# The flag trigger safety

for the MAS-36 French service rifle

by Alek Wadi



he World War II MAS-36 French service rifle is a 7.5x54mm-calibre bolt-action repeater rifle with an inbuilt bayonet. First produced by 'Manufacture d'Armes de Saint-Étienne' (MAS) in 1936, the MAS-36 appears guite ugly with its strange-looking contorted bolt handle. However, it is a rugged, durable and stocky rifle, proven to withstand the harshest combat surroundings during WWII and later during the Indochina and Algerian colonial conflicts under the most demanding climatic conditions.

The MAS-36 shoots well, at about 1.5 to 2 MOA, as most same-era military rifles (see the September 2009 Australian Shooter). It also lacks a distinctive feature - the original MAS-36 French service rifle has no safety device. There is no sense of French bashing here, for this is not a major defect affecting the functioning of this rifle. There are reasons for this measure.

The French military Commission d'Expériences, having drafted the technical specifications, considered that after years of war and colonial service, there was no need for a safety on a military bolt-action rifle. The reason behind this unusual feature for a military rifle is that, in a combat situation, the firearm must be ready to fire, as too many soldiers were killed in action having unfortunately forgotten to disengage the safety. Yes, it does happen. Another simple and valid reason was to reduce the mass production cost.

Under Australian firearms laws, all rifles







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now imported for use in Australia must be fitted with a proven safety device. Well, that means the MAS-36 is not legal in Australia these days, unless having a proper safety device. That makes it illegal to use a MAS-36 in Service Rifle competitions in its original configuration in Australia.

However, there is a solution to this dilemma for those who own a MAS-36 and want to use it in competition in Australia. By 1947, the MAS factory issued the MAS Mle 1947 competition single-shot rifle chambered in 8x50R Lebel cartridge with a trigger safety. Later, the same trigger safety device equipped the FR-F1 and FR-F2 French Army rifles and the MAS-Fournier civil carbine derived from the MAS-36. As these rifles were based on the original MAS-36 receiver and design, it is easy to imagine that this safety device could be also used on the original MAS-36. Indeed, it does and it works.

#### The safety

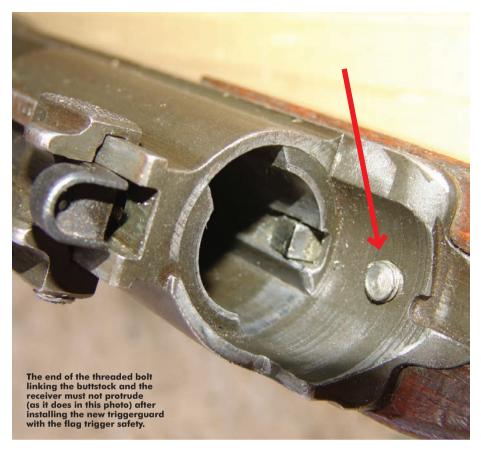
The trigger safety device is not new. MAS likely copied it from the one on the Soviet Tokarev SVT-38 and SVT-40 rifles. It is a simple flipping 'flag-type' device located inside the triggerguard just behind the trigger. It is quite unconventional, in that it is not mechanically linked to and does



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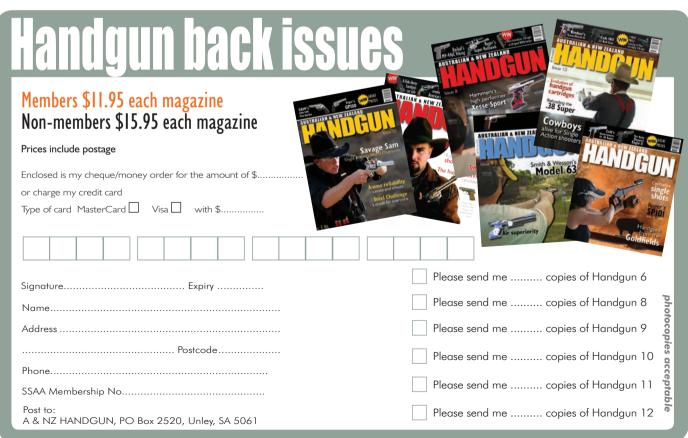


not block the firing pin. Its role is to plainly immobilise the trigger by blocking its rear travel, preventing disengaging the sear. Simple, cheap and efficient. Moreover, when this safety flag is engaged and blocking the trigger, it does not prevent the shooter from opening the bolt to extract a chambered round.

How difficult is it to operate this safety? The flag is retained in its position by a strong spring-loaded mechanism located above the rear of the triggerguard, in a recess in the rear butt. To flip the flag from the 'safe' vertical position to the 'fire' horizontal position and vice versa, you have to exert a deliberate pressure of about 1.5 to 2kg (3.3 to 4.4lb) and it clicks neatly into either position. Well designed.

#### Installation

Installing the flag trigger safety device on the MAS-36 French service rifle is a simple task and takes about 45 minutes. First, disconnect the buttstock from the receiver by unscrewing the threaded bolt linking the two. Disengage the trigger from the buttstock and remove the old triggerguard. Now, precisely drill an 8mm-diameter by 8mm-deep blind hole into the buttstock to lodge the spring-loaded, flag-flipping mechanism. This blind hole is located between the





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trigger window in the butt and the pillar in the buttstock. Place the new triggerguard in its lodgement in the buttstock, checking that it fits neatly. If so, proceed by reassembling the lot.

Here, you may face two snags. There are variations in triggerguard thickness; hence, the threaded bolt linking the buttstock to the receiver may be now slightly too long and may protrude inside the breech lodgement. This could prevent inserting or even closing the bolt action into the receiver. If this is the case, gently and carefully file and polish the end of the threaded bolt so that it comes flush inside the breech lodgement and does not interfere when closing the bolt, loading/ extracting a round or removing the breechlocking mechanism from the receiver.

The other problem is that once the new flag trigger safety has been installed, and the bolt action inserted into the receiver, you may not be able to remove it from the receiver. To take the bolt action from the receiver, you must pull the trigger as far backwards as you can. The upper part of the flag trigger safety may not allow the trigger to move far enough to the rear, so the solution is to gently file the angle of the left upper part of the flag and it should work fine.

One useful point with the flag trigger safety is that it has a hole on the flag, similar to the Tokarev SVT-40, permitting you to secure the rifle on a rack using a steel cable with a lock. Another positive point is that you would easily know if your rifle is safe even in poor lighting and hunting conditions. as you can feel it at the tip of your trigger finger.

However, there is a disadvantage to this safety device; it is only designed for righthanded shooters, as the flag flips from right to left only. Shooters should also be aware when in the field that a sturdy branch does not catch the flag and flip the safety to the 'fire' position. This seems extremely unlikely, but constant checking will ensure that you are better safe than sorry.

#### **Availability**

Now the tricky part. Where can you find an original MAS-36 new triggerguard with the flag trigger safety? A couple of years ago, I bought a few originals of them from France. They were not cheap (costing about 70 to 80 euros each), but they are a perfect fit on my MAS-36 rifle.

