

## Gatling Gun <sup>[1]</sup>

# Gatling Gun

by Thomas C. Parramore, 2006

See also: [Gatling Gun](#) <sup>[2]</sup> (NC Museum of History)



A view of the Gatling gun as shown on company letterhead, ca. 1875.

Courtesy of North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

Inventor [Richard Jordan Gatling](#) <sup>[3]</sup> was born in [Hertford County](#) <sup>[4]</sup> in September 1818. Issued his first patent in 1844 for a rice-seed planter, he soon moved to St. Louis, Mo., and successfully marketed the machine as a wheat-drill. More inventions followed, including a steam plow, a cotton cultivator, and a hemp brake. A [Unionist](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, Gatling was living in Indianapolis in 1862 when he patented his first machine gun, employing a cartridge-feeding mechanism adapted from his rice-seed planter. Initial models, built by a Cincinnati firm, had a single barrel fed by a rotary chamber and fired 190 bullets per minute. The Federal Ordnance Department showed no interest, but [Gen. Benjamin F. Butler](#) <sup>[6]</sup> purchased 13 and used them at [Bermuda Hundred](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, near Richmond, in the spring of 1863. As results were inconclusive, the gun saw no further service in the [Civil War](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, although the navy ordered a small number.



Gatling Gun.

Courtesy of NC Office

of Archives & History. <sup>[9]</sup> Postwar models, using new self-contained brass (rather than paper) cartridges, had six barrels hand-cranked around a central shaft. This design, the first successful machine gun, impressed the army, which bought 100 in 1866. Although Gatling continued to invent mainly agricultural and military machines and implements, he built his career around improving and publicizing his machine gun, manufactured by Colt's Armory in Hartford, Conn., and later by an English firm at Newcastle-on-Tyne. The gun was used by France in the [Franco-Prussian War](#) <sup>[10]</sup> and against Indians in the American West and adopted by Russia, England, Austria-Hungary, Egypt, and other countries. Later models fired up to 3,000 rounds per minute. American Gatling guns saw service in the [Spanish-American War](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, but by this time the weapon had lost ground to the Nordenfeldt and Maxim guns and other machine guns that were based on more advanced principles.

### References:

F. Roy Johnson and E. Frank Stephenson, *The Gatling Gun and Flying Machine of Richard and [Henry Gatling](#)* <sup>[12]</sup> (1979).

Thomas C. Parramore, "The North Carolina Background of Richard Jordan Gatling," *NCHR* 41 (Winter 1964).

Paul Wahl and Dan Toppel, *The Gatling Gun* (1965).

### Additional Resources:

Richard Jordan Gatlin, NC Highway Historical Marker A-26: <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=A-26%20-%20RICHARD%20J.%20GATLING> <sup>[13]</sup>

### Image Credit:

Gatling Gun. Courtesy of NC Office of Archives & History. Available from <https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=A-26%20-%20RICHARD%20J.%20GATLING> [13] (accessed September 26, 2012).

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**Authors:**

[Parramore, Thomas C.](#) [20]

**Origin - location:**

[Hertford County](#) [21]

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[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [22]

1 January 2006 | Parramore, Thomas C.

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