

## EXPERIMENTAL MULE SADDLE GUN, 1 POUNDER, c.1880

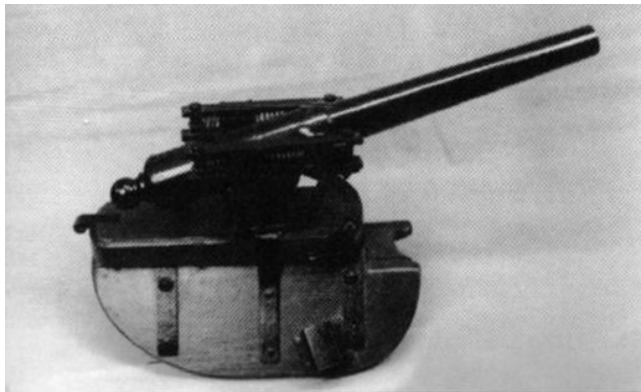
Inevitably, it seems, an army with both beasts of burden and artillery looks thoughtfully at both and decides that "something new" must be tried. The less the inventor knows about the laws of physics, i.e. mass and recoil, the better the idea looks. What could be simpler? A sure-footed beast of burden (mule, camel, etc.), a small bore cannon and a courageous artilleryman could walk an artillery piece to places the enemy would never look for them and bring direct or indirect fire right to the heart of the enemy camp. And, such a piece would allow even small, highly mobile units their own artillery and a great increase in surprise and combat effectiveness. So would run the thinking.

Unfortunately, by the time the idea has developed into hardware, the supporters of the idea are so committed that reason and even casual acquaintance with Newtonian physics have long since been eclipsed by the rush to find a mule and a tiring range.

The following is a highly-illustrative quote from the records of the Fort Sill Museum:

"This experimental saddle gun or mule gun, mounted on a wooden tree, was made to be fired from the back of a mule. According to tradition, when the piece was tested, the mule broke loose, began to whirl around, scattering the alarmed witnesses, then the mule stepped on the lanyard and fired the piece itself. The force of the recoil is said to have knocked the mule 'ass over teakettle' into a nearby river. Some versions say this incident took place at Aberdeen Proving Ground. In any event, the mule gun concept was precipitately abandoned. Scattered accounts in the literature may be found to other such 'Mule guns', including use by Mexicans during the Mexican War. Invariably it seems that the recoil knocked the mules down and frequently broke their legs."

The cannon itself is a rifled 1 Pound muzzle-loader. The rifling consists of 9 lands and grooves. The tube is 29" long from base ring to muzzle face. It is equipped with a "V" rear sight and a blade front sight. The trunnions are centered on the axis of the bore and play against two recoil springs mounted on either side of the tube. The gun is mounted on a pintle extending upward from a wooden saddle tree.



As to Other specifics, the authors noted that two strong men could barely lift this device waist high. It will be seen in the photo that a slanted iron bracket is attached to each side of the wooden tree and must have allowed the insertion of lifting poles and the attentions of four men. The iron-bound, wooden tree is totally unpadded underneath but must have been fitted, for the single, eventful firing demonstration, on a modified pack saddle frame with some padding provided. At the front end of the wooden tree will be seen a graduated iron sighting arc that allowed windage movement of the cannon on its pintle - presuming, optimistically, that the mule had a very short memory or was a mule just being introduced to this latest concept in sad saddle artillery

Aus "The American Military Saddle, 1776-1945", Seite 89

