

The U.S. Model 1847 Musketoon

by Maurice Garb

I would like to present to you the Model 1847 Musketoon as I see it. I do not intend to go into extreme details, but merely describe 9 pieces in my collection and two others owned by fellow members of the Society. I propose to present to you the three basic patterns, then the resulting alterations. I am also prepared to further describe to you two alterations in ignition principles, and a brief evaluation of the Musketoon.

The more intricate details I shall leave to Bob Reilly, Claude Fuller and George Moller.

By Act of Congress in March of 1844, the Second Regiment of Dragoons was reactivated to mounted status. A more suitable arm was advocated by the Secretary of War to replace the Hall breechloader, which had by then fallen into disfavor. The new arm was to be a .69 caliber, muzzle-loading, percussion musketoon which finally evolved into what we now know as the Model 1847 Musketoon. This Musketoon was to be standard with the Artillery and Sappers and Miners as well.

The entire production of the M1847 in the three basic patterns was assigned to the Springfield Arsenal; this figure was finally to amount to less than 11,000 pieces.

Upon recommendation of the Ordnance Department, the Secretary of War authorized and approved the adoption of the M1847 Musketoon on March 12, 1847. Production records indicate 10,892 Arms were built and assembled by the Springfield Arsenal between the years of 1848 and 1859 as follows:

- 3359 Arms for Artillery between 1848 and 1856
- 830 Arms for Sappers between 1848 and 1856
- 6703 Arms for Cavalry between 1848 and 1854

The starting date of 1848 for the Artillery Musketoon could be in error, because I personally have seen three of these with 1847 lock dates, including my own. George Moller, I leave this feature of dates to you in your forthcoming book.

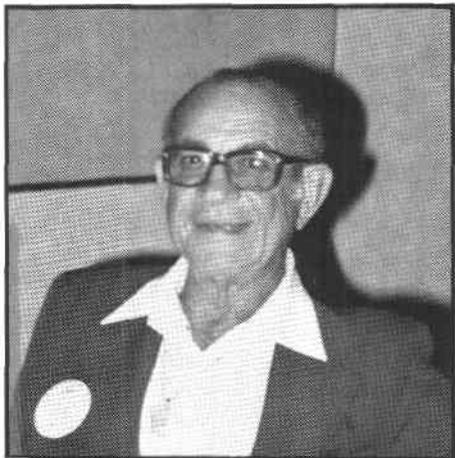
Let us now turn to the basic specifications and technical aspects of the Musketoon as we see it today.

1. The Artillery Musketoon

Overall Length - 41"

Stock - 38" long of American Walnut and oil stained, with an 8" comb; weight, 6 lbs. 8 oz.

All furniture is iron, finished bright. The barrel is 26" long, round, with V.P. and eaglehead proof marks. The barrel is dated, with the lock, such as "1847." Most specimens have a



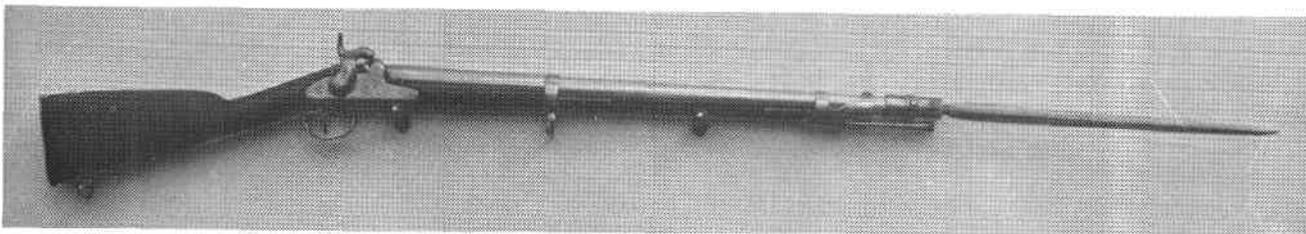
bayonet stud under the forward part of the barrel near the muzzle to accept the M1842 scalloped bayonet, or a shorter, special one, similarly patterned, both with U.S. marks. The barrel is held to the stock by 2 flat bands; the upper is double-strapped with a 1/2" lip underneath, extending backwards. The double strap is separated by a scroll design and the brass blade sight is on top of the forward strap. This upper band is 2 9/16" long and the straps are 1/2" wide. The lower band is 5/8" wide on top with 1" lip underneath, extending forward.

The sling swivels are mounted with the upper one attached to the lower band, and the other swivel located just forward of the toe of the butt, on a 2 1/2" plate screwed to the butt. The butt plate is flat, 4 1/2" long and marked "U.S." on the tang.

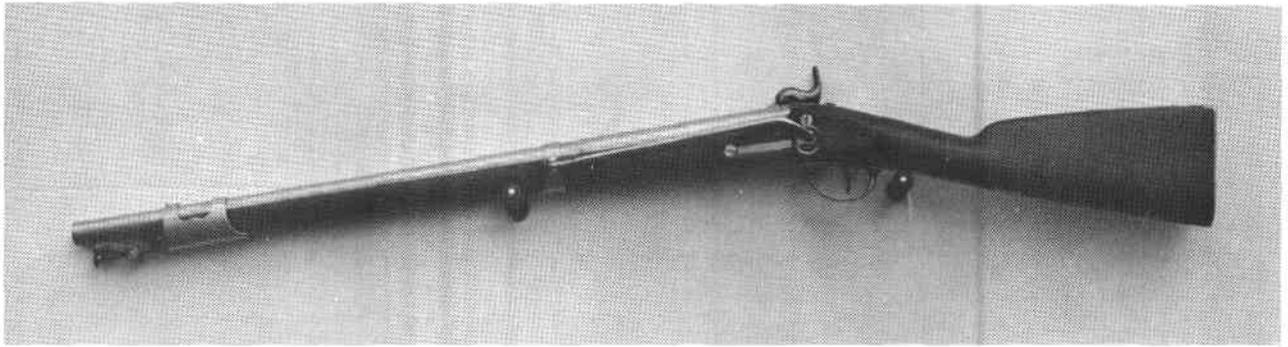
The trumpet head ram-rod is 25 3/4" long and is secured to the rod channel by the bands and a spoon spring beneath and in the stock. The bands are retained by conventional springs extending in opposite directions, the top one being a stud type.

The lock-plate is 5 1/4" long, is flat, bevelled, and set to bevel height. The plate is marked in front of the hammer with a spread eagle over U.S. to the rear of the hammer, in three vertical lines is stamped SPRING / FIELD / and the date, such as 1847. Inspector's marks are found on the left side of the stock opposite the lock.

The 9 1/2" trigger plate supports the detachable bow which is held by 2 round spanner-type nuts. The trigger protrudes through a split in this plate.



1. The Artillery Musketoon



2. The Cavalry Musketoon

2. The Cavalry Musketoon

Although basically the same in construction as the Artillery Musketoon, certain features of the Cavalry set it apart.

The differences are noted as follows:

The stock is $38\frac{1}{2}$ " long and extends $\frac{1}{2}$ " beyond the upper barrel band ($\frac{1}{2}$ " longer than the Artillery).

The ramrod is held in place by a swivel lug which is brazed and attached to the barrel $\frac{3}{4}$ " below the muzzle, underneath the barrel.

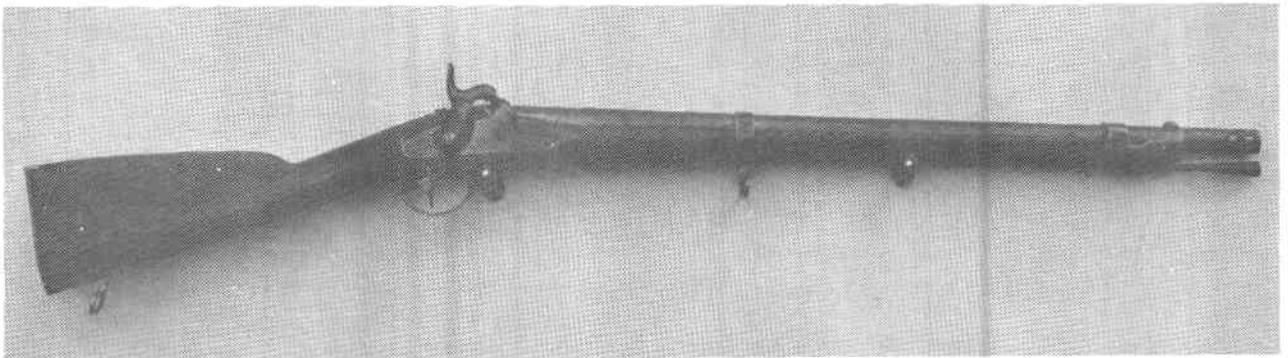
All furniture is brass, polished bright, and quite as appealing to the eye as the M1841 "Mississippi Rifle," its immediate predecessor.

Although the upper band is of double strap construction, it is only $2\frac{1}{4}$ " long with a $\frac{5}{8}$ " lower lip extending back, thereby

having a length of $2\frac{7}{8}$ ". The straps are separated by a single scallop design identified only with this Musketoon.

The flat headed ramrod is held in position by a curved swivel assembly supporting a ring which permits the rod to slide up and down either in the rod channel or, with manipulation, into the barrel to set the charge. This technique was devised originally to prevent the loss of the rod while reloading when mounted upon a horse. The Cavalry Musketoon was never designed to accept a bayonet. No sling swivels are evident here.

The lower band needs no spring because of a lug on the left side. Attached here and extending back $9\frac{1}{4}$ " is the sling ring rod and ring which is held in place by a screw in the rear lockplate.



3. The Sappers & Miners Musketoon

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This Musketoon is almost exactly the same as the Artillery arm except as noted—here we return to the sling swivels, the spoon spring for the ramrod and the trumpet head ramrod, as well as the iron furniture.

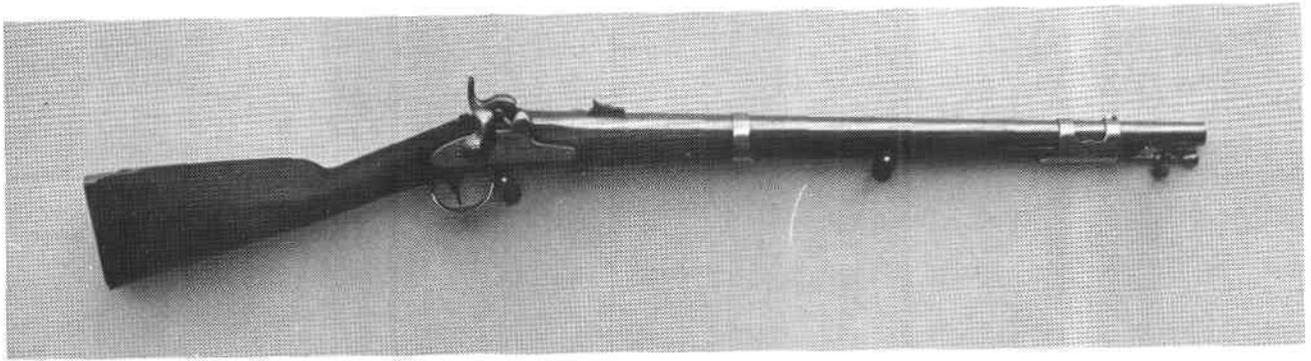
The major difference between the Sappers and Artillery is a feature which sets the Sappers apart as a separate arm. This is the $26\frac{3}{4}$ " double edged, brass hilted saber bayonet and its attaching system to the barrel, which is unique. When attached together, the arms takes on an incredible length of 62".

At $\frac{1}{4}$ " below the muzzle is a $\frac{5}{8}$ " double headed lug with square shoulders on the right side of the barrel. An additional lug is attached to the lower portion of the scalloped top band somewhat larger in size than the barrel attachment. Corresponding channels appear in the hilt of the Roman type bayonet to firmly anchor it into position. One other feature which appears at this point to add distinction to the Sappers is a small

square-shouldered lug atop the barrel located $5\frac{1}{8}$ " back from the muzzle with an accompanying cut-out at the rear of the top band where the band fits around the post, thereby creating a locking system. All of these lugs are soldered in place, and evidence of the brazing remains in place in outline even after, for whatever reason, the lugs have been removed, as in the case of the 228 arms recorded as being altered from Sappers to Artillery. Two arms altered later are in the speaker's collection which have clear outlines of removed lugs.

So much for the three basic pieces that we recognize as the Model 1847 Musketoons in Artillery, Cavalry, and Sappers Miners Configuration.

At this point, most collectors would be satisfied to stop; however, the story of the Musketoons continues, for, as its predecessor, the "Mississippi Rifle," many alterations followed in an attempt to update and modernize them. These were attempts to make this arm as functional as possible.



4. Cavalry Musketoon Alteration

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Let us now look at the Cavalry Musketoon for one of its most notable alterations—that of the “Chain Alteration” or the “1851 Chain Alteration.”

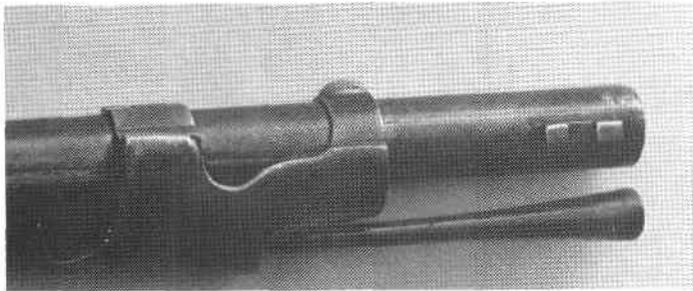
Either through carelessness or ignorance, approximately 1/3 of the Cavalry Arms were disabled at one time or another by breaking and/or losing the swivel screw, thereby freeing the ramrod from any restraint and rendering it free to move in any direction: upward, downward, and lost. This could be embarrassing, especially on horseback!

This was remedied very simply by another device, equally awkward: simply attaching a short brass chain to a stud under the forward part of the barrel on one end, and a loop on the

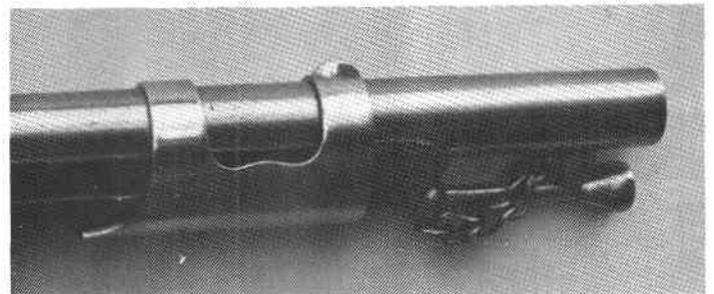
other end of the chain through which the rod was placed. This device prevented further loss of the rod, but did not prevent its aimless flopping around should careless hands fumble it. This, too, was embarrassing.

With the advent of the elongated Minie bullet, some of these Cavalry Arms were rifled. To reduce the excessive recoil which now occurred, an 8 oz. slug of hot lead was poured into the butt! The quick shrinking of the wood around this hot lead caused one or more splits in this area of the stock. This further distinguished musketoons so altered and is quite readily detected.

At the same time, these now-rifled Cavalry arms were equipped with a long range rear sight.



3A. Muzzle of Sappers & Miners Musketoon



4A. The 1851 Chain Alteration

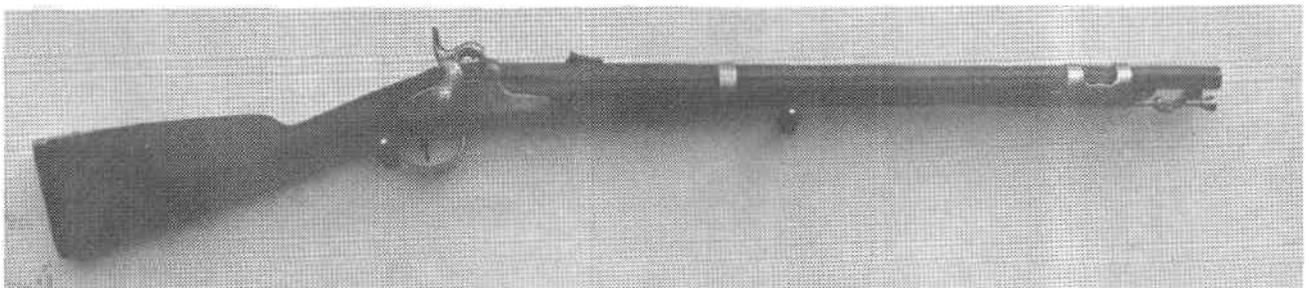
5. Another Alteration

Another alteration to the Cavalry arm can be mentioned here: this musketoon was originally an 1851 chain alteration, as is evident, however, the sling rod and ring have been removed. The long range rear sight remains as well as the 8 oz. lead slug and resulting splits in the stock. This arm has the appearance of what I call “Cavalry alteration to Artillery.”

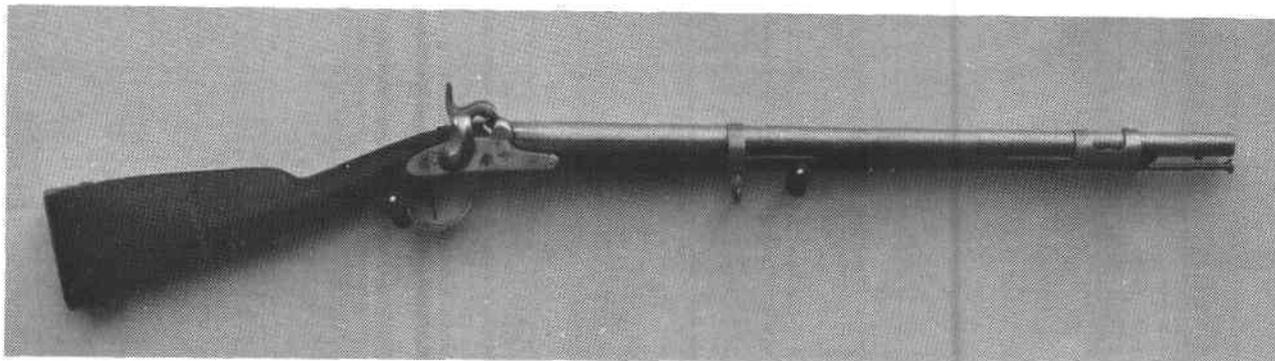
Of special significance is a large JMC that is stamped on the butt plate tang (additionally, many initials are carved into the wood). Through the efforts of the State of Mississippi Depart-

ment of Archives, it was learned that JMC were the initials of Jefferson Military College of Natchez, Mississippi. Several other items with this stamp are in the Museum in Jackson, Mississippi. Jefferson Military College still stands today.

What I believe is that we have here a “School Gun” of the Civil War era; I also believe this was a local alteration. Do we have also a Confederate secondary martial? Is there such a thing as a Confederate secondary martial? Or is this a genuine Confederate martial?



5. Another Alteration



6. The Next Alteration

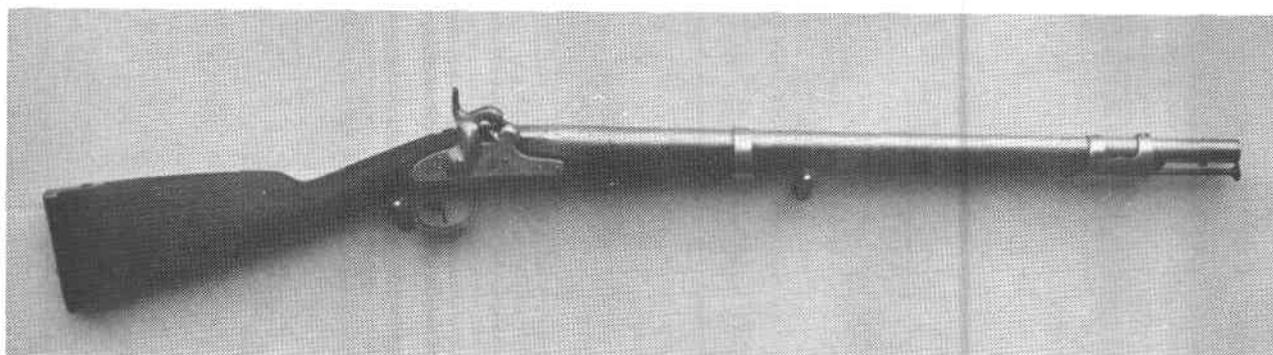
6. The Next Alteration

The next alteration to Artillery from Cavalry was simply done: here we start with a pure Cavalry, remove the ramrod swivel device, and add a bayonet lug under the barrel for the M1842 bayonet. The flat-headed ramrod is retained and the

spring spoon installed, as well as the sling swivels. The sling bar and ring are absent.

Therefore, no rod swivel, no chain, no rifling, no sighting, no lead slug, no sling bar and ring, etc.

Simple, isn't it?



7. Still Another Alteration

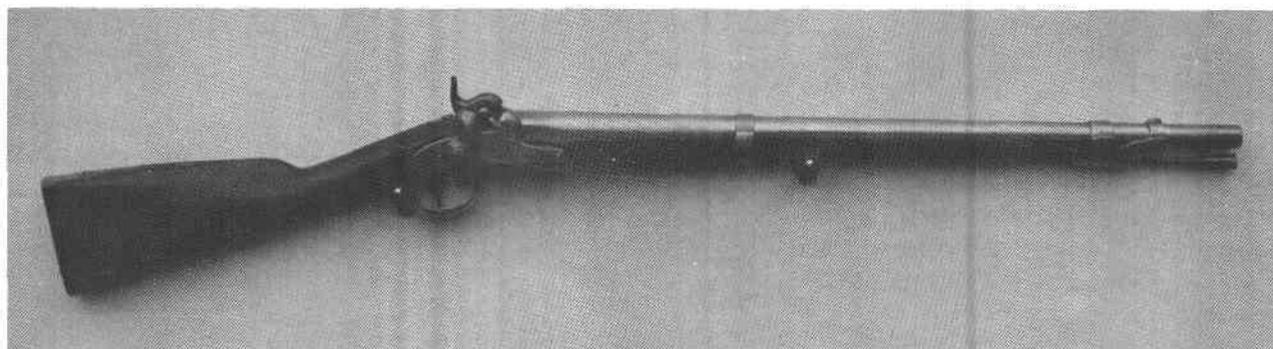
7. Still Another Alteration

Another alteration to Artillery from Cavalry follows the same pattern.

Here again we retain the Cavalry stock and brass furniture, and the flat-headed ramrod. The bayonet lug is added, as is

the spring spoon. Again, we have no rod swivel, no chain, no rifling, no sighting, no lead slug, and no sling bar or ring, but the bayonet lug *is* added here.

I told you it was simple.



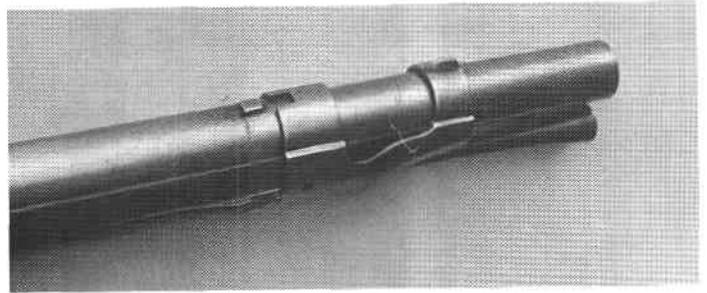
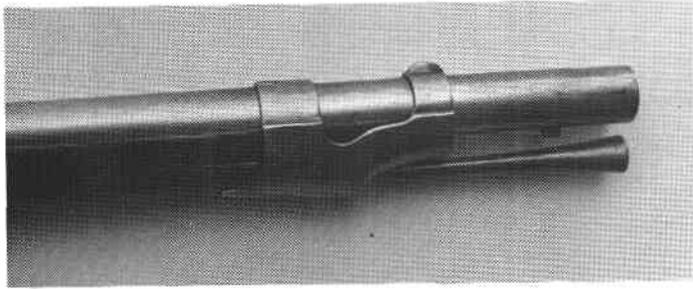
8. One of the Most Desirable

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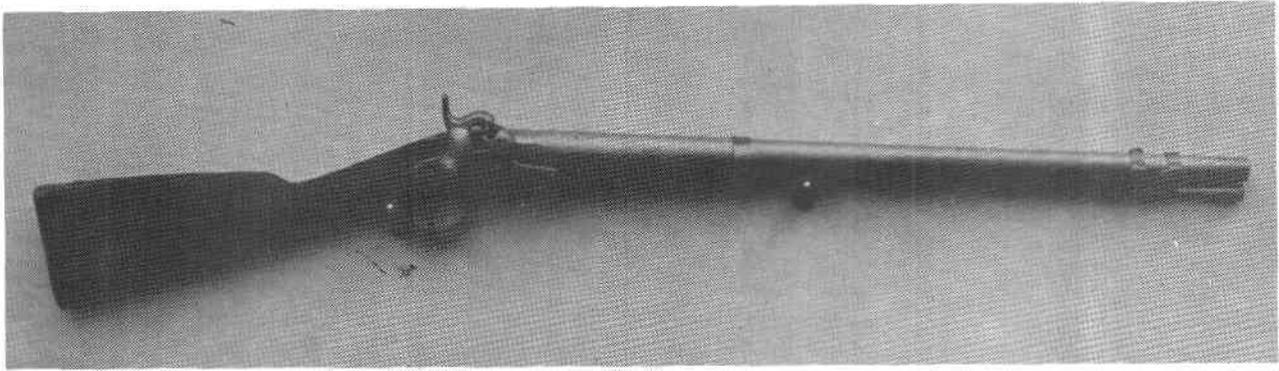
This is one of the most desirable alterations to Artillery. As previously mentioned, some 228 of the 630 Sappers Musketoons were altered to Artillery. Here we see that the unusual system of attaching the Roman-hilted Saber bayonet has been removed; the stud on the barrel and the corresponding stud on the band have been removed. However, the outline of the brazing remains on the barrel as proof positive of its original design. The outline of the stud on the upper band has been removed com-

pletely, for the band is smooth, I suppose by careful buffing. But the small locking stud atop the barrel and the corresponding slot in the upper band is still retained: this is another identifying feature of the original configuration of this piece.

The wood and furniture remain as the original Sappers. One oddity, as I see it, is that the original swivels have been removed. The swivel plate remains, though, and a slight scar on the bottom of the lower band. Why this was done is unknown to me.



3B & 3C. More Views of the Top Band of the Sappers & Miners Musketoon



9. A Puzzling Alteration

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The next alteration is a puzzle to me; it is perhaps one of a half dozen known, and rates high on my list.

George Moller has done extensive research on this variation, and further explanation will be available in his forthcoming book.

Claude Fuller, in his "Springfield Shoulder Arms," page 10, Plate XX, calls this a "Special Model 1842 Navy Musketoon," but warns us that no mention of this arm is found in the records, and believes it was made up mostly of extra artillery parts (except for the top band).

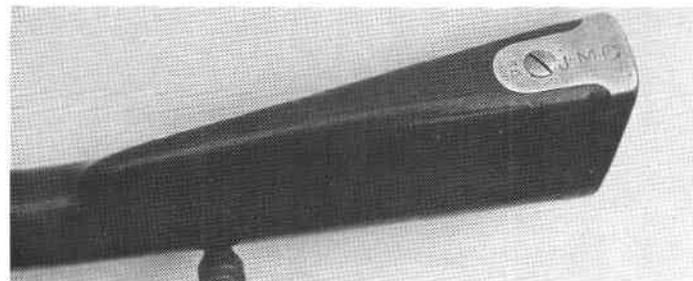
Norm Flayderman, in his *Guide to Antique American Firearms . . . and Their Values*, page 421, says: "the so-called Navy Musketoon is quickly distinguished by its very narrow double strap top barrel band, completely different from any other found on the 1847's. The lower band is heavier and thicker than usual, and found without the grooves or flutings on the outside. Band springs are notably shorter and the iron side plate has the configuration as seen on the Cavalry Carbine, although no provision is made for the ring bar. A single screw fastens the lower trigger plate instead of the usual two screws.

Most specimens observed are dated 1851."

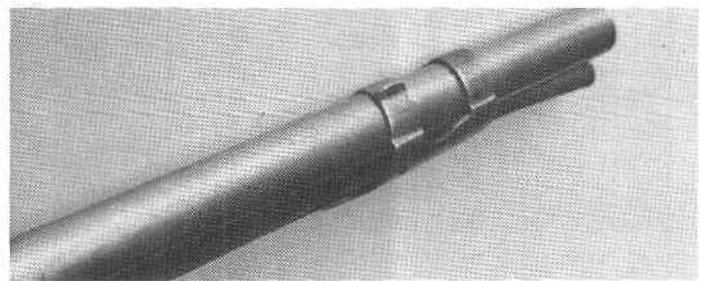
This specimen is dated "1847" on the back, and "1848" on the barrel. The wood is definitely Cavalry, having been shortened flush with the top band. The barrel is Sappers, for again we see the brazing outline on the barrel for the lug for the bayonet. Although the top band has been changed, the Sapper band and barrel locking device is still evident. There is a second screw hole under the trigger plate tang, obviously unused. Fuller adds that since this one was for navy use, swivels were not necessary. The proof positive fact that there was a so-called Navy Musketoon is borne out by one bit of evidence: at the lower end of the barrel, beside the plug, is clearly stamped a navy anchor!

Let's review here: Cavalry wood; Artillery configuration, hardware and ramrod; Sappers barrel; new type top band, and single-screw-held trigger tang. This has got to be a very desirable piece.

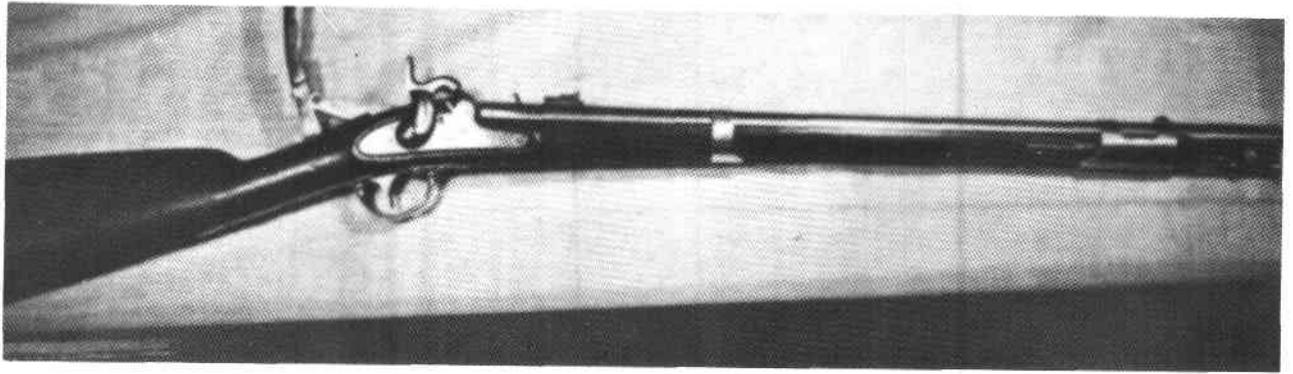
Perhaps the most usual alterations of early arms are where the ignition system is altered to make it a better weapon. The idea is to make it more efficient, or update it, so to speak; few were ever a success.



5A. "J.M.C." Initials on 1851 Alteration



9A. Barrel and Band Alteration of No. 9



10. The Merrill Alteration

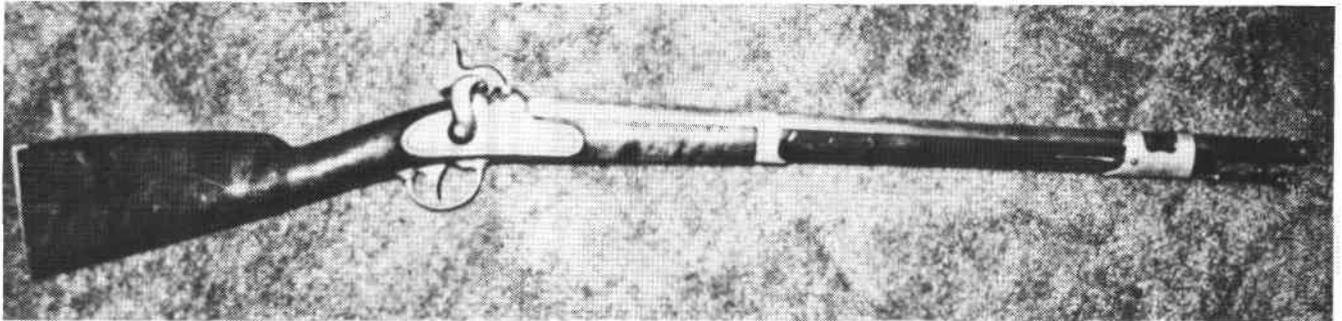
10. Merrill Alteration

This one is Jim Altemus' Musketoon with a Merrill Alteration.

This was accomplished by the removal of the breech plug and tang of the barrel, and a 6" long Merrill Mechanism was inserted and screwed in, and recessed into the stock, thereby weakening the stock considerably at the wrist. An operating lever and latch was added to the top of the barrel just in front of the lock. A reinforcing screw was threaded into this device from the lockplate side, thereby eliminating the rear side plate screw.

By pulling backwards on the large oval lever latch and pulling it up and back, the chamber is exposed for the paper cartridge. By pushing the lever forward and down, the breech plunger is forced forward, driving the cartridge into the proper position under the nipple, which, when capped, makes the arm ready to fire. The opening lever is marked on top: J.H. Merrill, Balto/Pat. July 1858 in 2 lines.

Please note this device is on the Cavalry Musketoon with the 1851 "Chain Alteration"; the speaker knows of only one other in existence.



11. The Gedney Primer Alteration

11. The Gedney Pellet Primer

Another ignition alteration occurs on an original Cavalry Musketoon with the ramrod swivel intact. This is from the collection of Bill Gerber.

An amount of inletting is necessary behind the lock to accommodate the priming hammer just behind the regular hammer. This priming hammer feeds the priming pellets up to the face of the hammer one at a time as the hammer falls. The pellets are fed through a rectangular tube and pushed forward by a spring affair attached as a clip. The spring-fed tube is a part of the priming device, and is attached at the top. The priming pellet was carried the full length of the hammer face to nipple, thereby igniting the cartridge.

The full picture of this device is not at all clear in the mind of the speaker as the only known one is on Bill's Musketoon. Any member more familiar with the device can help clarify the situation immensely.

The Gedney Pellet Primer was patented on March 15, 1859, by the M.C. Priming Co., of New York.¹

This alteration had to have failed, for if not, where are the others. Could this possibly be "one-of-a-kind?"

Commentary

Unfortunately, the ready acceptance of the Musketoon by

the troops was never a fact. The 412 grain bullet and 75 grain powder charge created a wallop most shoulders could not take. Mounted men complained of the easily broken swivel screws which caused easy loss of ramrods. Even the chain repair did not prevent the aimless flopping of a dropped ramrod, which they considered too short to begin with. Many complaints were heard that the loosely packed ball would roll out of the barrel when it was inverted across the shoulder. Target shooting became a joke (due to its inaccuracy) and combat shooting was disastrous! Very few compliments were heard: everything was Bitch! Bitch! Bitch!

With the arrival of the Sharps Carbine and other sophisticated arms, the Musketoon gradually faded away, straight to oblivion.

In 1907 the Cavalry Musketoon sank even lower when Bannerman offered them to the public at the price of \$3.85 each "in good second-hand condition."

However that may be—

Let me say that I find my nine Musketoons have given me a great deal of pleasure and a whole lot of satisfaction. I only wish I had more to be proud of. Two more, at least.

Thank you.