

NEW ENGLAND "U.S." SURCHARGED LONG LAND PATTERN BRITISH BROWN BESS MUSKET

The Long Land Pattern British Brown Bess musket was the primary weapon of the British soldier throughout the early and mid-18th century. They were the standard weapon of the British army and colonial provincial militia troops during the French-Indian wars in America and many were used here during the American Revolution. Close range combat was the order of the day and these smoothbore weapons were terribly effective when volleys were fired at massed troops.

It appears that Washington had a serious problem when it came to the pilferage of firearms and apparently this situation was something of a colonial tradition. Records show that more than 100,000 provincial militiamen served Great Britain in the colonial wars prior to the Revolution and that in many instances they took their weapons home with them when their enlistments expired. We know that nearly all of the more than 10,000 muskets issued to the provincials in 1758 vanished with the discharged colonials. Apparently this practice was still prevalent during the American Revolution and Washington felt that strong measures were needed to curtail what he termed, "...the great waste and embezzlement of public arms." In response to this problem, on February 24, 1777, the Continental Congress issued a resolution ordering the marking of all firearms and accouterments owned by the Federal Government. The wording required that the marks "US" or "UNITED STATES" be marked on, "...such parts as will receive the impression." The mark "U.STATES" is also often encountered. The letters were either stamped on the metal parts or branded into the stock and many variations are known to exist. Historians believe that it's possible that as many as 200,000 muskets were imported here for use during the war. However, inventories taken after the war show that less than 60,000 firearms were in storage in Federal Depositories.¹ While it's known that this number does not include muskets sold at the end of the war, muskets remaining in State armories, or those issued to post Revolutionary War troops, it's still most probable that a great many guns went home with the discharged soldiers. M. L. Brown, in his fine work, "Firearms in Colonial America", stated that at the end of the war the Continental

¹ Moller, American Military Shoulder Arms, p.1. Vol. 2

Congress voted to let the patriots take their firearms home with them as a bounty.² This could very well have been in lieu of pay.

Some historians believe that the government surcharges were placed on the weapons after the war and as the guns were being inventoried for storage. However, it is recorded that both branded and stamped surcharges were placed on many firearms during the war. It's known that the "UNITED STATES" brand was applied to firearms in 1777, and the "U.STATES" brand was applied to firearms in 1778.³ A contemporary journal of a continental soldier stationed with Washington's main army in New Jersey makes note of a May 1777 order, "...for all our arms to be carried to town to have them stamped US".⁴

As the American Revolution expanded into a world war the arms stored by the British Ordnance Department quickly dwindled. To replace these arms the Ordnance Department purchased private weapons from the London gunmakers. After 1775 most of the heavy military action occurred outside of the New England area. However, thousands and thousands of captured British weapons flowed through the region as a result of the actions of privateers. These privateers roamed the waters leading to the huge British supply base at Halifax, Nova Scotia. The British Ordnance ship NANCY was captured on November 27, 1775 by the armed schooner LEE. The NANCY'S cargo consisted of 2000 muskets, 100,000 flints, 30,000 round shot, 30 tons of muskets balls, and a large brass mortar.⁵ Only eight of the first thirty-five ships sent from England with military supplies in the winter of 1775 reached Boston. The remaining ships were either forced by the winter gales to proceed to the West Indies or were captured.⁶ A huge cache of munitions on the Ordnance storeship HOPE was captured off the Massachusetts coast by colonials aboard the ship FRANKLIN.⁷ Action like this continued off the New England shoreline throughout the war. In 1777 alone, Britain lost over 300 transports to American privateers.⁸ The French entry into the war changed it into a world wide conflict. The Royal Navy was required to

² Brown, *Firearms in Colonial America*, p.354.

³ *Op.Cit.*, p. 159.

⁴ Greenman, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, edited by Robert Bray and Paul Bushnell, p.73.

⁵ Balderston and Syrett, *The Lost War-Letters From British Officers During The American Revolution*, p.58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Footnote 1, p.72.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.86.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.117.

fight all over the globe. Less protection for the British shipping off New England made that area a very dangerous place to navigate.

The weapon illustrated in the photographs is a Long Land pattern British Brown Bess musket. This musket incorporates a lock which shows the presence of a second sear screw behind the hammer. This feature first began to appear in the 1770's.⁹ Other parts of the lock retain early features such as the three prong frizzen spring end and an early style hammer which incorporates a screw which is slotted and the only lock mark visible is the faint word, "TOWER", behind the hammer.

The 46 inch, .75 caliber barrel has the remnant of a proof mark visible, as well as a very worn "US" surcharge stamped near the breech. The wear on the barrel and the lock are consistent but this doesn't appear to be from excessive firing as the touch hole and the muzzle show only moderate wear. There is a large 4 1/2 inch by 1 inch "U.STATES" brand mark on the right buttstock of this musket. Perhaps muskets marked like this are part of the huge amount of ordnance captured on the high seas, and sold for booty, even to the Colonial government, before they ever reached the British soldiers stationed in America. The remnants of a British store keepers mark can be seen on the right buttstock.

Several features of the gun suggest the possibility that it might have been initially manufactured as a private contract or militia musket. Literally thousands of Long Land muskets were manufactured in the 1770's and a great many of these were made for commercial use.¹⁰ Weapons made under private contract often show proofmarks or minor design features which differ from Government specifications. The first ramrod pipe on the weapon illustrated is not of the standard trumpet shape but is straight. The brass escutcheon is smaller and thinner than those normally seen and is a different shape. This might also suggest that the gun was refurbished here in America.

Original Long Land guns are scarce and examples which show ownership and use here by Colonial forces during the Revolution are extremely rare. This musket is just such a weapon and could be an existing symbol of the work done by Colonial privateers during our War for

⁹ Bailey, *British Military Longarms 1715-1865*, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Independence. This firearm is currently on display in the Thomas Clarke House, at the Princeton Battlefield State Park, in a special exhibit entitled, "Arms of the Revolution".



British 1st Model Long Land Musket:
61 5/8" .75 cal. This Brown Bess is
marked 'Tower' on lock and branded 'U
STATES" on stock. Congress ordered in
September, 1777 that all government owned
firearms & accouterments be marked US or
United States. This U States variant is also
often encountered.

*WT Ahearn Coll.



