THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR – INFANTRY – WORM TOOLS

The armies that fought against each other in the American Civil War were basically organized in the same manner. At the start of the war, most units were comprised of volunteers. The primary unit of organization was the regiment, which was made up of 10 companies of 100 men each. A company was usually composed of men from the same town or county. The Civil War infantry regiment rarely consisted of its full complement of 1000 men. Death, injury and desertion depleted the ranks. Replacements were hard to find after the first year of the war.

In the North, state governments recruited, organized and armed regiments until they could be incorporated into Federal government service. Most early units were volunteers, but the length and severity of the war led both North and South to resort to conscription in order to fill the ranks. The South instituted a draft in 1862, the North in 1863. The average length of service was three years.

Civil War armies consisted of three branches of service: infantry, artillery and cavalry. The infantry were the "foot soldiers," the largest part of the army. A typical infantryman in the Northern army carried his weapon, most often a 1861 Springfield rifled musket, a percussion cap box, a cartridge box, a canteen, a tent shelter, haversack, bedroll and extra powder and lead.

Because bullets as we know them today were not available in the Civil War, most infantrymen used paper cartridges for their muskets and rifles. Paper cartridges were issued in a packet of ten. To fire a round, a Civil War soldier needed a paper cartridge and a separate percussion cap. These caps looked very much like the caps for toy cap guns sold today. The percussion cap was inserted into the firing chamber. The paper cartridge was then torn open, emptied into the barrel of the gun and firmly packed with a ramming rod. When the infantryman pulled the trigger, the hammer came down on the percussion cap, which ignited the paper cartridge, which, in turn, provided the force to propel the musket ball or bullet downrange toward its target.

Cartridges and bullets often misfired. This occurred most often after many rounds had been fired during battle and the musket/rifle barrel heated up. Musket balls and bullets became jammed in the barrel and the infantryman could no longer fire his weapon. In order to remove the jammed projectile, soldiers used a "Worm Tool." These steel devices featured a long double-screw action, which would attach to either a specialty rod, or to the musket's own ramrod. The soldier inserted the "worm" into the open end of the barrel, and pressed its sharp end into the lead projectile. He then turned the long rod and the "worm" screwed itself into the bullet. The soldier then pulled the rod, with the bullet attached, out of the end of the barrel.