THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR – ARTILLERY

The Civil War is often called the first "modern war." It was the first war, which was waged against civilians and civilian infrastructure to destroy the opponent's ability to fight. It was the first war that called for a total organization of all resources on both sides. Armies of the North and South used the newest weapons and devices in battle. Finally, it was a war in which the armies were broken into specialized arms. Cavalry had been part of the army for a long time. 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 used to defend harbors and permanent forts. Field artillery was portable and accompanied infantry units into battle. Artillery units played important roles at Antietam, Malvern Hill and Gettysburg.

The North possessed artillery in greater numbers and higher quality in the Civil War. This was because the North had an industrialized economy. The North had the advantage in numbers of artillery and ammunition factories. It had more skilled technicians available. It also had greater access to raw materials. The South attempted to close the gap through the purchase of materials from foreign sources. 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 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.