

HANDBOOK OF CONFEDERATE SWORDS

by
William A. Albaugh, III

Foreword by
Richard D. Steuart

THE CONFEDERATE
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by William A. Albaugh, III

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PREFACE



Little has been written on the subject of Confederate swords, beyond a brief article which appeared in *The Confederate Veteran* of January 1926 by Richard D. Steuart, author of the foreword of the present work. Theodore T. Belote, in his bulletin No. 163, put out by the National Museum, describes several Confederate swords.

The short work which follows does not by any means describe all the types or manufacturers of swords for the Confederacy. It is not intended as a "history," but is only a pictorial and brief written description of those swords which we have seen during our years of collecting.

There are unquestionably many swords which we do not list, and of which we have not heard, but this little booklet may serve as a starting point for those that follow.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of John & Ira Albaugh of Maryland; my great-grandfather, and great-granduncle who served in the 1st Virginia Cavalry under Gen. J.E.B. Stuart, and who gave their lives for the Confederacy; one at Kelly's Ford, Va., in 1863, and the other at Bunker Hill, Va., in 1864.

Thanks is given to the gracious assistance of Miss India Thomas, and Miss Eleanor Brockenbrough, of the

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Confederate Museum in Richmond, Va., in the permitting of access to the priceless relics in their custody.

FOREWORD

by Richard D. Stuart



*“Forth from its scabbard pure and bright,
Flashed the sword of Lee.”* – Father Ryan

And thousands of other swords just as pure and bright if less expensive flashed in the Southern sunlight in the four years of warfare which marked what has been called the American Civil War, or the War between the States.

Poets may dream of the beauty of these stainless blades, drawn in a Lost Cause, but the matter of fact historian and collector would like to know whence came these swords?

The outbreak of the war in 1861, found stored in the Federal and State arsenals, thousands of old sabres, relics of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Mexican War. They were clumsy, unwieldy weapons, with broad blades, heavy iron scabbards, wooden grips, and iron guards. Similar swords formed the armament of most of the various home militia companies throughout the South.

Also in private homes were many fine swords, relics of other wars, preserved as heirlooms, but of little use for actual service.

There were no sword factories in the South at the

beginning of the war. Swords had been manufactured at the Virginia Manufactory, or Richmond Armory, in the early years of the century, but apparently, their manufacture was discontinued about the time of the War of 1812.

Swords like dueling pistols, hunting rifles, and fowling pieces, Colt, and other revolvers were imported from Europe, or purchased from Northern Manufacturers by military outfitters in the South, such as Hyde & Goodrich, of New Orleans; Courtney & Tennant, Hayden & Whilden, of Charleston, S.C.; and Canfield Brothers of Baltimore, Md.

There were also a few men, like James Conning of Mobile, Ala., who apparently made a few presentation swords, or imported them "in the rough," ornamented them and marked them with their name.

At the outbreak of the war, several Southern States and the newly formed Confederate Government sent agents to the North to purchase weapons. Swords, and sabres, were included in these purchases, but few of them reached the South.

As many swords used in the Confederate Army were captured from the enemy, a glance at the types used in the Union Army is interesting.

General Ripley, Union Chief of Ordnance, reported June 30, 1862, that since the outbreak of the war, the Washington Government had purchased the following:

	American Made	European Made
Officers swords	1,352	2,107
Non-comm. officers	6,8899	19,951
Musicians swords	2,050	5,363
Cavalry sabres	53,986	138,813
Horse Artillery sabres	5,250	3,515
Foot Artillery swords	300	4,262

Col. George L. Schuyler, was sent to Europe by the Washington War Department and made extensive purchases of arms. In Sept. 1861, he wrote to the Secretary of War, that he had contracted for "20,000 light cavalry sabres of the Montmorency pattern."

Washington also let large contracts for sabres in the North. Perhaps the largest of these Northern sword-makers was the Ames Manufacturing Co., of Chicopee, Mass., an old firm of cutlers. They turned out excellent cavalry and artillery sabres of a pattern which remained unchanged and was the United States Army regulation until after the Spanish American War of 1898. Among other Northern sword makers was Tiffany, New York jeweler, who made fine weapons. The Confederate Government also sent agents to Europe in search of arms. General Josiah L. Gorgas, Confederate Chief of Ordnance, reported February 3, 1863, that Maj. Caleb Huse had bought abroad and shipped to the South by blockade runners, 16,178 cavalry sabres. There is no record, though, to show whence they came. The blockade runner *Fingal*, landed at Savannah in October, 1861, 500 cavalry sabres, and 250 swords of English make.

The United States Consul at Hamburg, Germany, reported April 5, 1862, that the British blockade runner *Bahama's* cargo included 57 boxes of cavalry swords marked "D.S." and 16 boxes marked "P.W."

That the business of running European arms through the blockade to the Confederacy continued until the last is shown by the announcement of the Navy Department in Washington on March 2, 1865, of the capture off the Florida coast of the British schooner *Delia* with a cargo of pig lead and sabres.

These English cavalry sabres were among the best

swords used in the South, and thousands of them were imported. They were called "Enfield sabres," and were adopted in 1853 for the British cavalry. Like the Enfield sabre bayonets, the grip was formed of two pieces of leather, or gutta percha riveted to the metal. Isaacs & Co., of London furnished many of these sabres to the South. To keep the record clear, however, it should be said that not all the Southern troopers liked these English sabres. Musgrove, in his book *Kentucky Cavaliers in Dixie*, says the 4th Kentucky Cavalry was issued these heavy English sabres which were unpopular (page 183).

Beautiful ornamented swords for officers were made in England and sent through the blockade by Robert Mole & Sons, of Birmingham; Firmin, of London, an old firm of military outfitters, and others.

Most of the swords bearing the name of Courtney & Tennant, Charleston, S.C., were made in England. The Charleston firm did not manufacture them.

Confederate swords were also made in Germany. W. Walsoneid, of Solingen, made many swords for the Confederacy.

The manufacture of swords was undertaken by many Southerners at the beginning of the war. *Debow's Review*, for March-April, 1862, says:

"McKennie & Co., of Charlottesville, Va., is making 6 swords a week.

"T. D. Driscoll, Howardsville, Va., is making 28 swords a week.

"W. J. McElroy & Co., of Macon, Ga., is making 20 infantry swords, 20 naval cutlasses, 20 sergeant's swords, and 20 bowie knives per week."

General Gideon Pillow, in a letter written from Memphis, Tenn., May 31, 1861, to General Anderson, says:

“We have a thousand sabres under way, none finished. In a few days we shall be receiving 50 a day.”

These were probably made by Thomas Leech & Co., of the Memphis Novelty Works. As Memphis was taken by the enemy in June, 1862, the industry must have been short-lived, although after the fall of Memphis, Leech did continue his arms-making activities elsewhere.

In Richmond, swords and sabre bayonets were made by Boyle Gamble and MacFee. In the *Richmond Examiner* of September 2, 1861, there is a note that the firm's stock of steel had been badly damaged by fire the previous day. This factory was located at the foot of S. Seventh Street, near the Tredegar Iron Works.

There are frequent references in Southern newspapers of the war period to sword making, but in most instances it has been impossible to identify the products of these individuals and firms.

The *Richmond Examiner* for June 3, 1861, says that local armorers are making fine Bowie knives and could as easily make swords. “It is a mistake,” says the editor, “to pay fancy prices for Ames chilled iron. Patronize home industries.”

In the *Southern Confederacy*, published in Atlanta, Ga., June 22, 1864, is the advertisement of C.J. Christopher, “swordmaker, Bridge St., near the Bridge.” Mr. Christopher offered to “repair swords of every description with neatness and dispatch.”

The same newspaper also contained the advertisement of H. Marshall & Co., swordmakers. The swords of Christopher and Marshall, have remained unidentified.

The *Memphis Appeal* for November 3, 1861, says: “The *Savannah Republican* has been shown a sword made without machinery by Mr. B.P. Freeman, of Macon, which

in solidarity, shape, and finish is not excelled in Yankee-
dom, or elsewhere. All honor to our energetic mechanics.”

The *Richmond Examiner* for June 7, 1861, said a sword factory was being established at Tilton, Ga. The output of this factory, if it ever got into production, cannot be identified.

In the Acts of the Confederate Congress for May 9, 1861, there is a reference to “certain papers from R. W. Habersham, of South Carolina, touching on a new artillery sabre, and asking that it be tested.”

An interesting note on sword making is contained in Wells, *Hampton and his Cavalry*. Says Wells: “At Columbia were made the heavy, long, straight, double edged swords, very serviceable and Crusader-like, with cross hilts.”

This writer however is convinced that Wells is in error. He must have been confused as to the type of guard.

In the Confederate Museum in Richmond, are four regulation French dragoon sabres, with long straight, double edged blades, and four-branched guard. They are the type used by Napoleon’s cavaliers at Waterloo.

Two of these French swords belonged to Gen. Wade Hampton, the third was given by Hampton to Gen. M.C. Butler, and the fourth was given by Hampton to Brig. Gen. Bradley T. Johnson of Maryland.

It must have been the above type swords to which Wells was referring. However, close examination will show that they are definitely of French manufacture.

A similar French dragoon sabre was carried by Col. Frederick Gustavus Skinner, of the 1st Virginia Regiment. It is dated 1814, and has a 38-inch blade. The sword was presented to the Colonel by Lafayette on the occasion of his visit to America in 1824.

At First Manassas, Col. Skinner is said to have slain three Federal cannonneers with this sword. At Second Manassas, Col. Skinner killed one enemy with this sword, and was then struck down by two bullets. The sword is still preserved by the Colonel's family (from *A Sporting Family of the Old South*, pp. 28, 42, and 44).

Kraft, Goldschmidt and Kraft, also operated a sword factory in Columbia, S.C. Some were made in South Carolina, while others were imported from England, and the blades etched by the South Carolina firm.

In some cases the Confederate swords made by this firm bear merely the initials "K. G. & K." Still others modeled after the regulation Ames sabres of the Union Army, are stamped simply "Columbia, S.C." Obviously they were made by Kraft, Goldschmidt and Kraft.

In the *Diary of General Gorgas*, the Confederate Chief of Ordnance, is this note of July 1st, 1864: "The President (Davis) sent for me day before yesterday to show me a big sword made at Columbia, S.C., and sent to him. He seemed to think highly of it tho I objected to its length." Under date of August 14, 1864, Gorgas writes: "He (Davis) spoke again of a long sabre that General Hampton wanted made for his cavalry, and remembered that on a previous occasion he spoke of armament of cavalry and said that if they had sabres they should not have guns, but be made to depend upon the sabre. He referred to the pistol carbine, the barrel of which was 12 inches long, and had a removable stock, which he had adopted in the United States service when Secretary of War. . . . He thought that if our cavalry were to depend upon the sabre alone that they would come to close quarters and run off their antagonists who depended upon their long range runs."

The largest sword factory in the South was the

Haiman plant at Columbus, Ga. Writing from Columbus under date of May 22, 1924, to the late E. Berkley Bowie of Baltimore, Md., one David Wolfson said in part:

“I was connected with the Haiman sword factory, and know all the particulars. They made swords, sabres, and army revolvers. We employed over 500 people, two of whom were from Virginia, and were experts in the manufacture of the Colt army pistol. The demands were so large that we had to annex a leather works to make boxes and straps to carry the cartridges, and also opened . . . a foundry to make cooking utensils for the army. The proprietors of the establishment were Louis, and Elias Haiman. Both are now dead (1924). Elias Haiman went to Europe and sent material through to us by the blockade. These works were carried on until the close of the war, when the Federals came in, as the last battle of the war was fought just across the river here at what is called Alabama Heights, and they destroyed the works at that time, on April 16, 1865.”

That at times the Confederates had to go far afield for their swords is shown by the fact that in the Confederate Museum, Richmond, is a Persian yataghan, carried by a Confederate officer, and in the Springfield, Mass. Museum is a Turkish scimitar captured from a Confederate soldier.

The Confederate naval cutlasses were nothing about which to boast. Most of them were modeled after the type used in the U.S. Navy in the Mexican War, with short double-edged blades similar to those of the obsolete foot artillery sword.

Some of these cutlasses were exactly like the foot artillery swords, and lacked the hand guards. They had merely the short straight cross-hilt. With the clumsy blades

several inches shorter than those of the Ames cutlass used in the Union Navy, the Confederate sailor was at a great disadvantage when facing his better-armed adversary.

The British bayonet cutlass, run through the blockade from England, was a much better weapon than those manufactured in the South. But England also sent to the Confederacy the short double-edged blade cutlass as well.

One in the Battle Abbey collection has a brass guard like that of the enfield sabre, and with the same gutta-percha, or leather grip. The 20-inch blade is encased in a black leather scabbard with brass tip and mouthpiece. On the back of the blade near the hilt is stamped "Mole," showing that it was made by Robert Mole of Birmingham, England. On the side of the blade is stamped "Courtney & Tennant, Charleston, S. C.," the firm which imported the weapon. These cutlasses are also found with a solid brass guard instead of the three-branched one described above.

The experts seem to differ about the efficiency of these short double-edged cutlasses. Commander Palmer, of the U.S.S. *Iroquois*, on September 4, 1861, complained that his Sharps rifles had no sword bayonets and that his cutlasses were all worthless old-fashioned Roman swords (*Official Records*, Vol. VI, p. 168).

On the other hand, Col. John Taylor Wood, of the Confederate Army, in a report of his dashing exploit in the Rappahannock River, wrote:

"In August, 1863, I left Richmond with four boats, and 60 men, and off Cawtoman's boarded the U.S.S. *Satellite*, and *Reliance*. We dashed alongside, and cut our way through the boarding nettings with the old Navy cut-

lass, or Roman sword, by far the most effective weapon for this work" (*Jeff. Davis Constitutionalist*, Vol. VIII, p. 543).

An article in the Louisville, Ky., *Journal* of March 9, 1865, says: "The Confederates captured at Chapman's Landing each had a fine Enfield rifle musket, and a regular Navy cutlass. One of the cutlasses was shown us. Including the handle it is two feet six inches long, and the blade is nearly two inches wide. On the handle are the letters 'C.S.N.'"

Undoubtedly these men carried the British Enfield cutlass bayonet, such as was used on some of the Enfield rifles, and the Wilson breech loading rifle which was used in the Confederate Navy.

No account of Confederate swords would be complete without some mention of the Virginia Manufactory sabres, which have been a subject of much controversy. Captain Theodore T. Belote in his excellent catalogue of swords in the National Museum, Washington, published in 1932, calls them "Hessian sabres." But in the *Bulletin of the American Sword Collectors Society* for October 1947, he says that he is not prepared to argue that designation.

The writer believes they were made at the Virginia Manufactory, or Richmond Armory, but can submit no documentary proof of this theory. The Virginia Manufactory, or State Armory, was authorized by the Virginia Legislature of 1798, and began operations in March, 1802. By October, 1803, John Clarke, Superintendent of the Armory reported that they had made and had in storage 3,272 muskets, 14 rifles, 470 pistols, 405 cavalry sabres, and 50 artillery swords.

Another document gives the output for 1806,

which included 852 cavalry swords, 444 iron scabbards, and 164 artillery swords.

On April 17, 1861, the day Virginia seceded, Adjutant General William Harvey Richardson reported to Governor Letcher that 3,350 cavalry sabres were in the hands of Virginia horse militia.

In 1863, General Charles Dimmick, Virginia Chief of Ordnance, reported to the Legislature that the Richmond Armory had issued up to October 1, 1863, 7,863 sabres, of which the majority were "Virginia sabres."

An article in the *Columbian, South Carolinian* for January 3, 1861, telling of Virginia's preparation for defense, says that old muskets, and rifles made at the Richmond Armory were being altered from flintlock to percussion and adds: "A quantity of old sabres owned by the State, 500 in Richmond, and 1,000 in Lexington, have been shortened and scabbarded and are now of modern design."

The fact is that the Virginia troopers complained of the weight and length of the old sabres. As a result, hundreds of them were made over by having the blades shortened by five inches, made narrower near the point, and fitted with new scabbards of iron with brass rings, and mouthpiece.

In the Virginia archives of the war years in the State Library at Richmond, are frequent references to "Old Virginia Sabres," "Virginia Cavalry sabres," and "Virginia sabres with new scabbards." On January 21, 1861, the Virginia Ordnance Department recorded the receipt of 2,000 new cavalry sabres, and 468 Virginia cavalry sabres with new scabbards (document-State Library).