

# Making Authentic Cartridges

To make a cartridge that adheres to the appearance of an original, you first have to start with the correct materials:

1. First is the "former". A dowel rod works well for this purpose. It should be the size of the bore for a rifled musket. A 1/2" or a 5/8" dowel rod may be adjusted to adhere to the proper size by either wrapping tape around it or by sanding it. One end should then be shaped to imitate the minie ball in the cartridge.

2. Common brown wrapping paper is the proper material for making the cartridge tubes. Parcel Post mailing paper works well. Grocery sack paper will not work as it is too thick. This should then be cut into the shape of a trapezoid, measuring 4.12 inches in height, 4.0 inches on the long base, and 2.5 inches on the short base.

3. Almost all cartridges used during the Civil War were tied with flax thread, though cotton thread did see limited use. Flax thread may be obtained at local shoe or leather repair shops.

4. The minie ball can be simulated with either a small cotton ball or just a sheet of wadded up toilet paper.

To actually make a cartridge, first wrap the outer trapezoid paper tightly around the "former", or dowel rod. The paper should extend beyond the end of the dowel rod by about 1/3" to 1/2".

The cartridge tube can be choked in two ways: The original way is by using a choking string and toggle. The other way is by just twisting. The choking string may be "made" by twisting 4 or 5 cartridge

threads, approximately 9 inches in length, fastened to the edge of a table, at the right hand of the workman" (1861 Ordinance Manual). The choking string is then given one turn around the projecting end of the cylinder and pulled to "choke" the cylinder between the end of the dowel rod and the end of the cylinder. Fold down the projecting paper inside-out, flat upon the top of the cylinder. Remove the choking string. Finally, place the cartridge thread at the choked end and make two complete turns around the choked "neck" with the string, pull tight, and tie in a single half-hitch (overhand knot). For making an elongated ball cartridge, now cut the thread at this point.

If the tube is to be choked by twisting, do so in a careful clockwise direction. Tie the same as the choking method. Now, using a fingernail or sharp object, separate the flattened, twisted part beyond the choke by dividing the sheets. Next, push up the separated paper, leaving it flat upon the top of the cylinder.

Remove the rolled cartridge cylinder from the dowel rod and insert the substance selected to simulate the projectile and ram this down to produce a fake bullet. Insert the black powder in the open end of the tube. Pinch the empty remaining tube shut between the forefinger and the thumb and shake while squeezing down further on the trapped powder. Fold over the pinched end of the tube and shake again while squeezing down further on the trapped powder. Next, fold over the

pinched end of the tube, pressing down on the powder, and strike or smash this end flat. The side with the "slant" of the trapezoid showing should be up. Holding the extension to the right, fold down the top "third" towards the body, just over to the halfway point. Then fold the bottom "third" up to cover the other part, reducing the pinched tube extension to less than half of its original width. Now, carefully fold this "tail" over the end of the cylinder and fold down along the other side of the tube. It is best to again press this bottom part firmly on a flat surface to sharpen the creases. Also, pinch the "tail" as it begins to lay along the tube so that it will remain flush on the cartridge. The cartridge is now ready to be packaged.

Sources:

1840 Ordinance Manual

1861 Ordinance Manual

Edwards, William B. Civil War Guns. Harrisburg, Pa.: The Stackpole Co., 1958.

Lewis, Berkeley. Small Arms and Ammunition in the United States Service. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1956.

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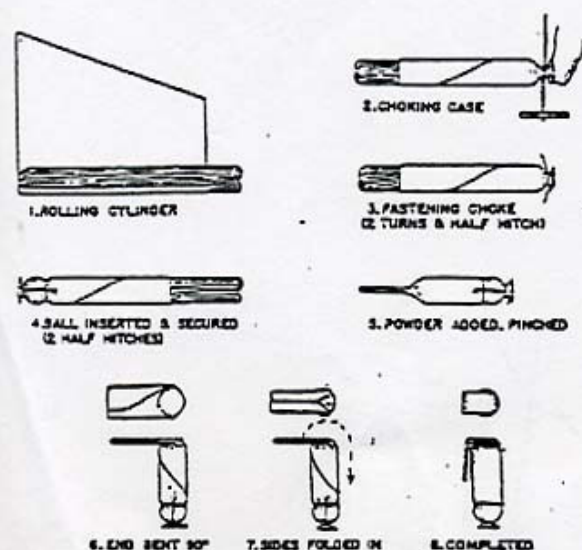


FIG. 1.—Cartridge manufacture, 1840 Ordinance Manual.

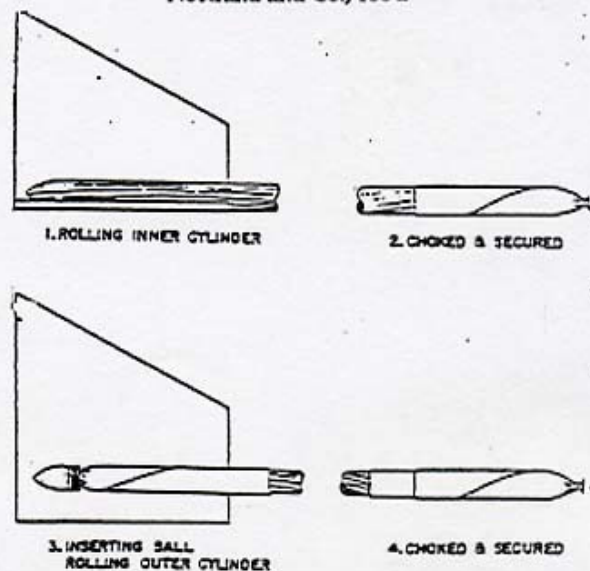


FIG. 2.—Cartridge manufacture, 1861 Ordinance Manual.