

SMALL ARMS OF THE ENROLLED PENSIONER FORCE Stan Gratte – Walkaway Museum

The British Army was equipped with 'Brown Bess' flintlock muskets for over 150 years until the 1840's when they were replaced with similar guns but ignited by a percussion cap, placed on a hollow 'nipple'. The flintlock was ignited by a piece of flint stone striking against steel to produce a spark. I am sure all the Guards would have used the Brown Bess flintlock in their army career. They later called it a 'firelock' to differentiate from a caplock musket. Of course the caplock musket was not subject to rain and was instantaneous in firing.

Both muskets were almost identical except for the firing mechanism and indeed some firelocks were converted to caplocks.

I believe at least some Guards early on were issued with 'firelocks' and this is borne out by a story which happened at Geraldton. Corporal Flanigan said he "he took his loaded firelock with him for safety." (1) He certainly would have known a firelock from a caplock in 1854.

There were still a few flintlocks in Perth Commissariat Store (2) and in 1861 there were Enfield Muskets (caplocks) issued to the Volunteer Corps in 1861. In October 1858 (3) it seems that 'percussion arms' – caplocks – are a news thing.

I believe all this may be available in a book on West Australian Firearms by Chris Hall, written about 1970. Chris was Curator of Firearms at Perth Museum.

The Enfield Rifle is another arm with a rifled barrel and is not to be confused with Enfield musket with a smooth bore. The Guards never received Enfield Rifles to my knowledge. There is no doubt that the main firearm of the Guards was the Enfield, Pattern 1847 musket, sometimes called the 'Tower' musket. Calibre .753 muzzle loaded, smooth bore, nicknamed 'Caplock'. The Guards were required to keep them at home with bayonet and full kit, for emergency.

Towards the end of the Guards days they were issued with Snider .577 breechloaders.

Therefore my contentions are:

Brown Bess Flintlocks - at least some early Guards used these.

Enfield Percussion Muskets - Pattern 1847 from at least 1858 to the last days of the Guards.

Snider Rifles – later days

Some of the old Pattern 1847 Muskets are still about. The one at Walkaway is in good order and was given to Solicitor du Boulay by an old Guard and it hung in his office for many years. He ceased business I think in about 1917. There is, or was about 15 years ago, one at Guildford Museum. In fair order I think. There is one in private hands, in good order. A broken one dug up recently near the Geraldton Pensioner Barracks site – in my hands now.

I have sighted these, so they must be common and were retained by the Guards when they retired I believe.

1. Ancient Landmarks, A Social and Economic History of the Victoria District of Western Australia 1839-1894. Mary Albertus Bain. UWA Press. 1975. p131
2. The Volunteer Movement of W.A. B.F. Wieck. Patterson Brokenshaw. P60.
3. The Veterans a History of the Enrolled Pensioner Force in Western Australia. 1850-1880. Frank H. Broomhall, Hesperian Press. 1989. p33
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Editors Note: We thank Stan for bringing us up to date with his research in the weapons used by the Enrolled Pensioner Force.

