



## THE KETCHUM HAND GRENADE

One of the most interesting new weapons of the Civil War was the Ketchum hand grenade. It was patented in August, 1861. The Northern Navy and Army quickly adopted it for use at close quarters.

The Ketchum hand grenade came in three parts. The first was a cast iron body that held the bursting charge. The second was a plunger/percussion cap assembly that ignited the blasting charge. The last was a tail fin that steadied the weapon in flight. For safety, each part was shipped to the field separately. Before a battle, soldiers filled the body with gunpowder, attached the tail fin at the rear, and inserted the percussion/plunger assembly at the front. When completed, the Ketchum hand grenade looked very much like a large, deadly lawn dart.

In battle, grenadiers threw the grenade so that its flight path had a high arc. This was necessary because the plunger only worked if the grenade landed squarely on the face of the plunger. Many times the Ketchum bounced off its target and did not explode.

The Ketchum hand grenade was most effective in naval battles. Navy grenadiers were more successful because the percussion/plunger assembly worked better when it struck the hard surface of a ship's deck. Throughout the war, naval officers employed the Ketchum more often and more effectively against their opponents than did their counterparts in the army.

Armies used the Ketchum during a siege where the battle lines were fixed. Grenadiers could open holes in breastworks with grenades and infantry could then charge through the openings. This plan often did not work. Soldiers quickly found out that creating a "soft landing" for the grenade would prevent it from exploding. There are stories about soldiers spreading blankets on the ground in order to prevent the plunger assembly from igniting the charge. The grenades were then picked up and used against the people who threw them first. This method gave new meaning to the "catch – 'em" grenade.