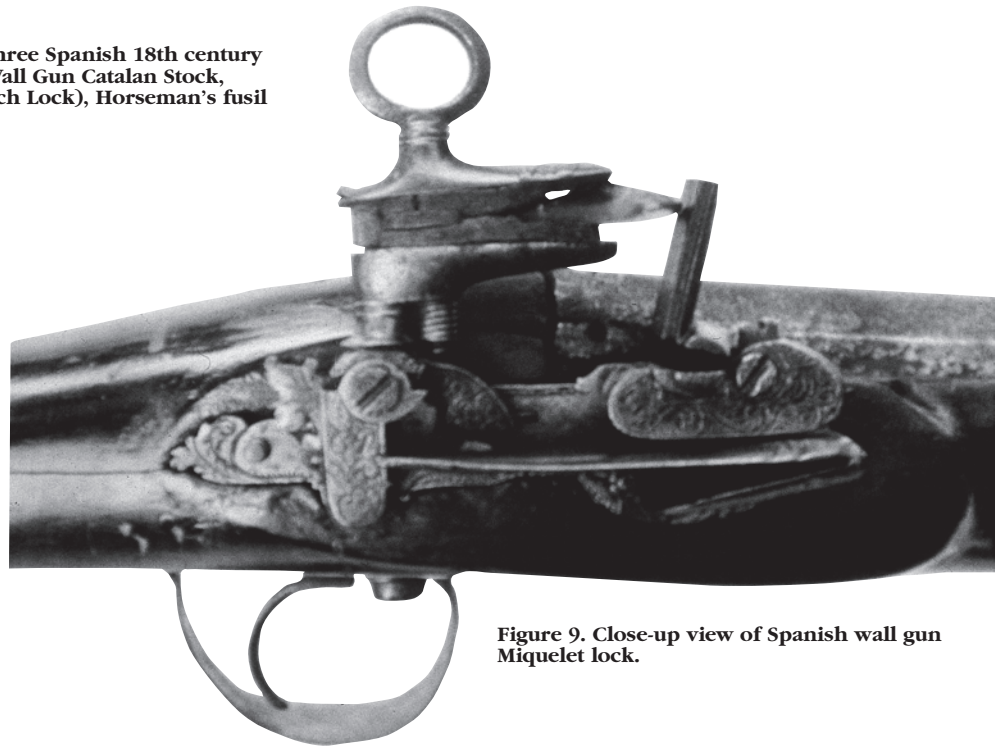


Figure 9. Close-up view of Spanish wall gun Miquelet lock.

and ring head flint screw. The furniture is iron and silver. While this was primarily a civilian weapon, they do appear in military inventories (Figures 9-18).



Figure 10. Close-up view of Spanish wall gun iron trigger guard.

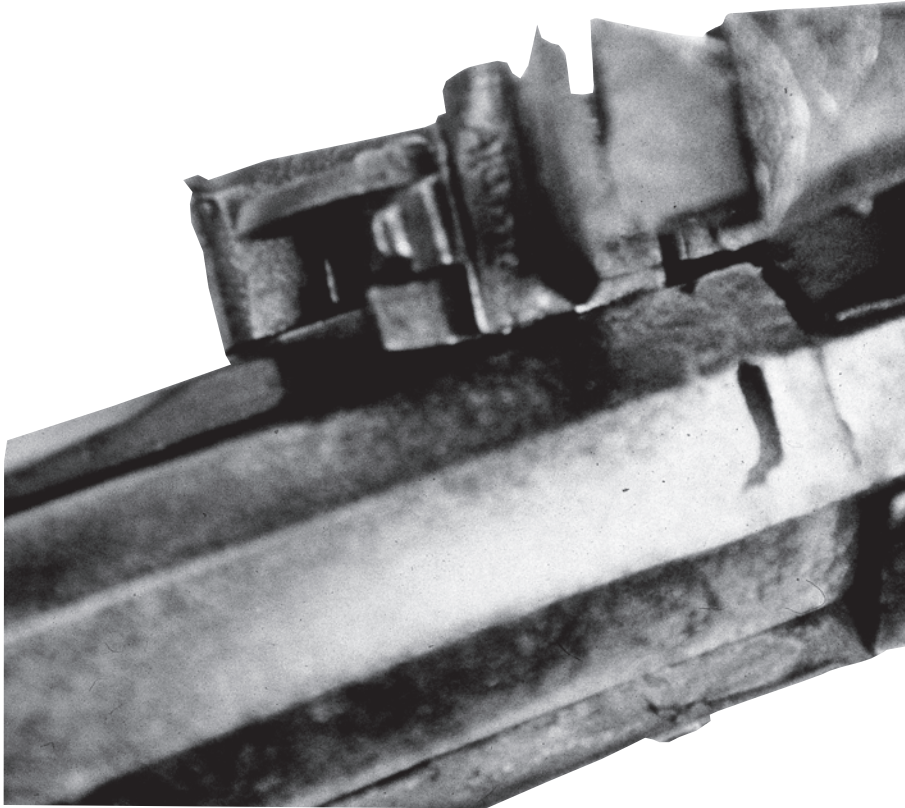


Figure 11. Alameda mark at wall gun frizzen base.



Figure 12. Counter guard of Spanish M1752/1757 musket.



Figure 13. Brass trigger guard of Spanish M1752/1757 musket.

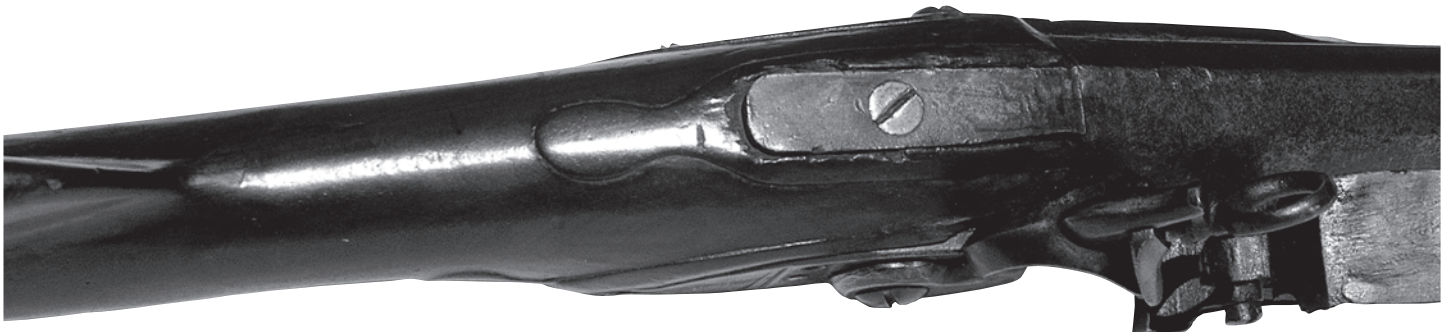


Figure 14. Barrel tang Spanish M1752/1757 musket.

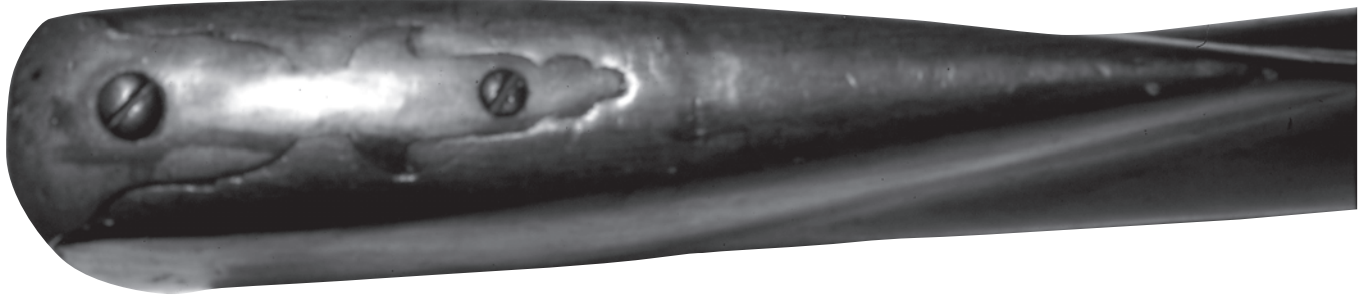


Figure 15. Butt tang Spanish M1752/1757 musket.

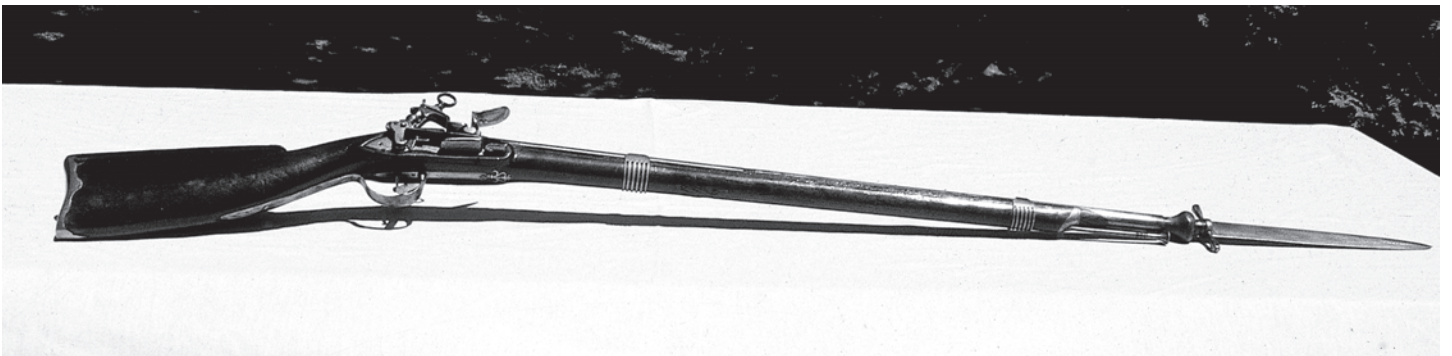


Figure 16. Profile 18th century Spanish fusil with companion plug bayonet.

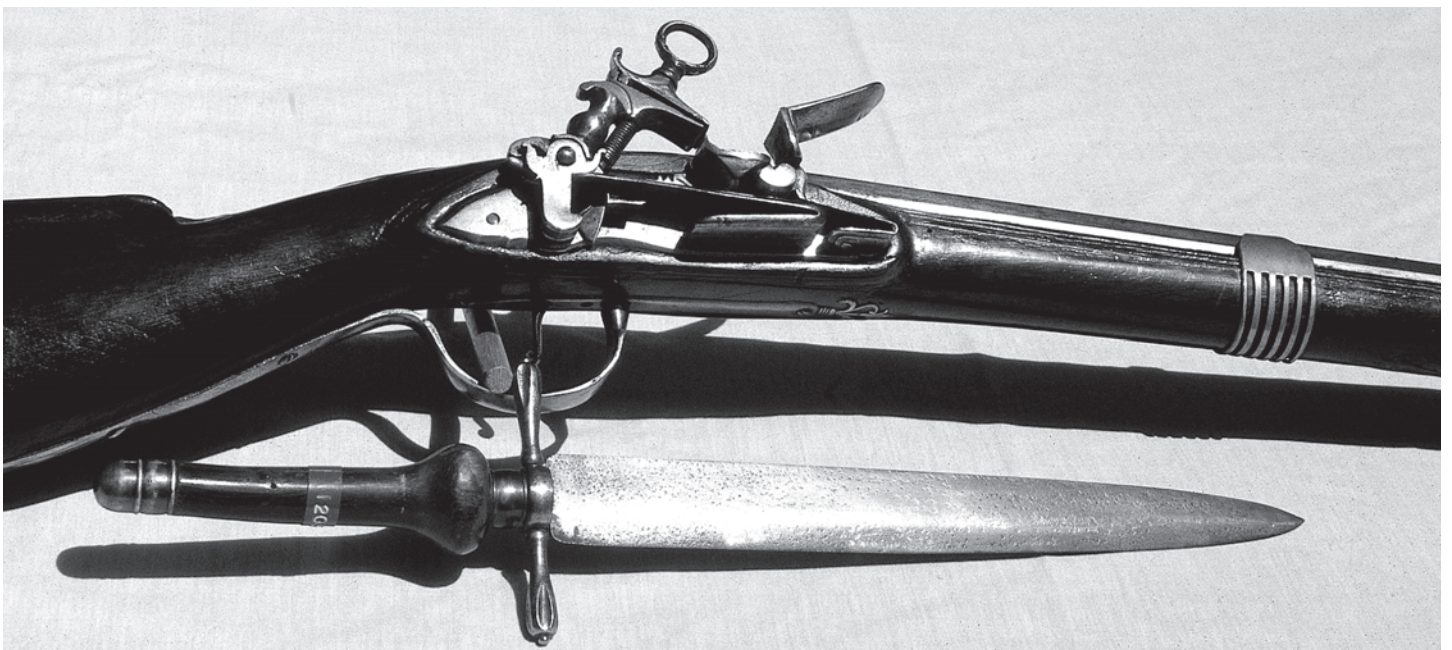


Figure 17. Close-up view of Spanish Miquelet lock and plug bayonet for fusil.

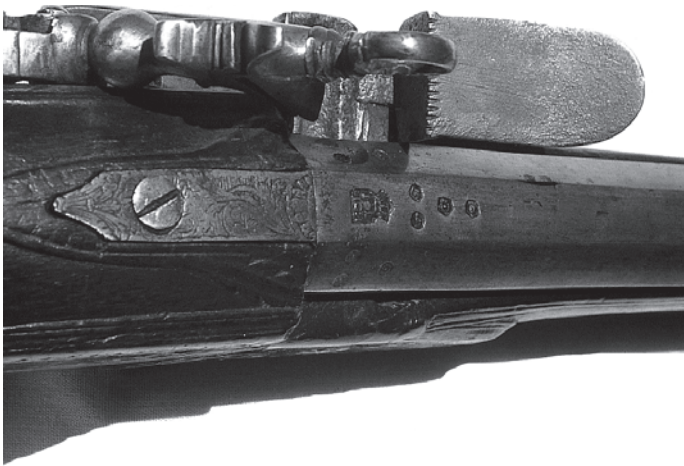


Figure 18. Markings on barrel of Spanish fusil.

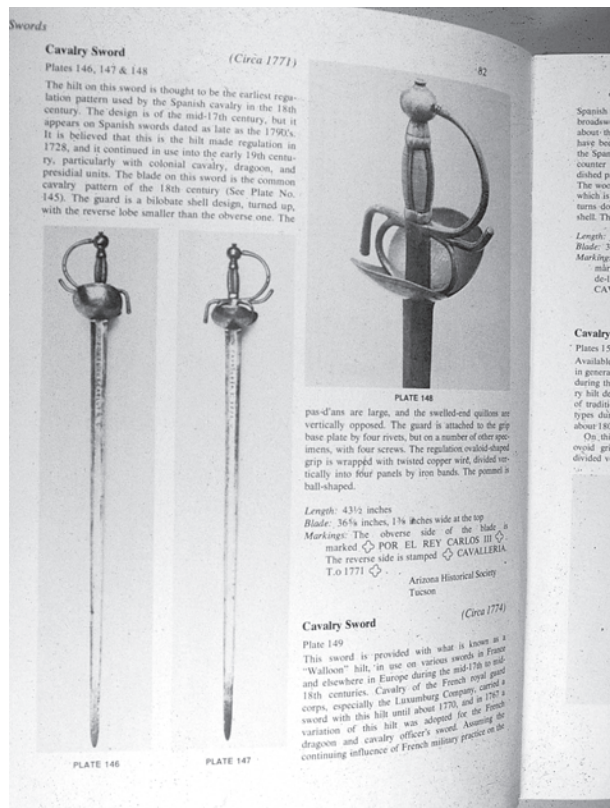


Figure 19. Page 82 from *Spanish Military Weapons in Colonial America 1700-1821*.⁸

Figure 20. Comparison of Spanish cavalry sword dated 1771, 18th century Espada Ancha, and plug bayonet of Spanish fusil (see Fig. 17).

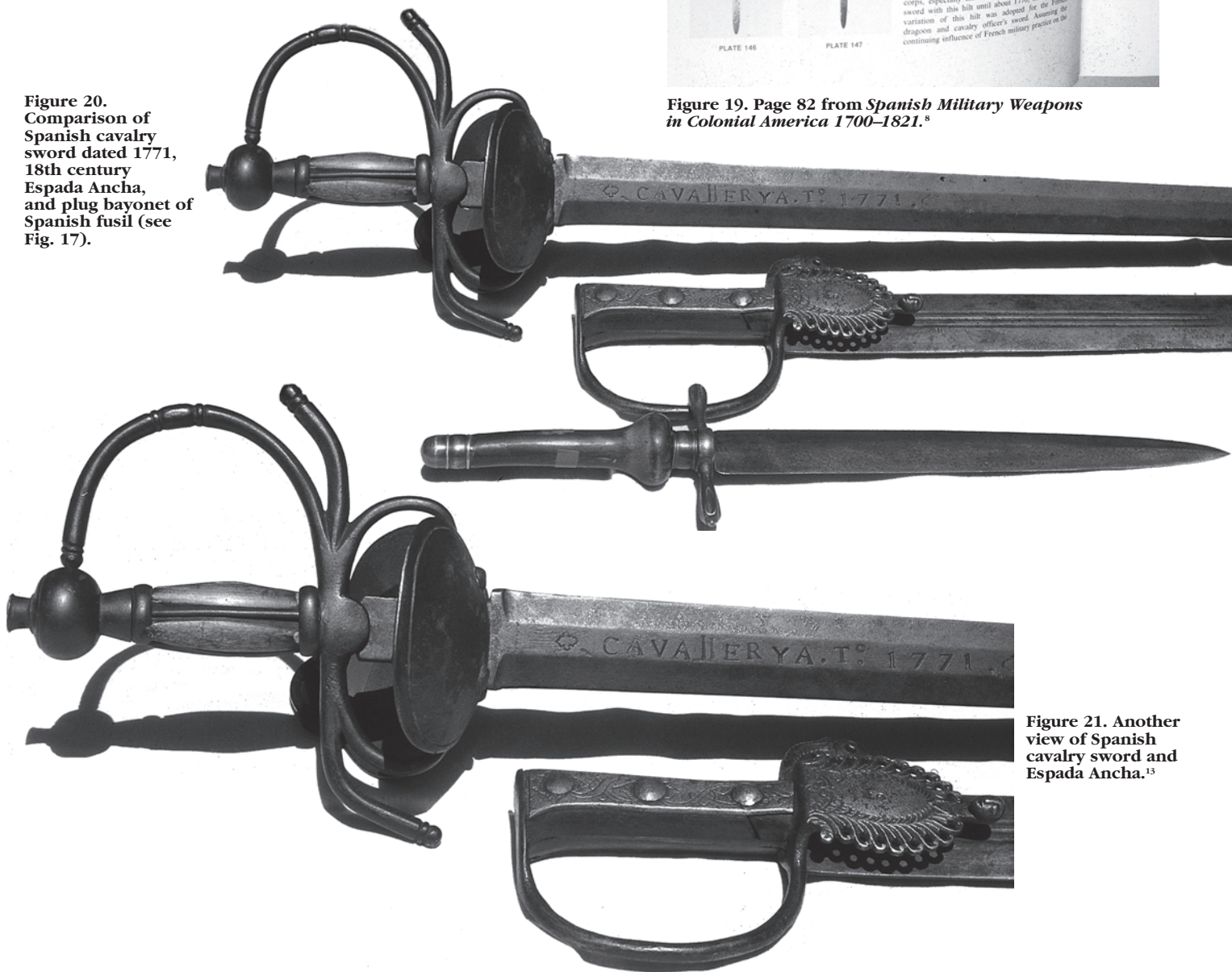


Figure 21. Another view of Spanish cavalry sword and Espada Ancha.¹³



Figure 22. 18th century portrait of Spanish Officer from Puerto Rican Regiment.



Figure 23. Modern historical painting of Spanish Grenadiers serving in Louisiana, officer, drummer, and private soldier.

18th Century Spanish Fusil and Companion Plug Bayonet

Measurements: Overall length: 44 1/4", Barrel: 29 1/2", Bore: 70".

Plug bayonet: Overall length: 15", Blade: 9 7/8".

The fusil and companion plug bayonet is an example of a Mexican/Spanish weapon used on the colonial frontier in the last quarter of the 18th century by traders, civilians, and Spanish militia forces. The various marks suggest original manufacture in Spain.

SWORDS

No presentation of arms would be complete without mentioning Spanish swords, but, like Spain pistols, they are a separate subject. However, I am introducing a few, hopefully to stimulate interest and research (Figures 19-21).

The hilt design on this example is thought to be as early as 1728. The piece has numerous markings including the designation for cavalry, King Carlos III, and a date of 1771. This type of sword was in common use in New Spain as late as the Mexican War.

Measurements, Spanish Calvary sword: Overall length: 44", Blade: 36 3/4".

Espada Ancha (wide blade)

Measurements: Overall length: 31", Blade: 27".

The Espada Ancha was a civilian or militia weapon. The striking feature in comparing the two swords is the blade length. There are many theories for the wide range of blade lengths appearing on Espada Anchas, including some areas of New Spain that limited blade lengths for nonregular soldiers to 28". It was popular with civilians, hunters, and militias. The many varieties suggest a personalized art form in New Spain much like American powder horns of the same period.

In conclusion, a few paintings illustrating Spanish soldiers in New Spain have been included (Figures 22-23).

ENDNOTES

1. *Muster and Pay Rolls of the War of the Revolution, 1775-1783*, Reprint (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 1996), 185-187.
2. Lorenzo G. LaFarelle, *Bernardo de Galvez, hero of the American Revolution* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1992), 20-21.
3. Lorenzo G. LaFarelle, *Bernardo de Galvez, hero of the American Revolution* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1992), 20.
4. Lorenzo G. LaFarelle, *Bernardo de Galvez, hero of the American Revolution* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1992), 20-21.

5. Lorenzo G. LaFarelle, *Bernardo de Galvez, hero of the American Revolution* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1992), 20–21.
6. G. Chinard, ed., *The Treaties of 1778 and Allied Documents* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1928.), vi–viii (Introduction), discusses Spanish secret participation; 58–59 provides a copy of the *act separate and secret*.
7. Lorenzo G. LaFarelle, *Bernardo de Galvez, hero of the American Revolution* (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1992), 22–24.
8. Sidney B. Brinckerhoff & Pierce A. Chamberlain, *Spanish Military Weapons in Colonial America 1700–1821* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1972), 31.
9. William Gilkerson, *Boarders Away II, Firearms of the Age of Fighting Sail* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray, Inc., 1993), 102, Plate 37, item 2 in Spanish Swivel Gun.
10. John Walton Caughey, *Bernardo de Galvez in Louisiana 1776–1783* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1934), 98.
11. James D. Lavin, *History of Spanish Firearms* (New York, NY: Arco Publishing, 1965), 155, Plate 60.
12. Sidney B. Brinckerhoff & Pierce A. Chamberlain, *Spanish Military Weapons in Colonial America 1700–1821* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1972), 28.
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15. Moorhead, Max L. *The Presidio, Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975.
16. *Muster and Pay Rolls of the War of the Revolution, 1775–1783*, Reprint (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 1996).
17. Padron, Francisco Morales, ed., Topping, Aileen Moore, trans. *The Journal of Don Francisco Saavedra de Sangronis 1780–1783*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1989.

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