

BUTTS, fitting new or refitting old...

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The BUTT. On the face of it, it's a simple enough job. Just unscrew the old and bash the new one on and screw it up. But that's JUST what you might do, screw it up! If you have a look inside the butt socket of the rifle, you'll see that it is actually tapered and it's tapered for a good reason. That being to keep the butt TIGHT. All new butts are slightly oversize at the butt socket and what we do is to fit the front end into the butt socket and tap the rear end of the butt, where the heel and toe butt plate screw holes are, with a rawhide mallet so that you start to see witness marks from the rifle butt socket. Then with a rasp or coarse file, rasp away GENTLY until the butt starts to fit into the taper of the butt socket. Keep doing this and you'll visibly see it going further into the butt socket. Ideally (but certainly on a grenade launching EY rifle), with a last tap of the rawhide mallet the butt should bottom out into the underside of the socket. It should be horizontal to the rifle.

Now for the important bit. The wooden shoulder of the butt, the part that sits proud of the butt socket, MUST be clear of the butt socket and there should be a gap of about 2mm between that edge and the actual butt socket. Have you got that? There MUST be a gap of about 2mm between the steel butt socket and the butt. If there isn't a gap, then you can be sure that a sliver of wood WILL break away. The butt MUST be tight in the socket and in an ideal world, according to the REME Armourers bible, the wood of the butt MUST (but in civilian circles, should) be proud of the socket by approx 1/16" and the edges should be crisp and sharp. Now, remove the butt and slap on a xxxing good coating of XG279 or automotive high melting point grease. Some of you will by now have noticed that there are TWO shapes inside top surface, inside the No4 rifle butt socket. The OLD ex SMLE shape with a rounded step on the right and a tapered step on the left and the post 1942 (? , but that's what we called them) shape of two rounded steps.

Officially, and according to our EMER's, you CAN fit a double rounded stepped butt to a single round/taper step body after adjusting the wood accordingly. But you CANNOT fit a single rounded/taper step butt to a double rounded butt socket. This is because, try as you might, you'll never truly get it tight, or if you do, it won't last!

That's the OFFICIAL party line. But if you think that any old, wise and weary old Armourer Sergeant would allow you to wait until a stock of double rounded butts arrived, from stores in England to Korea

or Aden or Malaya or wherever you were, you're WRONG. It was quite common practice to simply dovetail, glue, patch, peg and make off the butts to get to the type you need. Simple isn't it.

How tight do I tighten the stock bolt? I cannot find a specific torque figure but if I said to you xxxing tight would be about right, then we won't fall out but don't forget to put the double coil spring washer in first followed by the stock bolt covered in the same grease. I nearly forgot. Before you put the stock bolt into the butt, with your long 'BIT, screwdriver, stock bolt', check that there is a metal washer inside the butt. You'll easily tell by the metal to metal sound. If there's NOT, then PUT ONE IN. And DO NOT, DO NOT tighten the stock bolt up with the fore-end fitted because if the stock bolt does protrude into the body, then you WILL bugger up the rear of the fore-end and rest assured, a cock-up like that will ensure that you will be buying the tea's and buns at tomorrows tea break.

Next, the butt plate. All the EMER's state is that the butt plate should be '...evenly seated with the edges below the level of the wood surface of the butt'. In other words, it must be of a smaller silhouette than the butt. I say, with an approx .100" or 3mm gap around its edge and the edge of the wood. As for the fit of the butt plate, then, once again, I say evenly, by taking wood from underneath the butt plate to get an all round even bearing at its edge. If there was a 010 - .015" (ten to fifteen thousandth) that would be acceptable but no more. Oh yes, please, PLEASE don't polish the bloody thing up. We did it as apprentices to show off our skills but I never ONCE saw one polished to a gleam by an Armourer. A slight linish with emery to get rid of a scrape or roughness, but polish

What about stripped buttplate a sling swivel screws? Easy. For the butt plate screws, drill out 3/8", hard, oak, tapered plug glued and driven in. Sling swivel screws, same but 1/4". Wait 24 hours, make off and re-drill out with 3/16" and 1/8" pilot holes respectively. And I don't want to see old matchsticks, broken-up bits of softwood or rolled up bits of card in there either. It's shoddy workmanship and reflects badly on the good name of Armourers, the oldest trade. Here's a little font of Enfield knowledge that you didn't know before now.

As a result of ours being the oldest recognized trade in the Army (Oh yes it is....., waggoners were never an officially recognized trade at all), even today, Armourers have honour of always being acknowledged as 'Armourer' before their rank. Hence Armourer Lance Corporal or Armourer Sergeant or Armourer Warrant Officer. Some have suggested that on being Commissioned, it was really a demotion by having to forfeit the sacred title of Armourer.

The next episode will be fitting fore-ends. Are you still in for the long haul?

