

# Civil War soldiers

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## ***Muskets and Musketeers***



Muskets were an early type of gun. They were very long and had to be placed on a stand to fire them. More often than not, the muskets for which musketeers are names were slow, inaccurate, and more often used for their sharp blunt ends in melee combat. The technology for firearms, were many times, as dangerous to the person using the weapon as the target they were intended to hit!

Where did these problems come from? Musketry was a very volatile art of war. If a soldier did not follow the loading procedures for these weapons carefully quite often the gunpowder might ignite before the musket was even fired injuring the soldier or those around him. Even the best trained musketeers could rarely fire more than once a minute. The accuracy of the musket rarely exceeded 50

metres. Also the most commonly used musket was the matchlock which presented an extra disadvantage during battle as the light would giveaway the position of the person firing the weapon.

## ***Cavalry***



The favoured unit in an English Civil War army was the cavalry. The leading reason for the popularity of cavalry during the wars? The lands of England during that time were open and suitable for the movement of large units of soldiers on horseback. The Cavalry could move quickly and change the position of attack more easily than other units . Cavalrymen usually carried pistols and swords. Yet, as in most other areas of the military units during this time, the sword often became the main weapon due to the inefficient nature of the firearms of the time. Cavalrymen tended to be more heavily grouped in battle than they would be in later times. It was difficult, especially for the Royalist Army, to find not only a man trained to handle horses, but also knew how to fight.

## ***Cannon***

Cannon were used to fire a large shot at the enemy. They had a longer range than muskets and could inflict heavy damage on an enemy. Cannon however were large and bulky to begin with, were very slow firing and, understandably, the misfires were many times more dangerous than a misfire of a musket. Cannon fire could rarely be completed more than one time every three minutes. The infancy of the cannon technology decreased its



usefulness and it would not be until over a century later than the true benefits of this type of artillery would become clear.

### *Pikemen*

A large proportion of soldiers fighting in the Civil war were Pikemen. They carried a long pole with a sharpened metal end known as a pike. The pike was used to force back your enemy. Often the two armies would charge toward each other with their pikes raised in the air and try to push each other back and make the opponent turn and run. The pike was useful for keeping horses away from a large group of soldiers. The pike though was too long to be used to spear an opponent and in an open space it was easy to move around the pike and attack the soldier.



## Tasks

- 1) List the advantages and disadvantages of each weapon.
- 2) Which type of soldier would you have most liked to be? Explain the reasons for your answer.
- 3) A) The pictures of Cannon and Pikemen are modern photographs. How do you think these have been made?  
B) As historians why must we be careful when using these as evidence?
- 4) A) The pictures of Musketeers and Cavalry were drawn at the time of the war. Explain why this might make them more accurate as evidence.  
B) Explain why this might make them less accurate as evidence.