

Kane Salazar, Jonathan Ponce-Gavina, Dylan Gardner,

Bryan Mejia, and Fabian Cruz

Ms. Park and Ms. Salas

Mendez Summer Enrichment

24 July 2014

### **Weapons of the Civil War**

The American Civil War was the bloodiest battle in American history due to the advancement of weapons used in the war, which were powerful, accurate, and fast. The war, which took place in 1861 and lasted until 1865, began because the North (Union) and the South (Confederacy) fought over whether slavery should be legal or illegal in the newly acquired states in the west. When Abraham Lincoln became President of the United States, some of the southern states rebelled by leaving the Union and forming the Confederate States of America. The United States would not allow this. President Lincoln did not want to accept the Confederacy as a separate nation so the war started and the first battles began. The first shots were fired by the Confederates at Fort Sumter in South Carolina. The war, when it began, was about saving the Union, or keeping all the states together as one nation. The Civil War had the most deaths in American history due to advanced and innovative weaponry, which caused deadly wounds or injuries.

#### **The Gatling Gun**

One of the most powerful weapons used in the Civil War was the Gatling gun. The ancestor of the modern machine gun, it was the most successful rapid-firing weapon to be used in the war. It was powerful and dangerous and meant to accomplish more damage than ordinary weapons. The Gatling used 6 barrels to partially cool the gun during firing. The gun was capable

of firing 600 rounds a minute, each barrel firing 100 rounds per minute. The main reason that the gatling gun caused so many deaths is that the gatling gun had a rapid-fire function that killed the soldiers in an instant. What was special about the gatling gun was that it could be reloaded while it was still firing. Richard Jordan Gatling, the inventor of the gatling gun, stated the following regarding his invention,

*“It may be interesting to you to know how I came to invent the gun which bears my name; I will tell you: In 1861, during the opening events of the war, (residing at that time in Indianapolis, md.,) I witnessed almost daily the departure of troops to the front and the return of the wounded, sick, and dead. The most of the latter lost their lives, not in battle, but by sickness and exposure incident to the service. It occurred to me if I could invent a machine--a gun-- which could by its rapidity of fire, enable one man to do as much battle duty as a hundred, that it would, to a great extent, supersede the necessity of large armies, and consequently, exposure to battle and disease be greatly diminished. I thought over the subject and finally this idea took practical form in the invention of the Gatling Gun” (CivilWarWeapons.com)*

According to Gatling, the gatling gun was a supreme weapon because it it could shoot multiple bullets all at once and it eliminated the need for large armies because it could do more damage with less people using it. Also, it the gatling gun was so powerful that it killed instantly keeping soldiers from suffering.

The Revolver, a nine-chambered cylinder, which weighed about four pounds was another dangerous weapon used in the Civil War. The LeMat revolver was a weapon that could be held by one hand and could hold more ammunition than the musket. In addition, it could be reloaded much faster. Not only that, but it was small and more portable. Another revolver used in the war was the colt type 1860. Like the Lemat revolver this was portable and more accurate than other guns. The colt type 1860 revolver had an eight-inch barrel which gave it more range and ability to do great damage. Due to those two innovative revolvers, the death toll increased in the war.

### **The Musket**

In 1861, the musket was the powerful weapon next to the gatling gun. This musket model 1861 was the standard rifle-musket used throughout the war. The U.S. government contracted with twenty private contractors to have one million Model 1861–type muskets manufactured.

The musket was a powerful and useful weapon in the war if an enemy was approaching, the owner of the gun could stab a gun knife in the enemy's stomach. Also, it was more advanced because it could be used with stronger and more powerful bullets. In addition, the shooting range of the musket was 50 to 100 yards. Sgt. John Dore, a soldier said the following about his experience with the musket,

*“After we had abandoned the line, and on coming to a little stream of water, I undressed for the purpose of bathing, and after undressing found my arm all battered and bruised and bloodshot from my wrist to my shoulder, and as sore as a blister. I had shot one hundred and twenty times that day. My gun became so hot that frequently the powder would flash before I could ram home the ball, and I had frequently to exchange my gun for that of a dead comrade”*

We see the power of the gun as it overheats. It came to the point where he had to exchange his gun for another. Its size and weight made it different from other guns before it.

### **The Cannon**

The cannon was one of the most powerful weapons in the civil war. It would kill many of the Civil War soldiers (Melton). One of the cannon guns, called the “12 pounder field howitzer,” could shoot as far as 1,072 yards. Therefore, the increase in distance is one reason the cannons could kill more soldiers than in previous wars. Secondly, the twelve-pounder "Napoleon" was the most popular smoothbore cannon used during the war. The cannons bores were as big as 5.82 inches. Throughout the war, the search and invention of the perfect canon was a major goal for the United States, and it would continue on as stated in the text below:

*“During the American Civil War more varieties of artillery projectiles and cannon were used than in any other time in military history. The outbreak of hostilities in 1861, found inventors on both sides searching for the perfect blend of sabot, body, and fuze to create the artillery projectile that would give the military advantage to their respective cannoneers. This seemingly unending search for that elusive, perfect projectile continued even after the end of the Civil War.”*

The US military was looking for a new weapon that can be used in the war for battle. The Civil War cannons gave the armies an opportunity to do critical damage to gunboats and soldiers

on foot. In the end, this all led up to the high amount of deaths that happened during the Civil War.

### **Uncommon Weaponry**

Although weapons that fired bullets or canons were commonly used in the war, there were other types of weapons that were also used. Many soldiers carried swords to directly attack when an enemy approached (Brenna McDonald). The saber was a weapon that was helpful to the soldiers because when they didn't have enough time to load a gun, they used a sword to kill the enemy. The saber was made of bronze and was made sharp and light so it could be handled easily for faster attack (Kansas Historical Society). Since the saber could be handled easily, it could kill soldiers that were on the ground. When the troops were out of ammunition, they used the saber to kill soldiers as a last resort. According to some, the saber sword is the most "iconic weapons in human history" (Kansas History Society). Overall, however, the saber was not widely used throughout the war.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the importance of learning about the weapons of the Civil War helps us observe all the different kinds of weapons there were used back then and understand how those weapons may have caused greater amounts of death. It is interesting to figure out the question of whether the deaths in the Civil War were due to all the firepower or poor food conditions. It would also be a great research idea to continue looking into how many of these weapons have transformed throughout time and if there are some types of weapons that the US military still uses today that are similar to the ones in the Civil War. Throughout this research, it is clear that weapons were a very important part of the American Civil War and the innovations and deadly aspects of those weapons caused many deaths in the war.

Works Cited

“Civil War Innovations.” *Pbs.org*. Oregon Public Broadcasting, 2003-2011. Web. 23 July 2014.

<http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/civil-war-innovations/>

“Cool Things: Civil War Saber & Revolvers.” *Kansapedia*. Kansas Historical Society, March 2013. Web. 23 July 2014. <http://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/cool-things-civil-war-saber-revolvers/10354>

“Gatling gun.” *Princeton.edu*. CC-BY-SA, n.d. Web. 23 July 2014.

[http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Gatling\\_gun.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Gatling_gun.html)

“LeMat revolver.” *Smithsonian Institution*. Division of the History of Technology, Armed Forces History, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Behring Center, n.d. Web. 23 July 2014. [http://www.civilwar.si.edu/weapons\\_lemat.html](http://www.civilwar.si.edu/weapons_lemat.html)

MacDonald, Brennan. “Swords in the American Civil War.” *The Bangor Museum*. The Bangor Historical Society, n.d. Web. 24 July 2014. <http://www.bangormuseum.org/swords-in-the-american-civil-war.html>

Melton, Jack W. Jr. “Civil War Artillery Projectiles.” *Civil War Artillery.com*, 1994-2014. Web. 23 July 2014. <http://civilwarartillery.com/>

“Small Arms of the Civil War: Small Arms.” *Civil War Trust*, 2014. Web. 23 July 2014.

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/warfare-and-logistics/warfare/smallarms.html>

“The Gatling Gun.” *Civil War Home*. Historical Times, April 6, 2005. Web. 23 July 2014.

<http://www.civilwarhome.com/gatlinggun.htm>

“U.S. Colt Model 1860 Army Revolver.” *Nra.org*. National Firearms Museums, n.d. Web. 23 July 2014. <http://www.nramuseum.org/the-museum/the-galleries/a-nation-asunder>