THE STORY OF CONFEDERATE CARBINES

by John M. Murphy, M.D.

In discussing the subject of Confederate Carbines it is appropriate that we should briefly consider the general background of the Southern Confederacy, its resources and the men who so valiantly fought its battles.

The South, as a whole, was primarily an agrarian community. Within the borders of the Confederacy there were practically no facilities for the manufacture of arms other than the former U. S. arsenal at Fayetteville and the government arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The Tredegar Iron Works at Richmond, Virginia, was the only rolling mill in the South at the onset of the war.

The average Southerner lived an outdoor life and many were accomplished horsemen and hunters. It was only natural that, with the advent of hostilities, many Southerners gravitated to the cavalry, taking their own mounts with them and probably taking along as well, a polyglot assortment of rifles, pistols and shotguns.

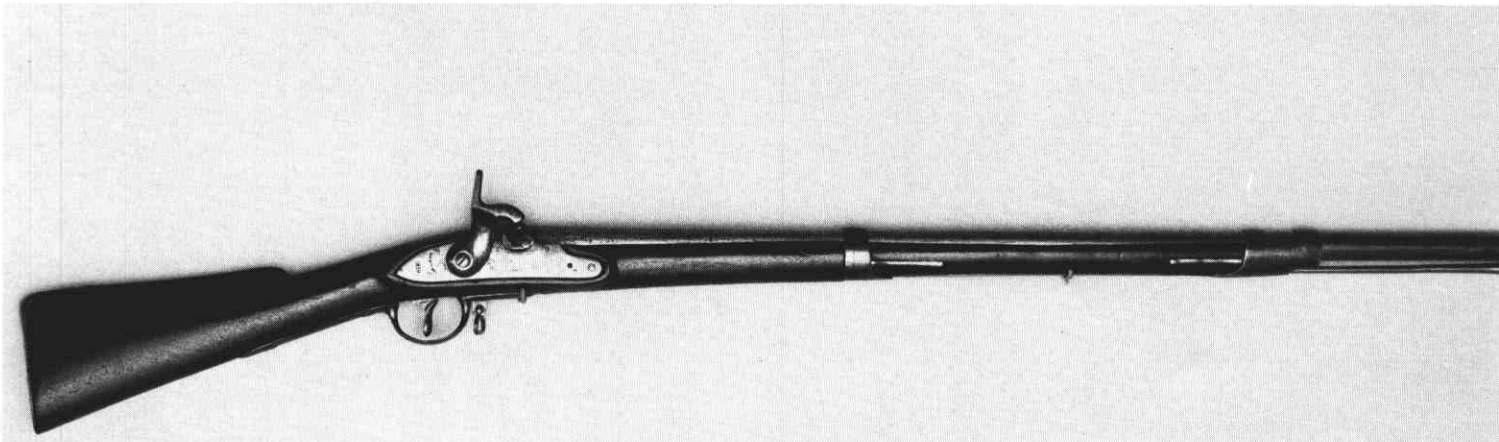
The carbine eventually evolved as a necessary weapon peculiarly suited for use by mounted troops. This weapon proved superior to the shotgun and gave increased range and accuracy over the pistol. It could be used either mounted or dismounted and enabled dismounted cavalry to approximate the fire power of infantry.

The subject of Confederate carbines in the broadest sense would actually embrace the entire field of Confederate long arms manufacture, as almost any rifle or musket could be cut down to carbine length. There are examples of shotguns which were cut to carbine length and had sling swivels added. There are Kentucky rifles which were similarly altered. One also encounters carbines made up of an assortment of components. Such could well have been of Confederate origin but one never really knows for sure.

In this discussion I will limit myself to carbines which, with reasonable certainty, were produced within the Confederacy for use by Confederate forces. I will, for the most part, keep to those pieces which were originally designed as carbines at the time of their manufacture. Where possible I will give some background data but I will primarily lay emphasis on the physical descriptive characteristics of the various carbines with the hope that this will be of value in the study of these rare weapons.

In 1798 the State of Virginia established an armory at Richmond, Virginia and, in the ensuing twenty years or so, arms of all types were produced. All firearms were originally flintlocks and the muskets were iron mounted. These muskets had a double strap front band and the barrel bands were retained by springs set into the stock. The lockplates forward of the hammer were stamped "VIRGINIA" over "MANUFACTORY" in script and "RICHMOND" over the date behind the hammer. About 1822 this armory fell into disuse and, in the following years, a number of weapons

Figure 1. A Virginia Manufactory Musketoon. The lock plate is dated 1819. The number "77" appears on most parts.



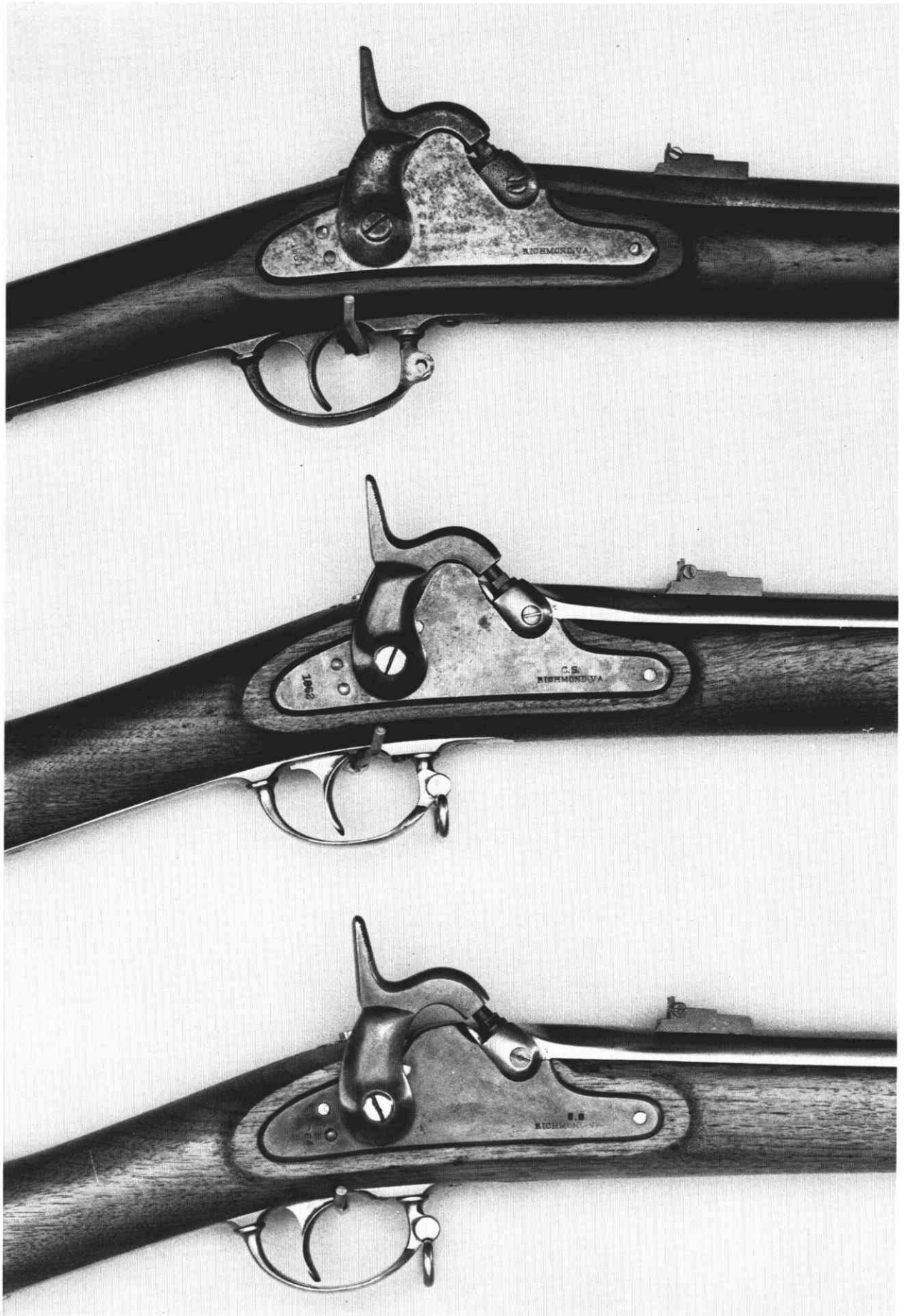


Figure 2. Three basic types of Richmond lockplates.

were kept in storage there. In 1860, with the threat of impending conflict, the armory was restored and refurbished and, with the addition of machinery captured at Harpers Ferry in 1861, became the principal armory in the South. At this armory a number of flintlock muskets and rifles which had been in storage were altered to percussion and some were cut down to musketoon or carbine length and issued to Confederate troops. (figure 1).

The single most important event for the manufacture of arms within the Confederacy was the capture of the U. S. Arsenal and Armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, by forces of the State of Virginia in April 1861. Everything seized, including machinery and parts, was transported to Richmond, Virginia. The machinery for making the rifled musket, caliber .58, was retained by the State of Virginia and eventually installed in the Virginia armory. A quantity of parts was also retained by the State of Virginia. Machinery for the manufacture of short rifles, caliber .54, of the Mississippi type, model 1841, was sent to the armory at Fayetteville, North Carolina. At first, guns turned out by the State of Virginia, had lockplates of a high "humpback" contour obtained from parts captured at Harpers Ferry and originally intended to incorporate a Maynard tape primer device but, as used by the Confederacy, did not have this mechanism. These early type lockplates were stamped "RICHMOND VA" forward of the hammer and the date "1861" to the rear of the hammer. I have designated this as Type I Richmond Lockplate. (see figure 2).

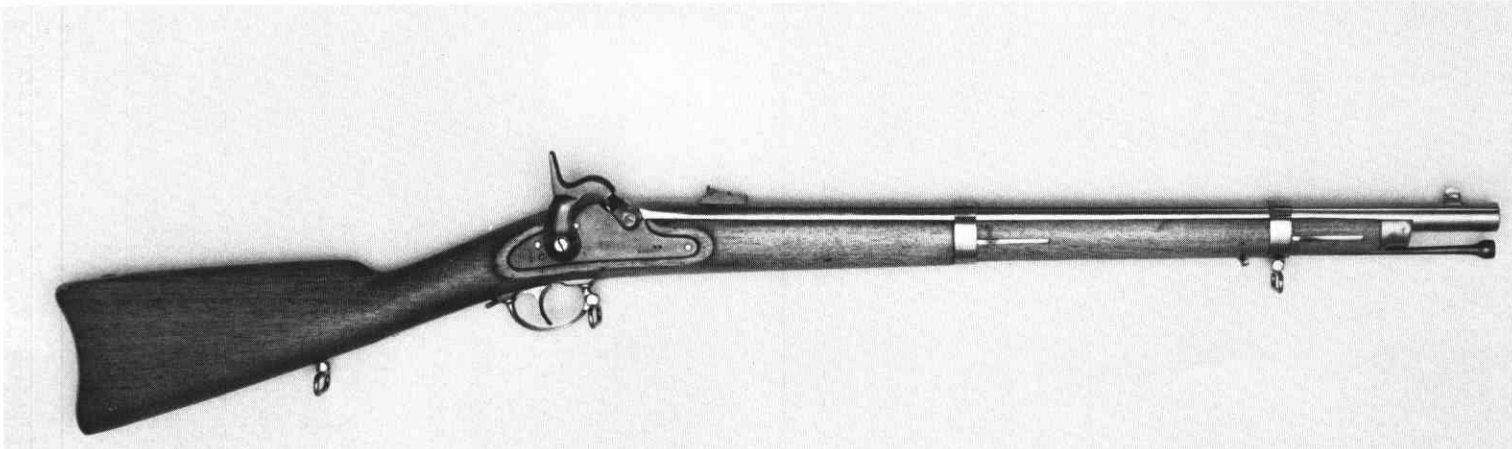
On August 23, 1861, all Virginia State ordnance was taken over by the Confederate government following which the Virginia Armory was known as the Richmond Armory. Lockplates of the same high "humpback" contour continued to be used but the stamping "C.S" was added over the "RICHMOND VA" forward of the hammer with the date "1862" to the rear of the hammer. This is designated as Type II Richmond Lockplate.

In 1862 a change in the contour of the Richmond lockplates was made. This consisted of a reduction in height of the high humpback by about three-eights of an inch, indicating that a new die, no longer suitable for a Maynard primer device, was being used. The markings continued to be the same as on Type II. This is designated as Type III Richmond Lockplate. Lockplates bearing the date "1862" have been observed in both Type II and Type III. Lockplates of Type III continued to be made at the Richmond Armory until the fall of the city in 1865.

Richmond carbines of a standard pattern were probably made up from rifled musket parts, perhaps using damaged or imperfect barrels and stocks which were felt to be unfit for the longer weapons.

This specimen shown in figure 3 has survived the years in virtually mint, unfired condition and affords an excellent opportunity to study its characteristics and markings. The overall length is 40½ inches and the barrel length, 25 inches. The caliber is .58. The lockplate and hammer are casehardened in mottled colors. Most of the Richmond carbines I have observed have Type III lockplates as described above. The lockplate forward of the hammer is stamped "C. S." over "RICHMOND VA" in two lines. To the rear of the hammer it is stamped with the date "1864". The barrel is finished in the bright and is part octagonal at the breech. The bore of this particular piece is considerably off-center, indicating that it was derived from an imperfect rifled musket barrel. It is rifled with three broad lands and grooves. The left side of the barrel near the breech is stamped with "V" "P" and an eagle head reading down. The top of the barrel is unmarked but other specimens observed have the date stamped near the breech. The three leaf rear sight is fire blued. The front sight is a high blade with a broad base. The nose cap and buttplate are of brass with a high copper content giving it a reddish coloration. There are no markings on these parts. The flat barrel bands are of iron stamped with "U" on the right side and are retained by springs fastened to the stock. An iron sling swivel is mounted beneath the forward barrel band. The trigger and trigger guard are of iron with a sling swivel mounted at the forward part of the guard bow. The stock is of walnut and is unmarked externally. It is to be noted that the wood of the

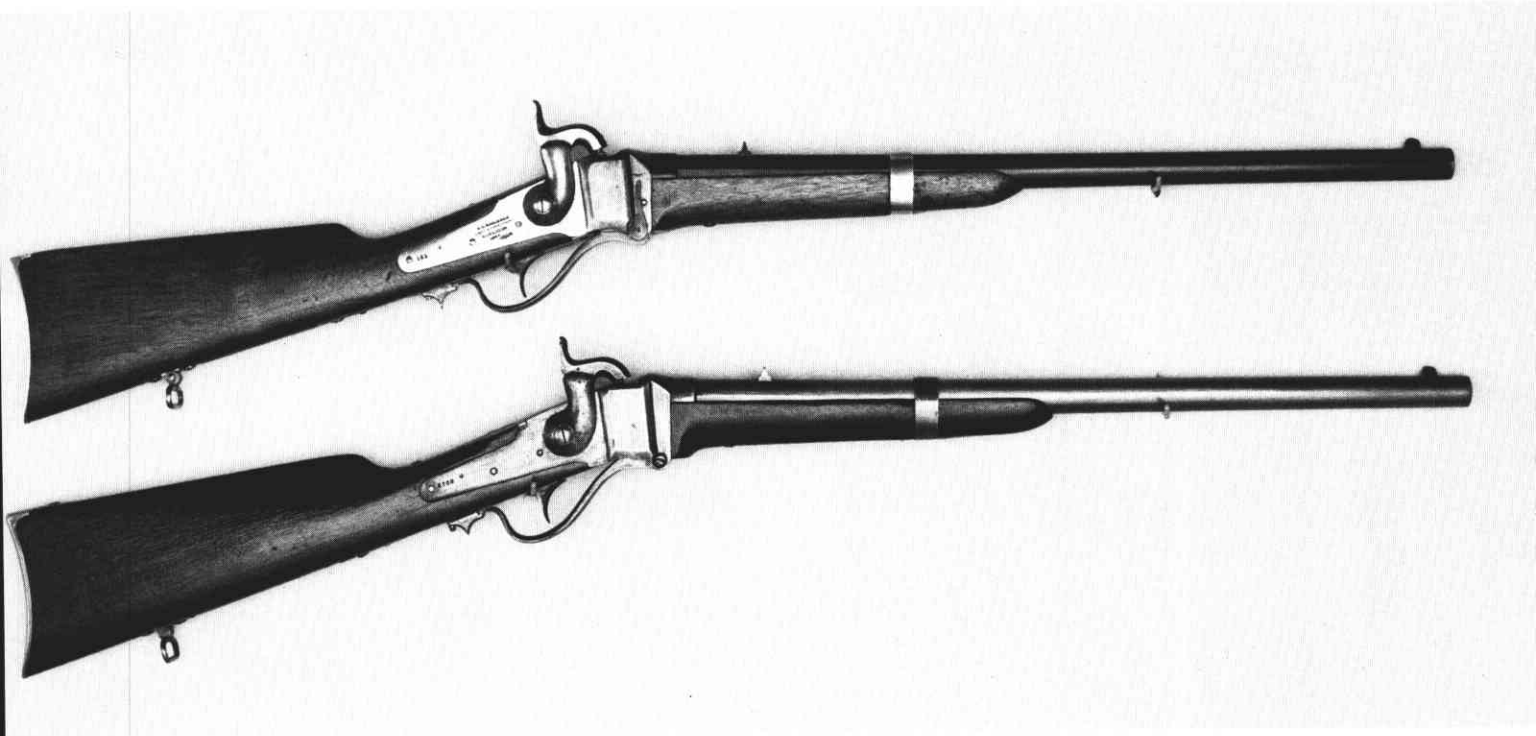
Figure 3. A typical Richmond carbine.



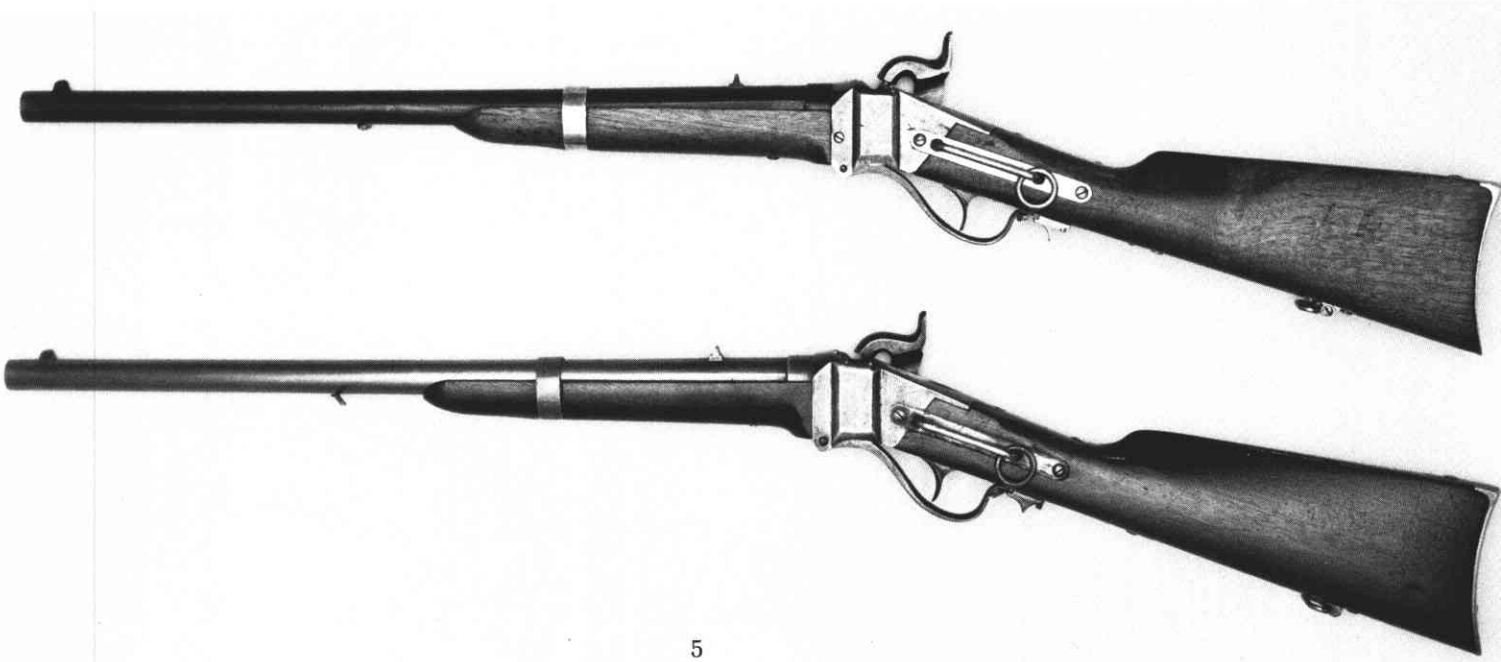
stock beneath the lockplate does not have the groove or channelling for the Maynard primer device and this is typically the case in most Richmond long arms. A third sling swivel is mounted beneath the buttstock. This third sling swivel, or the hole for it in the buttstock, is characteristic of the Richmond Carbine. There are many letter and numeral stampings on the rear of the breech of the barrel, on the underside of the barrel, on the internal parts of the lock, and on the inner aspect of the stock. A feature observed on this, and on other Richmond carbines, is that unlike the longer muskets, the brass forend caps are not fastened to the wood of the stock by means of a screw but rather the brass casting has two rearward projecting prongs which extend into the wood of the stock. A resinous substance was then used to fill in the hollow of the casting and to seal the fastening.

The metal parts of this and other carbines observed usually show various flaws and imperfections.

In 1862, S. C. Robinson was engaged in constructing machinery for manufacturing carbines on the Sharp's pattern in Richmond, Virginia, and, by December of that year, was ready to start actual production. Manufacture of carbines under the management of Robinson continued from December 1862 until March 1, 1863, when the S. C. Robinson Carbine Factory was taken over by the Confederate government. During this time close to two thousand carbines were produced.



Figures 4 and 5. Two typical Confederate sharps carbines.



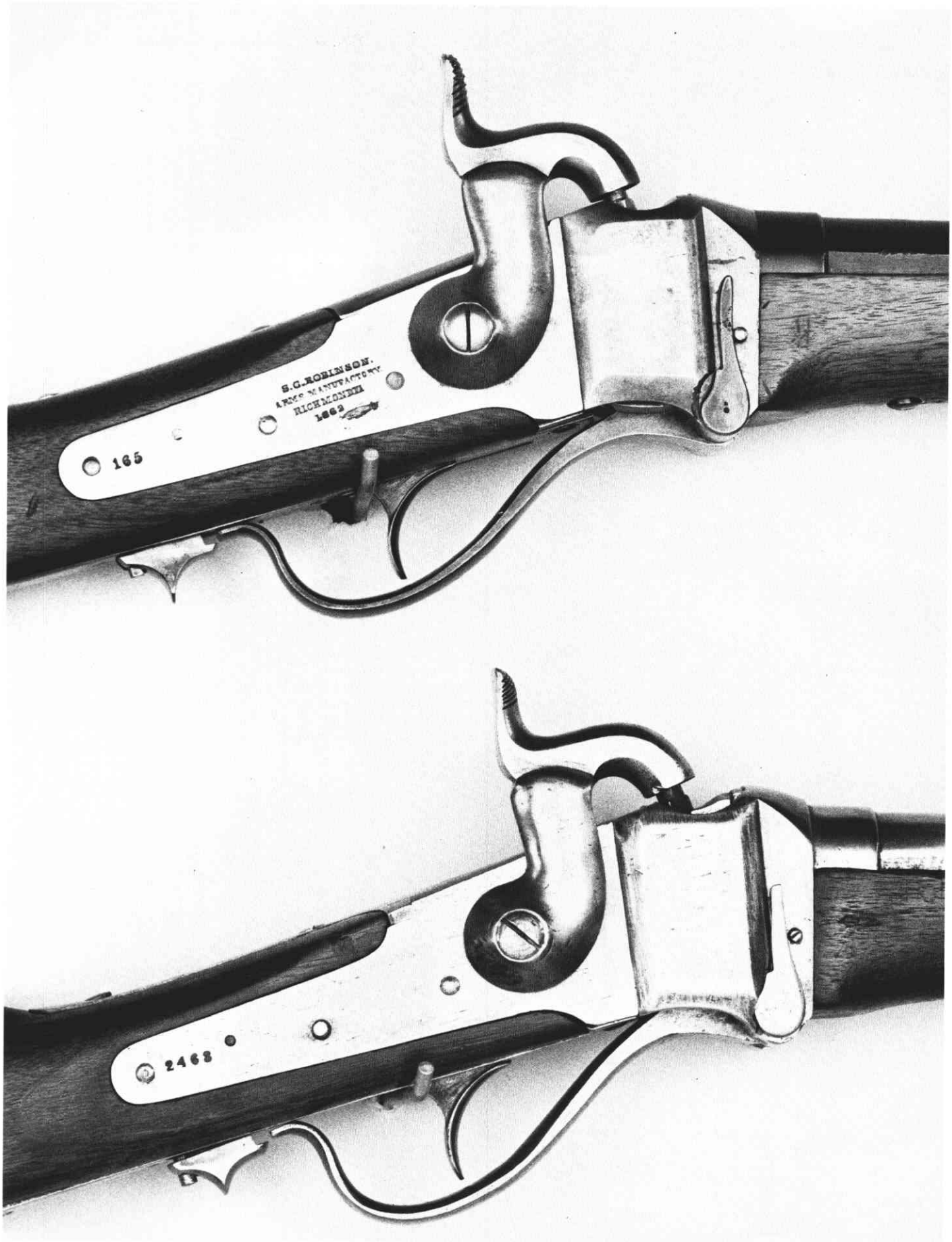
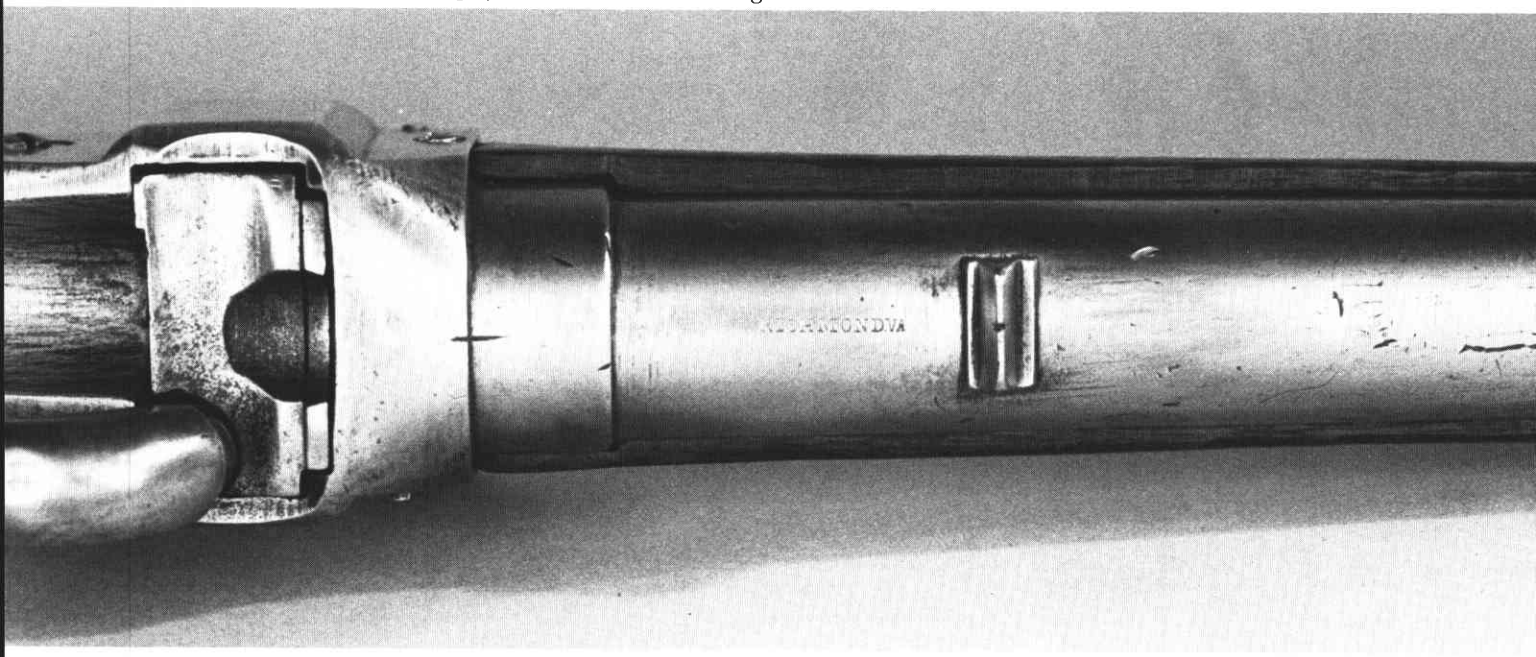


Figure 6. A closeup of Figure 4.

Figure 7. A closeup of the Robinson carbine in Figure 4.

Figure 8. A closeup of the barrel marking of the lower carbine in Figure 4.



Following purchase of the carbine factory by the Confederate government, manufacture of virtually identical Sharps pattern carbines was continued without a break in the serial number sequence. It is believed that the production of these Sharps carbines was continued through the spring of 1864 and that somewhat over three thousand were made under Confederate government supervision. At this time a new model carbine was being considered and, in the latter part of 1864, transfer of machinery to a new armory at Tallassee, Alabama was undertaken.

The upper carbine in figures 4 and 5 is one of those manufactured by S. C. Robinson. It is in extremely fine, near mint condition and the barrel retains most of its original plum brown finish. The serial number is 165. The lower piece is one made under Confederate government supervision and has serial number 2700. This second piece is somewhat unusual in that it does not have the usual spring retained lever pin but instead makes use of a bolt to retain the lever which screws into the left side of the frame. The frame has no hole for a lever pin retainer plunger.

Carbines made by S. C. Robinson are typically stamped on the lockplate to the rear of the hammer, "S. C. ROBINSON-ARMS MANUFACTORY-RICHMOND, VA.-1862" in four lines. The serial number is stamped on the extreme rear portion of the lockplate. The top of the barrels of such carbines are stamped just forward of the rear sight "S. C. ROBINSON-ARMS MANUFACTORY" in two lines (figure 7). Just behind the rear sight they are stamped "RICHMOND VA 1862" in two lines. Carbines made under Confederate government supervision

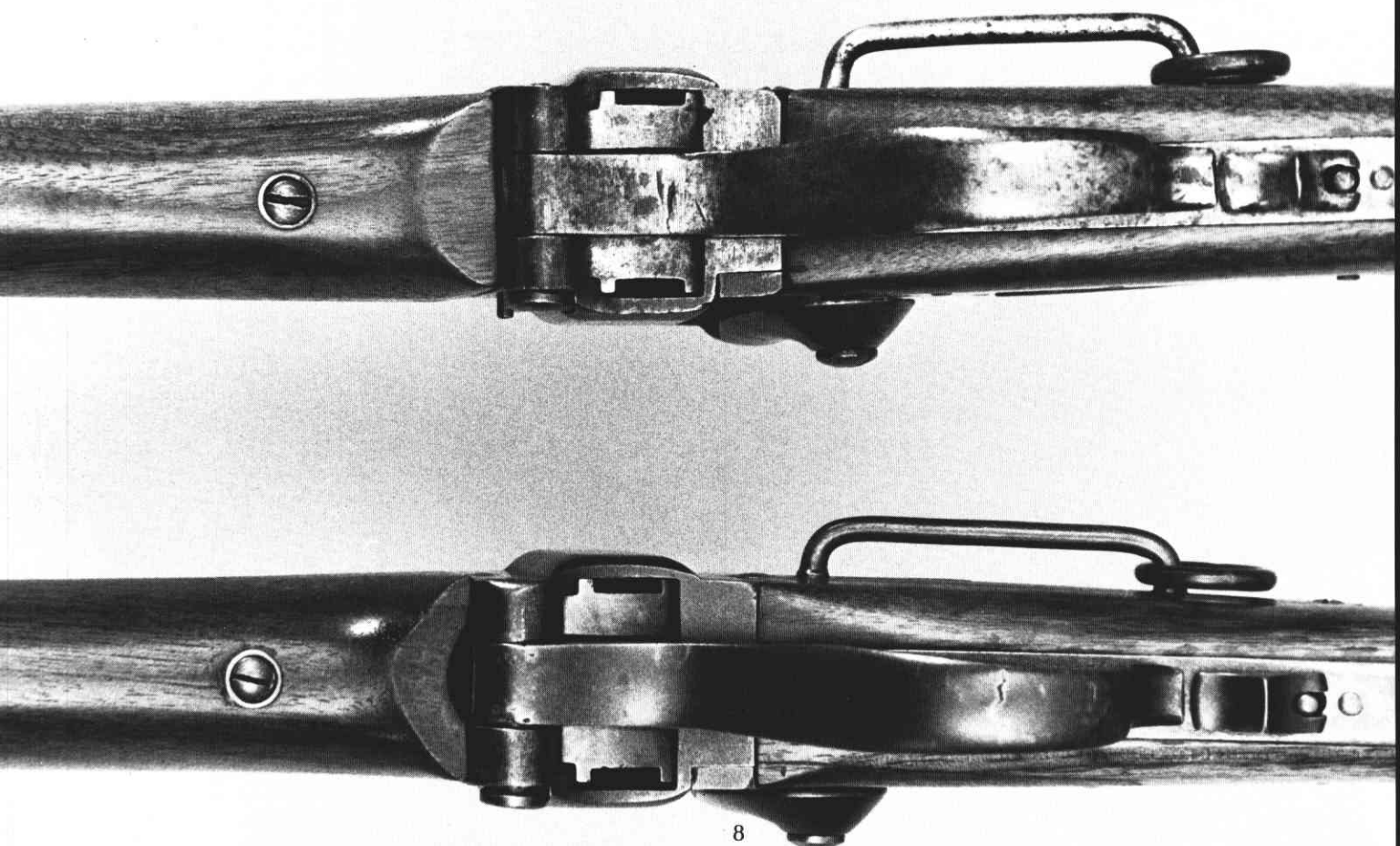
no longer have the Robinson markings. Lockplates of such pieces are stamped only with the serial number at the extreme rear portion in the same location the serial number is located on the Robinson pieces. The top of the barrels of these carbines is stamped "RICHMOND VA" in one line just behind the rear sight (figure 8).

It is to be noted that the barrels of Robinson Carbines in the very early serial number range are stamped only with the date "1862" just behind the rear sight. Some Robinson Carbines have only the stamping "RICHMOND VA" in this location. One specimen in my collection having a fairly high serial number "1877" is so stamped.

The lowest serial number in the Robinson Carbine range known to me is "11" while the highest is "1889" and is presently in my collection. A carbine produced under Confederate government supervision is known having the serial number "1925". Therefore the change in operation of the carbine factory must have taken place between the above numbers, that is, between "1889" and "1925". A fellow collector has two specimens with serial numbers "5136" and "5156". A carbine in my collection having mixed serial numbers has a lockplate marked with serial number "5212". As far as is known to me, this is the highest serial number observed and was probably close to the final production of this type. Of the little over five thousand Confederate Sharps Carbines made less than one hundred and fifteen are known to have survived and of these nearly fifty are of the Robinson type.

Other than the differences in the markings noted above, the Robinson and the later "Richmond" Sharps carbines are identical. As compared to the U. S. type Sharps Carbine which is caliber .54, the Confederate copy is caliber .52. The U. S. Sharps Carbine and the Confederate copy have approximately the same external dimensions and appearance. The barrels of both types are rifled with six lands and grooves. The Confederate Sharps typically has no patchbox and the buttplate and flat barrel band are of brass. Unlike the pivoted leaf rear sight with a sliding "V" notch bar seen on U. S. types, the Confederate rear sight is fixed with a "V" notch. Several variations in shape of the rear sight have been noted. The Confederate front sight is a fairly high, one-piece tapered steel blade as compared to a brass blade pinned in a slotted steel stud seen on U. S. models. Unlike the U. S. Sharps the lockplate of the Confederate Carbine does not have the Sharps pellet primer device with the Lawrence cut off. The sling ring

Figure 9. Underside view of two Confederate sharps. The forestock of the top piece is as originally made while the forestock of the lower carbine has been altered by a half-moon hole at the rear.

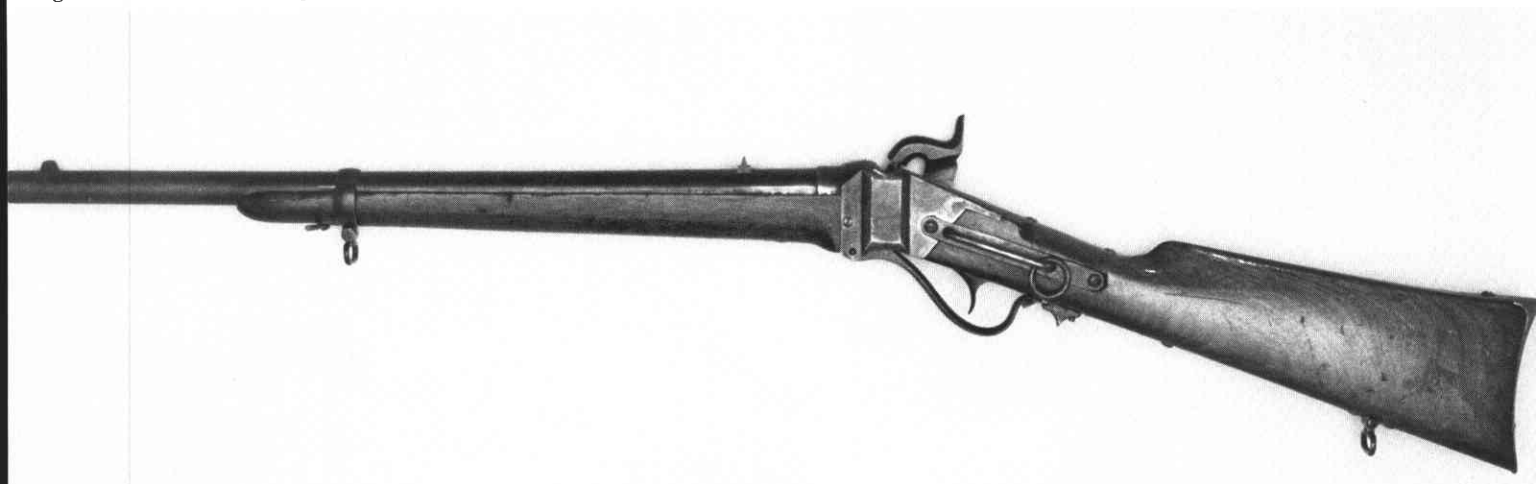


slide bar on the left side of the Confederate Sharps is set into an elongated iron plate with rounded ends which is inletted into the metal frame and into the wood of the stock whereas on U. S. models the front end of the slide bar screws into the frame and the rear end is fixed to a short plate inletted into the stock. Confederate models have a sling swivel attached beneath the buttstock. The serial number is stamped on Confederate carbines in the following locations: at the extreme rear of the lockplate externally; on the top or external aspect of the receiver or frame tang; on the underside of the barrel near the breech beneath and hidden by the lever spring; and on the underside of the plate to which the sling ring slide bar is attached. Very early serial number specimens also have the serial number stamped on the under side of the tang of the brass buttplate. Occasionally one encounters specimens having mixed serial numbers. While it is desirable to have pieces with all matching serial numbers it is felt that these mixed number pieces are correct and it is not hard to visualize some haphazard assembling under the stresses and pressures of war.

On viewing the wood of the stocks of Confederate Sharps Carbines after the metal components have been removed, one finds ample evidence of crude workmanship in the inletting process. Typically the marks of tools, particularly of the drills used to remove the wood are plainly visible and there is never the smoothly finished work seen on U. S. types.

Breechblocks on Confederate specimens tend to show minor variations but are essentially similar to those on the U. S. Sharps Carbine model 1859 and have flanged steel plate set into the face of the block. Almost all of the Confederate breechblocks studied have secondary number stampings. These numbers are made with much smaller dies than those used for the primary serial numbers. Typically there are two identical number stampings which appear on the under edge of the plate set into the face of the block and on the under aspect of the mid-portion of the block on the left side. On several specimens observed, these numbers appear on the lower face of the plate and the lower left front or face of the block. One specimen in my collection, instead of numbers, has a fairly large "S" on the under surface of the mid-portion of the block on the right side. These

Figures 10 and 11. A unique and undoubtedly one-of-a-kind Confederate sharps carbine.



numbers appear to have no relationship to the primary serial number. Two specimens in my collection have actual U. S. Sharps breechblocks with the usual Lawrence and Conant patent markings, however, one of these is also stamped with a fairly large "53". This same "53" is repeated on the under side of the barrel, on the inner aspects of the lockplate and the hammer, and on the lever, thus tying all these parts together. Apparently U. S. type breechblocks are often found in Confederate specimens and, in my opinion are correct, perhaps being incorporated at the time of manufacture or being later replacements.

Although a basically well made arm, the Confederate Sharps Carbine quickly gained an evil reputation with reports that seven out of nine carbines had burst when tested by a cavalry company. It was found that improper handling of the weapon often resulted in powder making its way into the mortise for the lever spring in the forestock and that subsequent firing resulted in bursting of the forestock. The forestocks of many pieces were consequently altered by cutting out a small half-moon hole at the bottom rear of the forestock to permit the escape of any powder which might collect there (figure 9).

The carbine in Figures 10 and 11 has a long forestock and a rounded iron barrel band. The plate is of iron and there is an iron patchbox in the buttstock. All of the component parts are of typical Confederate workmanship, including the crude inletting of the wood of the stock. It is interesting that the various parts have completely different serial numbers.

A fellow collector has informed me of other Confederate Sharps which also have rounded iron barrel bands, but the flat brass barrel band is the type usually seen.

The pioneer book FIREARMS OF THE CONFEDERACY by Fuller and Steuart, pictures an unusual Confederate Sharps Carbine with no marking of any kind. The sling swivel in the buttstock, the slide bar and saddle ring on the left side and the sights have all been omitted. These parts have not been removed as there is no trace of them ever having been on the arm.

As already noted, the carbine factory was removed to Tallassee, Alabama, in the latter part of 1864, an area which was felt to be relatively free from the threat of enemy attack. A new model

Figure 12. Two Tallassee carbines in the Fuller Collection at the National Military Park, Chickamauga, Georgia.

carbine on the Enfield pattern was prepared. This was the only Confederate arm officially designed and adopted by a board of Cavalry officers in the field (figures 12 and 13).

Typically the Tallassee Carbine is 40½ inches in overall length with a barrel length of 25 inches. The caliber is .58. A ramrod is attached to the barrel by swivels. The buttplate and trigger guard are of brass as are the two rounded clamping type barrel bands and the fore-end tip. The rear sight is of the three leaf type. Sling swivels are attached to the under side of the buttstock and to the under part of the front barrel band. The lockplate is stamped forward of the hammer, "C.S.-Tallassee-Ala." in three lines and the date "1864" to the rear of the hammer. About five hundred of these carbines were made but the war ended prior to their being issued and it is doubtful if any saw active service.

The company of Cook and Brother was organized by two English brothers, Ferdinand W. C. Cook and Francis Cook, in New Orleans in June 1861. At their plant they began the manufacture of rifles on the Enfield pattern as well as various edged weapons. When Admiral Farragut's fleet forced the passage of Forts Jackson and St. Philip, the Cook brothers dismantled much of their machinery, loaded it onto two steamers and escaped up river to Vicksburg, Mississippi. From there they made their way to Selma, Alabama and eventually to Athens, Georgia, where, in 1863, they set up a new arms manufactory where they resumed the production of arms, including rifles, carbines and edged weapons. The long arms made in Athens, Georgia, continued the serial number sequence begun in New Orleans. As far as I can determine there was no particular order in the production of rifles and carbines and both types continued the serial number sequence.

Carbines made by Cook and Brother are of two

Figure 13. Tallassee carbine at the Smithsonian Institute.

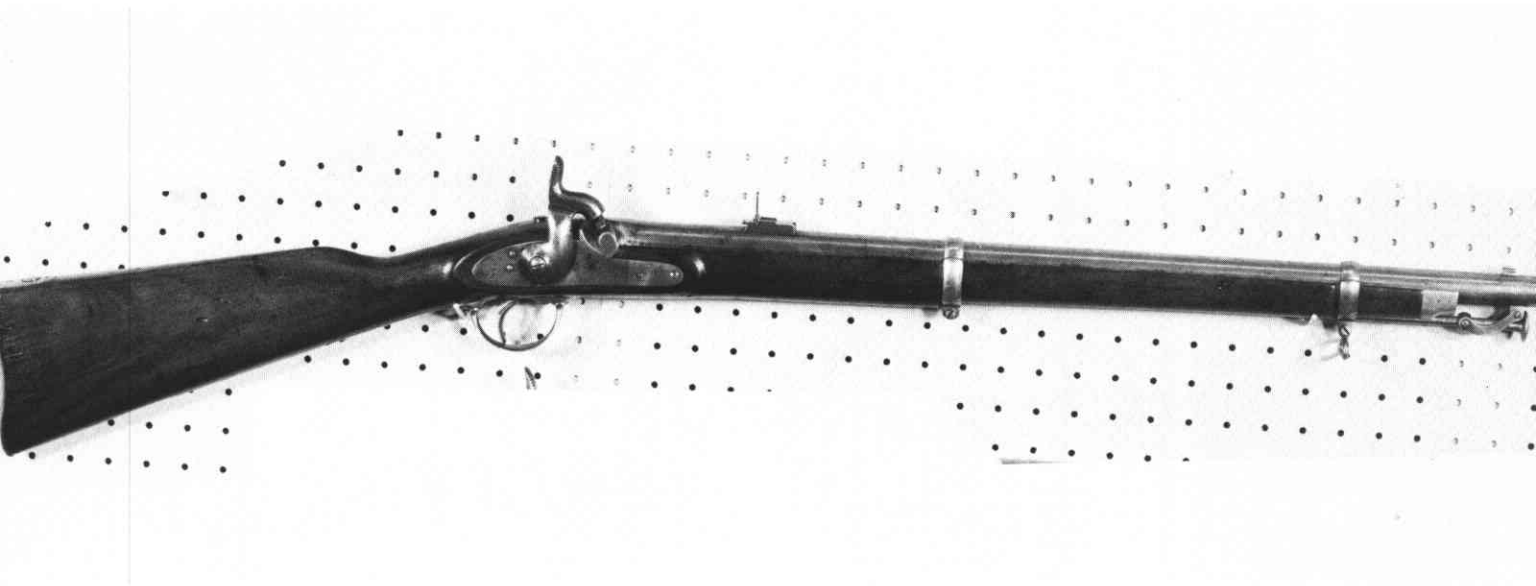


Figure 14. An unusual New Orleans carbine over a typical Athens made artillery carbine for purposes of comparison. While superficially quite similar, there are many differences. The most obvious difference is the small unmarked lockplate of the New Orleans piece as compared to the large marked lockplate of the Athens specimen.

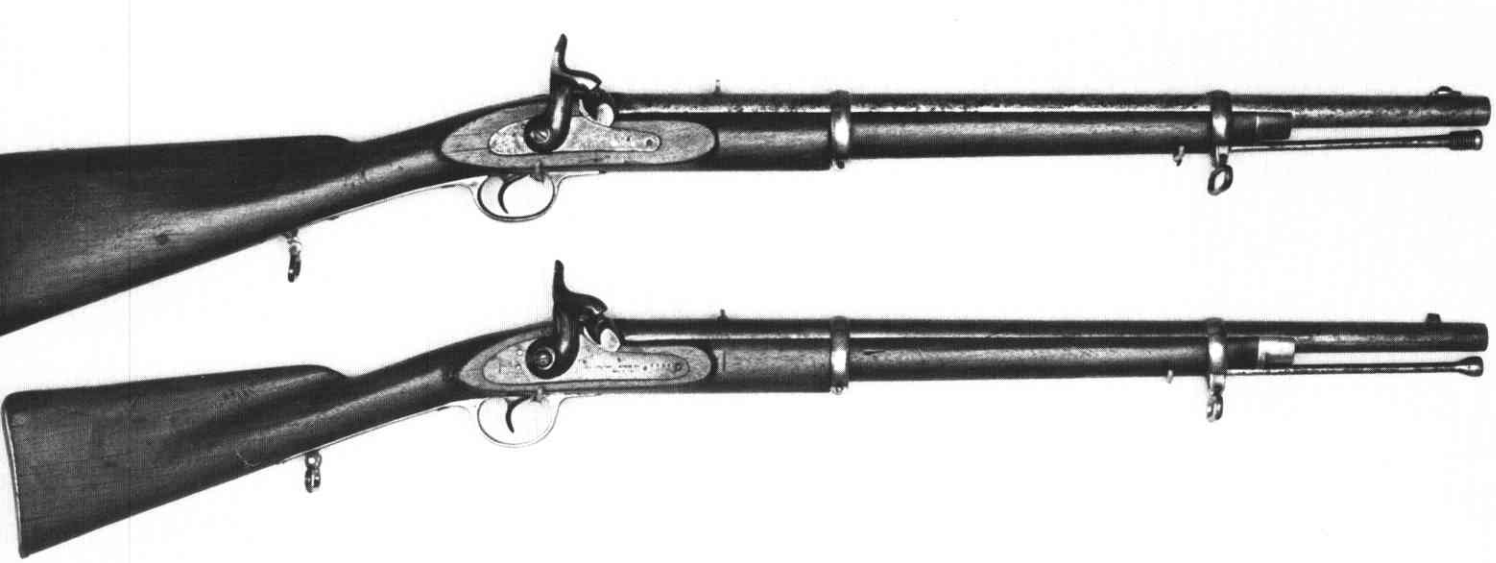


Figure 15. Cook & Brother lockplate markings. The lower piece is the one under discussion. The upper piece is an infantry rifle with a similar lockplate for purposes of comparison. These stampings are characteristic of all Athens made long arms.

Figure 16. Cook & Brother carbine barrel stampings. This also shows the twist grain of the metal of the barrel. The top of the barrel behind the rear sight is stamped "COOK & BROTHER-ATHENS GA 1864-3757" in three lines. The left topside of the barrel near the breech is stamped "PROVED".

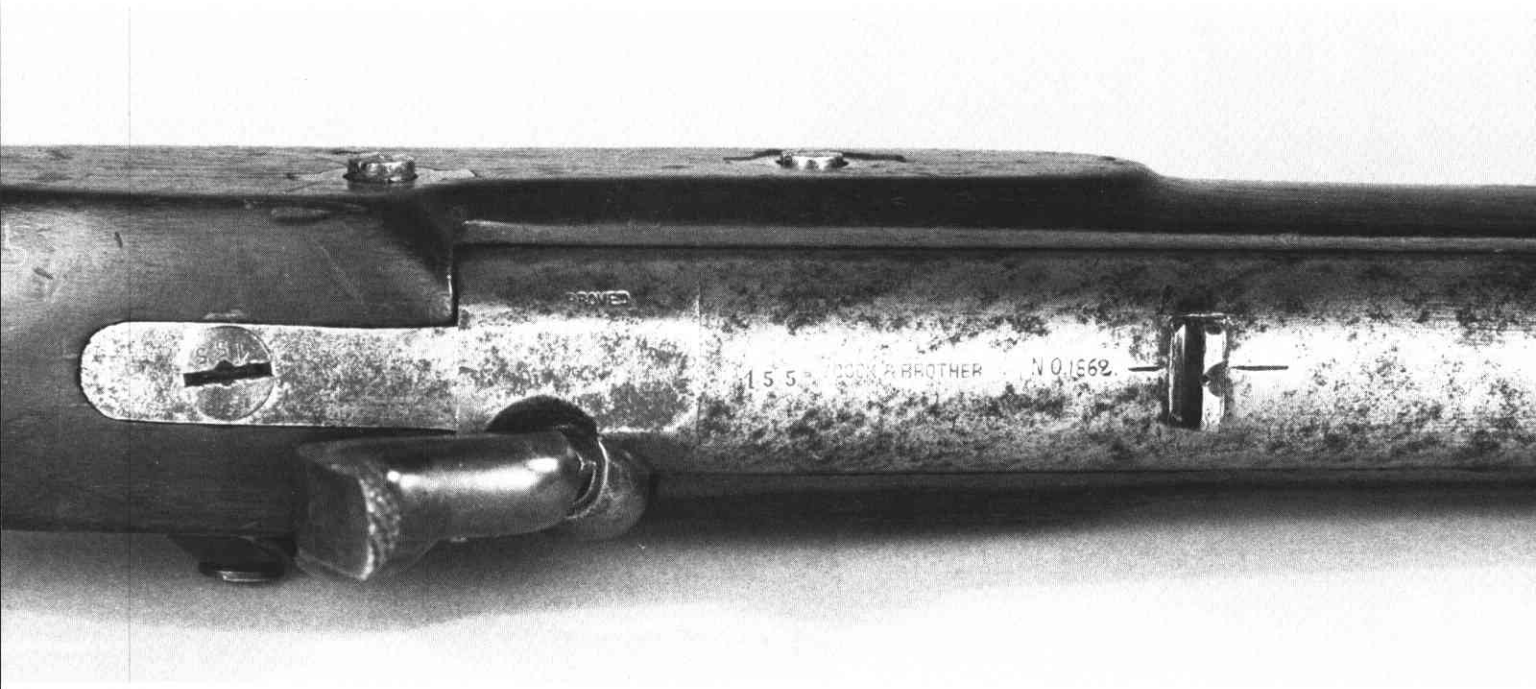


Figure 17. Barrel markings of the New Orleans carbine. It is stamped "155- COOK & BROTHER-NO-1862" in one line.

basic types, an artillery carbine or musketoon, and a shorter cavalry carbine. It is doubtful if carbines were regularly made while the firm operated in New Orleans. I have, however, an unusual carbine in my collection which has New Orleans markings. It has many of the characteristics of the rifles produced in New Orleans and I feel that it was, for the most part, derived from rifle components. It may well be a specially made, one-of-a-kind item as I have no definite knowledge of the existence of any other similar pieces (figure 14).

For purposes of brevity I will limit my description to the Athens specimen which is the one usually seen. The overall length is 40 inches and the barrel length 24 inches. The caliber is .58 and the barrel is rifled with three lands and grooves. The barrel clearly shows a twist grain as a result of spirally twisting the iron, a method devised to give the soft metal extra strength. This twist grain of the metal of the barrels is characteristic of all long arms made by Cook and Brother. It is to be noted that the source of iron for Cook & Brother arms, for Dickson, Nelson arms and for Griswold and Gunnison Revolvers was the Shelby Iron Works near Selma, Alabama. The rear sight is fixed with a "V" notch. The front sight is a tapered blade with a rounded top arising from an oblong block base. The furniture is of brass, including the sling swivels which are attached to the trigger guard tang and to the front barrel band. The brass barrel bands are rounded and are of the clamping type. Much of the brass for Athens made pieces was obtained locally

by the melting down of items such as church bells and household brasses. The ramrod tip has a simple tuliplike swelling with a cup. The lockplate is 5⅜ inches long and it is of the Enfield type (figure 15). Forward of the hammer it is stamped "COOK & BROTHER-ATHENS GA-3757" over the date "1864" in two lines. To the rear of the hammer it is stamped with the Stars and Bars Confederate Flag.

The serial number "3757" of the Athens Carbine, in addition to appearing on the lockplate and on the top of the barrel, (figures 16 and 17) is also stamped on the rounded bolt heads which secure the barrel tang and the lockplate, on the under side of the brass nose cap, and on the under part of the brass barrel bands. The inner aspect of the lockplate and the internal lock mechanism bears the stampings "57" or "M 57" on most parts including the bolt heads. The inner surface of the hammer is stamped "M-57" and "57" is stamped externally on the rounded head of the bolt securing the hammer. The under side of the barrel at the breech, as well as the underside of the adjacent breechplug is stamped "V" over "15".

The cavalry carbines made by Cook & Brother with the exception of the shorter length and certain minor differences are similar to the Artillery model. The external markings are in the same locations and are virtually identical. The overall length is 36½ inches with a barrel length of 21 inches. The caliber is .58.

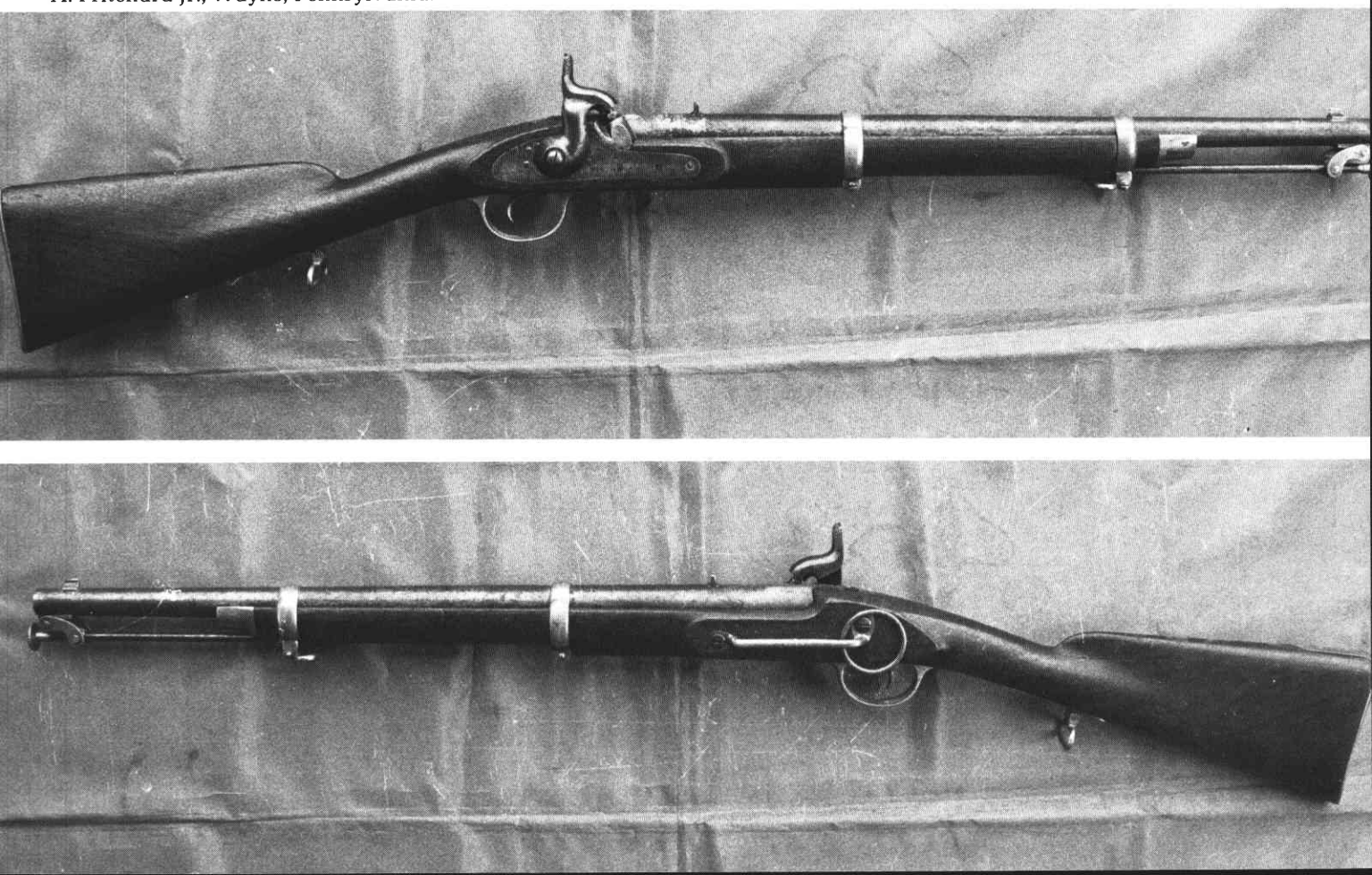
Early production pieces have a ramrod which is attached to the under side of the muzzle of the barrel by short swivels. The ramrod tip is a large flat brass button type. The left side of such pieces also have a sling ring slide bar with saddle ring which is attached to the stock by the same brass inserts to which the bolts securing the lockplate are fastened (figure 18).

Later production pieces (figures 20 and 21) eliminated the swivel ramrod attachment and the sling ring slide bar. Two such pieces in my collection plainly show where the sling ring slide bar was filed off.

Prior to the war the firm of D. C. Hodgkins & Sons of Macon, Georgia, was engaged in shipping arms from the north to the State of Georgia. With the advent of the war this firm manufactured munitions of war and altered flintlock muskets to percussion. They also contracted for and made 100 carbines closely patterned after the U. S. Springfield Model 1855 rifled carbine (see figure 22).

The Hodgkins carbine is 37 inches in overall length and the barrel length is 22 inches. The caliber is .58 and it is rifled with three broad shallow grooves. All mounts are of iron except the nose cap which is of brass. The rear sight is fixed and notched and is not very high. The front sight is a broad based, rather low, blade. The ramrod is attached to the underside of the barrel near the muzzle by means of swivels. The flat iron barrel

Figures 18 and 19. Early model Cook & Brother cavalry carbine. Serial number 3425. Dated 1863. Collection of Mr. Russ A. Pritchard Jr., Wayne, Pennsylvania.



Figures 20 and 21. A later production Cook & Brother cavalry carbine having the serial number "6401".

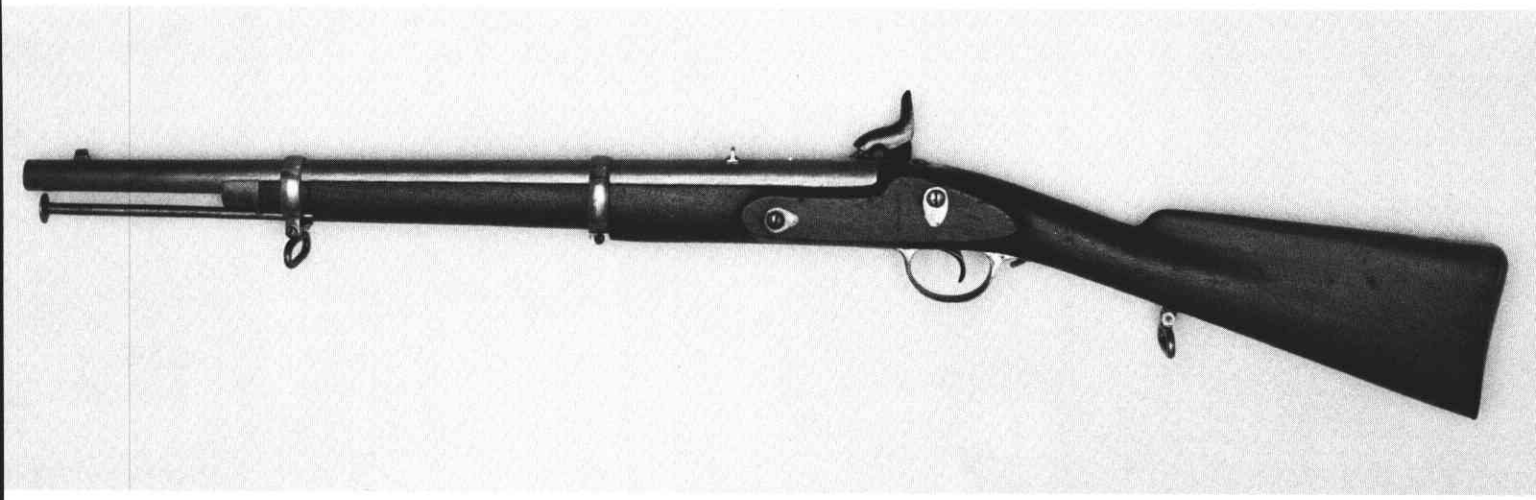
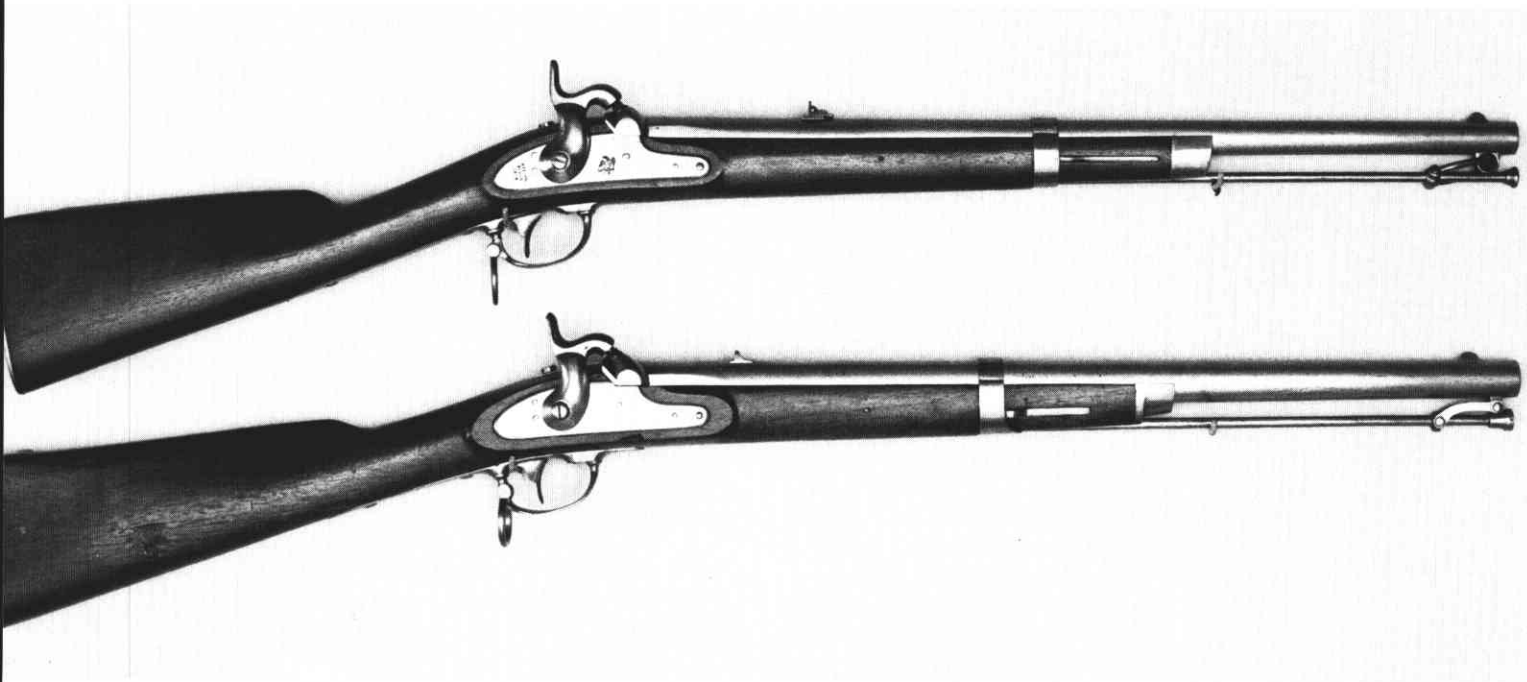


Figure 22. A Springfield Model 1855 rifled carbine with a Confederate Hodgkins carbine below. Both pieces are in mint, unfired condition.



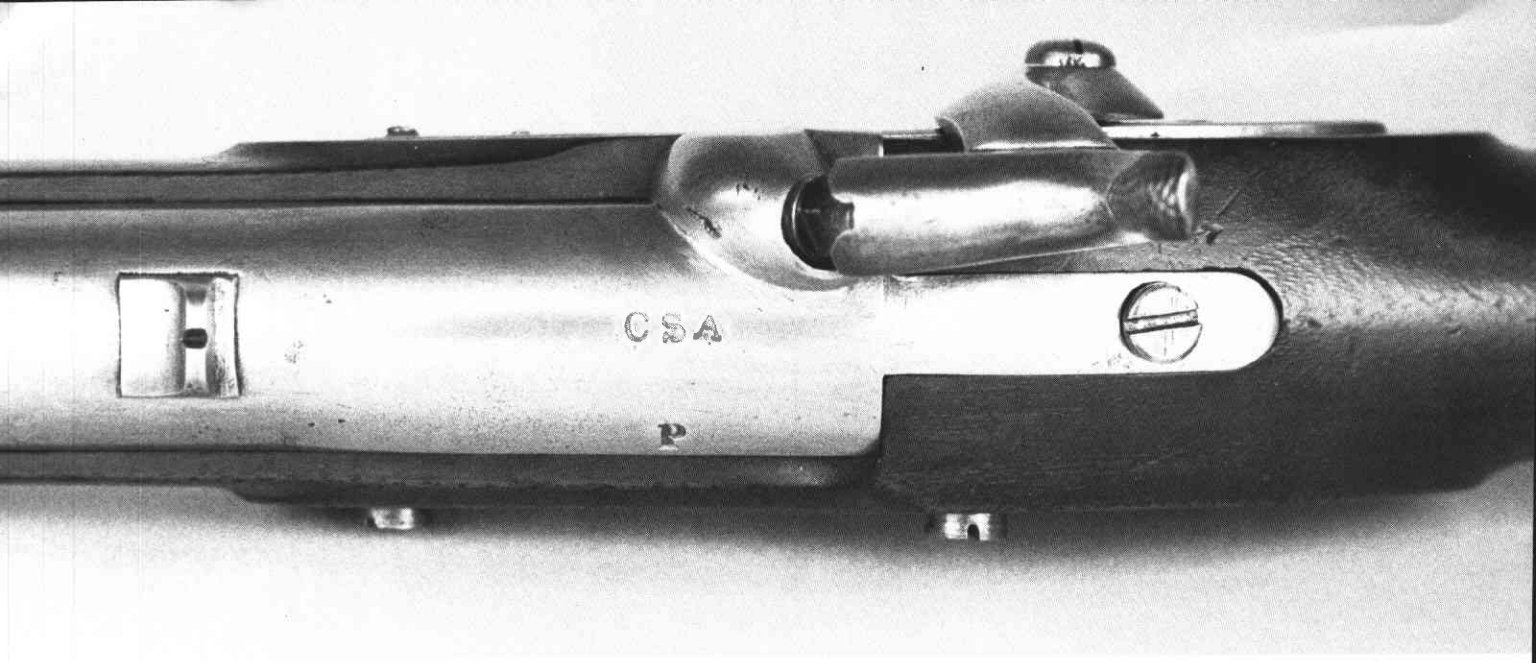
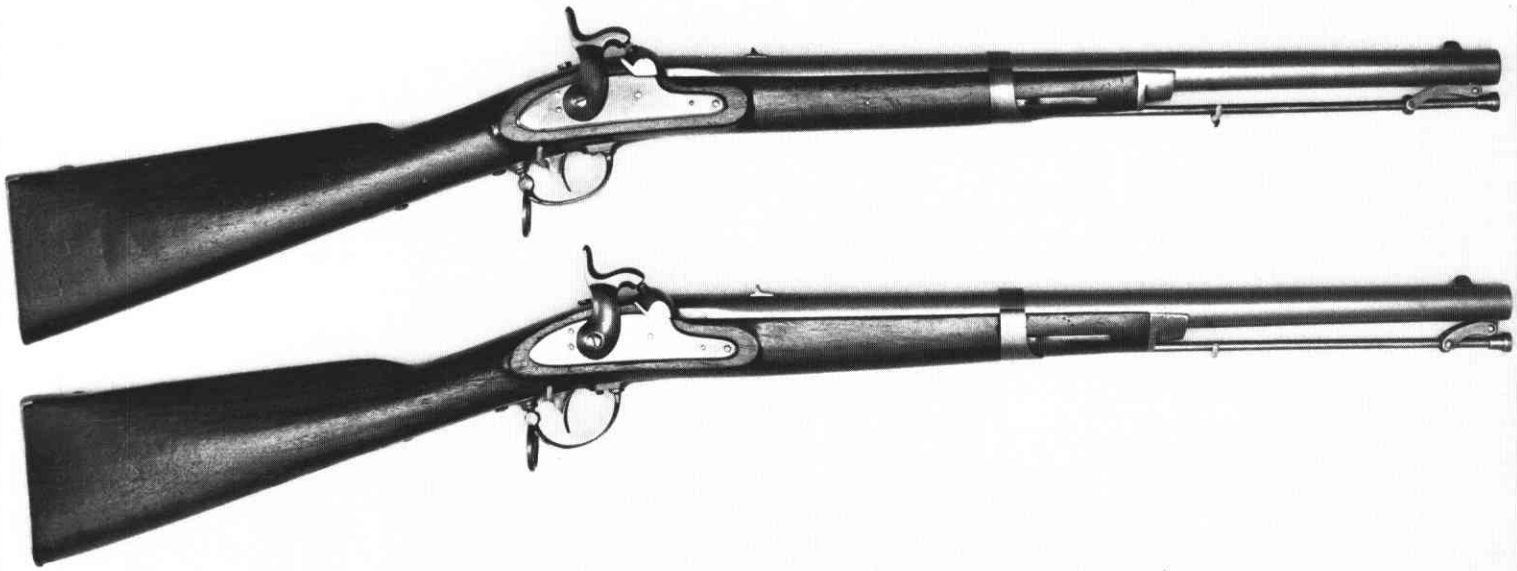


Figure 23. Typical Hodgkins carbine barrel markings.

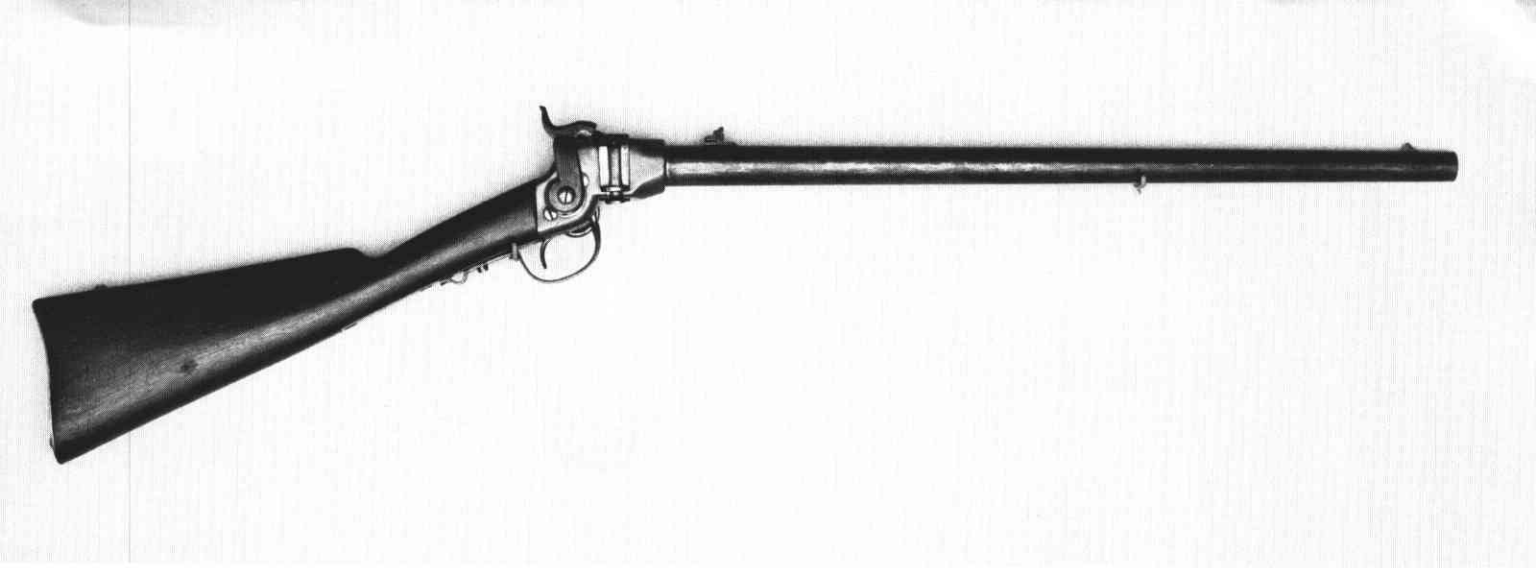
Figure 24. Two Hodgkins carbines. The top piece has a brass nose cap. The lower piece has a pewter nose cap.



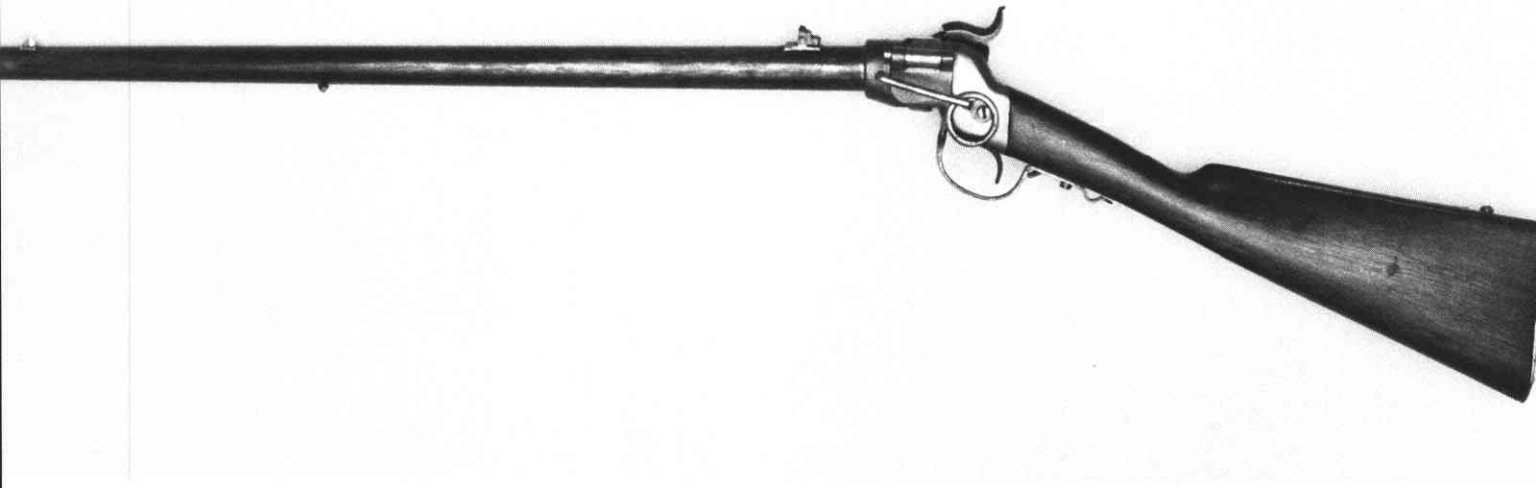
band, unlike the U. S. model, comes forward at the bottom portion. Like the U. S. model it is retained by a spring. An iron carrying ring is attached to the rear of the trigger guard bow. The lockplate is unmarked externally. Variations in the shape of Hodgkins lockplates have been observed. The rear portions of some have a quite rounded configuration while others are more pointed. The top of the barrel near the breech is stamped "C.S.A." with a "P" stamped just below this on the left side (figure 23).

"K 8" is stamped in the wood of the stock of this piece just to the rear of the trigger guard tang. The only other external markings are "2" stamped on the underside of the buttstock near the buttplate and "F" stamped on the rear of the buttplate near the top. Such external stampings seem to be fairly consistent in specimens I have had the opportunity to observe.

Other stampings are internal. "K 8" is stamped on the underside of the barrel near the breech. "61" is stamped on the underside of the barrel tang. The inner aspect of the lockplate at the rear tip and the inner aspect of the hammer are stamped "29" over



Figures 25 and 26. A Tarpley carbine.



"O". Other stampings are "R" and "25" on the bridle of the lock.

Some Hodgkins Carbines are found with pewter nose caps and these, in my experience, are much scarcer than the ones with brass nose caps (figure 24).

All pieces I have observed show evidence of hand craftsmanship. It is interesting that the pewter nose cap on the specimen shown in Fig. 24 will not interchange with the noise caps on the other two pieces.

Jere H. Tarpley of Greensboro, North Carolina, was granted a Confederate patent for a breech loading carbine on February 14, 1863. In association with the firm of J. and F. Garrett, this carbine was manufactured at Greensboro, N. C. Production was apparently limited to about one year and it is believed that the total output was only a few hundred. It was made for the State of North Carolina but was also the only known Confederate arm offered for public commercial sale (figures 25 and 26).

It is of .52 caliber and used a paper cartridge. There is no forestock. The overall length is 38¾ inches and the barrel length is 22 inches. The barrel is rifled with seven lands and grooves. It screws into the frame and it retains much of what appears to be original blueing. The front sight is of brass and of a pyramidal blade type arising from a brass block base. The rear sight of iron has a thick double leaf arrangement. Both leaves have deep "V" notches. The frame is of brass with a distinctly reddish tint indicating a high copper content. The buttplate is of iron. An iron breech block attached to the left side of the frame is released by a spring and swings up and to the left. An iron sling ring slide bar, with iron ring, is attached to the left side of the frame. The trigger guard is of iron. The hammer is casehardened in mottled colors. The brass backstrap extending back from the frame is stamped "J H TARPLEY'S-PAT FEB 14- 1863" in three lines (figure 27). The serial number 395 is stamped on top of the breech block. Just below the serial number, the barrel is stamped with either "P"

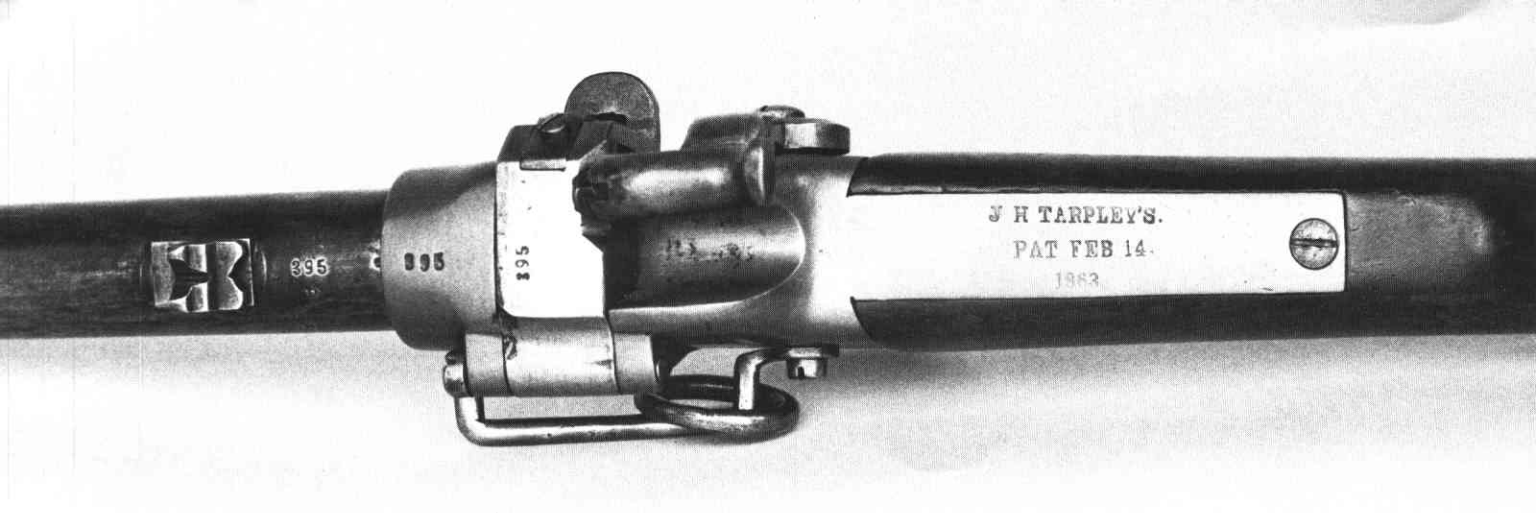


Figure 27. Top view of the Tarpley carbine in Figures 25 and 26.

Figure 28. A rare relic, a Tarpley carbine frame.

Figure 29. Two Murray artillery carbines.

Figure 30. "Windmill" marking attributed to Nathaniel D. Cross.

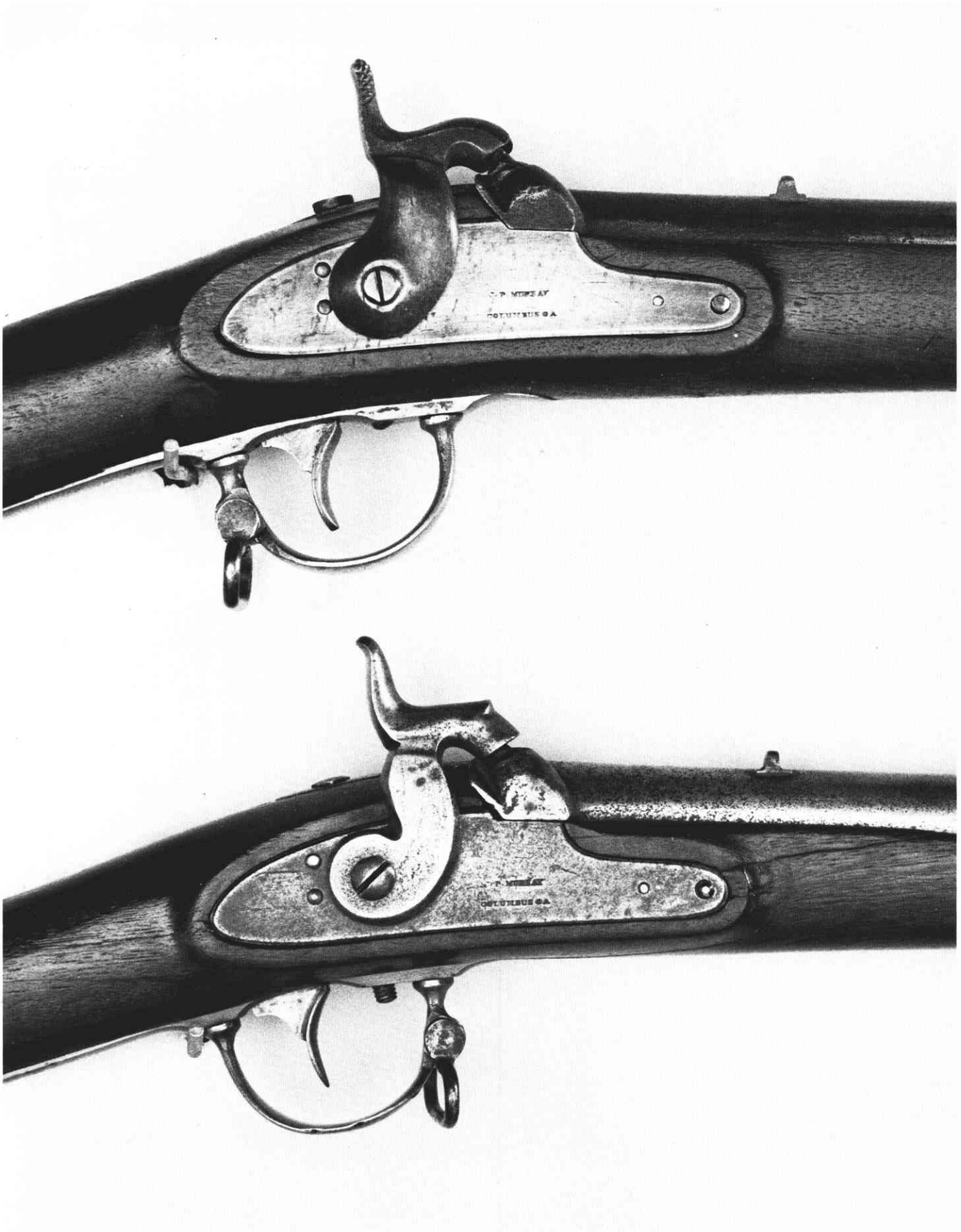


Figure 31. Murray lockplate markings. The upper piece is a Murray Rifle for comparison.

or "D". Below this an "M" is stamped. No other external markings appear on the piece.

The Tarpley Carbine frame shown in figure 28 was unearthed several years ago in a field in western Tennessee, near the town of Parsons which is located close to the Tennessee River. This could well have been used by one of General Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalrymen who operated extensively in this area. The top of the front part of the frame has been almost completely cut through but the serial number "26" is still visible. Like the complete carbine shown, the backstrap is also stamped "J H TARPLEY'S-PAT FEB 14-1863" in three lines. There are no other markings.

A specimen of the Tarpley carbine in the Smithsonian Collection is stamped "C.S.A." on the backstrap and on the left side of the stock. The left side of the stock is also stamped "MANUFACTURED BY-J. & F. GARRETT & CO-GREENSBORO N.C.CSA".

Tarpley Carbines are very rare. Perhaps the lack of a forestock, which undoubtedly rendered it a very unsatisfactory weapon to handle, has something to do with its rarity.

Eldridge S. Greenwood and William C. Gray operated a cotton warehouse firm prior to the war. On January 17, 1862, they purchased some property and set up a rifle factory in Columbus, Georgia. J. P. Murray, an Englishman who was a skilled

Figure 32. Murray carbine markings.

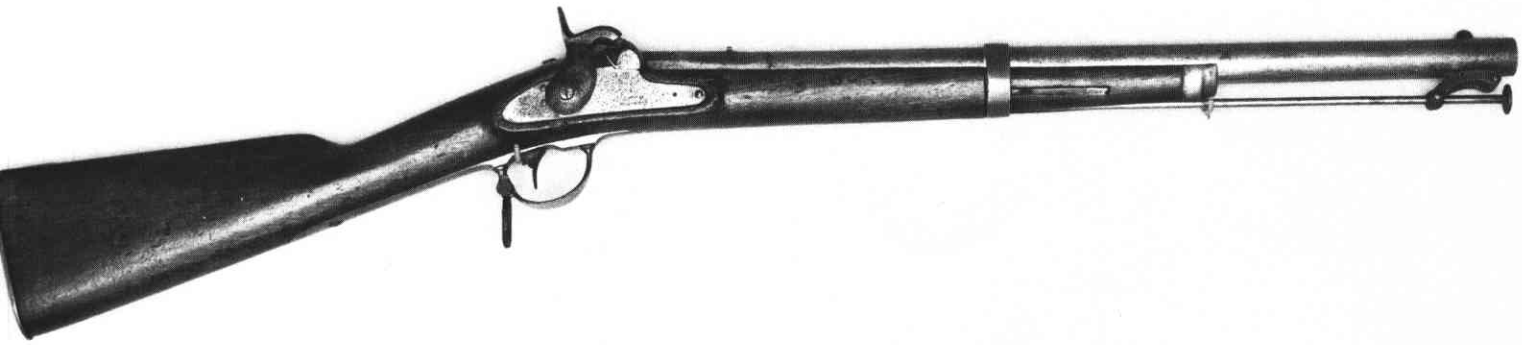


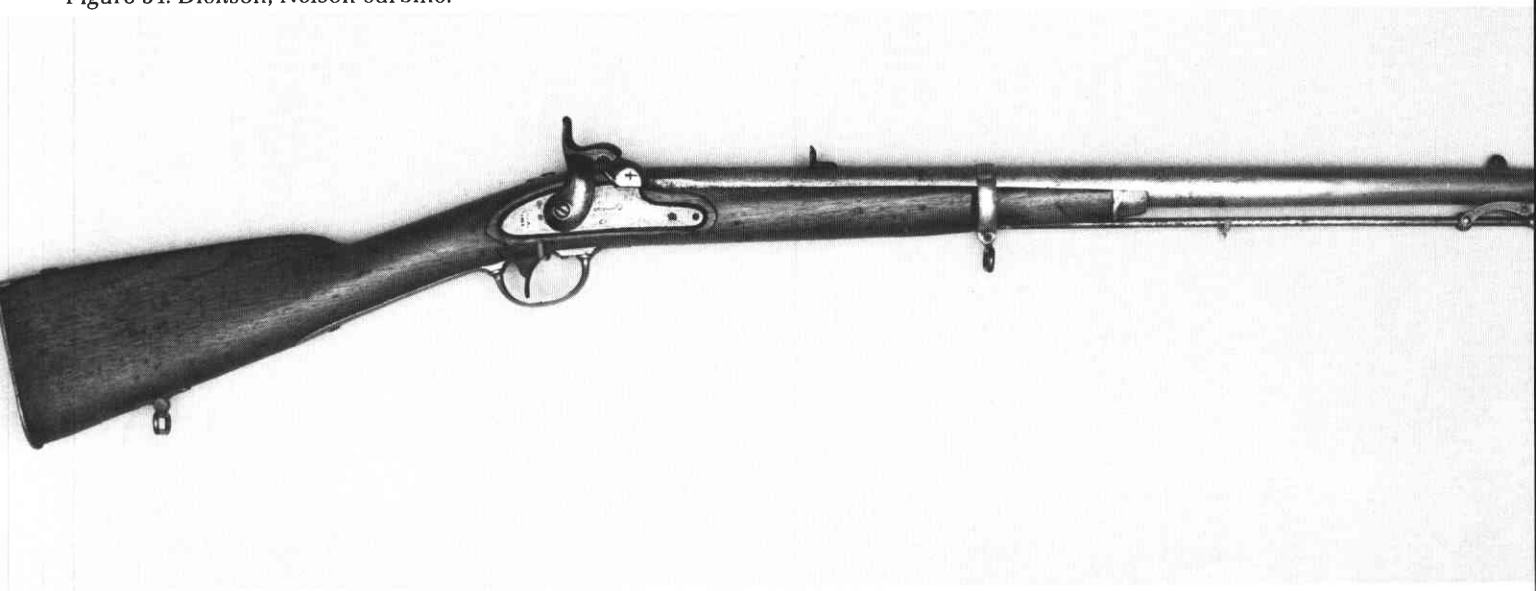
Figure 33. Murray cavalry carbine.

gunsmith and mechanic, was made superintendent and master armorer of this plant. At least a portion of the firm's long arm production was made under contract with the State of Alabama as records indicate that Greenwood and Gray furnished Alabama with 262 Mississippi rifles and 73 carbines between Oct. 1, 1863 and Nov. 1, 1864. Murray's name appears on the lockplates of most of the long arms produced by Greenwood and Gray, however, some specimens have lockplates which are unmarked. Major F. C. Humphreys was the Confederate ordnance officer at Columbus, Ga., during the war. His initials, "F.C.H." appear on most of the arms made in the Columbus area. It is also known that Nathaniel D. Cross, an inspector at the Selma Arsenal in Alabama was detached to inspect the barrels produced at Columbus. His peculiar "windmill" mark is stamped on the underside of many of the arms produced at Columbus.

Murray, or Greenwood & Gray Carbines are known in two basic types, a musketoon or artillery carbine and a shorter cavalry carbine having a swivel ramrod. The artillery carbines were made having both single and double front barrel bands and with marked and unmarked lockplates.

The top piece in figure 29, has an overall length of 40 inches. The barrel length is 23½ inches and the barrel is rifled with three shallow lands and grooves. Originally caliber .58, this piece has either been shot out or rebored to caliber .64. The front sight is a small brass blade. The rear sight is fixed and notched. The top rear of the barrel has no visible markings, although pitting in this region may have obscured any marking which might have been there. The underside of the barrel near the

Figure 34. Dickson, Nelson carbine.



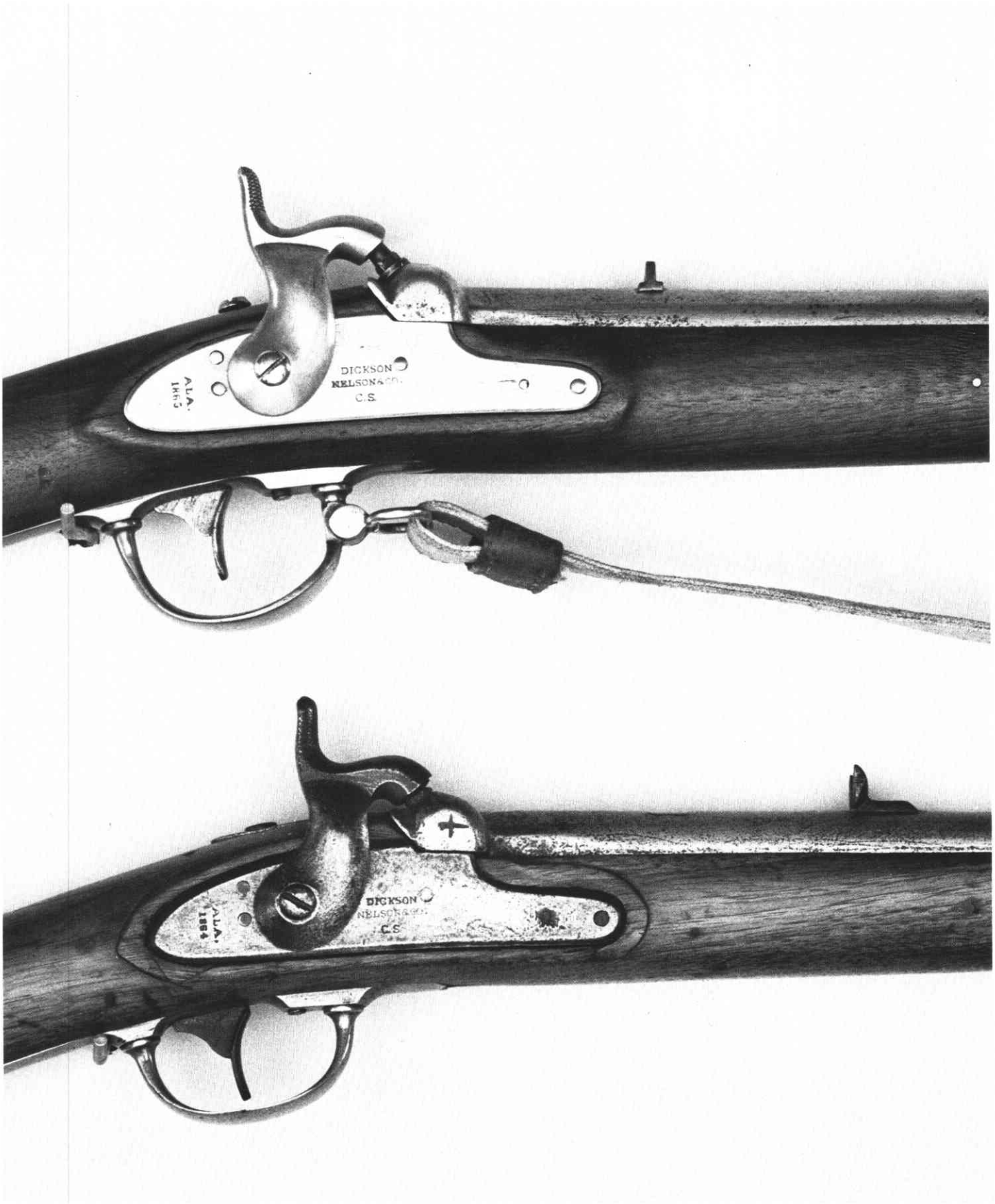


Figure 35. Dickson, Nelson lockplate markings. The top piece is a Dickson, Nelson short rifle whose markings are more distinct.

Figure 36. A walnut carbine stock blank found in one of the original buildings of the Dickson, Nelson factory in Dawson, Georgia, in 1959. Quite a number of these stock blanks were on hand at the close of the war indicating that the firm had intentions of producing carbines in quantity. This blank plainly shows that it was cut out and not turned on a lathe.

breech is stamped with the "windmill" marking of Nathaniel D. Cross (figure 30).

The rear surface of the breech on the right side is marked with three vertical dots. Such cryptic markings are often seen on Confederate pieces, the significance of which is not clear. The hammer is of a flat sporting type and is probably a replacement. The lockplate forward of the hammer is stamped "J. P. MURRAY-COLUMBUS GA" in two lines.

The inner aspect of the lockplate is stamped "22". The bolt heads securing the lockplate and the barrel are rounded and do not show any number stampings. All the furniture is of brass having a distinctly reddish coloration indicating a high copper content. Even the trigger is of brass. The flat brass barrel bands are retained by springs. Iron sling swivels are attached to the front barrel band and to the front part of the trigger guard bow. The ramrod tip is a simple swell without cupping. This carbine is identical to one in Battle Abbey in Richmond, Virginia.

The bottom carbine in figure 29, while quite similar, presents a number of differences. The overall length is 40¼ inches and the barrel length is 24 inches. Probably .58 caliber originally, it is now about .64 caliber and shows evidence of heavy usage. The rifling is about obliterated. The front sight is a small low brass blade. The rear sight is fixed and notched and is quite low. The top left side of the barrel near the breech is stamped "ALA. 1864" (figure 32). Just beneath this, and hidden by the stock, the left side of the barrel is stamped "PRO" (proved) and "F.C.H." in two lines. The underside of the barrel is stamped with the cryptic three dots in a row. The exterior of the lockplate is unmarked. The inner aspect of the lockplate is stamped "16". Below this appears a cryptic dot. The bolt heads are flat and are all stamped "16". The furniture is of brass and is similar to the other carbine, however, the trigger is of iron. Carrying swivels are also attached to the front barrel band and to the front part of the trigger guard bow. The ramrod tip is similar to the first carbine. The wood of the stock beneath the breech of the barrel is marked with three large dots in a row.

The Murray Cavalry Carbine, (figure 33) is 39 inches in overall length and the barrel length is 23 inches. It is .58 caliber and is rifled with three broad lands and grooves. The front sight is fixed, notched and rather low. A ramrod having a large flat tip with a knurled edge is retained by swivels fastened to the underside of the barrel at the muzzle. The left side of the barrel near the breech is stamped "1864" and "ALA" (barely legible) over "PRO." and "F.C.H." The under side of the barrel near the breech is stamped "2N1" and "76". The back of the breech is stamped "W" in four places. The lockplate is stamped "J.P. MURRAY-COLUMBUS GA" in two lines forward of the hammer. The inner aspect of the lockplate and the inner aspect of the hammer are stamped "21". The bolt heads are flat and those securing the lockplate are stamped "21". "22" is stamped on the head of the bolt securing the barrel tang. "76" is pencilled on the inside of the stock beneath the barrel.

It is of interest that, although the J. P. Murray stampings on the two carbines described above are identical and from the same die, the lockplates will not interchange.

William Dickson and Owen O. Nelson formed the Shakanoosa Arms Company and were awarded a contract to manufacture "Mississippi Rifles" for the State of Alabama. Operations were to have

Figures 37 and 38. Two Rising Breech carbines, the lower showing the breech in a raised position.

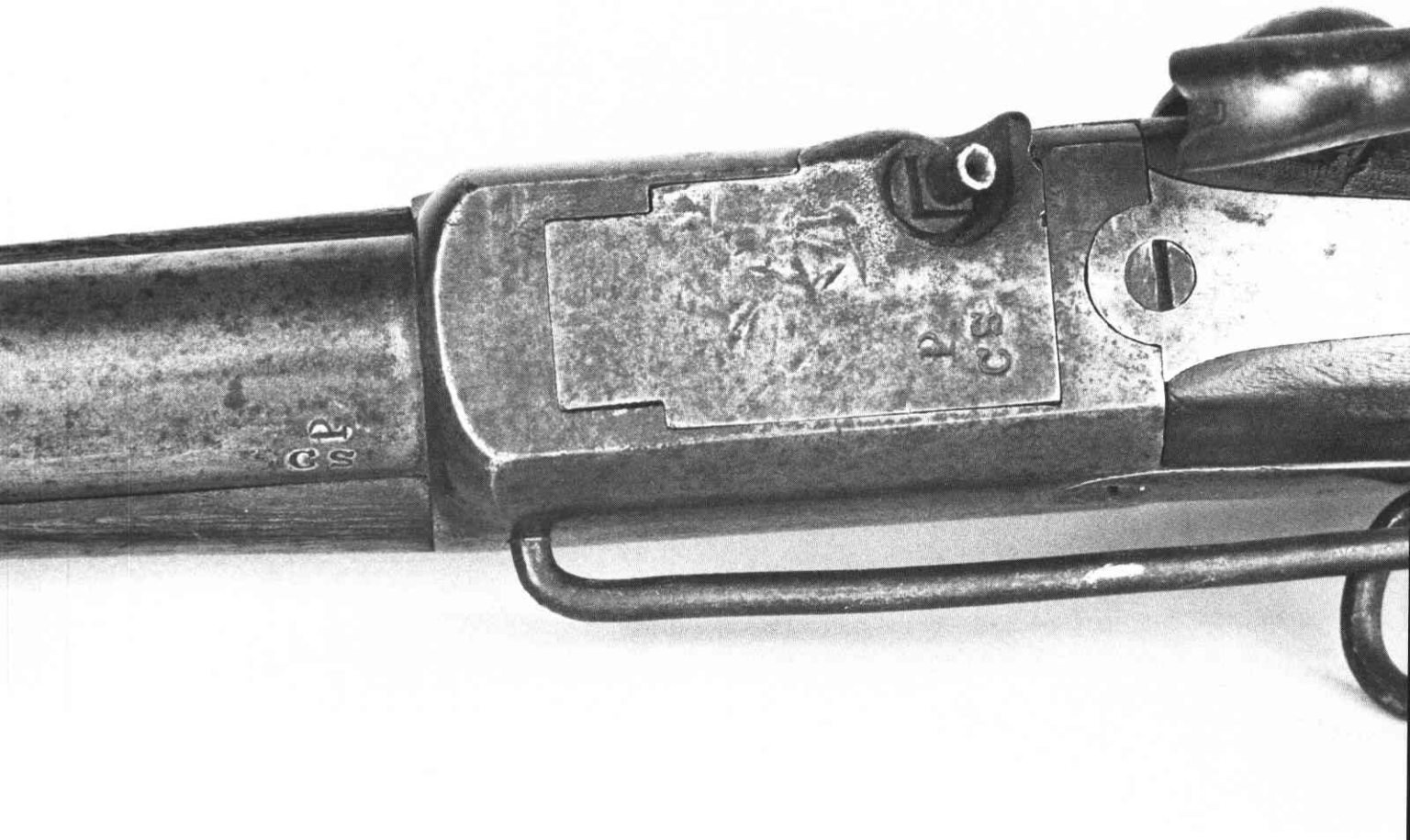
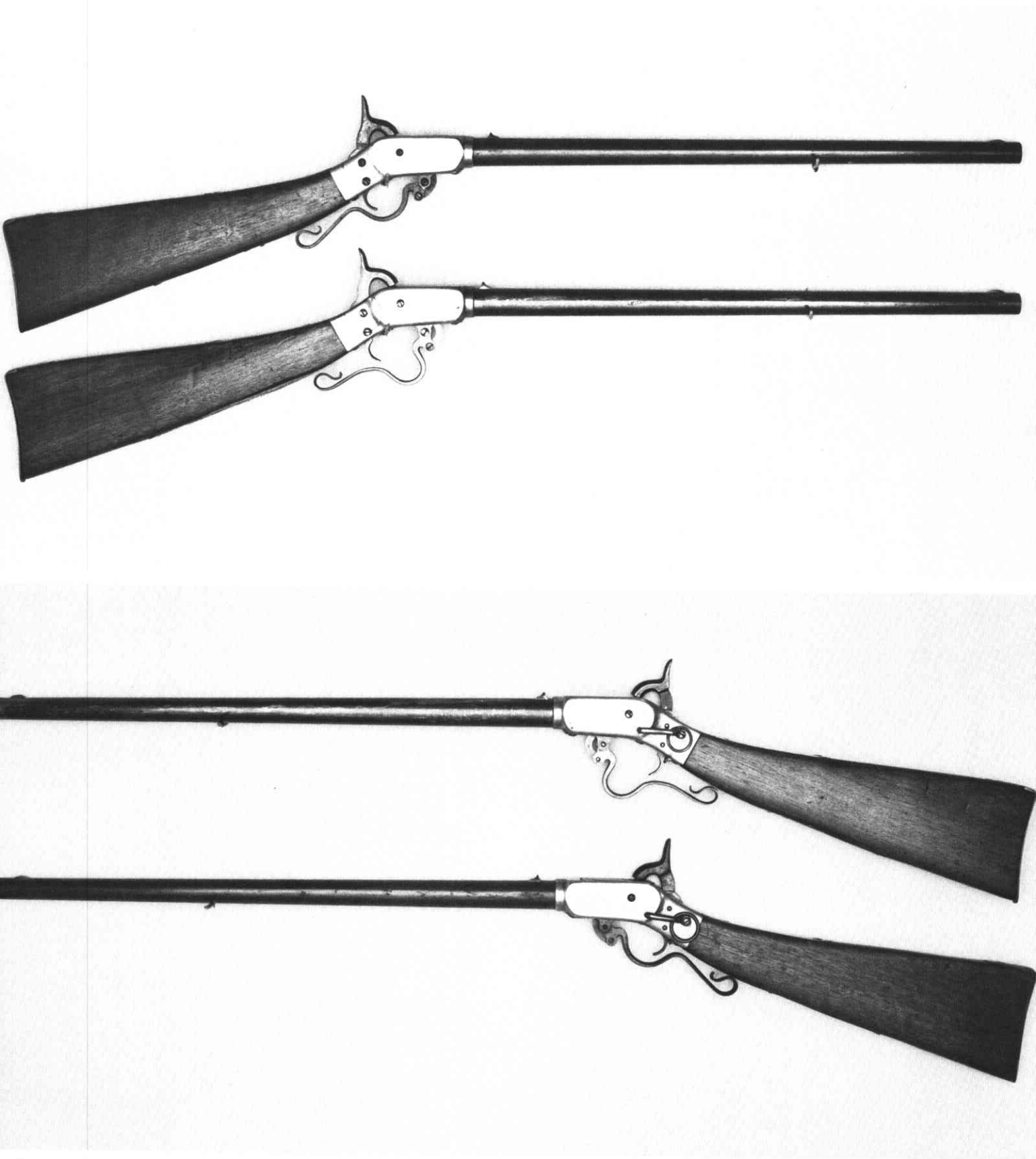


Figure 39. Breechblock markings on Rising Block carbine.

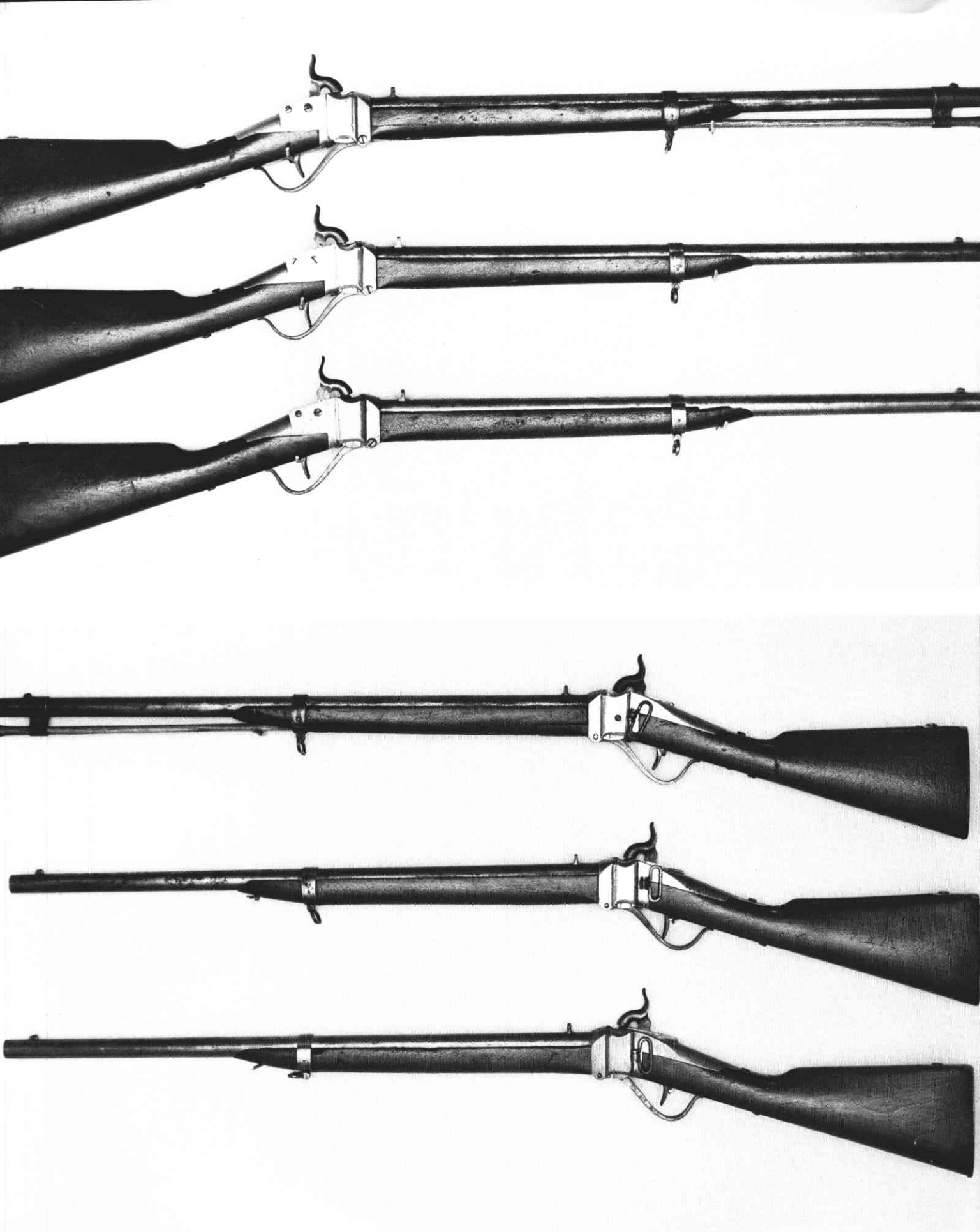
begun at Dickson, Alabama, but due to the changing tides of war, the firm hastily moved to Rome, Georgia. A large brick building was leased, but operations were hardly begun when the plant was destroyed by fire. The next move was to Adairsville, Georgia, where short rifles of the Mississippi type were manufactured until after the battle of Chicamauga. The firm then moved again to Dawson, Georgia, where rifles continued to be made until the end of the war. Although the firm had a contract to manufacture rifles for the State of Alabama and the lockplates of these pieces are stamped "ALA", all were actually made in Georgia. Such rifles were among the best produced in the South. Iron for their fabrication came from the Shelby Works which also supplied Cook & Brother and Griswold and Gunnison.

Carbines made by this firm are much scarcer than their rifles and probably represent a salvaging operation to utilize flawed or defective rifle barrels which were still sufficiently sound to make the shorter barrel (figure 34).

The overall length of this carbine is 40½ inches and the barrel length is 24 inches. The bore is .62 caliber and has been badly shot out so that the rifling is difficult to detect. The front sight is a high broad based blade. The slot where the original rear sight was attached has been filled in with copper and a large rabbit ear fixed rear sight has been positioned about two inches further forward. An iron ramrod with a flat button type tip is attached to the underside of the barrel near the muzzle by means of iron swivels. The left top side of the barrel is stamped "ALA 1865". The underside of the barrel near the breech is stamped with the unique windmill armorer's mark exactly the same as found on many Murray made pieces and attributed to Nathan D. Cross, as previously noted.



Figures 40 and 41. Perry carbines.



Figures 42 and 43. Three brass framed "Huntersville" carbines.

Figure 44. Barret carbine.

One can speculate that this is actually a Murray barrel or that Cross somehow inspected it. Dickson, Nelson rifles in my collection do not have such markings. The lockplate forward of the hammer is stamped "DICKSON -NELSON & CO.-C.S." in three lines. To the rear of the hammer it is stamped "ALA-1864" in two lines (figure 35).

All the furniture is of brass. The oval clamping type front band has a carrying swivel attached. Another carrying swivel is attached to the underside of the butt stock. The wood of the stock appears to be cherry. It is of note that typically only early production or first model Dickson, Nelson Rifles had cherry wood stocks. Later production, or second model types, had walnut stocks. The inner aspect of the stock beneath the barrel is marked with a Roman "III". The stocks of some Dickson, Nelson Carbines are stamped "F. ZUNDT".

The place of origin of the Rising Breech carbine still remains a mystery. Inasmuch as several have been found in Virginia it is believed that they probably originated in that state. It is a rather heavy, well made weapon. It is unique in that it is fitted with a lever action which, when activated, causes the entire breech section to rise above the axis at the bore thus exposing the loading chamber into which is inserted a paper or "skin" cartridge of .54 caliber. When the lever is raised or closed, a trunnion action causes the steel breech to return to its position of alignment with the bore of the barrel.

Overall length of the top piece in figures 37 and 38 is 40 inches and the barrel length 21 inches. Originally the frame and block were casehardened in mottled colors. Some specimens I have seen indicate that the barrels were originally browned. The caliber is .54 and the barrel is rifled with three lands and grooves. The front sight is a broad based blade. The rear sight is of the three leaf variety. The top left side of the barrel near the breech is stamped "P" over "C S". These stampings also appear on the top left rear of the breech block (figure 39).

Figure 45. A rare Barrett or Wytheville carbine derived from Hall carbine (Model 1833) components. It is .52 caliber, is smoothbore, and retains the original Hall bayonet supporter near the muzzle.

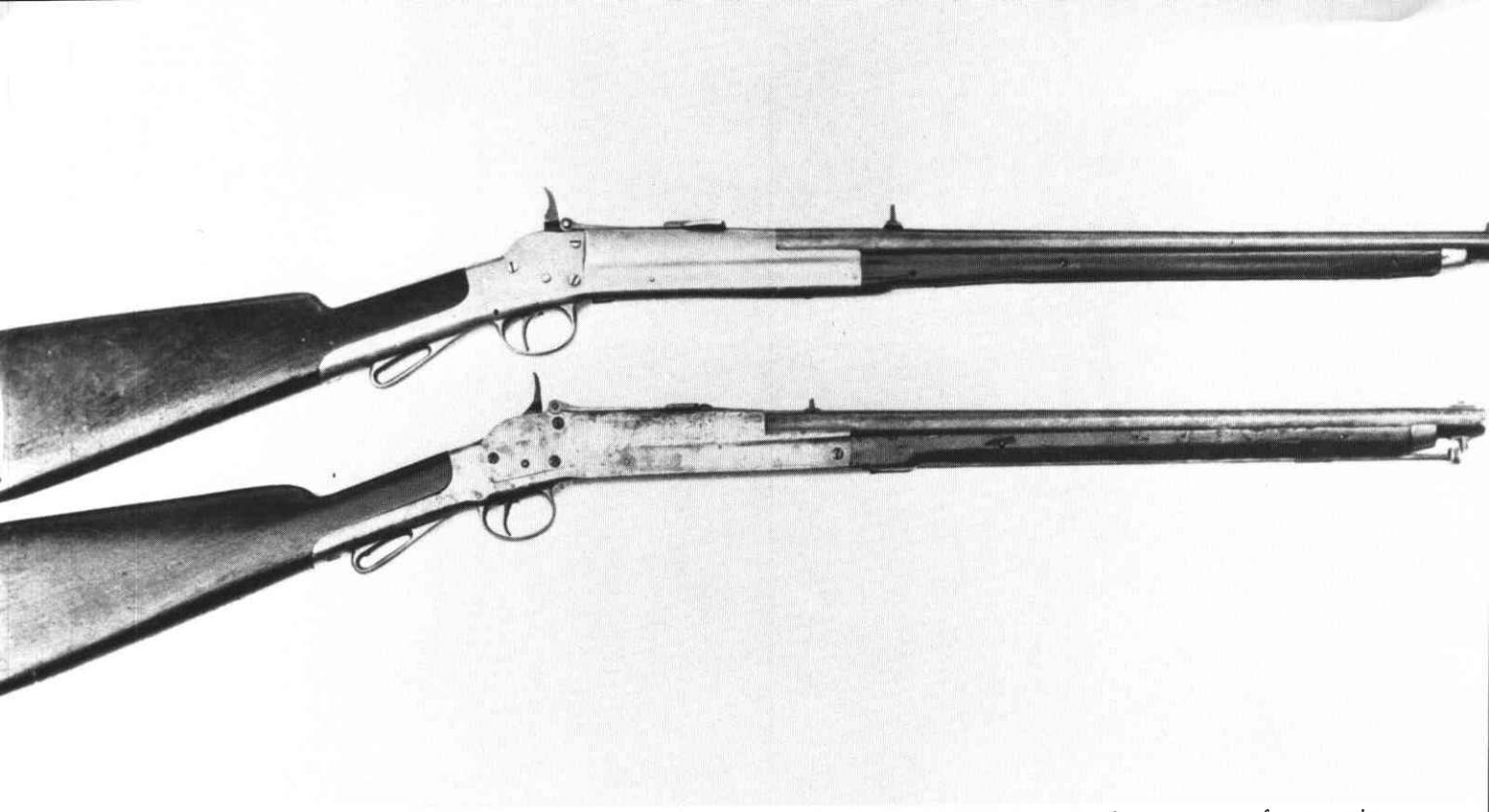


Figure 46. Atlanta Morse carbine above the usually seen type made in Greenville, South Carolina, for purposes of comparison. Collection of Mr. William A. Floyd, Greenville, South Carolina.

The flat iron barrel band is retained by a screw on the under side. A slide bar with saddle ring is attached to the left side of the frame and to an elongated iron plate extending back from the frame and inletted into the stock. A serial number appears externally on the underside of the breechblock near the front. This number is also stamped into the wood of the buttstock just to the rear of the lever latch. The upper or inside surface of the lever is stamped with an "A" over the serial number. The serial number is also stamped on the hidden or inner aspect of virtually every component of the gun including the forestock. This is consistent in all of the specimens I have had the opportunity to examine. The highest serial number known to me is "85". The serial numbers of the two Rising Breech carbines in my collection are "28" and "70". Although the two pieces in figure 37 appear virtually identical, close examination reveals slight differences in the contouring of the metal and wood indicating that they were all individually hand crafted. It is to be noted that the inletting of the stock is quite crude and typically Confederate.

The origin of the Confederate "Perry" or Maynard Carbine (figures 40 and 41) is a source of disagreement. According to Fuller and Steuart in FIREARMS OF THE CONFEDERACY, it was produced at Tallassee, Alabama, however, Mr. William Albaugh is of the opinion that it is the product of N. T. Read of Danville, Virginia and manufactured by Keen, Walker & Co. of Danville, Va.

Superficially this carbine resembles the U. S. Maynard Carbine inasmuch as the block is actuated by a toggle lever of the same design as the Maynard, however, in the Maynard Carbine, the toggle lever moves the pivoted barrel and not the breech block. A further resemblance lies in the very thin stock and the absence of a forestock. The resemblance to the U. S. Perry Carbine lies in the manner the breech block is pivoted in the frame.

Both carbines shown have an overall length of 40 inches with a barrel length of 21½ inches. Both are caliber .54 and the barrels are rifled with seven lands and grooves. The frame is of brass or bronze and the breech block is of iron. The forward part of the chamber has a bronze lining which extends back about ¼ inch and is separated from the rear part of the chamber by a deep groove. The combination of bronze lining and deep groove was quite probably an attempt to take advantage of the expansion to make a gas tight joint. One carbine retains most of the original heat blue on the barrel and the trigger has traces of original blue. Most of the other metal parts, including the breech block, hammer, lever and the long plate or tang extending along the under aspect of the frame and the buttplate are case hardened in mottled colors. The barrel of the other specimen retains most of its original brown lacquer finish. Typically, the front sight is a long, rather low, brass blade arising from a rectangular brass base which is inletted into the barrel. The rear sight is fixed and notched. The barrel of the specimen with the blued barrel is unmarked. The barrel having the brown lacquer

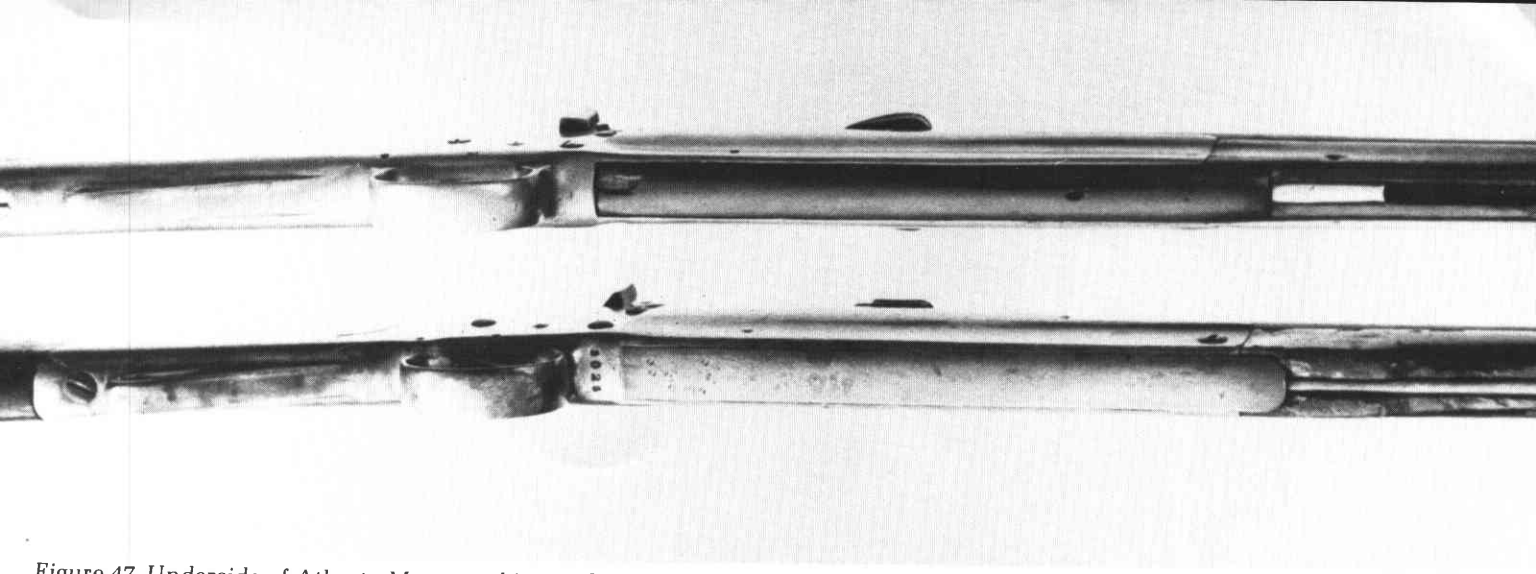


Figure 47. Underside of Atlanta Morse carbine with Greenville Morse carbine for comparison.

Figure 48. Three Greenville Morse carbines, illustrating the three basic types of breech locking actions.

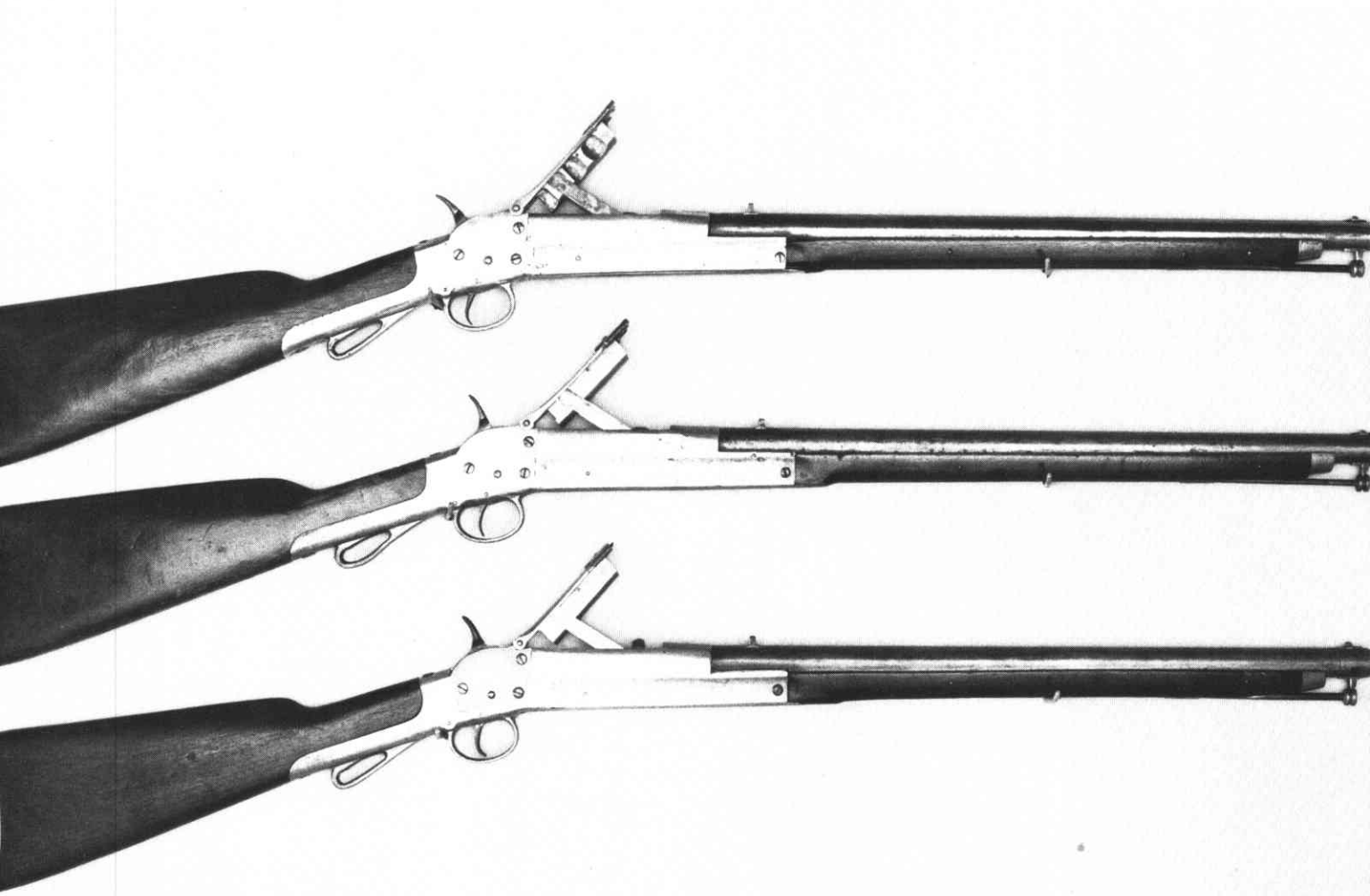


Figure 49. The left side of the frame of Morse carbine serial number "676" which has the third type latching device. It is inscribed "Mar. 1, 1865 Cos G and K 55th Mass. Inf. by a night march surprised near St. Stephens S. C. a squad of Georgia cavalry who had followed Sherman's army from Chattanooga to Savannah. This carbine was captured in the fight by Capt. Chas. C. Soule".

finish is stamped with "P" on the right side near the breech. There are no other marks externally on either piece. Both pieces, as well as other specimens I have examined, have Roman numeral markings which are quite large and appear to have been cut into the metal. These appear in the following locations: on the under surface of the brass tang extending back from the top rear of the frame; on the inner or upper surface of the iron tang extending along the bottom of the frame and stock; and in the wood of the stock beneath the brass frame tang. The blued barrel piece is marked "XV", the other piece has the interesting marking of "VIIII". A short slide bar with saddle ring is attached to the left side of the brass frame. The breechblock is pivoted on two shallow metal bolts which pass through the frame on either side and extend a short distance into the block. Lowering the lever tips up the forward part of the breech block for loading with a paper cartridge.

Next considered is an unusual carbine which has a brass frame similar in contour to the percussion Sharps Carbine model 1859, but with a centrally hung or boxlock type hammer. The other components are derived from Hall rifle parts undoubtedly obtained when the government arsenal at Harpers Ferry was taken over by the State of Virginia (figures 42 and 43). The general characteristics and workmanship of this carbine are typically Confederate. Available information indicates that they were probably fabricated in the western part of Virginia, perhaps in Huntersville, now just over the Virginia line in West Virginia.

To date, four of these carbines have been discovered. With minor exceptions all four are virtually identical.

The front and rear sights are of iron. The large, high, rear sight is fixed and notched. Sling swivels are fastened beneath the flat barrel band and to the left side of the frame. The top carbine has a wooden ramrod. The ramrod channelling in the other two has been closed up with a piece of walnut which has been glued into place. All metal and wood parts bear Roman numeral markings. The only place where this number appears externally is on the rear of the buttplate. The carbine with the ramrod is marked "I". The other two are marked "II" and "V" respectively. The carbine with the "I" marking is caliber .58, smoothbore, probably a scored, but usable caliber .52 Hall rifle barrel bored out to caliber .58 for purposes of trial. The carbine marked "II" is caliber .52 and is rifled with sixteen lands and grooves. This barrel is undoubtedly derived from a model 1819 Hall rifle which had such rifling. The carbine marked "V" is rifled with seven lands and grooves. This barrel was probably obtained from a model 1841 Hall rifle.

Figure 50. "MORSE" stamping on a piece made near the end of production. Collection of Dr. H. L. Sutherland, Union, South Carolina.

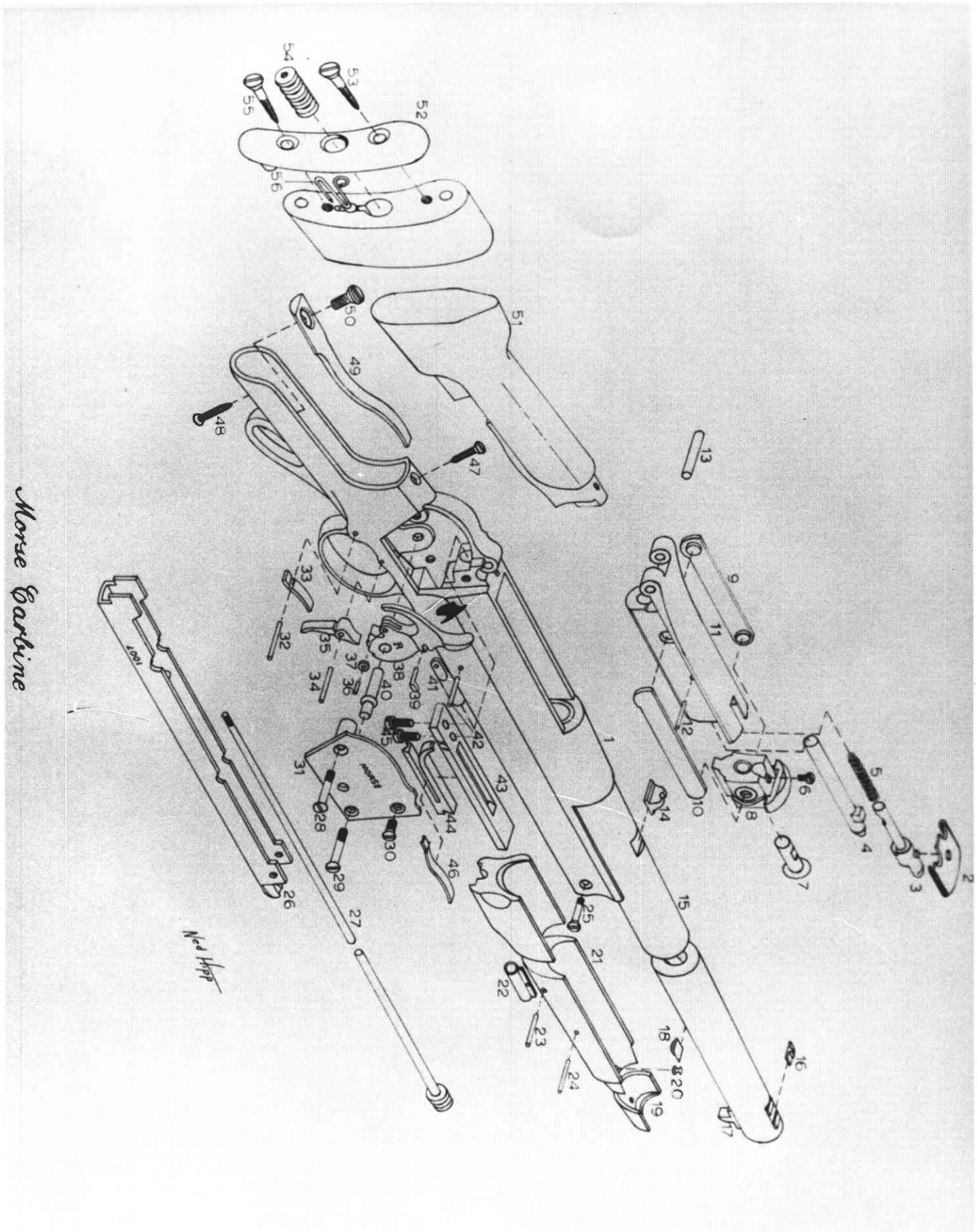
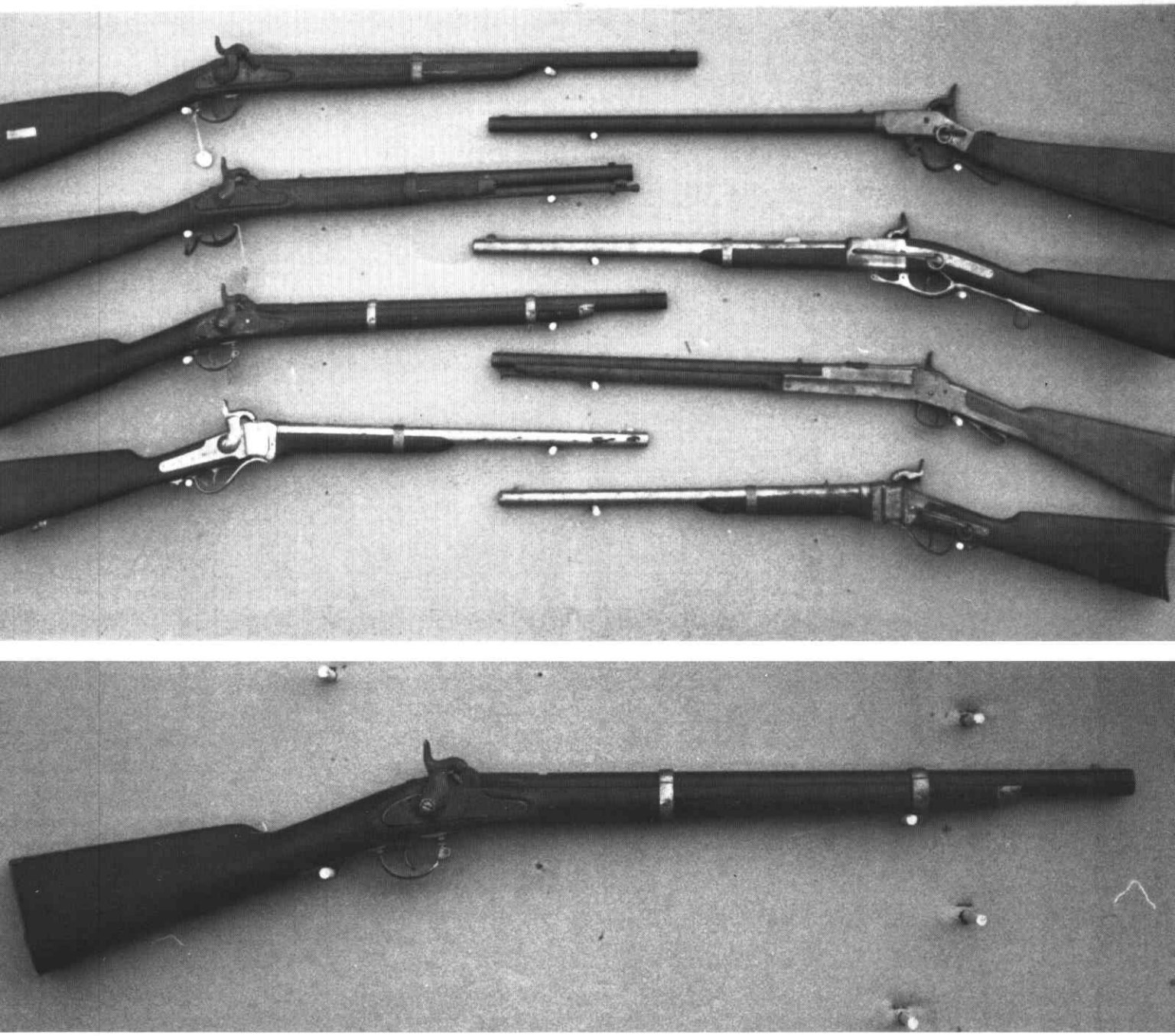


Figure 51. An 'exploded' drawing of the Morse carbine, prepared by Dr. H. L. Sutherland, Union, South Carolina, which clearly illustrates the complex construction of this unique carbine.



Figures 52 and 53. A grouping of Confederate carbines in the collection of Mr. William B. Floyd, Seneca, South Carolina. A Davis and Bozeman carbine is the third weapon from the top on the left side. Lower is the Davis and Bozeman carbine.

In my opinion this type constitutes a major new Confederate carbine discovery and is more truly derived from Hall components than the Barrett rifle which has an entirely new stock.

Speaking of the Barrett or Wytheville rifle, some of these, like other Confederate long arms, were reduced to carbine length.

Of considerable rarity is a type of the Barrett conversion which made use of a trigger guard and barrel derived from a model 1833 Hall Carbine (figures 44 and 45).

The final carbine which will be considered is the Morse breech loading brass framed metallic cartridge carbine. George W. Morse invented a system for the alteration of old muzzle loading arms to breechloaders. Machinery for this purpose was set up at the Harpers Ferry Armory. In April 1861, when the Harpers Ferry Arsenal was captured by Virginia forces, this machinery was removed to Richmond and Morse cast his lot with the South. The machinery was then sent to Nashville, where Morse served as superintendent of the Tennessee Armory until that city fell in February 1862. Machinery saved from the

Nashville Armory was then moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Manufacture of Morse carbines was undertaken at the manufactory of H. Marshall & Co. in Atlanta. A specimen made in Atlanta and which was probably the pilot model, or prototype carbine, survives.

While quite similar to the later Greenville type, the Atlanta carbine has differences in the configuration of the latch and in the front and rear sights. Also the under side of the frame on the Atlanta Morse is filled in with wood whereas the later type has a metal plate in this area.

The carbine machinery was apparently very shortly removed to the State Military Works in Greenville, South Carolina, where Morse manufactured the brass framed carbine that bears his name. Morse was far ahead of his contemporaries with the basic idea for what, eventually, became the modern center fire cartridge.

The Morse Carbine is a handsome weapon with a large brass frame, brass buttplate and brass forend tip. Overall length is 40 inches. The caliber is .50 and the barrel is rifled with three shallow lands and grooves. The stock and forestock usually have a butternut finish. The ramrod is brass tipped and a brass cleaning appliance is contained in the butt. The lever behind the trigger guard is false and an integral part of the frame. The brass plate, or bolt, covering the action is hinged at the rear and two iron plates or lifters on either side connect to a sliding breech block. The firing pin is contained in the bolt portion of the brass plate. The hammer acts as a cocking piece.

The total production at Greenville was in the neighborhood of a thousand carbines. Serial numbers appear on most parts, however, the only external location is on the under side of the forepart of the frame. Various secondary numbers or markings such as Roman numerals also appear on most internal parts.

Three basic types of Morse carbines are identified, each showing an improvement over the previous model. These variations or improvements have primarily to do with the locking of the breech. The first type depends entirely on the firing pin to lock the action. It is to be noted that first type carbines having very low serial numbers have part octagonal barrels at the breech.

In the second type, the action was locked in position by a latch engaging a large bolt head on the sliding breech block.

The third type is locked in position by the latch engaging the rounded iron upper portion of the sliding breech block. Third type carbines having serial numbers close to the end of production, have "MORSE" stamped on the brass side plate set into the right side of the frame.

Morse carbines were intended primarily to arm the South Carolina State Militia, but some undoubtedly found their way into the regular Confederate forces.

The firm of Henry J. Davis and David W. Bozeman located near Central Alabama made Mississippi-type rifles for the State of Alabama. From October 1, 1863 to November 1, 1864, this firm supplied the State with 749 rifles and 89 carbines. Such arms are stamped 'Ala' and the date on the breech and 'D. & B. Ala' and the date on the lockplate.

The author gratefully recognizes the kind assistance of the following fellow collectors who supplied information and photographs.
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