THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR – ARTILLERY

The American Civil War is often called the first "modern war." It was the first war waged against civilians and civilian infrastructure to destroy the opponent's ability to fight. The home front and the war front became indistinguishable during the Civil War. It was the first war that called for a total mobilization of all resources on both sides. Armies of the North and South employed the newest technological weapons and devices in battle. Finally, it was a war in which the armies were broken into specialized arms. Cavalry had long been a part of warfare, but the Civil War created separate commands and separate units for infantry, cavalry and artillery.

There were two types of artillery in the Civil War; Heavy Artillery and Light or Field Artillery. Heavy artillery was employed in the defense of harbors and permanent fortifications. Field artillery was portable and accompanied infantry units into battle. Artillery units play important roles at Antietam, Malvern Hill and Gettysburg.

The North possessed artillery in greater quantities and higher quality throughout the Civil War. This fact is attributed to the North's industrialized economy. The North had the advantage in numbers of artillery and ammunition factories, availability and number of skilled technicians and greater access to raw materials. The South attempted to close the gap through the purchase of materials from foreign sources, but the northern blockade prevented large quantities of arms and ammunition from reaching Southern ports.

Civil War artillery was identified by type of bore (smooth or rifled), weight of the projectile, caliber of the bore diameter, and the method of loading (muzzle or breach). Sometimes artillery identification also included the name of the manufacturer. The most commonly used artillery piece on both sides was the Napoleon, 12-pound, smooth bore, muzzle-loading howitzer. It was most effective at short range – less than 300 yards.

Smooth bore and rifled guns could fire the same type of ammunition; solid, shell, case or canister. Solid shot was used to destroy fortifications. Shell ammunition was a hollow projectile filled with gunpowder and exploded by a fuse. Case shot was a hollow projectile with thinner walls. It contained a bursting charge and was filled with smaller balls that would scatter when the case burst. A timed fuse was set into the case shot so that it would explode over the heads of infantry and cause the greatest damage. Canister was a cylinder filled with smaller balls packed in sawdust. When the gun was fired, the cylinder disintegrated and the balls fanned out in a deadly pattern. Regardless of type of ammunition, the propelling charge was pre-measured in a cloth bag and attached to the projectile using a small frame known as a sabot.