

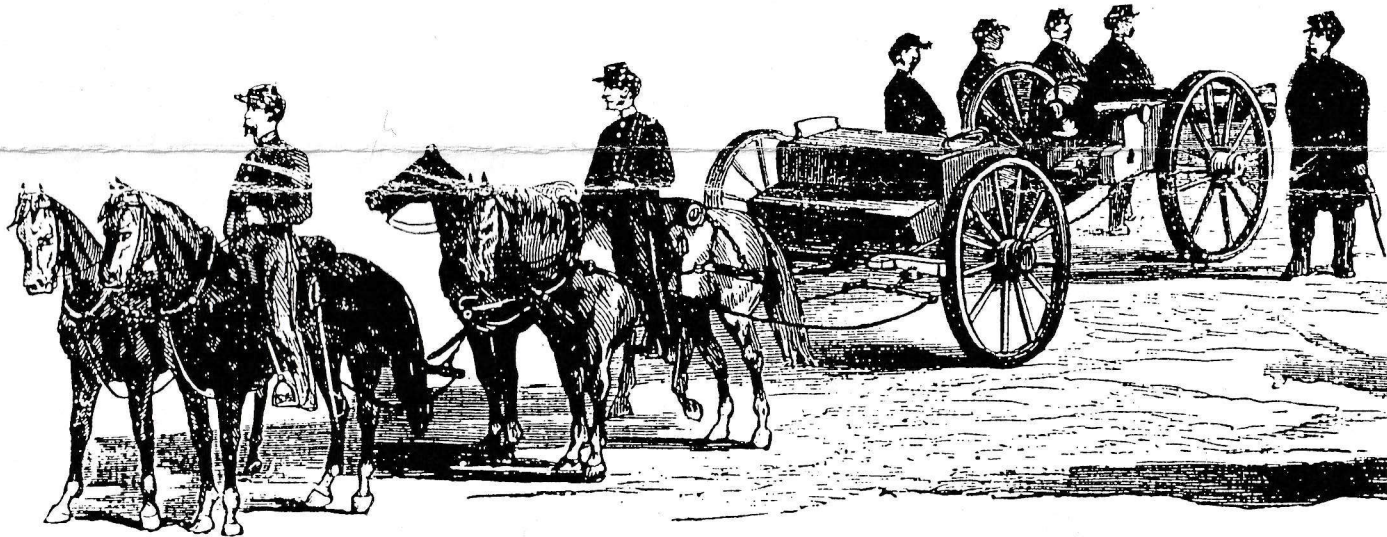
# Pea Ridge

National Military Park

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

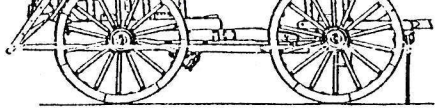
*“...a withering, scorching blast...”*

## Artillery at Pea Ridge

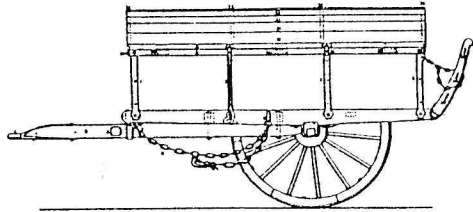


The cannons deployed across Pea Ridge and other Civil War Battlefields stand silent watch over hallowed ground. Their only attackers are clothed in sneakers, blue jeans, T-shirts and ball caps. The sharp clicking of camera shutters rings against the rear of

Each battery had several support vehicles including one caisson per gun, one battery wagon, and one traveling forge. Caissons were two-wheeled carriages carrying two ammunition chests and a spare wheel. Like cannons, caissons were hooked to a limber and drawn



Caisson and limber.



Battery wagon.

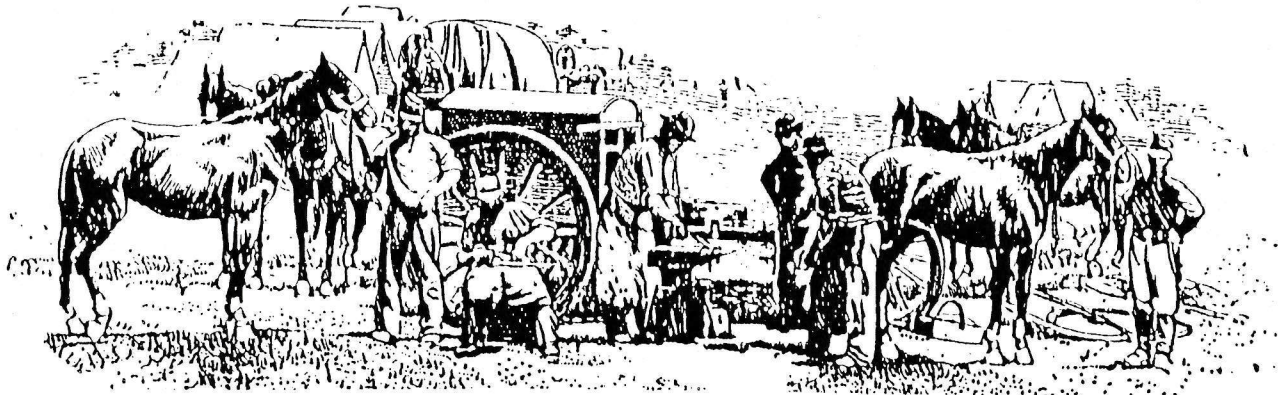
combat once swirling around the guns. Sometimes alone or in pairs often in groups of four or six, the big guns rarely fail to attract the attention of park visitors whose questions reveal a keen interest in Civil War artillery.

Cannons were organized into units called batteries. Generally, there were four guns in a Confederate battery and six in a Union battery. Each gun was moved by hooking it to a two-wheeled cart called a limber. The limber also carried the limber chest, filled with ammunition. A team of four to six horses was then hitched to the limber and with soldiers riding the left or "near" horses, off they went!

by horses.

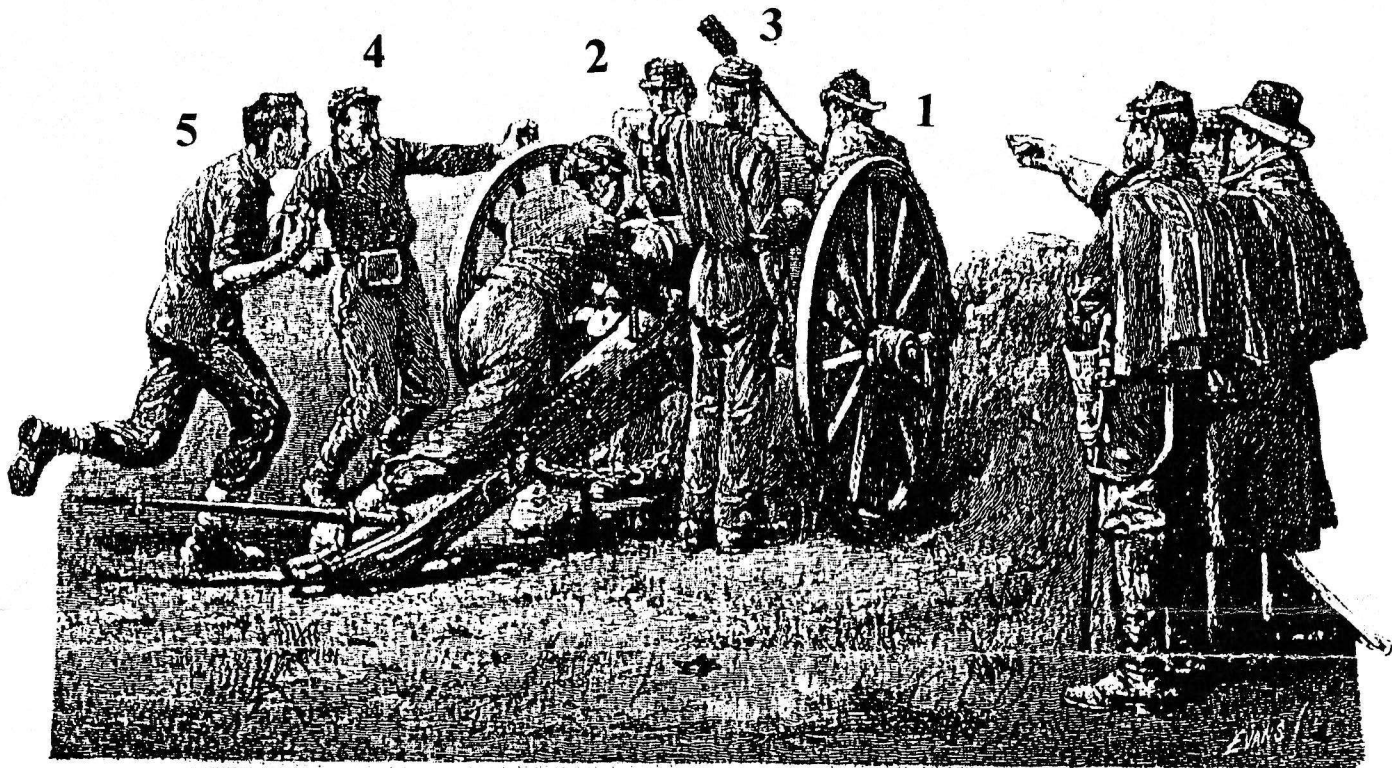
The battery wagon was a mobile hardware store of supplies needed to make repairs to the wood, leather and cloth parts of the battery. It carried over 125 items including carpenters' tools including saws, planes, gauges as well as harness leather, needles, and beeswax. Oil, paint, extra wheel spokes and even scythes for cutting hay for the horses were carried in the battery wagon.

The forge carried horseshoes, bolts, washers, nails, iron bars, an anvil, coal, and of course, a bellows. Well stocked with blacksmith tools, the forge could replace or repair nearly any iron part of the battery.



Shoeing horses at the forge.





Extensive drill, teamwork, and trust were necessary to serve the gun in combat. Anyone on the crew could be killed or wounded and have to be replaced. For this reason, each member of the crew had to be able to perform all the complex steps needed to fire the gun.

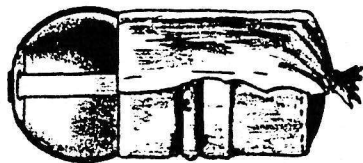
Four men, each with a number, stood at the gun, and a fifth stood to the left rear. Two others prepared ammunition at the limber, six yards behind the gun.

Command "LOAD", number 1 swabbed the bore with a damp sponge while number 3 covered the vent, shutting off the oxygen and extinguishing any burning debris inside the barrel. Meanwhile, number 5 brought one round of ammunition from the limber to the gun. Number 2 placed the ammunition in the muzzle and number 1 rammed it down the barrel. The gunner aimed the gun, judging the effects of wind and elevation on his shot

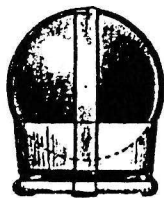
disintegrated spraying the balls in a wide pattern like a shotgun blast.

At Pea Ridge, artillery played important support roles in the fighting around Elkhorn Tavern. During the first day's battle on March 7, 1862 cannons of the Missouri State Guard duelled with four guns of the Union 1<sup>st</sup> Iowa battery. "We stood in that tempest of death" an Iowa veteran recalled, "I believe every man at the guns had made up his mind to die there, for it did not seem

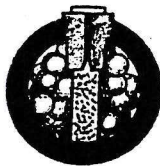
The gunner, a sergeant or corporal supervised the crew. At the



Shell, sabot, and powder bag



Solid shot



Case shot



Canister

and turned an elevation screw to raise or lower the barrel. At the command "READY", number 4 inserted a friction primer into the vent and at the command "FIRE", he detonated the primer by sharply jerking the lanyard. The bursting primer fired the larger charge inside the cannon sending the projectile on its way.

Civil War artillery fired ammunition consisting of an iron projectile seated on a wooden disc called a sabot. Attached to the sabot was a cotton bag of gunpowder. The whole package was held together by metal straps and cords.

Ammunition types included solid shot, shell, case shot, and canister. As the name implies, solid shot was a solid iron ball, used to smash enemy cannons or batter down breastworks. It could also kill and wound infantry deployed in mass. Shell and case shot exploded overhead by means of a time fuse. Shell was hollow and filled with an explosive that threw large chunks of hot iron in different directions. Case shot was hollow but filled with marble size iron balls that increased its killing power. Most lethal of all was canister. Only effective at ranges less than 300 yards, canister consisted of a tin can filled with iron balls. When fired, the can

possible any of us could get out alive." One Missouri Confederate described the effect of canister fired by Union artillery "Like a withering, scorching blast, a torrent of lead and iron poured through the surrounding smoke."

Accounts of the second day's battle are equally vivid. Twenty-one Union guns targeted 12 Confederate guns. In addition to being outgunned, the Confederates suffered the disadvantage of being on low ground, and short of ammunition. In a rare example of artillery supporting the offense, Union guns pounded their adversaries with a fire so severe that one southern officer wrote his wife "it is a perfect miracle that any of us ever came out." An Illinois soldier said "The constant roar of artillery seemed to shake the ground like an earthquake."

From these accounts, it is clear that Pea Ridge veterans had great respect for the power of artillery. As you tour Pea Ridge we urge you to develop a similar respect. Though obsolete on today's battlefield, the cannons are weapons. They were designed and built to kill enemy soldiers. Each time the gun was fired a wife lost a husband, children lost a father, and parents lost a son. It is in their memory that places like Pea Ridge are preserved.