

The Edged Weapons of Kenansville, North Carolina, or How to Succeed in Business by Disposing of a Rascal Partner

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As we in the American Society of Arms Collectors hold our 1986 Spring meeting here in the historic State of North Carolina, in beautiful Greensboro, it might be interesting to pause and look back over the years, through the veil of time, to when there were no super highways, no automobiles, no radios, no televisions, no airplanes, no, not even any video games, home videos, or computers. A time when the primary mode of transportation, other than on foot, was by horse and wagon and stagecoach, with some railroads to the more heavily populated areas. A time when there were no highways or roads as we know them today, but only well-worn, trampled-down, paths and ruts, criss-crossing at times, and leading off in various directions.

In the year 1860, North Carolina had a population of approximately 1 million people, of which 320,000 were slaves.¹ In the entire state there were only about 2,600 business or commercial establishments,² a very small percentage of which were engaged in manufacturing, or the making of a product other than strictly by hand.

By comparison, New York State at the same time had a population of nearly 3,800,000, no slaves, of course, and over 23,000 business or commercial enterprises,³ many of which were industrial and manufacturing establishments. So we can see that in approaching the time when a decision would have to be made regarding secession from the Union, possibly pitting North against South, a state of the size and with the resources of North Carolina should have been doing some planning and worrying.

Many of the southern states which would shortly secede from the Union had during the late 1850s and the latter part of 1860 and early 1861 been building up their State Militias' arms coffers by procurement of small arms from federal arsenals. It is indeed surprising that these later requests for supplies of small arms were met; a few such requests from southern states were even honored after South Carolina seceded in December of 1860! But that's another story for another day.

There was the overwhelming feeling in the Southern States that each needed to prepare itself for the time when it must stand up with its sister states to the ever-expanding power of the federal government in Washington, a government which was seemingly hell-bent in encroaching upon the sovereignty of individual states, especially southern states.

On April 23, 1861, North Carolina seized the U.S.



Arsenal at Fayetteville, which had some 37,000 stands of small arms. Less than one month later, on the 20th of May, 1861, some six months after her sister state of South Carolina had done so, North Carolina broke its ties with the Union at its convention in Raleigh, becoming the 10th State to secede.⁴

Also in April of 1861, in keeping with the idea of preparing for a probable conflict, the State of North Carolina contracted for the purchase of edged weapons with Louis Froelich and his rascal partner, "Colonel" B. Eastvan (Estvan).⁵

Louis Froelich, a German immigrant, was the artisan and mechanical brains behind the edged weapon operation, while his partner, the phony-titled "Colonel" B. Estvan, a Hungarian, was the contact man soliciting business. He might have been more aptly described as a "con" man.

Getting by on his wits and holding himself out to be a professional soldier with substantial credentials, it was Estvan who wooed North Carolina Governor Henry T. Clark into awarding the April edged weapon contract to himself and Froelich. He followed that up by urging the Governor to recommend to Confederate authorities in June of 1861, that he, Estvan, be employed in instructing a company of North Carolina Volunteers in the use of the lance (an effective weapon according to Estvan).⁶ Naturally, Froelich and Estvan would supply the lances at a price, and perhaps a whole regiment of North Carolina lancers could be envisioned some time in the future.

We are not sure what became of this Confederate version of the saga of the Royal Lancers, for the next

thing we note is a March, 1862, letter from Governor Clark to the Confederate Secretary of War, Judah P. Benjamin, that "... We did engage from the Estvan & Froelich sword factory at Wilmington, and paid high prices, but three-fourths of the swords proved worthless."⁷

The "worthless" swords were to have been cavalry sabres made for Colonel Spruill's cavalry regiment, and none have been identified to date. (These were certainly not the same fine cavalry sabres which we now identify as those made later by Froelich at Kenansville.)

Also in March, 1862, Froelich apparently became disenchanted with the smooth-talking Estvan, after he cheated Froelich out of monies due the firm, for Froelich published the termination of the partnership and established a new manufactory at Kenansville, North Carolina, under the new name, "Confederate States Armory."

Well over a year later, while Froelich's new business was prospering and the production of edged weapons was flourishing, we again hear from Estvan, who was still plying his trade as a "con-man," only now concentrating on Yankee territory.

The Monday morning edition of the *Richmond Examiner*, August 10, 1863, reports the following exploits of "Colonel" B. Estvan.

SOUTHERN IMPOSTERS NORTH — Another Richmond ass has turned up in New York, where, managing to conceal his ears, he is passing for a lion. He has got into the newspapers, and Gotham is agog over a book he has published, entitled "War Pictures from the South." This ass and impostor in Richmond, and lion and great man in New York is no less or more a personage than the notorious, Estvan, the Hungarian, who lived here before the war by theft and deception, supported when these shifts failed by an amiable wife he was unworthy of, and taking himself off North to escape the jail, if not the gallows, he richly deserved.

Estvan is a sleek rascal, smooth spoken and slimy as the serpent in the garden, and we perceive by the accounts of him in the New York papers that he has been practicing his little deceptions upon them. They speak of him as the "gallant Colonel" and of his book as "interesting and remarkable." We make the following rich excerpt:

"Colonel Estvan is a Hungarian by birth, served with distinction in several European wars, came to this country and opened a military school in Richmond. While engaged in this enterprise our civil war began. Estvan was sent South by the Richmond authorities as a military inspector, and was afterwards appointed a colonel in the rebel cavalry. Still, he did not heartily sympathize with the rebel cause."

The only thing true in this extract is contained in the last sentence. He was a traitor and scoundrel, and that was all. He never was "sent South as a military inspector," and never was "made a Colonel in the rebel cavalry." He did get a contract for making swords for the Government, but three hundred of the first lot were condemned and he cheated his partner out of all the funds and ran away from

North Carolina, where the factory was located. He was previously known in Richmond as an unauthorized borrower, and user of other people's money, a thief, a low blackguard, and improvident vagabond, who was alone kept from the support which charity affords outcasts by his wife, well known and respected in Richmond.

The comments of the New York *Herald* (from which the above extract is taken) on the military talent and powers of criticism displayed by Estvan in his book, are amusing, and would be enjoyed by those who knew Estvan, if we thought them worthy of publication. The *Herald* says: "The opinions of such a man in regard to the conduct of our war are not to be lightly considered." This, written for sublimity at the North, becomes ridiculous at the South. Estvan has pulled the wool over the Yankees eyes completely, and it is not beyond the range of Yankee probability that Estvan, the Richmond imposter and loafer, may yet head, as Commander in Chief, the "Grand Army of the Potomac," and lead, at some future day, his "On to Richmond," like the rest of the pigmies.

If Froelich had read this account of Estvan's latest hype, he would have been overjoyed and much relieved to have rid himself of "Colonel" Estvan.

The edged weapons made by Froelich after his episode as Estvan's partner were of high quality and were widely used by the Army of Northern Virginia.

By far the best known product of the Confederate States Armory (though by no means its most heavily produced item, judging from the production records available), is the officer's sabre with the familiar "C.S.A." cast into the guard. This is easily the most recognizable and attractive of any of the Confederate edged weapons.

As hallmarks of the Confederate States Armory, these sabres generally run true to form in specification and dimension; this during a time and under manufacturing circumstances which were anything but standardized.

Nearly all have slender, straight blades, approximately one inch wide at the ricasso, with unstopped fullers on both sides, and are about 32 inches long. The shallow fullers generally commence about one-half inch from the guard and run down the blade for approximately 23 1/2 inches, where they end in a single, somewhat elevated, spine in the middle of the blade and continue to its tapered point.

The wraps (grips) are generally of dark brown or black leather and are wound between 11 and 12 times with single strand brass or iron wire. The overall configuration of the grips shows a swell in mid-section. A graduated brass collar, or ferrule, 3/4 of an inch wide encircles the grip at the base.

The brass pommels are all very similar, with a rolled collar near the top, then tapering up from the collar to a smaller flattened area at the very top itself. The hilts generally measure 5 1/8 to 5 3/16 inches from the top side of the guard to the top of the pommel.

Many of these sabres show a copper-colored brass while others are of a goldish or even yellowish hue: the Confederates had to make do with whatever raw materials they could get their hands on, from the melting down of brass church bells and household implements to the conversion of farm equipment and building supplies. Their manufacturing methods and quality control weren't necessarily the most sophisticated (there are usually a few minor casting flaws in the brass guards), but "they got the job done" in admirable fashion.

Crude Roman numerals are nearly always cut into the front edge of either the obverse or reverse of the quillon, with matching Roman numerals cut in the top flat surface of the brass throat of the scabbard. Inasmuch as a good amount of hand work went into the manufacture of these sabres, the matching Roman numerals were no doubt used so that the sabre could be re-joined with the matching throat when the scabbard manufacturing process was completed.

The brass throats of the scabbards are held in place by single flush brass rivets on either side. The scabbards themselves are made of iron with narrow brass ring mounts and iron rings, and are lapped-over at the seam, with the seam always being visible on what would be the reverse side as viewed with the sabre encased. The drags are usually of iron (sometimes brass) and conform rather strictly to pattern.

Several dozen of these desirable pieces have been examined and approximately half were accompanied by their own scabbards! Oftentimes, where scabbards are missing, the sabres appear to have been shortened in varying degrees, but still seem to run true to form.

A short time ago a fine variant of this model, complete with matching scabbard, cropped up and created a great deal of interest among fellow Confederate sword collectors across the country. While it is not one of a kind, for now there are several other known specimens, it is very rare and is 100 percent original.

This particular piece, while similar in style and general configuration to those of standard pattern, differs in many major respects, and is not just a cut-down version of the standard pattern. Its heavier blade is 30 inches long and is approximately 1 1/4 inches wide at the ricasso, rather than the standard model's barely one inch wide and 32 inches long.

The unstopped fullers on either side of the heavier blade run from approximately 3/4 of an inch below the guard about 29 1/4 inches, nearly to the end of the blade, where they come to a ridge or spine which continues to the point. The fullers themselves appear to be deeper.

The scabbard is nearly identical in construction to

the other models, only it too is a heavier, wider version, with heavier brass ring mounts and a correspondingly larger brass throat which has a rocker-shaped lower edge; the others are straight. Single flush brass rivets hold the throat to the scabbard.

This sabre has matching Roman numeral "IV" cut into the obverse side of the quillon and the top flat portion of the throat of the scabbard.

The grips are of dark brown leather, wrapped 13 times with iron winding. The hilt itself is somewhat shorter than standard, measuring barely five inches. The piece has an entirely different feel from the others, and one gets the impression that it might have been made on special order, along with its few companion pieces. A truly interesting variation of the most recognized of Confederate swords!

The Confederate States Armory also made cavalry sabres and "D" Guard Bowie knives.

The cavalry sabres which I have examined have all been pretty much alike, with a few minor variations. Generally, they have blades which are approximately 34 1/2 to 35 inches long and 1 3/16 inches wide at the ricasso. The blades are all rounded at the back, and have single fullers which begin about 1/2 inch below the guard and run down the blade 26 to 26 1/2 inches. The grips are of dark brown leather and are wound with either twisted brass or iron wire.

It is noteworthy that, to the author's knowledge, Froelich did not use oilcloth grip wrapping on his cavalry sabres, although oilcloth had occasionally been used in the wrapping for foot officers' sabres.

While not as readily recognizable as the foot officers' sabre, the Kenansville Cavalry sabre has its very own looks. The brass cast pommel is large, crude and club-like: very distinctive.

The usual basket-with-branch configuration of the Confederate cavalry sabre is present, but differs from others because its two branches stem from different points on the knucklebow; in most Confederate cavalry sabres the two branches stem from approximately the same point on the knucklebow.

As with the Kenansville foot officers' sabres, we find Roman numerals along the edge of the quillon and the top flat of the throat of the scabbard.

Scabbards are brass-mounted with iron carrying rings and drag. The seams are overlapped at the rear on the reverse side as are those of the foot officers' sabres. They are red-lacquered.

As noted above, much variation is found in the color of the brass on Kenansville products because of the many sources from which brass was obtained or reclaimed, but perhaps nowhere is this more evident than with the

cavalry sabres. The color spectrum runs from yellowish to orange to reddish-brown; some of the brass guards almost look painted. The Kenansville cavalry sabre, with the officers' sword, seems to have been "found only in the wake of that superb Army of Northern Virginia."⁸

There is another type of edged weapon generally attributed to Froelich at Kenansville which has been variably described as an artillery cutlass, a navy cutlass and a "D" guard Bowie knife.

Specimens examined generally have plain blades, double edged with a swell in the middle, ranging from 15 inches to 16 1/2 inches in length and 1 3/4 inches wide. The grips are rounded one piece walnut approximately 5 inches in length.

The "D" shaped guards of iron appear to have been stamped from sheet metal, with a flat, oval-shaped skirt at the base of the grip.

The walnut grips are generally intact and secure, seldom loose. The quality of manufacture is indicated by the smooth mating of the guard to the top of the grip by pressing the tang over.

The scabbards are of black leather sewn in the back middle and generally have tin throats and toes. Some have a leather loop for a belt riveted to the top throat.

These weapons are very well made and have good balance. They are a far cry from the Union and Confederate brass-guarded versions of the foot artillery and naval cutlasses. They are handsome weapons indeed!

After ridding himself of his phony partner, "Colonel Estvan," Louis Froelich made a substantial contribution to the Confederate war effort in his production of edged weapons: in the Wilmington, North Carolina, *Journal* of April 28, 1864, it is reported that from April 1st, 1861, to March 1st, 1864, "Messrs. L. Froelich & Co., Kenans-

ville, produced . . . 3,700 lance spears, 800 gross military buttons, 6,500 sabre bayonets, 11,700 cavalry sabres, 2,700 officers sabres, 600 navy cutlasses, 800 artillery cutlasses, 1,700 sets of infantry accoutrements, 300 sabre belts and 300 knapsacks."

Until it was destroyed by a Federal raid in the Autumn of 1864 (or by another account, July 4th, 1863)⁹ the Confederate States Armory at Kenansville, North Carolina, truly distinguished itself.

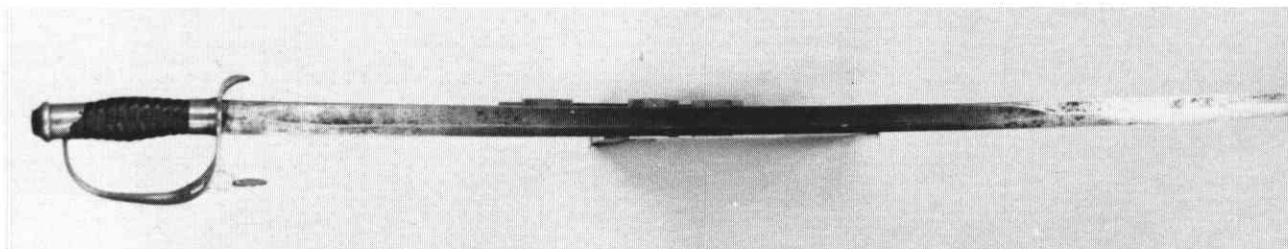
NOTES

1. Bruce Catton, *The Coming Fury*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1961, p. 470.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 470.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 470.
4. Ben La Bree, Editor, *The Confederate Soldier in the Civil War 1861-1864*, The Courier-Journal Job Printing Company, Louisville, Kentucky, 1985, p. 12.
5. William A. Albaugh III, *Confederate Edged Weapons*, Bonanza Books, New York, 1960, p. 23.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 24
7. *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, vol. 1, part 4, p. 987.
8. Albaugh, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
9. *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, vol. I-27, chapter XXXIX, p. 859.

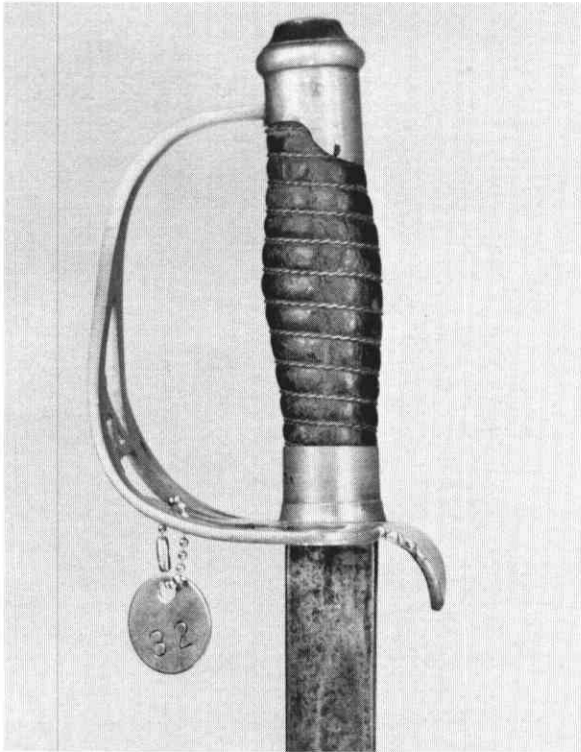
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- *A Photographic Supplement of Confederate Swords*. Washington, D.C.: Published by the author and William A. Bond, 1963.
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 - and Richard D. Steuart. *Handbook of Confederate Swords*. Harriman, Tennessee: Pioneer Press, 1951.
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- La Bree, Ben (editor). *The Confederate Soldier in the Civil War*. Louisville, Kentucky: The Courier-Journal Job Printing Company, 1895.

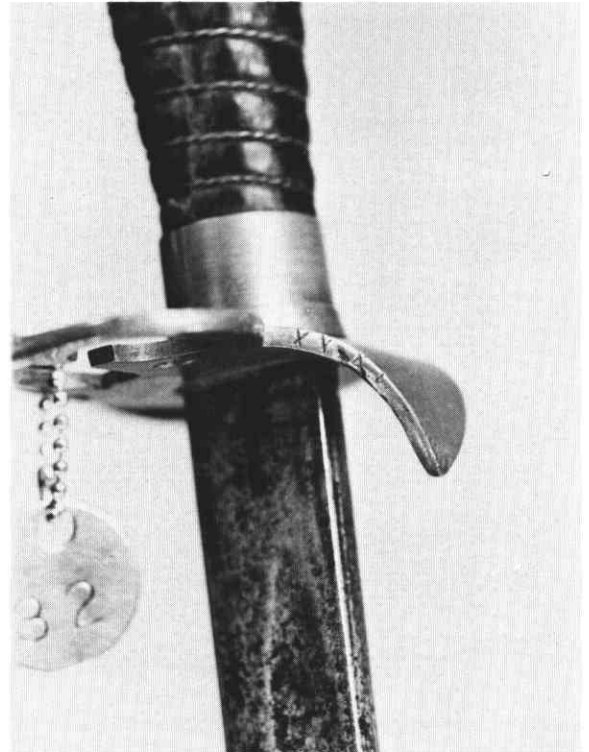
The following photographs are of edged weapons attributed to the Confederate States Armory owned by Louis Froelich, and located at Kenansville, North Carolina.



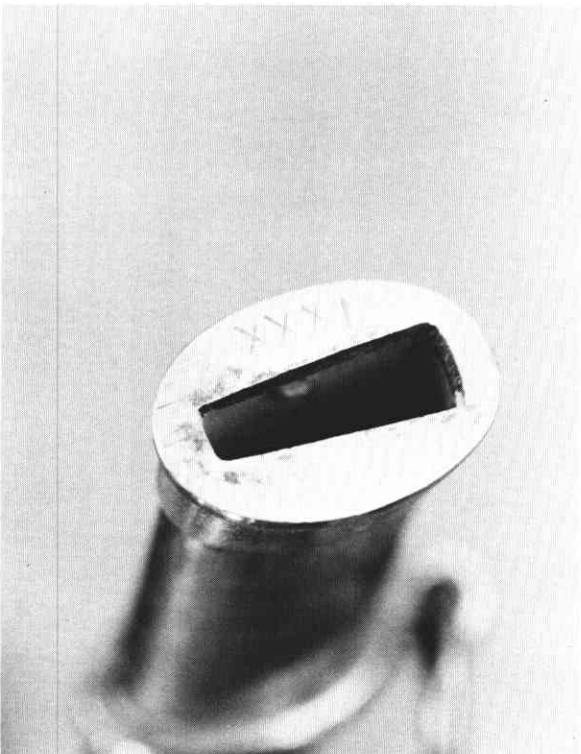
A classic example of the foot officer's sabre with its long slender blade configuration.



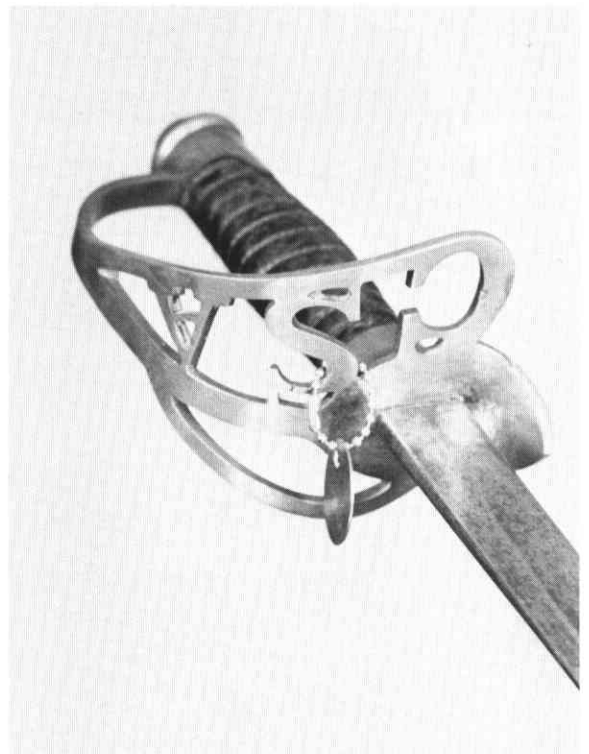
The same sabre, showing a casting flaw in bottom front section of brass pommel and leather wrap with twisted brass wire. The brass ferrule at the base of the grip is standard. None of the blades on Kenansville products have stopped fullers.



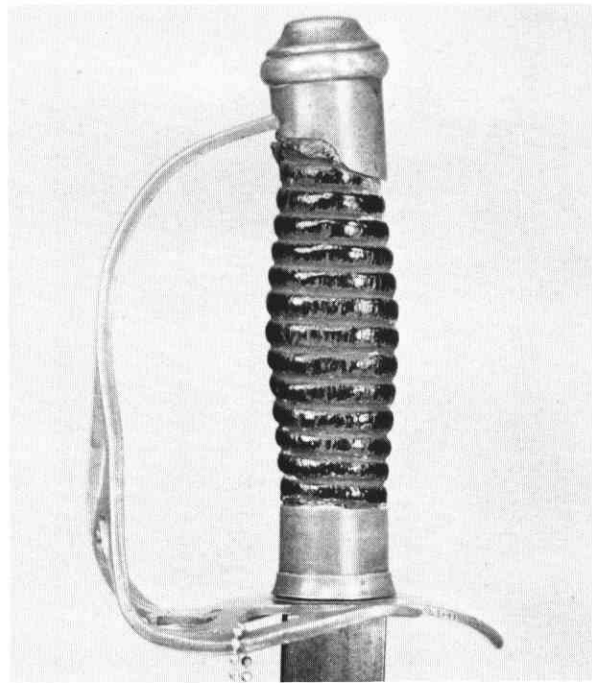
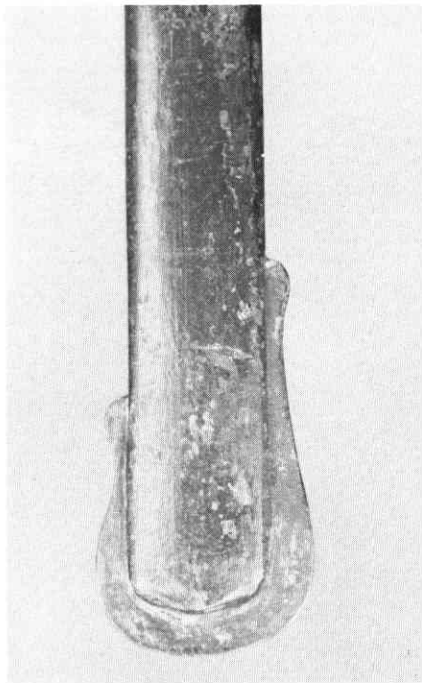
The Roman numeral XXXI cut into the obverse side of the quillon, and . . .



. . . the brass throat of the scabbard for sabre XXXI, showing matching Roman numeral XXXI.

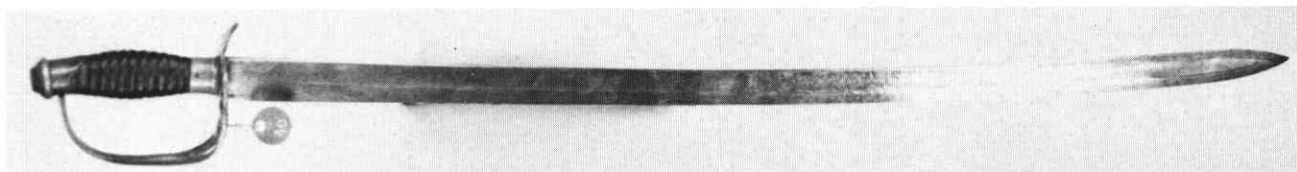


The brass counterguard of No. XXXI, showing a small casting flaw in the back inside of the "C".

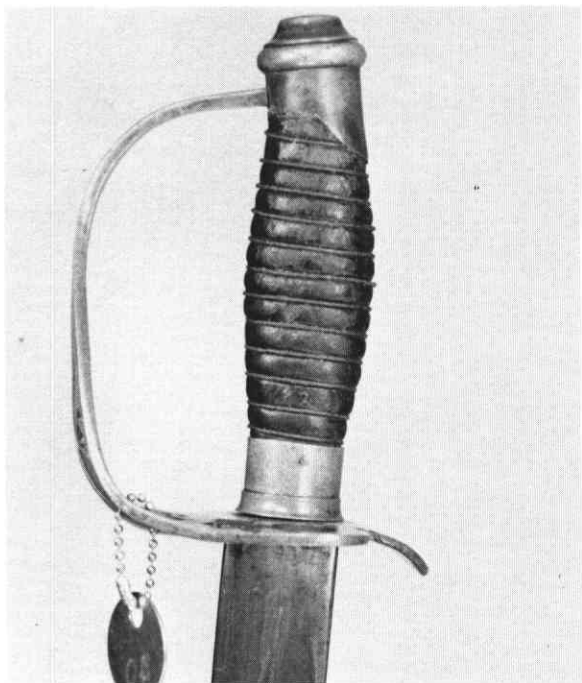


The brass throat of the scabbard of No. XXXI, held by single flush brass rivet, and the overlap seam along the rear; note the slender brass ring mounts. The scabbard is brownish-red lacquered. The iron drag is standard.

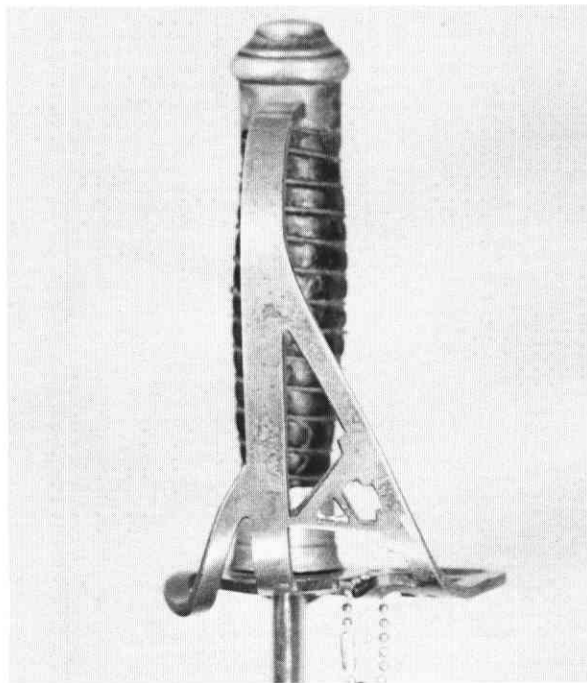
Another standard example of the foot officer's sabre, wood grip painted black, with brass ferrule at grip base, No. XXIII. All features are the same as those of No. XXXI.



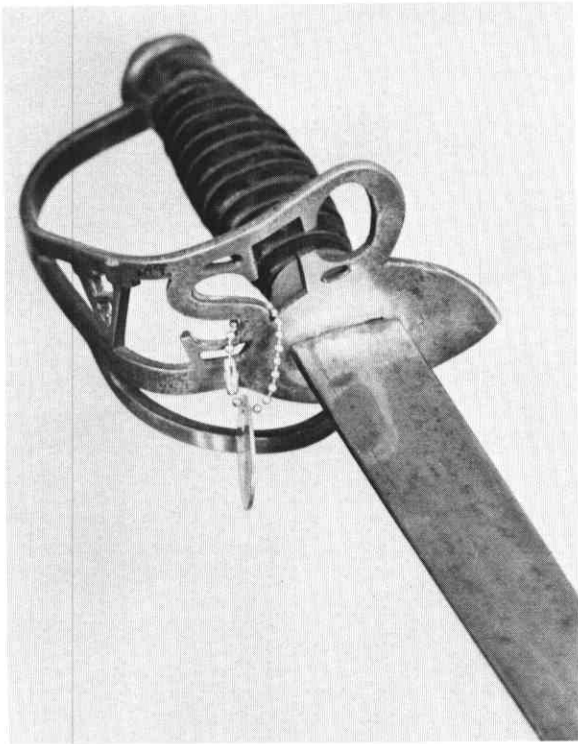
A shorter, slightly curved version with wider blade; compare with the first illustration.



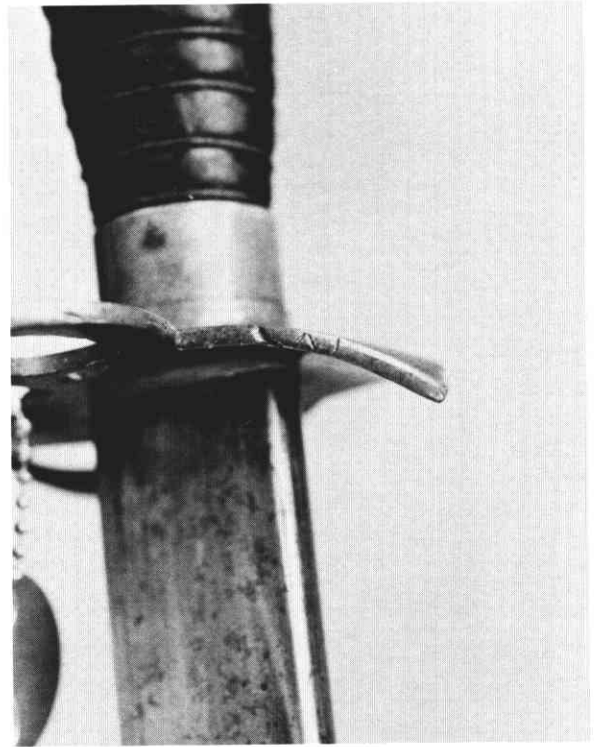
Its heavier brass guard, thicker and shorter; leather wrapped grip with single strand iron wire, and considerably heavier blade.



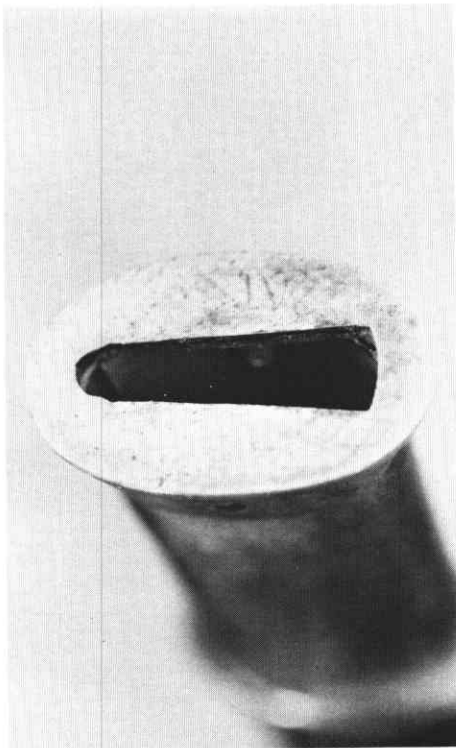
A rear view of guard and grip. The guard appears to be stamped brass, but is actually cast.



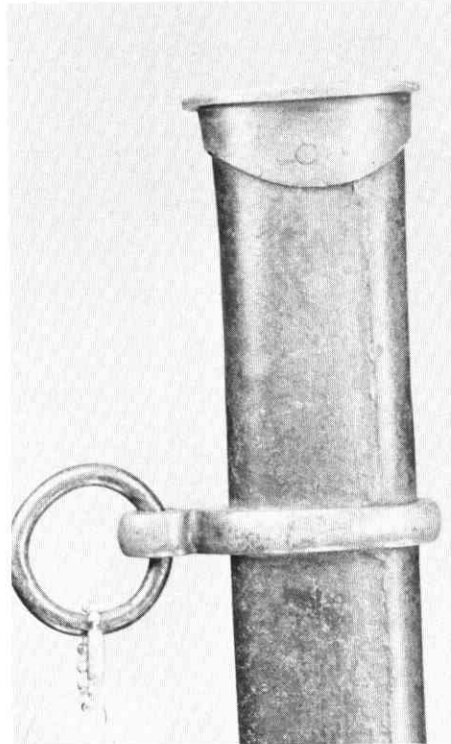
The same, showing counterguard of heavier model with wider, heavier blade.



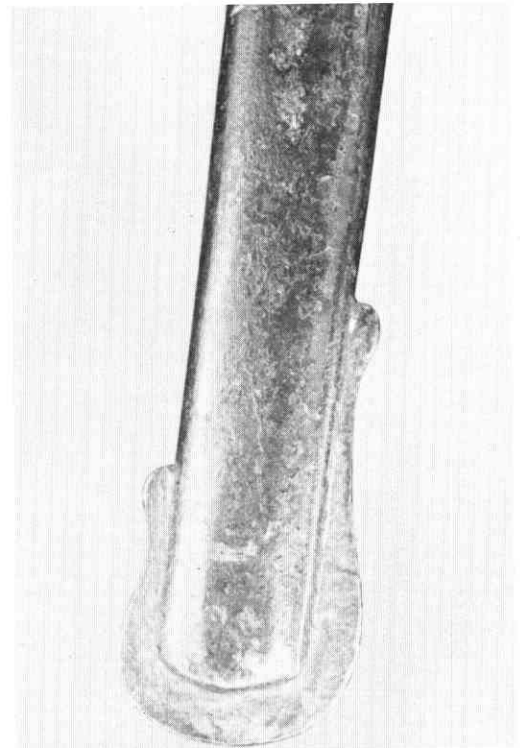
The Roman numeral IV cut into the obverse side of the quillon.



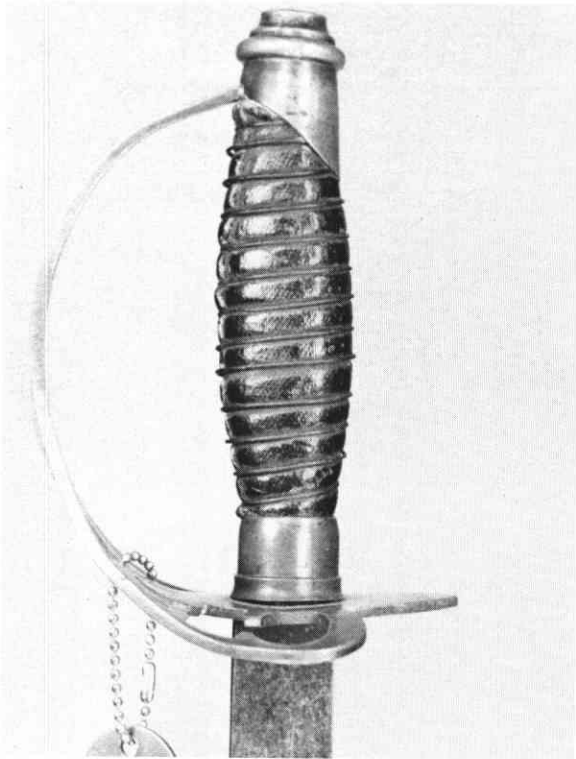
Brass throat of the scabbard for No. IV, showing matching Roman numeral IV.



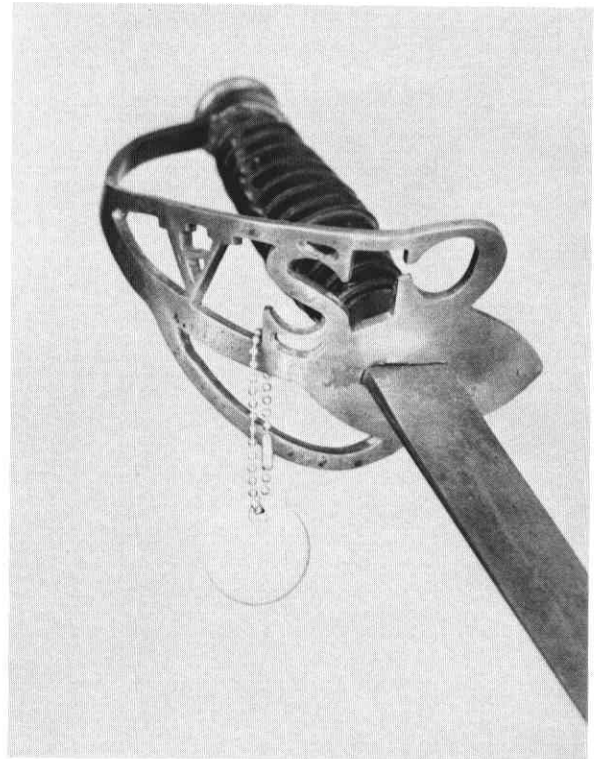
The scabbard for No. IV, showing its brass rocker-shaped throat with single brass flush rivet and reverse overlap seam; note that the brass ring mount is heavier.



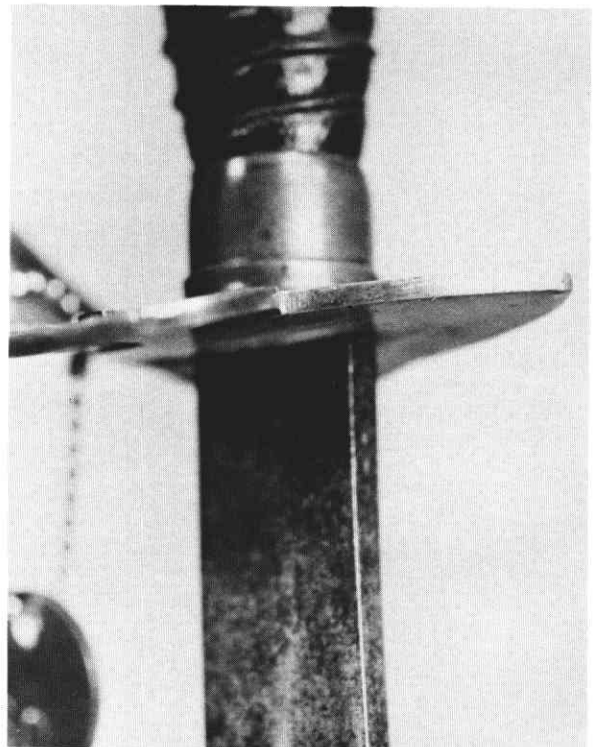
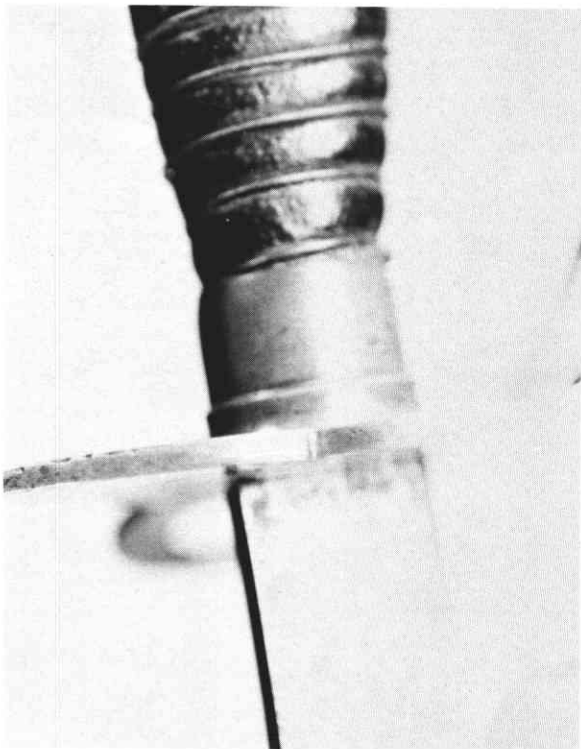
The toe of the scabbard, with reverse overlap seam and standard drag.



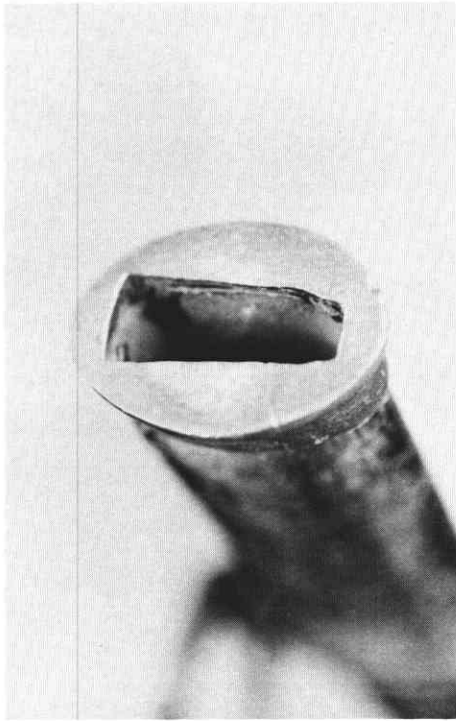
An unusual officer's sabre, rather fragile, with oil-cloth grip and single strand iron wire. Guard has a different casting, thinner brass. Pommel is a smaller casting.



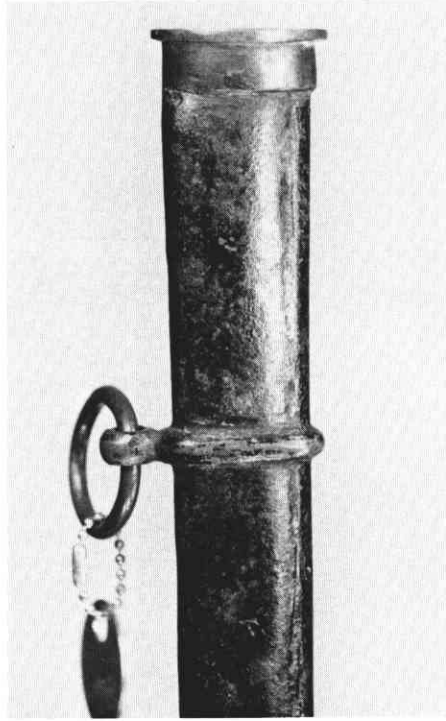
It has a counter-guard of slightly different design, with no cut-out above the "C" as in the other models.



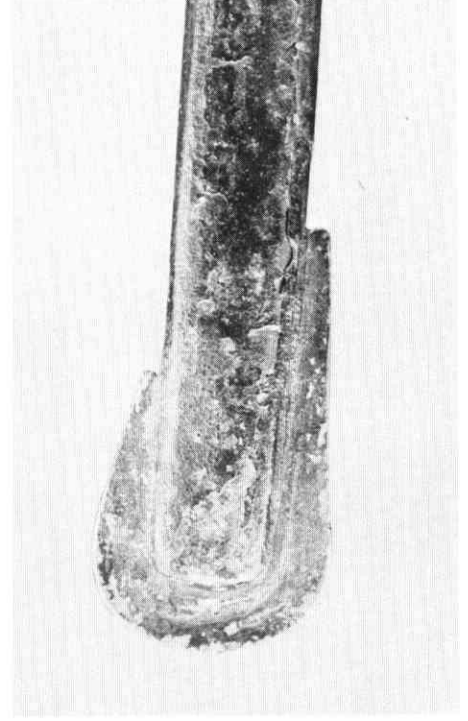
The same sabre, showing that there is no Roman numeral on obverse or reverse side of quillon . . .



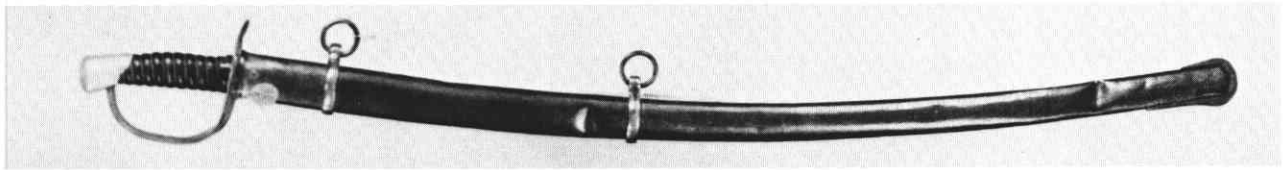
... and no Roman numeral on the brass throat of scabbard.



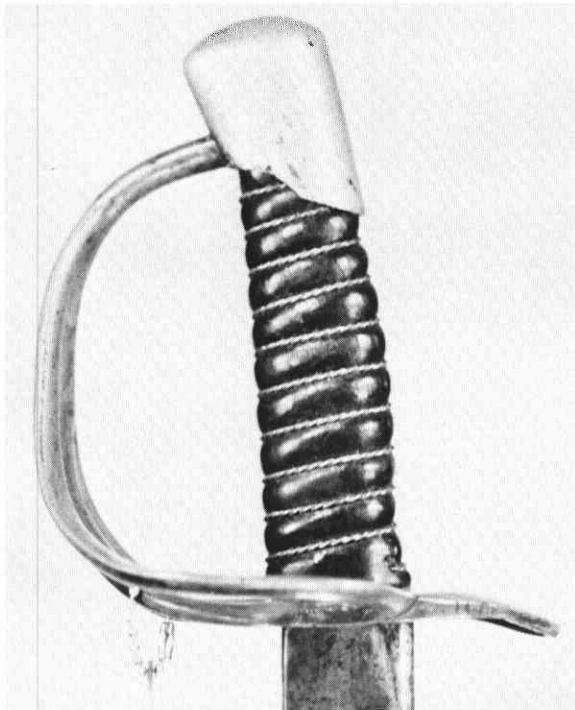
The rather flimsy scabbard has a shallower brass throat, narrower brass ring mounts and overlapped seam in rear.



The brass drag for the scabbard, showing the different configuration and pronounced seam.



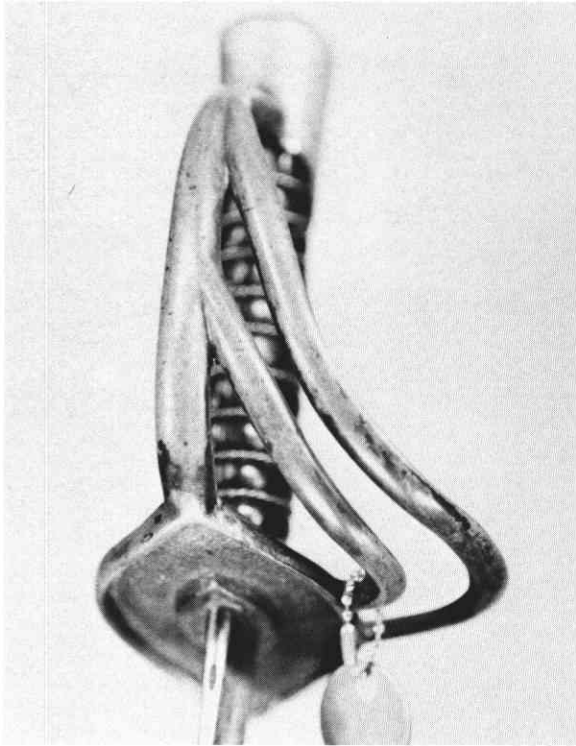
The standard configuration of a Kenansville cavalry sabre and scabbard.



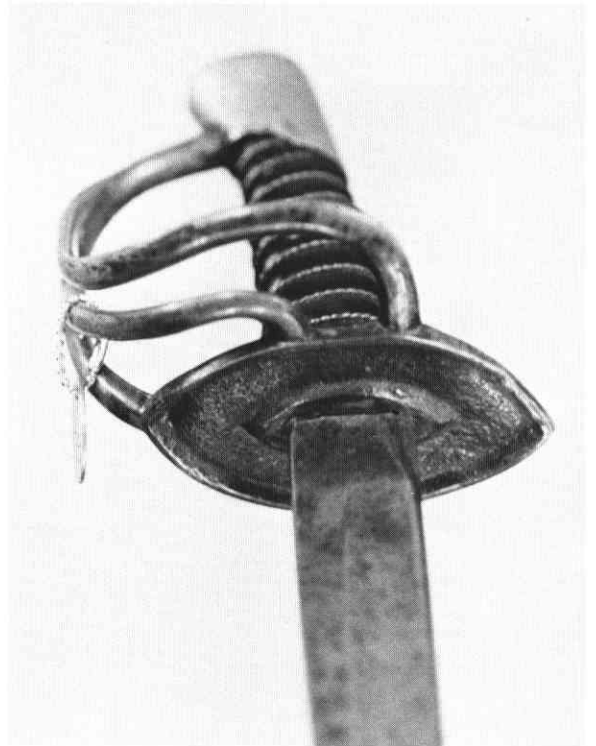
The same sabre, with its crude but solid, club-like pommel, leather wrap with twisted brass wire, heavy non-stopped blade with rounded back. The Roman numeral II is cut into obverse side of quillon.



This shows the heavy brass guard with two branches emanating from different points on knucklebow; note the tapering around edge of quillon and lower guard.



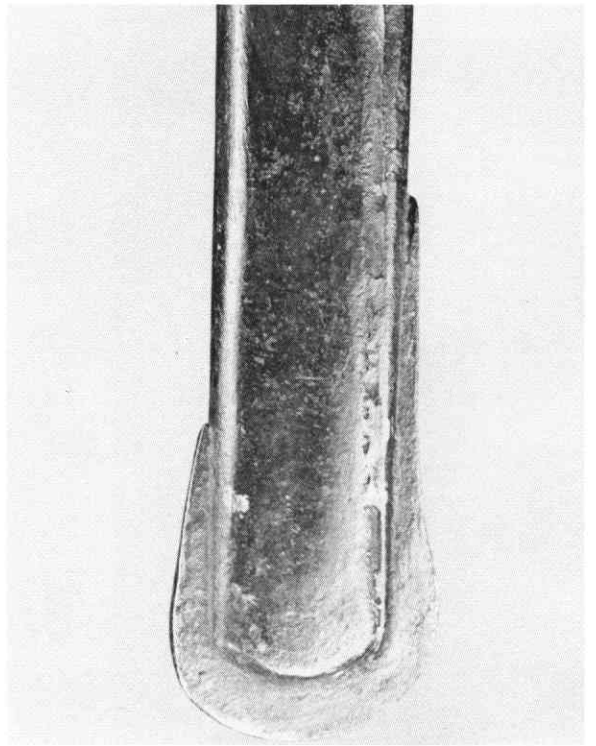
A view from the rear, showing configuration of counterguard.



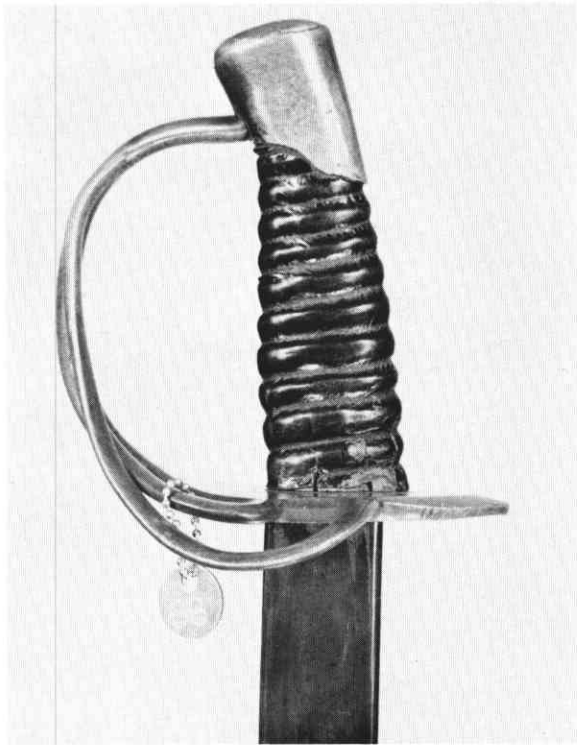
Another view of counterguard, which shows the rounded branches of the guard.



The scabbard for this sabre. The brass throat has Roman numeral II on top flat; there is a heavy brass ring mount and iron ring, and overlapped seam on rear reverse.



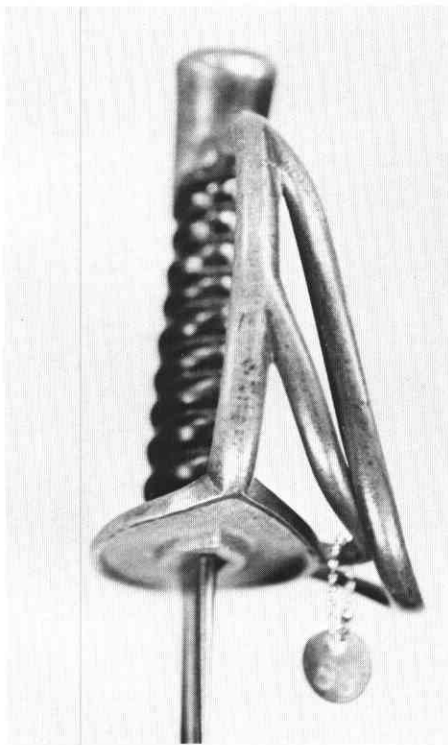
This shows the seam and standard iron drag.



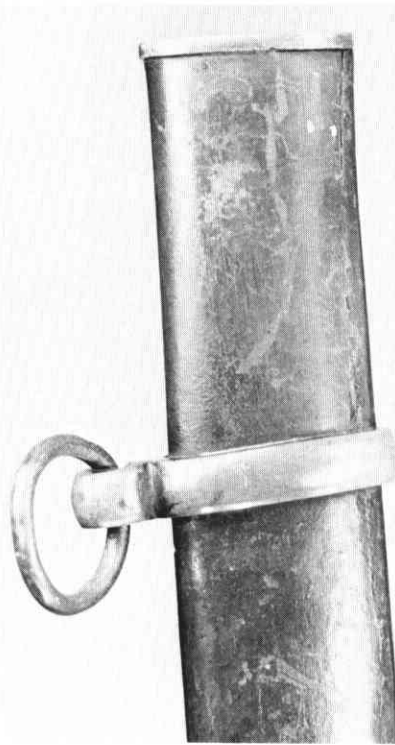
Another standard cavalry sabre of typical crude, heavy construction, wider grips: The leather wrap is missing but it was originally twisted brass. Roman numeral XXII cut into obverse edge of quillon; back of blade rounded.



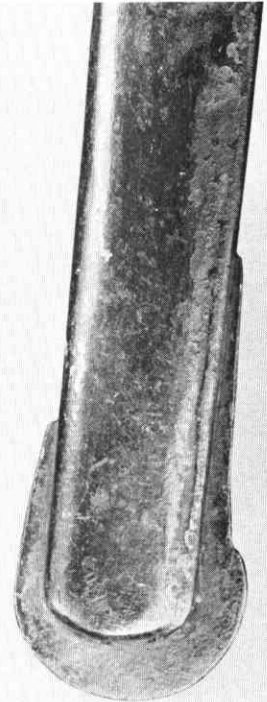
The same, showing heavy bent branches of guard and tapering edge of quillon.

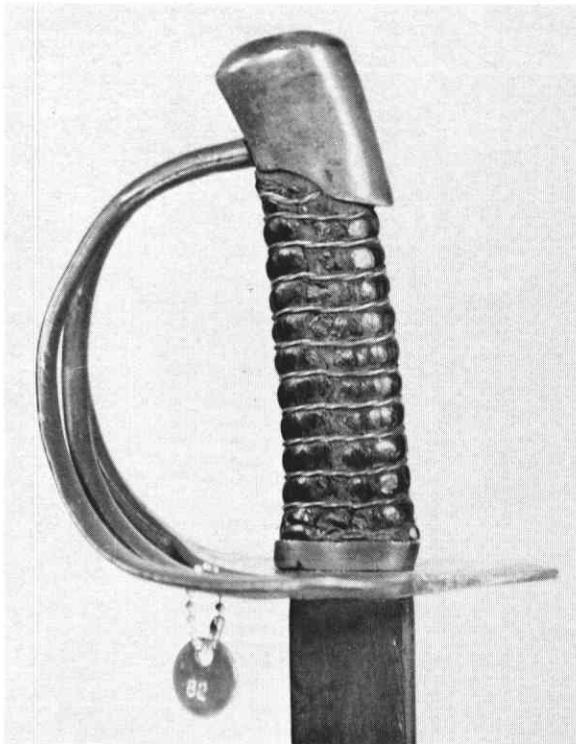


A rear view with standard counterguard design.

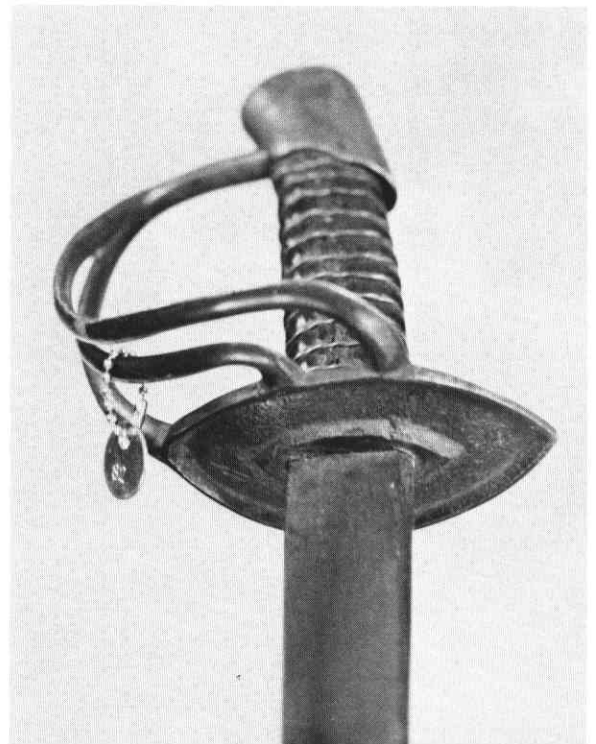


The standard brass throat has Roman numeral XXII on top flat, a single rivet, heavy brass ring mount, iron ring, and overlapped seam on rear reverse. The scabbard is red lacquered, has the standard iron drag.





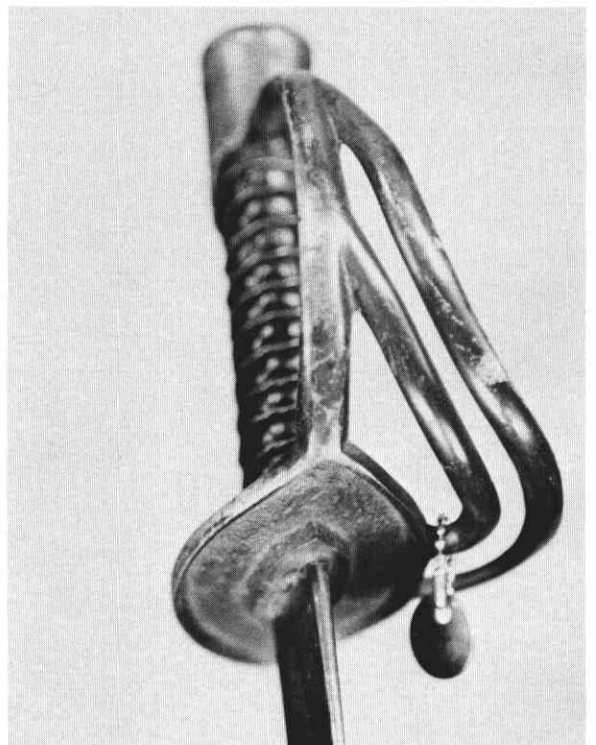
A slightly variant cavalry sabre, of standard design with iron ferrule at base of grip and back of blade rounded.

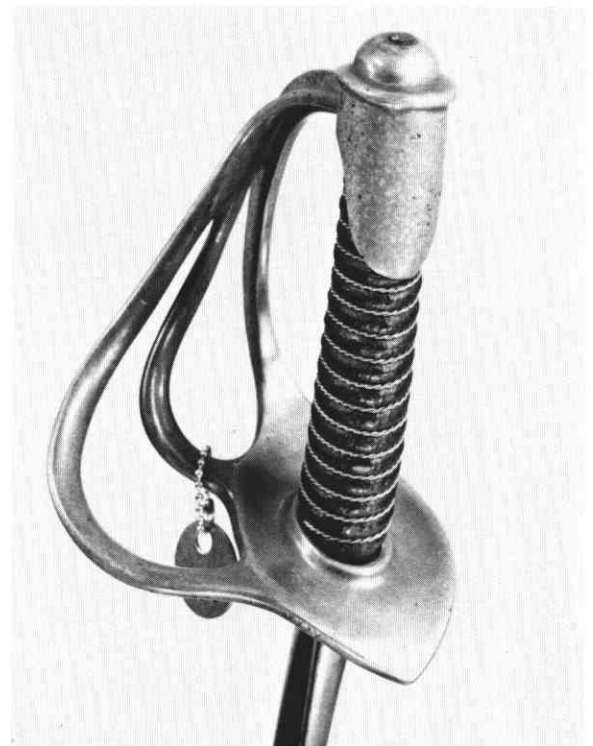
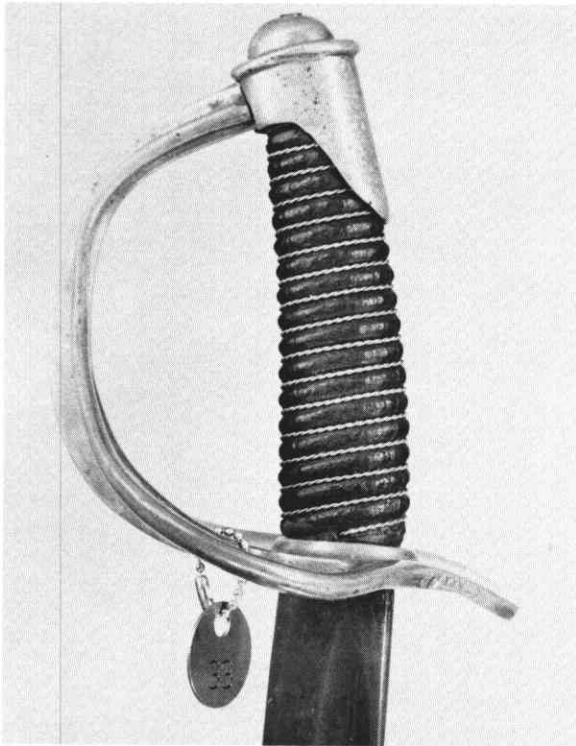


The standard configuration of its brass counterguard.

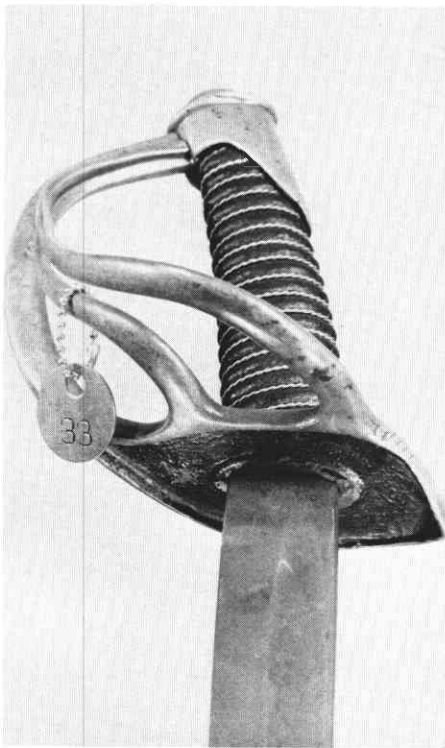


Its heavy, crude pommel and taper-edged quillon, with branches of guard emanating from different points of knucklebow. This feature is rarely used on other swords.

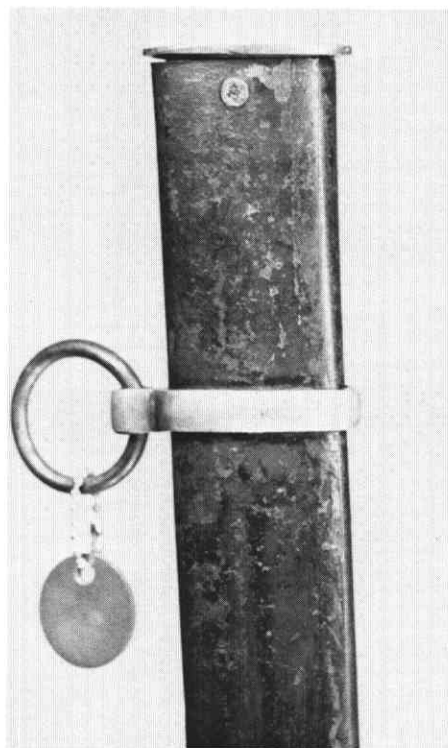




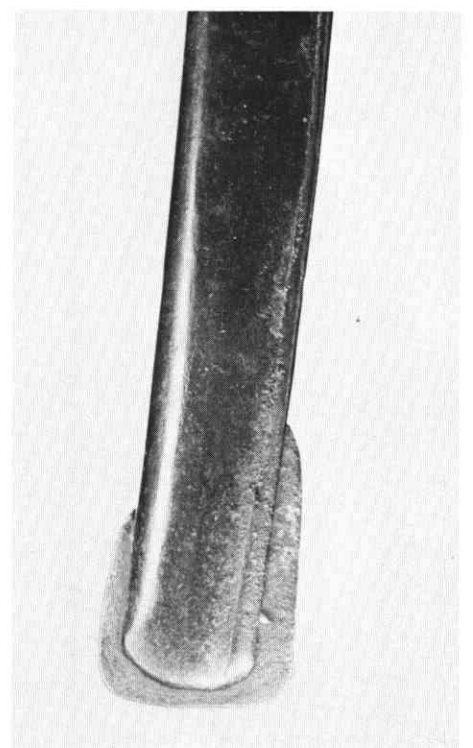
Although the guard is different in many respects from standard Kenansville cavalry sabres, this sabre bears many striking similarities: leather wraps and twisted brass wire, and Roman numeral XXXV cut into obverse side of quillon. The similar configuration of guard and counterquard.



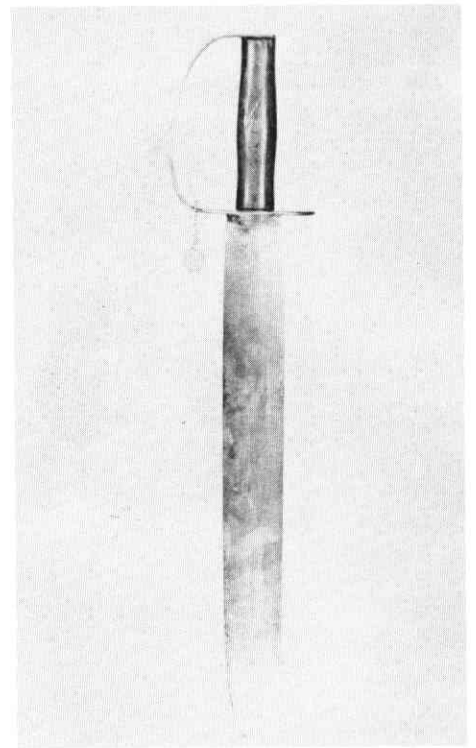
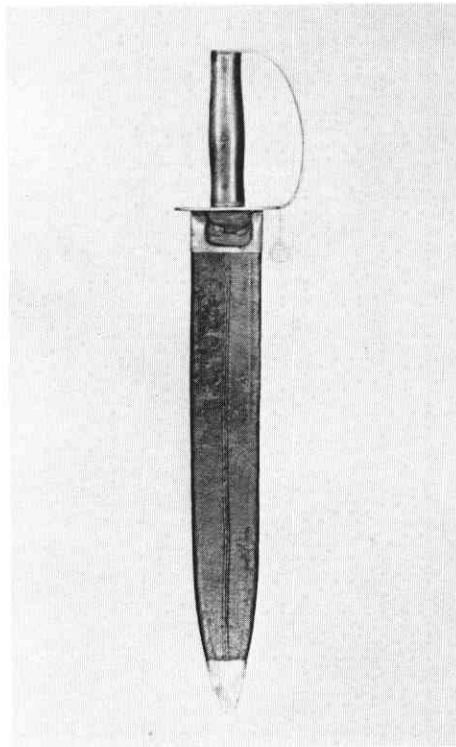
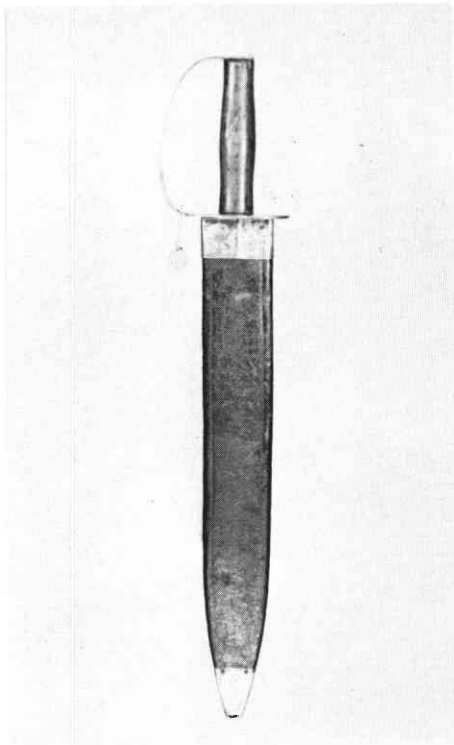
However, branches emanate from same point on the knucklebow, unlike other Kenansville cavalry sabres.



Its scabbard is very similar to the Kenansville, with brass throat held by single rivet on either side, heavy brass ring mount, iron ring and rear reverse overlap seam.

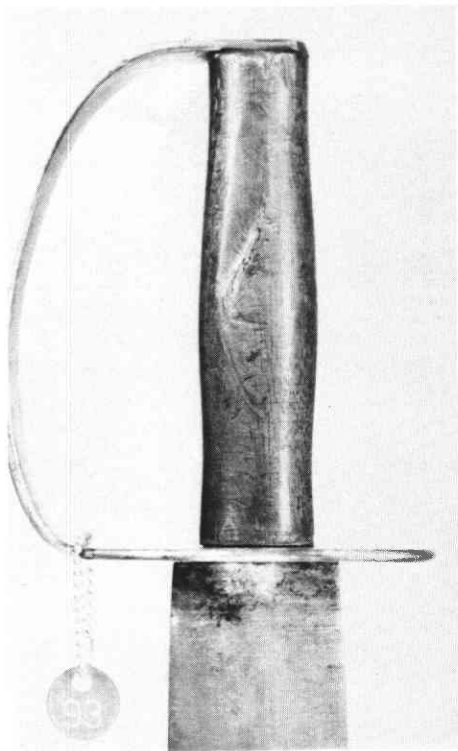


The seam and iron drag.



This "D" guard Bowie knife has also been referred to as a naval cutlass and/or an artillery cutlass. An obverse view is shown here, with the knife in its tin-mounted leather scabbard, then a reverse view, showing the seam in the back center of the scabbard and the remains of the leather belt loop riveted to the tin throat of the scabbard.

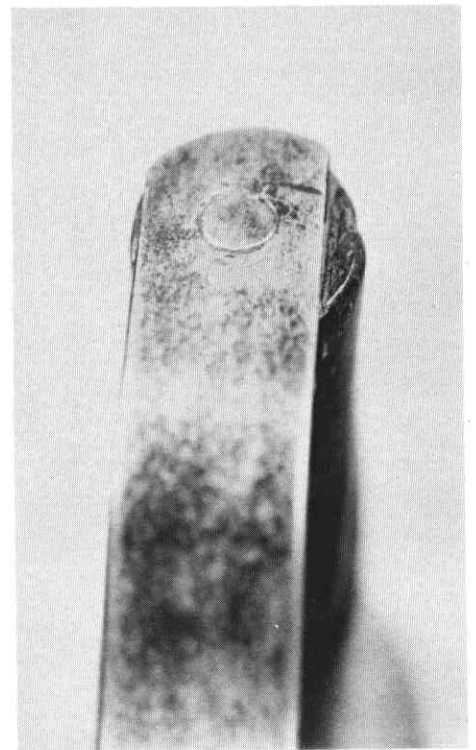
This shows its plain double edged blade, heavier in the mid-section, and no fuller.



Its one piece walnut grip and "D" guard.



And this, the general configuration of the guard. This is a quality piece, very well made in every respect.



This shows the smooth joining of the top of the guard to the tang.