



Figure 1. Commissioning documents for Captain (later Col.) Charles Joseph, Commander of the 9th Ohio (Turners) at Mill Springs, KY.



Figure 2. First model Henry rifle no. 673 with Cincinnati style bayonet marked Bohn-Frei. There were two makers of these bayonets in Cincinnati: L. Schreiber and R. Hug.

RIFLES AND BAYONETS OF THE GERMAN AMERICAN TURNERS

by Peter Albee

In 1811 a German man named Frederich Jahn started a gymnastic club, which in German is called Turnverein, and the members were called Turners, which means gymnasts. Frederich believed that gymnastics were the road to good health. The Turners were religious and got involved in political activities too. They enjoyed rifle shooting and did a lot of military drilling.

In 1848 there was a revolution in Germany and a lot of Turners were involved. The government put the revolution down, which led to 100,000 Germans migrating to the United States. Hundreds of them were revolutionary leaders too. From 1840–1860, 100,040 Germans came to America. They came to find a new life and were very much against slavery.

The first Turner society was formed on November 21, 1848, in Cincinnati, Ohio. By the start of the Civil War, there were 150 Turner societies in several states. In 1860, Baltimore became the national headquarters for the Turners and their weekly newspaper was published there. The Turners became involved in the abolitionist movement.

In 1860 Wendell Phillips, an abolitionist, was to give a speech in Boston. His life was threatened, so the Boston Turners formed bodyguards equipped with rifles with fixed bayonets to keep the peace. The Turners supported Lincoln for president and formed a bodyguard that protected him. The Turners were involved in other conflicts in other cities too.

After the Battle of Fort Sumter, the Turnverein Hall in Baltimore still flew the United States flag. A pro-Southern mob stormed the hall and destroyed it along with their newspaper building next door.

With the North and South at war, the state of Missouri population was split between the two sides. The city of St. Louis had the largest federal arsenal in the west. A pro-Southern mob tried to take control of the arsenal, but one-third of St. Louis' population was German with pro-Northern feelings. The Turners with rifles surrounded the arsenal and were successful in defending it. With the help of the Germans, the state of Missouri stayed loyal to the Union.



Figure 3. Cosmopolitan first model rifle with Cincinnati Bohn-Frei bayonet.

The Northern Turners were involved in forming 20 German regiments from different Northern states. Some of the regiments had companies known as the Turner Rifles. Other regiments used the Turners for sharpshooters. Sixty-five percent of the Northern Turners fought bravely in the Civil War. The Germans were the largest ethnic group to fight for the Union in the Civil War.

One regiment called the "9th Ohio" published the history of their 3-year enlistment and the battles they fought bravely in. Their first big battle was January 19, 1862,

at Mill Springs, Kentucky. The battle raged on for hours, and in the afternoon the rebels were getting the upper hand. The 9th Ohio was giving the order to fix bayonets and charge the rebels left flank which they did with good results. The rebels left flank retreated which led to the whole rebel line collapsing and the Union winning the battle. It was the first victory for the Union during the Civil War. The Turners later said, "It was our bright, shiny bayonets that must have scared the rebels." Today there is a Bohn-Frei bayonet in the Tennessee State Museum. It was picked up after the Battle of Stone River.



Figure 4. 1817 Deringer common rifle converted to percussion and modified to take a Bohn-Frei bayonet.



Figure 5. Rifle made by A.L. Basher in Cincinnati, Ohio with a Bohn-Frei bayonet using a German hunting sword that was probably brought here by a German immigrant.



**Figure 6. A German hunting rifle with a Cincinnati, Ohio bayonet.
The rifle was probably brought here by a German immigrant.
About a 1,000,000 German immigrants came to America in 1848
after a failed revolution in Germany.**



**Figure 7. Rifle made by C.H. Zettler in New York city and bayonet made by F. Weis in New York.
Rifle and bayonet are No. 26.**



**Figure 8. Rifle made by John Wurfflein in Philadelphia and bayonet made by
Hortsman and Sons in Philadelphia.
Both are No. 18.**



Figure 9. Rifle made by I. Zettler of New York city and
bayonet made by Goulding and Co. of New York.



Figure 10. Rifle made by W. Kelermann of IL. and
bayonet made by G. Tolle and Degenhard of Chicago, IL.