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Review of *Weapons of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* by Jim Garry

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Jim Garry’s recent publication offers a meticulous assessment of the Corps of Discovery’s arsenal. One of Garry’s goals centers on correcting outdated information from well-known books, about the Corps and the weaponry the men carried, especially Carl P. Russell’s *Guns of the Early Frontiers* (1957). The author acknowledges that historians have continuously advanced the scholarship on the Corps’ weaponry, but misconceptions about the arsenal still exist, muddying the historical record. He encourages readers to view his book as a tool for placing the expedition and the weapons of the early nineteenth century in an accurate historical context.

The volume contains ten concise chapters, introduced by a brief discussion of the commissioning of the Corps and the preparations for the two-year journey. Each chapter reviews one type of weapon: the Model 1795 musket, swivel guns, blunderbusses, short rifles, pistols, edged weapons, and ammunition. Garry includes a chapter on John Shields, the Corps blacksmith, and another on the gun trade. The book’s appendixes offer a detailed list of the guns carried by specific people and an essay on weapon maintenance.

Most interestingly, Garry analyzes the misunderstandings surrounding the Corps’ carrying of the Harper’s Ferry Model 1803 rifles (or short rifles). Part of the discourse on the short rifles stems from the lack of sources from Harper’s Ferry. However, Garry decisively states that the Corps could not have carried the Model 1803 rifle. He reviews correspondence from Secretary of War Henry Dearborn to the superintendent of Harper’s Ferry, Joseph Perkin, in which Dearborn gave Perkin one month to provide Meriwether Lewis with rifles. In this short time, Perkin did not have the supplies in stock to make a rifle from scratch, but he did have the 1792 contract rifles. Garry argues that the gunsmiths modified the 1792 contract rifles and suggests that these served as prototypes for the Model 1803 rifle. Also, Dearborn did not approve the design for the Model 1803 rifle until after the Corps departed on their expedition. Other historians suggest that Lewis obtained the short rifles in Philadelphia or Pittsburgh, but Garry rejects those arguments for lack of evidence.

Overall, readers will find the book entertaining and informative. Garry succeeds in translating mechanical jargon on weaponry into coherent description. *Weapons of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* advances the historiography; by correcting misconceptions, it will have far-reaching appeal.

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