

# THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF RIFLE SHOOTING SPORTS

**DR. BALJIT SINGH SEKHON**

*Deputy Director of Sports & Head,  
Nagaland University, Nagaland*

## ABSTRACT

*The objective of this paper is to examine the retrospective prospective of rifle shooting sports. In this descriptive and historical study, the investigator applied the analytical approach for the investigation. A biggest change in shooting was happened after the invention of gunpowder but the existence of gunpowder had very little effect on the traditional way of hunting.*

*Keywords: Historical Perspectives, Matchlock, Gunpowder, Wheel-lock, Flintlock, Flintlock Kentucky.*

## INTRODUCTION

Competing in accurate shooting has a history almost as old as weaponry itself. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, shooters began to organize themselves nationally, and one of these was French pistol champion Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics. Soon world championships were being organized as well. During the years, the sports have changed a number of times and new things have been added. For instance, from the beginning, many of the targets had human- like (or in the case of running target, animal- like) shapes; most have now assumed a circular form to reduce the connotations with the use of guns in wars. The main objective of this paper is to give brief note on historical perspectives of rifle shooting.

## METHOD

In this descriptive and historical study, the investigator applied the analytical approach for the investigation. A sincere effort has been made to study the primary and historical sources. The works of various authors on the topic have also been explored. Information available from the various sources like books, journals, encyclopedias, periodicals and research work conducted by various researchers from time to time were analyzed. The present study aimed at exploring the historical perspective of pistol shooting sports from the shooting scriptures.

## HISTORY OF RIFLE SHOOTING

The invention of gunpowder brought about a big change in shooting. However there is a lot of confusion as the origin of the invention and its background is shrouded in mystery. It is said that it was invented by a Franciscan monk named Berthold Schwarz, who was born in the Germany in thirteenth century. The existence of gunpowder had very little effect on the traditional way of hunting with crossbow at the time. As the crossbow and longbow were very accurate for hunting, most of the people preferred these weapons than firearm till the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century. Firearms were complicated, unreliable and noisy but in the art of warfare, gunpowder invention was considered a greatest change. It reduced the number of cannon because of difficult absorption of recoil. These guns were heavy and crude tubes which were loaded at one end and sealed from the other. A flame or glowing cords were used to provide ignition to fire the gunpowder. These weapons by that time were not suitable for hunting and military purpose because these were slow weapons.

The development of military was slow till the last decade of 15<sup>th</sup> century. During this period King Edward IV produced hang gones for his three hundred foot soldiers which were comparatively more developed than the heavy metal sealed tube. Before the rifle, crossbow bolt because of its accuracy and stability was finest weapon. The spin from the airflow over the fins were the main factor for its accuracy and the same principle of inducing spin by groove inside the barrel may be the reason of the first rifle in the last decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. A rifle of around first part of 15<sup>th</sup> century was of .24 bore and owned by Maximillian I which is still existing. In this match lock rifle a glowing cord was placed in the touch hole to fire and the powder wax used for ignition. But this costly manufactured rifle had unreliable and slow method of ignition, therefore was never considered as an alternative weapon for military use. It also carried draw-back of unreliable ignition method particularly during night time, rainy days and windy weather. Some times its unexpected shower of spark also resulted in premature firing.

Although the matchlock system had helped to make the arquebus easier to fire, but there were still many disadvantages and these were biggest challenges in the development of weapons. The wheel-lock invention in the second decade of 16<sup>th</sup> century was a significant improvement in the older form of weapons. This was a next step from the match-lock and in which the arquebus was fitted with a wheel-lock. The wheel-lock was a sort of rough disk fitted with a type of pawl, known as a cock or dog head, which was connected to the wheel by a spring. In wheel-lock, a steel wheel was rotated against a small piece of pyrites, and the resulting shower of sparks ignited the priming powder in a pan which then set off the main charge. To wind the spring a small key was used. The triggering released the cock from the spring and it hit the pan. The fire stone would then produce a shower of sparks which lit the gunpowder to fire the shot. Most of the problems associated with match lock were solved with this

costly invention. Although, the wheel-lock had solved many problems but even this it could not replace the old warfare weapons. In fact, this was most popular weapon for hunting and target shooting at that time. This was comparatively handy and sufficient accurate weapon. The first challenge to crossbow and longbow was given by wheel-lock as it reduced delay between pulling the trigger, firing the shot and the new ignition system was also an asset. This was a first accepted target shooting rifle and accurate weapon. The only biggest problem with wheel-lock was its cost and but accuracy has defended this cause. The development in this firearm was greatly hampered in Germany by long war of three decades.

In 1580 a new mechanism known as snaphaunce or rogue appearance which was cheaper and simple to make than the wheel-lock was invented. Dutch makers invented this long range reputed and accurate rifle, while Spanish developed as the brigand or miquelet. This was the second development which was cheap and reliable. But there was inherent disadvantage in that as it was prone to shatter when roughly treated. This led to the quest for better and more durable alternatives. In 1610 a French gunsmith, M.L. Bourgeois invented a mechanism that was felt to be finest form of flintlock. This mechanism, initially known as the French Lock dominated shooting for more than two centuries.

A close-range volley muskets and accurate long range rifles were developed in this period. Various styles and calibers in rifle shooting for sports and recreation purpose emerged. The flintlock musket rapidly became popular in military circles and rifle chasseurs/companies were corporate. In the last decade of 17<sup>th</sup> century, military company of mounted cavalry and life guards engaged rifle men. For the mounted cavalry the rifle with short barrel was the need and the carbine and easily handled arms were appeared. The simplicity of the flint ignition system caused the flintlock rifle to replace earlier mechanism as the standard sporting arms. But there was an inherent disadvantage associated with these rifles, during the loading, as the ball had to be slightly larger than the actual diameter of the rifle and to seat the ball correctly on the powder took considerable efforts. This disadvantage was tackled by the introduction of greased patch in 17<sup>th</sup> century. In this mechanism the ball was wrapped in a small patch of greased cloth and this gave the ball the required spin when fired. Though the oversized ball was still necessary now, loading required fewer efforts which further lessened the time consumption for firing. In the first decade of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the sporting rifle was evolved into many varied styles and .30 into .70 in caliber to suit a wide range of shooting distances. The sufficiently accurate, well balanced, portable and light rifles were made which were equally useful for small target shooting sports. This was the golden period of target rifle shooting. Shooting sports was established during this period for long and short ranges.

The gunsmiths from Austria, northern Italy, Holland and Germany were famous for making rifles for sporting and military use. However, the England militants were not very prone to that traditional weapon for that period. But the developed form of the Brown Bess Tower Musket with rapid fire

capacity and foolproof loading was adopted as standard weapon for British army in the third decade of nineteenth century. Although the accuracy level was poor compared to European rifles, which were predominantly a sporting rifle, the smooth-bored tower musket remained the standard military weapon for over a century because of its effectiveness. European rifle was famous due to its different styles, variety of bore and accuracy. Till the last decade of eighteenth century there was a slow development in sporting rifles in the European countries where as American and British Empires adopted due to accuracy and warfare need. Due to the expansion of British Empires, the demand of lighter, accurate and reliable rifle rose. The matchlock guns, wheel-locks guns and the early flintlocks were not proved adequate for defense against the indigenous fighters and enemies. Easy portable rifle of smallbore which would use less gun powder was in high demand. The result of this demand was met with less weight and .45 in caliber rifle which has effective range and accuracy. This flintlock Kentucky rifle proved far superior to the army musket as it was a long range rifle. It was used as tool of survival and had great accuracy as sports and war weapons. In experienced hand it could hit accurately at three hundred meters. Therefore, this was proved to be a weapon of war with some limitations. The main problem was with powder residue after some fires and the slow loading procedure. The American marksman developed more accurate and more reliable rifles which proved adequate for defense against the colonizers. During this period the sports shooting and target competitions experience great achievement in the Kentucky rifles. The elongated bullets were improved which led to greater accuracy of this sporting rifle.

Target rifle shooting first began as an organized recreation activity in Great Britain in the 1860s when National Rifle Association was formed. Originally target shooting competitions were based around military marksmanship, and during this period the society of working men's Rifle club was formed, which later become the National Small-bore Rifle Association. This association was formed to promote the learning of shooting sports skill by the population. Target shooting has been an ever-present part of the Olympic Games since it was first introduced in 1896 and the initiator of the Olympic movement, Baron de Coubertin, was himself a shooter.

## CONCLUSION

Shooting dates back to man's most primitive origins as spear-throwing fight and improved hunting expertise. The conventional hunting was subjugated by the crossbow before the beginning of gunpowder to the western hemisphere. The gunpowder had slight effect on the long established traditions of hunting and the conventional hunting arms like the longbow and crossbow were hard for more efficient and perfect hunting than fire arms. The primary function of these weapons was for hunting and occasionally for self-defense against rival tribes and animals. The skill of gunfire had a various character extended before it became a sport.

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