

Musket Match Cords

Match cords (or “slow matches”) were made from the fibers of various plants, including cotton, bamboo, and cypress. They were often treated with saltpeter to increase their flammability. Once lit, the cords typically smoldered for several hours, but gunners still carried flint and tinder or a container of mugwort embers with which to relight their match cords. (Examples of these fire-starters are displayed below.)

This panel from *Buki nihyaku-zu* (Illustrations of 200 Weapons) shows a number of accessories:

- 1) a leather musket case;
- 2) a coil of match cord;
- 3) a match cord cut to a length of five *sun* (roughly 15 cm);
- 4) cut match cords readied for use on a board that could be staked to the ground next to the gunner; and
- 5) a cap used to cover the lit end of a match cord.

The exact length of match cord that each gunner carried into battle differed from army to army, but it was not uncommon for each soldier to have three meters of cord or more wrapped around his wrist or arm.