

The flag trigger safety

for the MAS-36 French service rifle

by Alek Wadi



The MAS-36 .5x54mm-calibre bolt-action service rifle with its inbuilt bayonet.

The 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 quite 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



The new triggerguard with the flag trigger safety device (post-1947), top, and the original MAS-36 triggerguard, bottom.



The flag safety in 'safe' position, blocking the trigger.



The flag safety in the 'fire ready' position, freeing the trigger.

The flag trigger safety for the MAS-36

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



Drilling an 8mm-diameter by 8mm-deep blind hole between the trigger window and the pillar on the buttstock to install the new triggerguard with the flag trigger safety.

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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 breech-locking 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 right-handed 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.

You may also scan for them on Google. Search for 'pontet MAS-36' or 'pontet FR-F1' - 'pontet' means 'triggerguard' in French. I have also heard of gunsmiths in Australia fitting some MAS-36s with a device similar to the Tokarev safety, but I have not yet seen one personally. ●



The upper left angle of the flag may have to be gently filed and polished to allow for the trigger to move as rearwards as possible to remove the bolt from the receiver.



Prior to installation of the flag trigger.