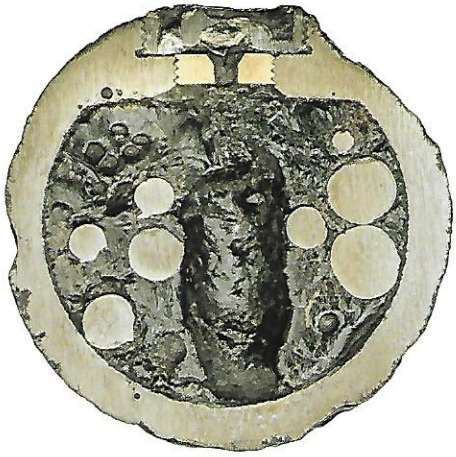
U.S. 12-Pdr. spherical Bormann fused shell. Note the wall thickness as compared to a case shot projectile.

U.S. 12-Pdr. spherical Bormann fused case shot with lead case shot balls and a black pitch matrix to hold them in place.



C.S. 12-Pdr. spherical Bormann fused case shot with iron case shot balls and a rosin matrix to hold them securely.

Each gun fired four types of ammunition: shot, shell, spherical case, or canister. Shot was a solid iron ball, or bolt for the rifled pieces, used for counter-battery fire or knocking down structures. Shot could also be used effectively against infantry formations if fired perpendicular to a rank. Shell was essentially a hollow iron ball with a timed fuse, that fractured into numerous pieces above enemy infantry or artillery formations. Spherical case shot, or shrapnel, was a fused shell filled with powder and numerous small lead or iron balls. The effect of case shot was devastating against masses of infantry. The dispersal of the balls and shell fragments spread out over a wide area. Canister was a metal can filled with small iron (occasionally lead) balls, which dispersed upon leaving the muzzle. Used defensively for close-in work, canister made the cannon into a giant shotgun. Canister was rarely used at more than 300 yards.[11]

Thompson's first action came on April 18, 1862, as the unit participated in a reconnaissance along the Rappahannock River north of Fredericksburg. Several Confederates were detected across the river in a strong artillery position overlooking a bridge. Battery C was called forward, and Thompson posted the two Parrott guns at the river's edge under Lieutenant John P. Barry. Barry's

This is the most common 12-Pdr. canister used during the Civil War. It was intended to be fired from a 12-Pdr. smoothbore cannon such as the Model 1857 Napoleon. The standard 12-Pdr. canister balls ranged from 1.46 to 1.49 inches in diameter with a mean weight of .43 pound each. Five nails secured the 6.28 inch long tin cylinder to the wooden sabot. Twenty-seven cast iron canister balls were stacked in four layers, packed in sawdust, with the top center ball omitted so the iron top plate would fit properly. The grooves in the wood sabot were cut so that the powder bag could be attached making the round fixed. This method allowed faster loading of the smoothbore cannon by the artillerists. The 12-Pdr. canister had an initial muzzle velocity of 1,262 feet per second with a 2 pound service charge when fired from a 12-Pdr. field gun.
The non-excavated canister on the right is courtesy The Atlanta History Center, Thomas S. Dickey Sr. Civil War Collection; the canister on the left is reassembled from battlefield recoveries and is from the David Gotter Collection. (Jack Melton)