

## Gunners' Gear

Armies of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries were drawn from two classes of warriors: elite samurai, who acted as officers and cavalry, and peasant foot soldiers called *ashigaru*. Both classes could carry muskets, but it was usually *ashigaru* who formed the long firing lines that made up the bulk of an army's gunnery corps.

The suit of armor on display here belonged to a samurai. Samurai armor was made with overlapping plates of metal that were thickened when firearms became prevalent on the battlefield. However, even heavy armor could not stop a musket ball from close range, and armor continued to serve primarily as protection against swords and spears, and as a mark of rank.

Every gunner brought their own ammunition into battle. This warrior's kit consisted of a coil of match cord made from braided strips of cypress or cotton; a large, canteen-shaped container for gunpowder and a smaller, gourd-shaped container for priming powder; a pouch of musket balls with a special "crow's beak" neck that dispensed one ball at a time; a satchel of *hayagō* cartridges; and one or more ramrods to pack the musket ball and powder into the barrel. The large wooden box was used to carry ammunition to the field of battle.

Note the tube affixed to the back of the armor to hold the samurai's personal field banner (*sashimono*).