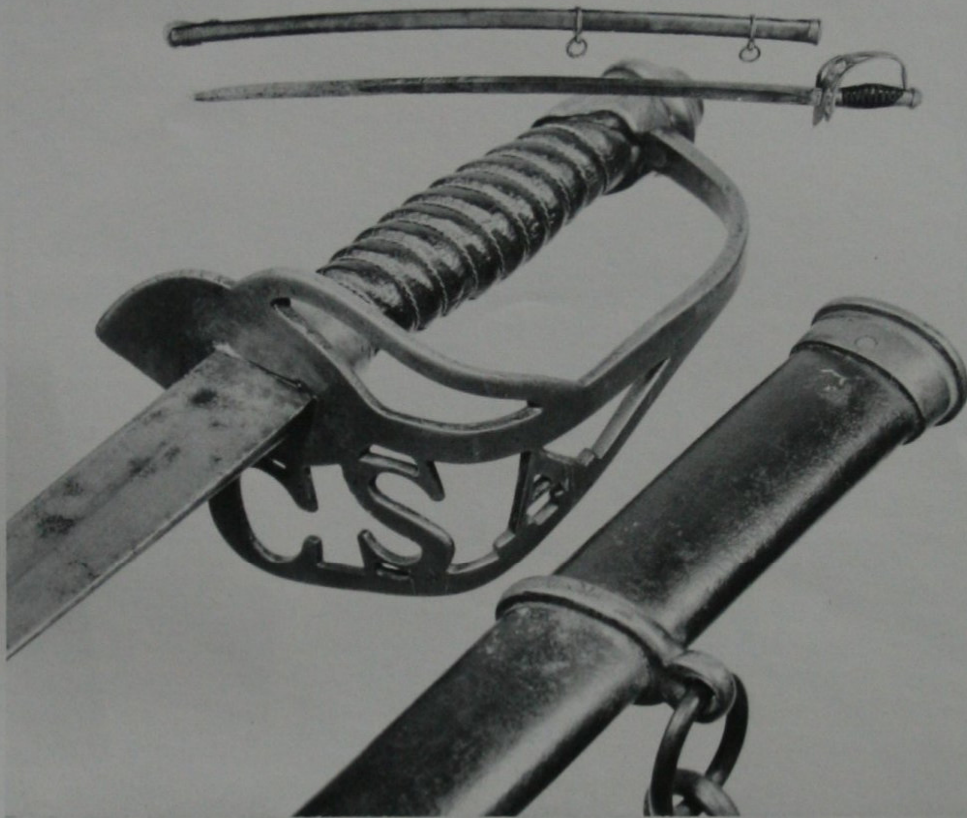


CONFEDERATE SWORDS



by Stephen W. Sylvia and Michael J. O'Donnell

IN BYGONE DAYS WHEN WARFARE was a glorious affair waged by proud and noble warriors, the sword functioned not only as a weapon, but as a symbol as well. A sword's design and adornments proclaimed the bearer's nationality, rank, and martial achievements. Often, the very structure and appearance of a particular sword would strike fear and respect in the heart of a foe, and garner admiration from a fellow countryman.

A set of customs involving the sword and its place in warfare evolved. Just as the unsheathing of a blade signaled the opening of combat, the offering of a sword signified surrender. Thus, the sword became the most revered battle trophy a soldier could obtain.

This ancient and honorable weapon was last used in large-scale military action during the American Civil War. Practically every officer and combatant other than infantrymen wore a sword on the field. In future wars, industrialized weapons would render the sword and its glory obsolete.

In keeping with tradition, captured swords were in great demand by Civil War soldiers, especially Northerners. Accounts in Federal regimental histories, dairies, and memoirs offer voluminous testimony to the Yankee's pursuit of Rebel swords.

George A. Custer, while a captain in the 1862 battle at White Oak Swamp, captured a sword from a Confederate cavalry officer. The "trophy" was a long, straight-bladed Toledo which Custer proudly wore in place of his own regulation issue sabre.

In the wake of Pickett's Charge, Sergeant-Major Stockton of the 71st Pennsylvania was observed carrying a dozen captured Confederate swords. By the war's end, thousands of such trophies were destined for Northern veterans halls, museums, and attics.

After the war, a handful of men began amassing collections of artifacts from the late conflict. As the process of identifying and cataloging these relics progressed, it became apparent that large gaps existed in

(Above) Staff/field officer's sword of the Confederate States Army in Kenansville, North Carolina. The guard, displaying the letters "CSA", is cast and the numerals "XXII" are stamped in the guard and the scabbard throat, a feature common to this maker. The blade has an unstopped fuller and is sheathed in a maroon-lacquered iron scabbard of lap-over metal construction. Scabbard throat, carrying rings, and drag are brass.



Photograph of three Confederate officers of different branches of service, each bearing the sword of his respective branch. At left, a second lieutenant of infantry with a foot officer's sword, in the middle is an artillery captain, and on the right, holding a two-branched cavalry sabre, is a first lieutenant of cavalry. (Photo courtesy of William Turner)



Section of a W.J. McElroy sword and metal scabbard showing the noted etching of F. Herzog. The reverse side of the blade is engraved; "Presented to Capt. J. T. Kennedy by R. P. Howel, C.S." between Stars and Bars flags and stands of cannon. (Photo courtesy of William A. Albaugh, III.)

the data concerning C.S. weaponry.

Few reliable sources were available to the post-war collector of Southern swords. In the chaos following Lee's surrender at Appomattox, records were misplaced or destroyed. While every conceivable battlefield exploit was published and debated, scant attention was paid to C.S. ordnance. Consequently, only swords with a Confederate motif cast into the hilt, stamped or engraved on the blade, or of crude manufacture were classified as "Rebel."

This identification technique was inadequate and often inaccurate. Though some C.S. swords were exquisitely made and properly identified, most were unmarked or stamped by an unknown manufacturer. One of the premier collectors of the late 19th century, A.E. Brooks of Hartford, Connecticut, recognized that collectors should pool their knowledge "with the view of correcting whatever errors may exist . . ."

In 1899 Brooks published a catalog describing his Civil War collection which included many rare Confederate swords. One entry read: "C.S. Army sword, leather scabbard, rubber hilt with brass guard. It is one of a lot of army stores captured from a blockade runner on the coast of Cuba in 1861. This sword is stamped 'Courtney & Tennent, Charleston, S.C.'" Brooks' sword was in fact a C.S. naval cutlass made for Courtney & Tennent by a British firm, Robert Mole & Sons of Birmingham, England.

In the same era, Charles F. Gunther, a German immigrant and veteran of the Confederate Navy, assembled one of the largest private collections of Civil War artifacts in history. His collecting activities spanned some forty years, during which time he established the

famous Libby Prison War Museum in Chicago housing four floors of Civil War relics of every kind, including excavated specimens.

Gunther compiled a catalog of his relic inventory, and like Brooks, made a serious effort to authenticate his collection. Unfortunately, both men, and others of the same ilk, were sorely limited in research material.

Two articles published at the turn of the century cast a pale glimmer of light on the subject of Southern weapons production. The former chief of the Confederate Ordnance Department, Josiah Gorgas, described his wartime operations in an 1895 essay in "The Confederate Soldier in the Civil War." In 1909, C.S. Colonel Mallet wrote an article for the *Southern Historical Papers* entitled, "The Work of the Ordnance Bureau." These articles were among the earliest efforts on the subject, but their contribution was sparse.

It was largely through the diligent research of two second generation collectors that the record is as complete as it is today. One of these men was Theodore T. Belote, curator of history at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., who published the first reference work on the subject of American swords. His book, *American and European Swords in the Historical Collections of the United States National Museum* (1932), identified many Confederate edged weapons. Understandably, he made several mistakes such as his labelling of a Virginia Manufactory sabre as a Hessian blade of Revolutionary War origin, but most of his information has been proven correct.

Another dedicated sword collector and prolific writer was Richard D. Steuart of Baltimore, Maryland. A reporter with the *Baltimore News-Post*, Steuart filled in



The most commonly encountered model of a Kraft, Goldschmidt & Kraft staff/field officer's sword. The unique hilt design with "CS" surrounded by leaves is indicative of the fine craftsmanship of this company. The engraved blade has an unstopped fuller and a cutting edge that begins abruptly three quarters of an inch below the guard. (Photo courtesy of Don Tharpe)

and their manufacture.

Shortly before his death, Steuart co-authored a small booklet entitled *Confederate Swords* (1951) with a contemporary, William A. Albaugh, III. This treatise laid the groundwork for Albaugh's milestone, *Confederate Edged Weapons* in 1960. Three years later Albaugh published a more complete reference work entitled, *A Photographic Supplement of Confederate Swords* which offered extensive photographs of specimens and data that is unsurpassed. This book was reprinted in 1979 with an Addendum updating the information, but as Mr. Albaugh frankly admits, "the record is still far from complete."

Sword Components

Swords of the Civil War period are generally composed of five separate parts: blade, pommel, guard, grip, and of course, the scabbard. To date, research has revealed various characteristics of these parts that are peculiar to Confederate swords.

Because the South's manufacturing capabilities were limited, the majority of their domestic blades were crudely made. Frequently, they were hammered out by hand rather than rolled in a mill, leaving them with a flawed, uneven appearance. Noticeable fault lines were particularly common to blades of Boyle & Gamble, Richmond, Va.

The blade fullers were usually unstepped, tapering off at either end; however, this is no certain indicator of Confederate manufacture — some blades had no fuller at all. Many foreign blades were also unstepped, although a close examination might expose a proof-mark, a feature absent from local C.S. products.

Scarcity forced Southern manufacturers to import European blades as well as reworking captured and antique blades. England supplied the bulk of these, but other quantities were acquired from France, Belgium, and Germany. Southern military suppliers such as Dufilho of New Orleans, La.; Louis Haiman & Brother of Columbus, GA.; and Kraft, Goldschmidt & Kraft of Columbia, S.C., imported then rehilted blades in their own distinctive styles. Gen. Wade Hampton, C.S.A., bought four such swords from K., G. & K., each with a long, straight, double-edged blade of the Napoleonic era.

The pommels of Confederate swords were generally patterned after the U.S. regulation models with shape and design differing for each branch of service. However, numerous variations were employed by the Southerners. Many were simplified versions, without an encircling ring

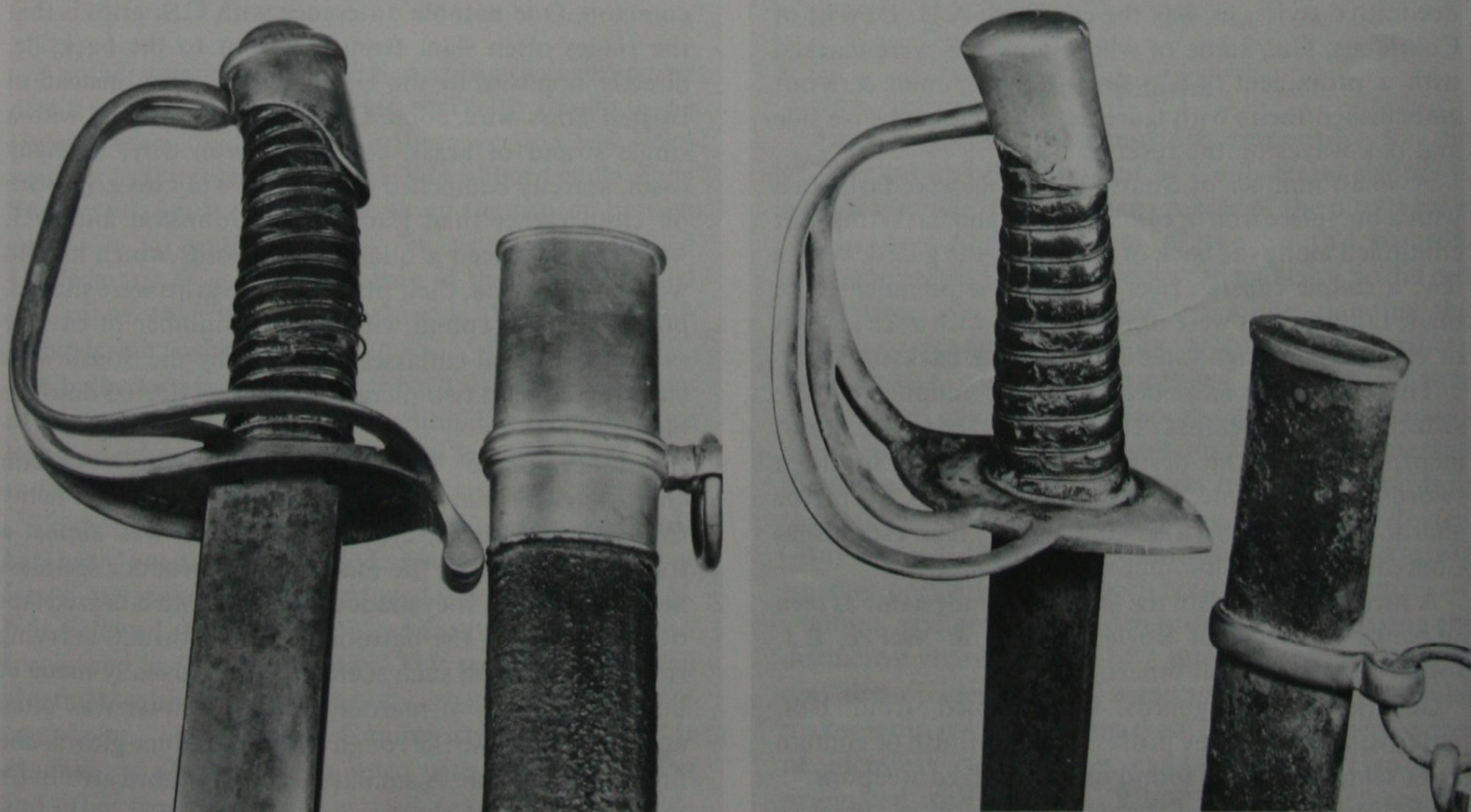
many of the unknown areas concerning C.S. swords. In a 1909 issue of *Confederate Veteran* magazine, the novice sword collector queried, "I am collecting data for an article on arms and equipment used in the Confederate armies, of which I have a large and interesting collection. A sword in my collection bears on the bronze guard: 'C.S.A.' and 'Nashville Plow Works'. Can you tell me anything of its maker's?" Steuart answered his own question in a 1926 issue of *Confederate Veteran*: "...at Nashville, the firm of Sharpe & Hamilton, manufacturers of plows and farm implements, reversed the Biblical injunction and converted plowshares into swords. These weapons were well made with 'C.S.A.' and 'Nashville Plow Works' cast in the brass guard. When the Federals occupied Nashville in April, 1862, Sharpe and Hamilton were thrown into prison and their sword-making activities abruptly terminated." In this same article, Steuart offered a wealth of data he had laboriously obtained on Confederate weapons, their procurement,

Beautifully fashioned staff/field officer's sword by Dufilho of New Orleans with the Louisiana state seal in high relief in the guard. Though a dealer, not a manufacturer, the blade contains the Dufilho trade name and address stamped on the reverse side in the unstopped fuller several inches below the guard. Some of the edged weapons attributed to this firm are unmarked.

(Photo courtesy of Smithsonian Institute)



(Below left) Foot officer's sword produced by Boyle, Gamble & MacFee of Richmond. The firm's name is cast in raised letters on the reverse underside of the guard. The leather grip is wound with a single strand of brass wire. (Photo courtesy of William A. Albaugh, III.) (Below right) Crude, unmarked cavalry sabre believed to be a product of the Confederate States Armory. The guard and scabbard throat are both marked with matching numerals as is found with other known products of this firm. The leather covered grip, similar to the U.S. Model 1840, is wrapped with a single strand of iron wire. The 35-inch blade is unstopped and its maroon-lacquered iron scabbard bears brass mounts and a lap-over brazed seam. (Photo courtesy of William A. Albaugh, III.)





View of a B. Douglas & Co. staff/field officer's sword showing a guard design similar to those of Boyle & Gamble. The blade fuller is unstopped and the reverse ricasso is stamped "B. Douglas & Co. / Columbia, S.C."



College Hill officer's sabre with an iron pommel and backstrap, and a guard nearly identical to a model made by the Nashville Plow Works. A capstan rivet holds the pommel onto the grip.

(Photo courtesy of William A. Albaugh, III.)

at the top and little or no decoration. Others bore unique decorative styles, as was the case with A.H. DeWitt of Columbus, Ga., some of whose pommels were marked with a prominent "CS". Kraft, Goldschmidt & Kraft embellished theirs with laurel leaves on the obverse side and oak leaves on the reverse.

A small number of Southern swords were fashioned with a one-piece iron or brass pommel and backstrap that continued along the back of the grip to the guard. With a few, a simple capstan rivet fastened the pommel to the blade tang. Others were ornately made with a sea serpent or eagle head design tapering down the backstrap.

The guard, the most eye-catching component of the sword, was sometimes cast with a patriotic motif incorporated in the design. A number of Southern swords, for example, contain the letters "CS" in the guard, but are otherwise unmarked. This establishes Confederate affiliation, but not the maker.

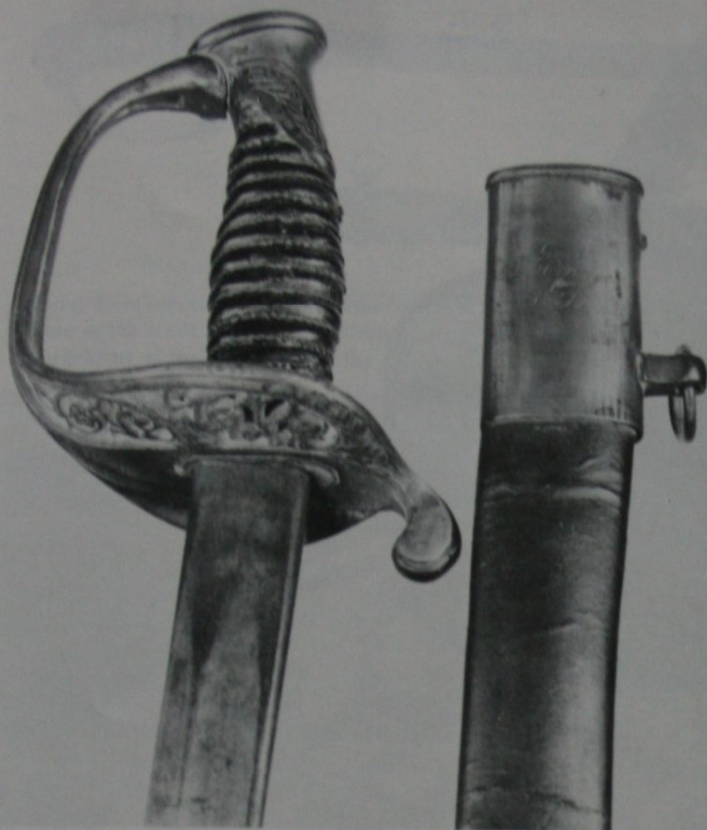
A rare few do contain the armorer's trade name as seen on some products of Boyle, Gamble & McFee, E.J. Johnston, and several others.

Generally, C.S. guards were copied from U.S. patterns, but often they possess a rough finish or contain flaws seldom, if ever, found on U.S. edged weapons.

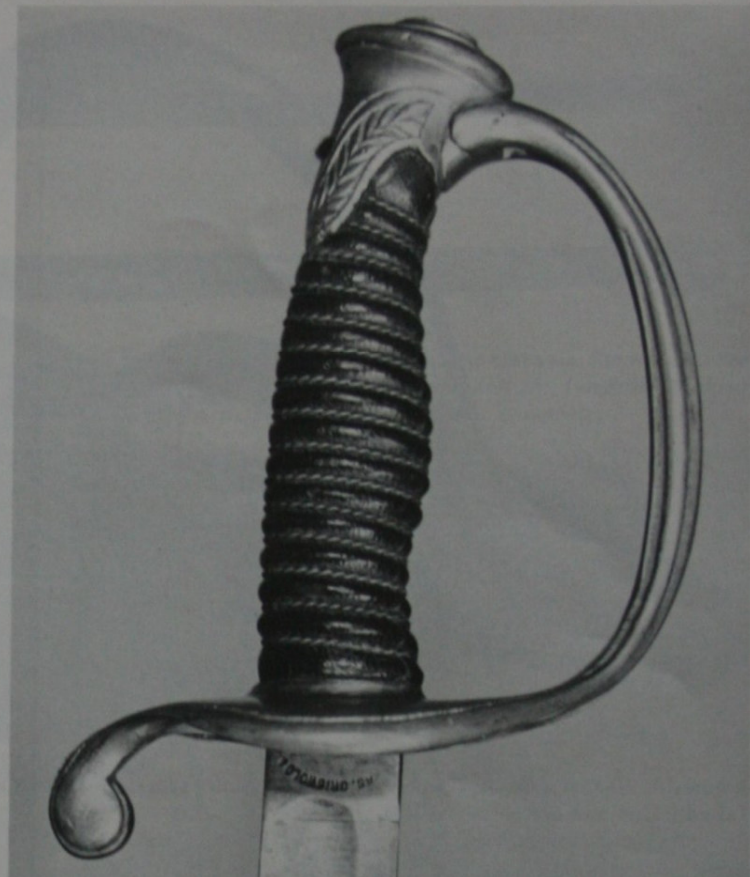
The grips of Confederate swords were likewise

modeled after the U.S. style. Again, variants were common. One notable difference with C.S. grips is that the ridges often slant from the front to the backside, directly opposite to the U.S. models. Also, instead of twisted brass wire, some C.S. grips were wound with a single strand of brass, copper, or iron wire. In many cases, scarcity compelled a maker to wrap his grips with oil cloth rather than leather. E.J. Johnston and W.J. McElroy produced a quantity of swords which had no wrapping; instead, their plain wooden grips were shaped, polished, then wound with wire. A number of cavalry sabres and naval cutlasses imported by the South were constructed with two-piece leather grips riveted onto the blade tang.

Southern-made scabbards often feature certain characteristics that render them unique. As with many Confederate swords, crude construction was almost a trademark. Lacking the machinery to produce seamless metal scabbards, they made scabbards with a brazed lap-over seam along the bottom edge. The throat, carrying rings, and drag on such scabbards were usually made of brass. A coating of maroon-colored lacquer was often applied to disguise the rough exterior, reduce gleam, and preserve the metal. A similar model was fabricated of tin rather than iron.



Sword and scabbard with the same number (204) stamped on the guard and on all brass components of the scabbard. This is a trademark of James Conning, Mobile, Ala. As with most of Conning's officer's swords, the reverse scabbard throat is engraved "Made by James Conning, Mobile". The blade fuller is unstopped, with a cutting edge that extends from the tip to approximately two inches from the guard. The obverse top scabbard mount (shown here) is engraved "Lieut. / R. M. Rogers, / from / L.S." (Photo courtesy of William A. Albaugh, III.)



Marked foot officer's sword made by the Thomas, Griswold & Co. of New Orleans, La. The company's trademark is stamped in the reverse ricasso and is partially obscured by the guard in this photograph. The grip has a pronounced center-swell, the blade is rudimentary stopped, and the fuller is rounded near the ricasso. (Photo courtesy of Don Tharpe.)

Another common type of C.S. scabbard was composed of stiff leather and brass mounts, markedly similar to the Federal issue model. The Northern version was sewn together at the reverse center of the scabbard while many Southern types were stitched along the top or bottom edge — a far simpler process for the poorly equipped Confederacy. The brass furniture of the Federal model was often gold plated, a feature seldom found with Confederate scabbards.

A bulky-looking wooden scabbard also sheathed many a Southern blade. Crude but functional, it generally bore brass or tin mounts and a maroon lacquer finish. The sources of these remain a matter of speculation.

To date, not a single maker of Confederate scabbards has been positively identified. Evidence indicates that few, if any, swordsmiths produced their own scabbards. It is believed they were acquired from other firms who specialized in that commodity. This would explain why identical scabbards sometimes sheath swords of different companies. The Boyle & Gamble style scabbard, for example, is often found coupled with Leech & Rigdon and other firms' blades.

Manufacturers

An inventory of the companies responsible for the production and procurement of Confederate swords is not yet possible. Far too many pieces of the puzzle have yet to be found. The loss of the South's records, compounded by the numerous sword makers who did not mark their merchandise, has left a fog clouding the origins of many C.S. swords. Unlike their Northern counterparts who were compelled by an Ordnance Department edict that all weapons carry the contractors name, few Confederate sword manufacturers marked their wares. Louis Haiman & Bro. turned out swords at the rate of 100 per week, according to *DeBow's Review* (May-August, 1862). And yet existing specimens are rare because only a few have been recognized as such.

Often, pedigree can be determined by comparing the distinctive characteristics of a questionable sword with one already identified. If a specimen from a particular maker is discovered to be marked, then unmarked swords of identical construction can be assumed to have originated with that firm. While far from infallible, this

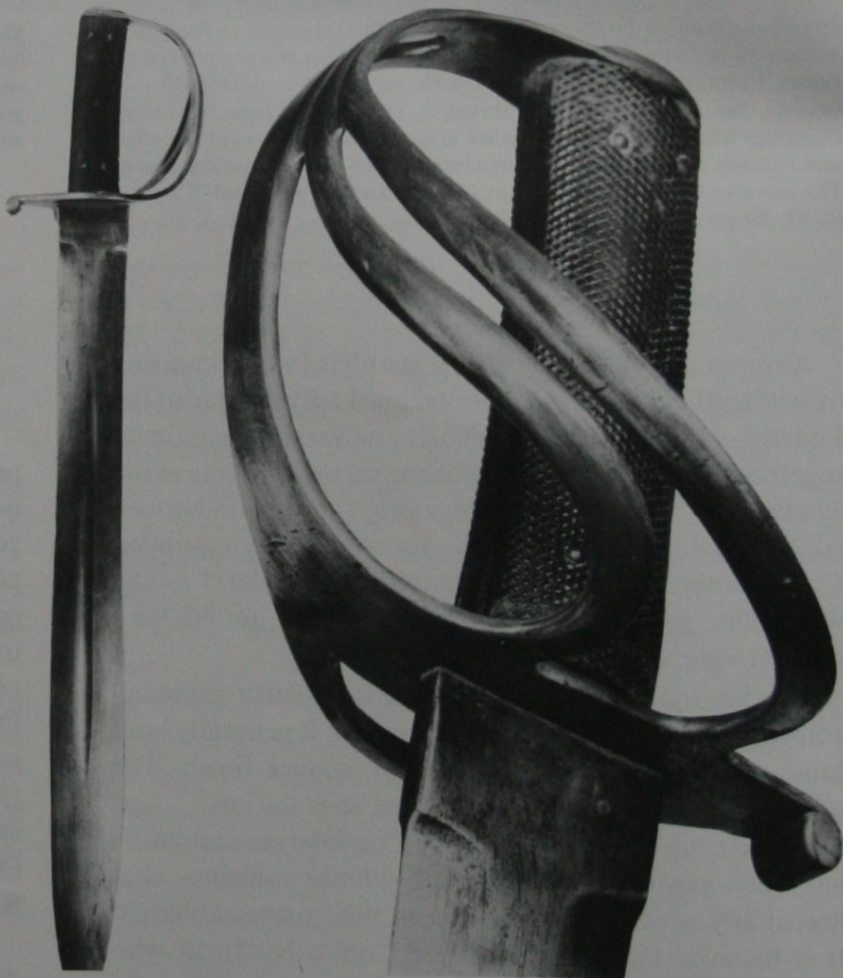


Underside view of a Boyle, Gamble & MacFee cavalry sabre copied after the U.S. Model 1860 cavalry sabre. The firm's name and address are cast in raised letters and are clearly visible.



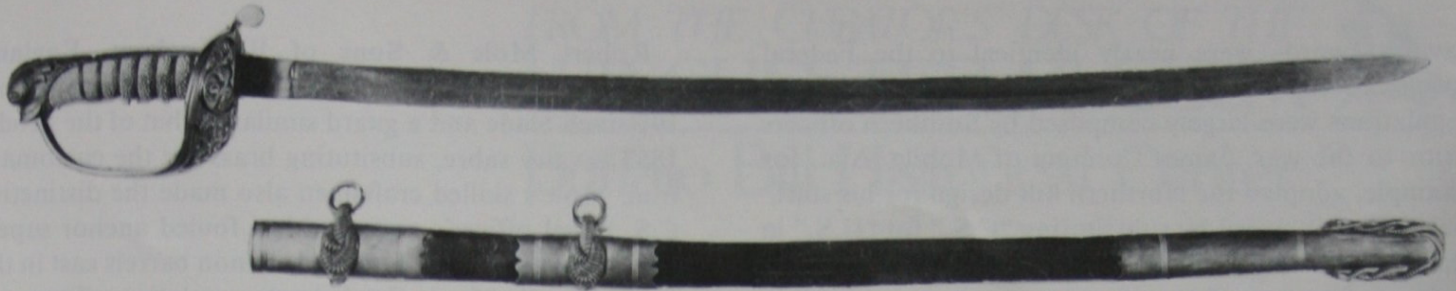
Unmarked staff/field officer's sword of Confederate manufacture, maker unknown. The pommel is undecorated and the knuckle guard has a slot for a sabre knot. The blade has an unstopped fuller and a flat back. Varieties of this unmarked type of sword are extant; some with the "CS" in the hilt facing the opposite direction as that shown in this specimen.

Photo courtesy of Don Tharpe)



Full length view, top, and close-up, bottom, of a Confederate naval cutlass made by Mole of Birmingham, England for Courtney & Tennant of South Carolina. The brass guard and leather grip are similar to the 1853 Model English cavalry sabre. Courtney & Tennant were military suppliers, not manufacturers, and a wide array of other military goods such as brass and hard rubber buttons were imported from Europe by this company.

(Photos courtesy of William A. Albaugh, III.)



(Above) Confederate States regulation naval officer's sword worn by John McIntosh Kell, Executive Officer of the C.S.S. Alabama. Stamped on the ricasso is the trade name and address, not of its maker, but of its exporter "Firmen & Sons, 153 Strand and 13 Conduit St., London". (Below) Enlargement of the guard shows the C.S.N. coat-of-arms and the hinged reverse counterguard. (Photos courtesy of William A. Albaugh, III.)



rule of thumb is considered reliable and is used extensively.

A meticulous examination of each sword is essential, however, as several wartime firms copied the designs of other Southern manufacturers. At this time it is impossible to determine who copied from whom. In fact, there is evidence to support the theory that certain firms were sub-contracted to make hilts and blades in the rough for others; hence the similarities. The brass guard of the College Hill ARsenal with raised letters "C.S.A." on the underside bears a strong resemblance to that of the

Nashville Plow Works staff/field officer's sword. B. Douglas & Co. of Columbia, S.C. produced a staff/field officer's sword hilt identical to the popular Boyle & Gamble model with a five-pointed star and wreathed "C.S." cast in the guard. Two sword makers in Macon, Ga., E.J. Johnston & Co. and W.J. McElroy, were closely connected. They both used blades with stopped fullers bearing similar hilts and scabbards.

One of the major obstacles to identifying C.S. swords is the close similarity many have to U.S. specimens. Confederate regulations for infantry, artillery, and

cavalry swords were nearly identical to the Federal specifications, which is understandable since U.S. Army regulations were largely composed by Southern officers prior to the war. James Conning of Mobile, Ala., for example, adopted the Northern hilt design for his staff/field officer's sword by substituting "C.S." for "U.S." in the guard.

Some Southern firms whose names are stamped or etched on C.S. swords had no connection with their manufacture. These were military outfitters or jewelers who purchased, finished, and marketed the products of another company. One such firm, Mitchell & Tyler of Richmond, obtained the bulk of their edged weapons from Boyle & Gamble for sale to the "carriage trade." Another, Hayden & Whilden of Charleston, S.C., decorated, then sold, swords made by a variety of companies. Courtney & Tennent, also from Charleston, contracted an English firm (Mole) to export products stamped with the Courtney & Tennent trade name and address. Even the large Southern concern of Leech & Rigdon occasionally dressed up another makers' goods with decorative etching and their own name on the blade.

A few manufacturers changed their trade names as the war progressed. Hyde & Goodrich of New Orleans reorganized in August 1861 as Thomas, Griswold & Co., but their style of manufacture remained essentially the same. Swords made by Sharp & Hamilton were initially stamped as such. Later, the name was changed to Nashville Plow Works. Products of Leech & Rigdon have been found with a variety of combinations including "Memphis Novelty Works" and "Novelty Works."

Three of the Confederacy's most prolific manufacturers were forcibly closed in the spring of 1862. Thomas, Griswold & Co. ceased operations upon the arrival of Farragut's naval squadron at New Orleans in April 1862. The Nashville Plow Works and their cross-town rival, the College Hill Arsenal, were also closed that same month as Union General Rosecrans advanced into central Tennessee. The existence today of numerous examples from these firms testifies to their brief, but energetic, careers.

The European sword market was heavily tapped by Southern contractors until squeezed off by the Union naval blockade. Prominent among foreign exporters was the English firm of Issac & Co. (Issac, Campbell & Co.) who shipped all types of military equipment to the Confederacy including the English cavalry sabre Model 1853 stamped "Issac & Co." on the back of the blade. An unknown quantity of English officer's swords displaying the name "S. Campbell & Co." (predecessor to Issac, Campbell & Co.) were imported by Halfmann & Taylor of Montgomery, Ala. The latter firm's name was etched on the reverse ricasso and an eagle with CSA on the breast surrounded by eleven stars was etched on the blade as well as the reverse counterguard.

Robert Mole & Sons of Birmingham, England produced a naval cutlass for Courtney & Tennent with a 19½-inch blade and a guard similar to that of the Model 1853 cavalry sabre, substituting brass for the customary iron. Mole's skilled craftsmen also made the distinctive C.S. naval officer's sword with a fouled anchor superimposed over a pair of crossed cannon barrels cast in the guard as called for in Confederate regulations. These are found with "Mole" stamped on the back of the blade and "Courtney & Tennent / Charleston, S.C." in two lines, enclosed in a rectangle and stamped on the ricasso.

A variant of this sword exists which does not carry the "Mole" stamp, but is believed to have been made by Mole or, possibly, Wilkinson of England. Etched on the ricasso is "Firmin & Sons, 153 Strand and Conduit St., London". Firmin, under contract to the Confederate Navy, was a supplier not a manufacturer.

Although the South imported many edged weapons, only a few foreign makers are known to have produced swords especially for the South. Devisme of Paris, France, who made the beautiful sword carried by Robert E. Lee, supplied the Confederacy with a quantity of sabres, but none, save Lee's bear any Confederate motifs or inscriptions. Without such, it is nearly impossible to label a foreign sword as Confederate.

W. Walsoneid of Solingen, Germany produced a non-commissioned officer's sword exclusively for the South that features a turn-down counterguard with raised letters "CS A". Apparently, Walsoneid exported cavalry sabres to the South, but there is no indication that their manufacture was intended for the South. Unfortunately, this is true for the majority of imported swords.

One can readily deduce from the preceding that the field of Confederate sword collecting is one which is fraught with challenge and risk. There are few hard and fast rules to guide the collector, and as Albaugh cautions, "It can be disastrous to use the words 'always' or 'never' as applied to any artifact." This is especially true of Confederate swords. And, sadly, the difficulties in identification are compounded by the disconcerting quantity of reproduction and fake "Confederate" swords on the market for which the collector must always be on guard.

As new data trickles in and is disseminated by the collecting fraternity, more and more C.S. swords are emerging from obscurity and neglect. But it will remain for future generations to complete the puzzle of Confederate swords and thereby do justice to their role in the swords' last epic encounter, the American Civil War.

This article was reviewed for publication by renowned Confederate weapons expert and author, William A. Albaugh, III. To him go the authors' sincere thanks.