



THE MINIE BALL

During the Civil War, both the North and the South used a rifled musket that used Minie ball bullets. They caused most of the deaths in the Civil War. The word Minie is pronounced "Minnie."

Mr. Minie was a French army officer. He invented the Minie ball, so they named it after him. His bullet had a pointed end. It also had a hollow base with an iron plug. Two to four grooves were cut into the metal base. This bullet allowed muzzle-loading rifles to be used in battle. Before this invention, muskets were too hard to load. They often misfired.

The way the Minie Ball was packaged made it easy to use. It could be loaded into the rifle very fast. At the factory, a paper tube full of powder was placed behind the Minie ball. Both were then wrapped in more paper. They tied off the package at the bullet end. The powder end was folded or twisted closed. The package is called a cartridge.

When a soldier wanted to fire his rifle he would bite off the folded end of the package. Then, he poured the powder from the package into the barrel. Next, he squeezed the ball from the paper wrapping into the barrel. He used a metal rod that came with his rifle to pack the ball and the powder into the rifle barrel. Then, he put a percussion cap in the firing chamber. The cap was very much like the cap that comes with toy cap guns today. Now he was ready to pull the trigger. Boom! The Mini ball spun through the air towards its target.

Minie balls in the North had three grooves cut into the base. The South used Minie balls with two grooves in the base. No matter how many grooves the Minie ball had, it was very deadly.