

## **Bayonet "Tent Stakes And Candle Holders"**

At the beginning of the Civil War, the battlefield tactics that were accepted and taught were those of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. In Napoleon's day, infantry warfare was based in large part on the bayonet charge. The muskets of that era were accurate for little more than 100 yards; therefore an attacking force could expect to reach that distance from an enemy's position in relative safety. That last 100 yards would be crossed quickly in a furious charge, with the attacker relying upon the bayonet to roust the enemy out of his position. In making the charge, the attacking force could expect to receive but one volley from the slow loaded muskets of that day, and that one volley would not usually knock out enough attackers to deter them from their mission.

In the Civil War, however, the mass charge was often disastrous for attacking forces, as witnessed by the results of such famous battles as Malvern Hill, Fredricksburg, Gettysburg, and Franklin. These charges all failed because firearms had improved between the wars of Napoleon and the Civil War. Rifling added to musket and cannon barrels and the development of ammunition for these rifled weapons greatly increased their range and accuracy. Forces attacking across cleared areas were now easily within range at 400 yards or more, and by the time they fought their way across that added distance, too few men were left standing to complete the mission. Sadly, some Civil War generals never learned this lesson.

On the Civil War battlefield, the bayonet turned out to be a relic, responsible for few battlefield wounds. Though there were many mass charges in Civil War battles, there were few hand-to-hand bayonet fights, and those were usually of short duration. Although infantry

soldiers were issued bayonets and received bayonet drill, they found the weapon most useful for other purposes. Bayonets made excellent tent stakes and candle holders, and when a charge petered out, they were useful for digging a hole to hide in.

Fact: Bayonets counted for less than 4 percent of battlefield wounds; artillery fire caused 5 percent. Bullets, on the other hand, caused more than 90 percent of the wounds.