

THE MINIE BALL
lethal ammunition in the
Battle of Kennesaw Mountain.



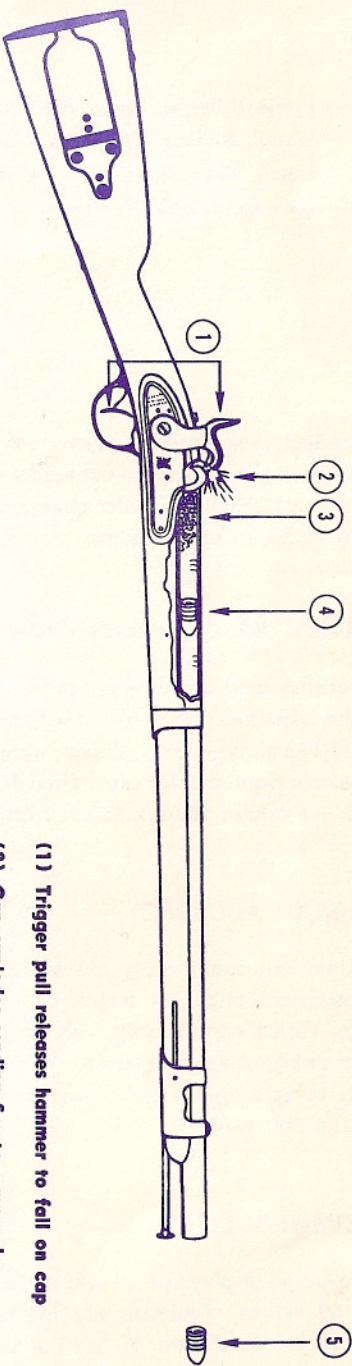
THE KENNESAW MOUNTAIN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

This association was formed in 1948, a nonprofit organization designed to help promote development of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park, in cooperation with the National Park Service.

Address all correspondence to the Secretary, P. O.
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FIRING THE CIVIL WAR RIFLE



- (1) Trigger pull releases hammer to fall on cap
- (2) Cap explodes sending fire to gunpowder
- (3) Powder burns releasing gas
- (4) Gas forces minie ball out of barrel
- (5) Minie ball leaves barrel spinning toward target



Prone Rifleman, as sketched by A. R. Waud, famous Civil War Illustrator from "Mountain Campaigns in Georgia", by Joseph M. Brown.

The American Revolution was fought by men who fired round balls from their smooth-bore flintlocks. Such weapons had very limited range and accuracy. Enterprising Americans wanted better ones. The battlefields of the Civil War were proving ground for these new weapons.

In 1842, the United States Army began using percussion locks instead of flint; that same year the first rifled guns were issued. Spiralling grooves in the barrel imparted to the bullet a twist that made it more accurate in flight and gave it longer range as well. With these better guns available, new experiments began to improve the bullet.

CAPTAIN MINIE

In 1847 Captain Minie in France developed an elongated or conical bullet, quickly named the Minie ball. It had a pointed nose to lessen air resistance. The base was round, to conform to the shape of the barrel, and thus avoid loss of power from the burning powder charge.

The base was hollow to equalize weight of nose and base and to prevent the bullet from tumbling end over end, as it might do if unbalanced in weight. The base had a thin skirt or wall, which under pressure of the powder charge expanded to fit the grooves or riflings in the barrel.

MINIE BALL

The United States Ordnance Department, in thorough tests, determined that the Army should use percussion lock guns, rifled, firing conical bullets of moderate (.58 caliber) size. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis approved these findings July 5, 1855. Later as President of the Confederate States, he was hard pressed to find arms to match those he himself had specified for the United States Army.

CONFEDERATE ARMS

The Confederates, short of arms, rifled some of the older muskets, which fired .69 caliber bullets. In Johnston's Army 4,298 men carried them, about 9% of the Confederate force. No Federals used these older weapons.

The Confederates bought foreign guns of many types, and used captured Federal guns as well. With this wide variety of guns came a corresponding wide variety of size, or caliber, in bullets. Only 56% of Johnston's Confederates had .58 caliber weapons.

The Federals firing a .58 caliber bullet had several advantages over men armed with guns firing larger balls. The smaller ball was just as accurate and just as lethal. But this smaller size ammunition meant

less weight, and thus was easier for the soldier to carry. The smaller ball also required a smaller powder charge, and firing the lighter charge was easier both on the gun and on the man.

EXPENDITURE OF AMMUNITION

The armies used ammunition at an astounding rate. In the Atlanta Campaign, Sherman's men fired 22,137,132 balls — 96% of them were of .58 caliber. Johnston's Confederates often fired 50,000 balls per week — a rate of about 8,000,000 for the campaign.

RANGE OF ACCURACY

A Minie ball could easily kill at 1,000 yards, and sharpshooters often hit targets at that range. Accuracy varied considerably with the natural ability and training of the soldier. It appears that the accurate firing range of the average man was between 200 and 600 yards.

SPECIMEN BULLETS

These are on display and on sale at the Park. The .58 and .69 caliber specimens are identical with balls fired on the battlefield. If left out in the weather, they will turn white, or oxidize, just as the originals.