



Weapons of Choice



Civil War Cavalry

Cavalry during the Civil war was utilized for a multitude of purposes. Typically cavalry screened the movements of its army, reconnoitered enemy forces and positions, pursued a retreating foe, generally harassed and fatigued opposing troops, distracted the opposition so as to mask the true intentions of its own army's movements, and raided behind enemy lines. The Civil War cavalryman was required to be proficient in the handling and use of firearms. He was expected "to fire frequently at a mark, and to handle his weapon with accuracy and effect at all gaits and in all situations." Civil War cavalry depended on speed, agility, and maneuverability to accomplish its varied operations and required weaponry smaller, lighter and less cumbersome than the musket of the infantryman.

Carbines

Carbines were most often the weapon of choice for cavalrymen during the Civil War. They were of intermediate weight and length. They were shorter, lighter, and more maneuverable than the musket of the infantryman and thus easily fired from the saddle for extended periods. Featured here are four different types of carbines. They represent the wide variety of designs in

use during the Civil War. Carbines were usually breech-loading; the means of sealing the joint at the breech was the distinguishing feature of a design. Failure in this specific enabled gas to escape at the joint – a serious defect that impacted the range, accuracy and efficiency of the weapon.

Jenks Carbine



William Jenks received patent number 747 in May or 1838, for the development of a breech-loading small arms system. Jenks' first breech-loading weapon was a .64 caliber smoothbore flintlock carbine, which he tested before government officials for possible adoption by the United States. A slow rate of fire prevented the weapon from being employed in heavy numbers. A total of only 100 were purchased by the United States in 1839. Flintlock ignition

was replaced by percussion for Jenks' arms beginning in 1841. A distinctive feature of Jenks' percussion arms is the hammer. Commonly called the 'mule ear,' Jenks' percussion lock employed a side hammer that struck horizontally from right to left. This was only the second breech-loading arm acquired for government use and the sole weapon with the side hammer feature.

Joslyn Carbine



Firearms inventor and manufacturer, Benjamin F. Joslyn, received patent number 13,507 on August 28, 1855, for designing a breech loading rifle and carbine. The Model 1855 Joslyn carbine was a single-shot, breech-loading percussion weapon. It fired a .54 caliber bullet. Subsequent modifications to the design resulted in the Model 1862, and 1864 versions, which replaced the percussion system with the rimfire system. Between January 1860, and July 1864, the United States government contracted to

Purchase 11,261 Joslyn carbines of various models at a total cost of \$280,128. While government testing of the Joslyn returned favorable results after thousands of firings, its use in the field proved much less effective. The complexity of the breechblock design and an improper understanding of its usage caused the mechanism to blow open when fired. In addition, there was a difficulty chambering some types of ammunition.

Sharps Carbine



From the time the first Sharps carbines were issued to the United States military in 1854, they were regarded as reliable and sturdy weapons. The breech was opened by moving the lever – which also served as the trigger guard – down and forward. A single .52 caliber bullet in a paper or linen cartridge was then inserted into the breech. The distinguishing characteristics of this weapon were the slanting breech and the pellet priming system. Christian

Sharps received patent number 9308 on October 5, 1852, for these unique innovations. Subsequently, Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Company had approximately 4,500 of the Model 1852 made between 1853 and 1855, by Robbins and Lawrence of Windsor, Vermont. A slight modification resulted in the Model 1853, of which approximately 10,300 were manufactured in Vermont and Connecticut between 1854 and 1858.

Starr Carbine



Ebenezer Starr, of New York City, was from a prominent small arms manufacturing family. The Starr family of Connecticut produced weapons from the late 18th century through the Civil War. Nathan Starr provided tens of thousands of contract weapons to the United States Government during the first half of the 19th century. His son Ebenezer developed and patented a carbine bearing the family name. The Starr carbine saw wide service during the Civil War. The United States government purchased over 20,000 of the Starr carbine. Although some

Ordnance department officials considered it a superior weapon compared to the Sharps carbine, it never achieved the same popularity. The Starr carbine bore a heavy resemblance to the well-respected Sharps and was similar in function, but was criticized for poor performance in the field. The vast majority of Starr carbines were percussion weapons that used a linen cartridge and .54 caliber bullet; however, approximately 5,000 rimfire arms were also supplied to the government.