



The Sealed Knot Society

DISPLAY DESCRIPTION



Infantry Display

Safety Notice: There are 2 sets of blue ropes placed around the battlefield area, these are here for your safety and are positioned a pike's length apart, so that should a pike fall during action, there is no risk of this hitting a member of the public. Please ensure that you do not enter the area between, or beyond the ropes, and be especially vigilant that children and dogs do not enter this area.

There are 3 groups of foot soldiers you will see on the battlefield. Sometimes you will see them working together and sometimes you will see them working as independent units.

Pike

The pike was the principal arm of the armies of the English civil War, but they are already on the decline at this point. (Don't let the pike know I said that!) All of the men would also have been equipped with a short sword called a hanger for personal defence. Because they get face to face (often quite literally) the pike are referred to as "gentlemen".

A pike is a long pole, usually around 16" in length with a metal spear head at one end. They were very much a formation weapon as they create a wall of spikes that is difficult to get past.

You will see pike blocks using 2 techniques. You will see them engage at 'point' where they approach one another with the tips of their pikes lowered to attempt to skewer each other on the blades.

This attack will often turn into a 'press' of pike where the two sides end up face to face and begin to touse in hand-to-hand combat. You will also see many 'pushes' of pike, where the blocks form something resembling a rugby scrum and ram into the opposing side in an attempt to physically force them backwards across the field.

We like to keep our people in one piece as much as possible so in the Sealed Knot we have a rule that if somebody ends up on the ground, someone will shout "Man down" and

everyone will back off so people can get up safely. You will see this happen a lot, and, whilst it's not authentic to the 17th century, it's very important to us.

Musket

A musket is a muzzle loading weapon which means that all of the firepower is put down the barrel of the gun and ignited by a naked flame at the stock end of the barrel. You'll see musketeers doing this with the butt of their gun on the ground and then turning it up to put more powder in the pan so that is the place they will have fuel to light the charge in the barrel. If it's a gloomy day, you can sometimes see the flash of flame from the barrel and the pan!

There are 2 types of musket you will see on the field. Most common is a matchlock musket, where after loading, the powder will be ignited by a lit piece of saltpetre soaked cord being put into the pan of the gun. At the start of the battle, you might see musketeers spinning this cord around to make sure it's well lit. If it's not hot enough, or it's wet, it won't ignite the charge and nothing will happen – a flash in the pan!

The other type is the flintlock. This is quite new technology for the time and these weapons were more expensive. Instead of using a lit match, these guns were ignited by striking a piece of flint against a metal surface to create a spark that will set the gun off.

There is a set pattern to how you load a musket. (This is really simplified; in any display you'll see the full pattern. 17TH Century drill books had as many as 60 separate movements!)

1. Cast about your musket. Put the butt of the gun on the ground to the right of you. Use your powder horn to put a measure of powder down the barrel.
2. Withdraw your ramrod. This is attached to the musket under the barrel and is used to put a piece of wadding down the barrel to create a tight seal for a good bang! If we were doing this for real, this is where you would put in the ball or shot.
3. Ram home. Giving it a good thump for security. Traditionally three taps.
4. Return your ramrod. For safety reasons, SK musketeers acknowledge this instruction.
5. High port your musket. This brings the musket from the ground across the body and is a signal to everybody that your musket is loaded. When it's here the musketeer will use their powder horn again to fill the pan and then they're ready to fire.

As you can tell, muskets take a while to reload but a good musketeer can achieve 3 shots in a minute. Watch and see! Choose the musketeer you think is fastest!

Both weapons were increasingly popular in the 17th Century as it was quick to learn how to use one as opposed to the years of training it took to use the much more accurate longbow.

However, they had their problems. If they get wet, they don't always co-operate! And a musketeer can only keep firing until they run out of powder and there's only so much gunpowder you can carry. Sealed Knot musketeers are issued on the day of the battle with enough for 14 – 16 shots and they can run out quickly! See if you can count the number of shots.

You might see a musketeer leave their block. Don't worry! They're not running away. They've just had a misfire. Their musket has failed to fire and they need to go to the side of the field to clear it.

You will be likely to see four different types of fighting by musket blocks. Musketeers are organised into ranks and files. Files are the lines made by the men standing one behind the other; ranks are the lines made in the other direction.

Firing by 'salvy' is where the entire musket block fires their shot at the same time with the front rank kneeling to allow the ranks behind to fire over their heads. Firing by 'introduction' and 'extroduction' are manoeuvres where 1 rank at a time will fire and then either the rear rank will march forward, or the front rank will march to the back, meaning that the musket block is very slowly moving either forwards or backwards with musketeers firing at all times and no gaps for reloading. The last method you will see musket blocks use in combat is 'clubbing their butts' which means that they turn their muskets around to use the blunt end as a weapon as they get up close and fight in hand-to-hand combat. Musketeers will often use a sword alongside their musket at this point, but it is a sure sign that musket officers are worrying that they are low on black powder or lead shot.

Drums and Colours

The third group you see are the drums and colours. These were used as an authentic form of communication on the battlefield where the noise of people shouting and smoke from gunfire made hearing and seeing individual people very difficult.

The colours (the large flags, also known as standards) would be unique to each regiment, using recognisable colours and designs. They might be used at the start of a battle to 'taunt' the enemy by being displayed and 'shown', meaning that they would be waved through the air in intricate patterns, advertising which commanders were present on the field. During the heat of battle, they would be used as a rallying point, allowing troops to easily see where they should be at any given time.

The drummers provided a means of communication that could be heard over the general noise of battle. On the march they would provide a rhythm for the soldiers to step to, providing a faster or slower pace depending on what was needed. During the battle itself, they would relay the orders given by officers, drumming out different rhythms that could mean anything from 're-form' to 'attack'.

Working together.

When they're on the march, pike and musket will be together with a body of musket in front and behind the pikeman. When they come up against an enemy force, they will form up with the pike behind and musket in front. That means the musket can fire at an opposing force and the pike march through them and engage with the enemy while the musket reload. An enemy force can be held back for a while like this.

All of the divisions come together in the most effective way when the order to 'charge for horse' is given. The drummers will take up their rhythm and stand closely with the colours whilst the pike create a circle around them, with pike tips levelled at the chest height of the horses. Musketeers will then kneel under the pikes giving fire at will. Also known as a 'hedgehog', this manoeuvre was remarkably effective in preventing a troop of infantry from being mown down by a cavalry attack.

If you want a closer look at either of these weapons, do go over to the Living History Camp and you can see one up close and personal. You can even have a go with a pike and wear the helmet and armour of a pikeman or handle a musket under the supervision of one of our experienced soldiers.

You never know – this might be the start of something new for you!