

THE SENTINEL

Field Artillery: “Model” Weapons of the War

New presenter Doug Rolfé brought a large scale model of a Civil War 6-pounder cannon with four horses and three riders that he built and used as a springboard to studying field artillery in the war, a new topic to him. Doug had gotten the “bug” for building fine-scale miniature models as a veteran railroad themed diorama builder for many years. The model is an accurate 1/12th scale replica of a 6-pounder light field artillery cannon, typical of the American Civil War. This type of artillery piece was used extensively by both the Blue and the Gray in the epic struggle of 1861-1865. Stonewall Jackson used four of these same cannons with the special names of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, known as the four apostles...because they spoke a powerful language.

Guns and howitzers are the weapons most people think about when Civil War artillery is discussed. These weapons were usually formed in units called batteries. At the beginning of the war, a battery contained four guns and two howitzers. A 6-pounder battery usually contained four 6-pounder guns and two 12 pounder howitzers. A 12-pounder battery would be made up of four 12-pounders and two 24-pounder howitzers. Yet a third type of battery would sometimes be four 12 pounders and two 32 pounder howitzers. Occasionally four gun batteries were used instead of six, especially in the Confederate army. Several batteries were quite often placed together in line to form a very deadly defensive position.

In a full war strength battery there were 152 men, which included the officers, gun crews, artificers (who were the persons in charge of the maintenance and upkeep of the cannon) supply sergeants, buglers and the guidon, the flag or pennant bearer. Getting a gun into firing position was an amazing feat of speed

and skillful maneuvering for these men. Often in the heat of battle, charging over the ground at full gallop, the driver or drivers (sometimes there would be two men on the lead horses) would swing the horses in a tight half circle, rein up to a stop for an instant to allow the cannoneers to jump off and drop the gun trail from the limber, then they would execute another quick half circle a few yards to the rear, unhitch the team from the limber and with scarcely a pause wheel the horses around and dash for a spot of cover to the rear of the position, out of the line of enemy fire. Usually by the time the drivers finished reining up, the gun crew poured shot and shell into the enemy ranks. If the position became untenable, the teams would pull forward, hitch up, and be off again at full tilt, only to repeat the performance when they reached another vantage point. All this would be done in a matter of a few minutes.

Above all, the artillerists were expected to protect their guns. One veteran cannoneer was quoted as saying “The gun is the rallying point of the detachment and its point of honor. It is that to which the men stand and fight for and for which they fall. As long as the gun is theirs they are unconquered, but when it is lost, all is lost.”

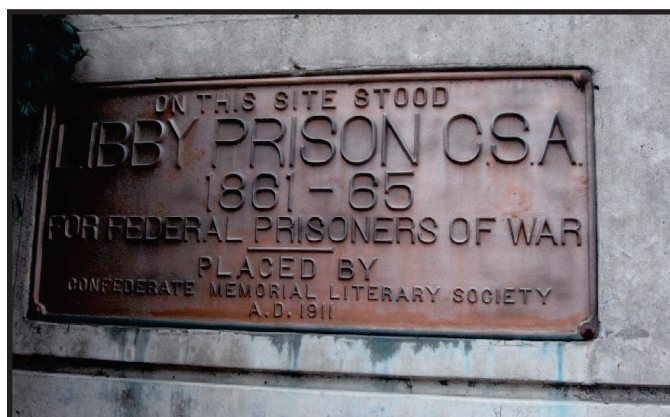
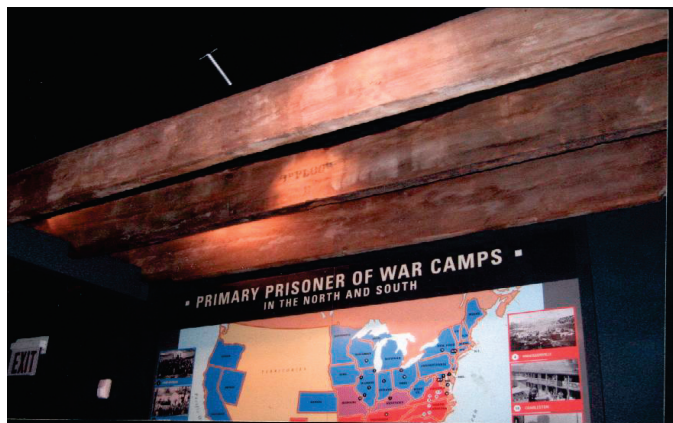
The importance of artillery service during the war cannot be overstated. Artillery fire was apt to produce mass casualties when fired into an advancing line of enemy and it was a very “psychological” weapon, as well as being physically destructive. A soldier advancing against artillery was almost always unnerved by the prospects of encountering canister, case shot, and shrapnel. One of the more famous artillery battles of the war was the Battle of Malvern Hill on July 1, 1862. It has been recorded in military history as an artillery classic, and was one of the few defeats Lee suffered early in the war. The Union batteries under Colonel Hunt mounted 340 guns of various calibers, arranged in tiers, on a commanding promontory. This strong position stood in the path of Lee’s advance and, in his effort to dislodge it, he suffered the loss of 5000 men under the hail of canister and grape.



Photo courtesy of Chris Heisey

Next Month

Join us on May 6th at the Monroe County History Center and hear John Kinder talk about “Encountering Injury in the Civil War,” examining how Americans made sense of the Civil War’s mass production of injury, death, and disability. Drawing upon a colorful array of personal narratives, medical illustrations, photographs, and popular art, it describes two broad interpretations of Civil War casualties. For some, soldiers’ injuries symbolized patriotism, manliness, and courage under fire. For others, they forecast a grim future in which techniques of science and industrialization turned the modern battlefield into a slaughterhouse.



Libby Prison Timbers Have a New Home!

The Libby Prison timbers are now, as we announced in the fall, at Pamplin Park, a very impressive private Civil War museum and historical facility just outside Petersburg, Virginia. They were provided to Pamplin Park by Bob Willey, a collector and an MCCWR member and the principal donor to the Civil War exhibit at the Monroe County History center last summer. Pamplin Park is planning the construction of a special new building to house the Libby timbers and other items related to Civil War prisoners. They have fumigated all the timbers and safely stored them until this building is completed, but they were eager to show, at least, a few of them and couldn't wait until the construction was completed, so they have made room for three of the timbers in the main museum building, and they are on display now.

Museum of the Confederacy to Contract ... Yet Expand!

Because of a severe lack of funding, there has been discussion for at least two years now that the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia, would be closing or moving to another location, but MCCWR member Bob Willey reports that he has learned from the Director of that Museum that this is not true. The museum will remain at its current location, and there will be three more Civil War museums built in Virginia to house the extensive, and mostly stored, collection, with one of those near the Bull Run Battlefield and another at Appomattox.

Announcement

Join Friends of Wilderness Battlefield today by planning to attend one or more of the activities the weekend of May 9 - 11 including . . .

- Fascinating presentations by nationally recognized historians
- Amazing battlefield tours by nationally recognized historians
- Annual Dinner and Auction
- Sunday at Ellwood Plantation: A Tribute to Civil War Mothers

All fee based activities will benefit the restoration of Ellwood. View www.fowb.org for full event descriptions (brief descriptions below) and registration information. You can register for one or for multiple events by contacting Dale Brown at 540-972-9298 or DALEKBROWN@verizon.net. Be sure to register today!!

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Or on the web at <http://mypage.iu.edu/~rawatson/roundtable/>.