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Weapons — Flintlock Sea Pistol

During a naval boarding action, there is little room for manoeuvre, so any firearm needed to be short. The distance to the enemy also tended to be in feet as opposed to yards, so accuracy is less important. The sea pistol provided a cheap means of providing firearms in such an environment.

In the mid 1740's the Royal Navy standardized on a twelve inch flintlock pistol of .54 calibre with a brass plate on the butt. It used a wooden rod to ram the powder and ball down the barrel. Since flintlock pistols took some time to re-load, which rarely happened in a boarding action, the brass plate offered an alternative use for the pistol. The user reversed the pistol to use as a club. There was also a .69 calibre version, but it is not clear when this calibre was introduced into service.

Sea pistols used a conventional flintlock firing mechanism. This required a piece of flint rock held in a vice atop a hinged hammer cock. After pulling the trigger, the hinged hammer cock moves forward and down scrapping the flint against a metal face (frizzen) resulting in the creation of sparks. These sparks ignite powder on the flash pan. The powder burns transmitting the fire through a small hole into the propellant basin in the barrel. The propellants in the barrel ignite forcing the ball down the barrel. A noticeable lag occurs between the time you depress the trigger and the time the ball leaves the barrel. This affects the accuracy of the weapon, as most shooters fail to remain motionless. Consequentially, in naval boarding actions, most men preferred to get as close as possible to their intended target before firing.

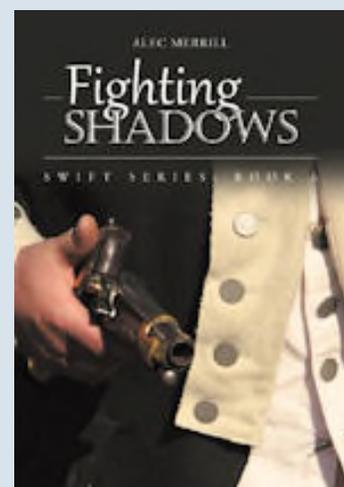


The exposure of powder on the flash pan makes flintlock weapons more prone to misfire, as dampness affects the ability of the powder to ignite. The manufacturers of the weapons attempted to mitigate this possibility. That's why the frizzen is lowered over the flash pan. When the cocking arm moves forward it pushes the frizzen forward exposing the powder.

The Royal Navy maintained the 12 inch model until introducing a shorter 9 inch model sometime in the 1790's. The two models remained in various armed forces around the world until superseded by percussion cap pistols in the 1840's.



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