

The Bugle



Quarterly Journal of the
Camp Curtin Historical Society
and Civil War Round Table, Inc.

Spring 2016
Volume 26, Number 1



Civil War Swords and Sabres

"The field upon which we now stand will be known as classic ground, for here has been the great central point of the organization of our military forces. When my administration of public affairs will have been forgotten and the good and evil will be only known to the investigation of the antiquarian, Camp Curtin, with its memories and associations, will be immortal."

- Governor Andrew Curtin, 1865

The Bugle • Spring 2016, Volume 26, Number 1

Mark Your Calendar
June 17 – 18 – 19, 2016
HARRISBURG
CIVIL WAR
DAYS

A commemoration of our local history
Lectures, Concerts, Displays
Living History Programs
Tours of East & West Shore Civil War Sites
and more



Camp Curtin Historical Society
National Civil War Museum
Historical Society of Dauphin County
Historic Harrisburg Association



**More information and schedules will be released
as the final arrangements are confirmed**

Cover: As part of our continuing series on the basics of the Civil War, this issue looks at swords and sabres. Pictured (left to right) are a Light Cavalry Sabre, Foot Officer Sword and Horse Artillery Sabre.

Camp Curtin
Historical Society and
Civil War Round Table

Post Office Box 5601
Harrisburg, PA 17110
Telephone: 717-732-5330

Home Page:
www.campcurtin.org

Board of Directors

James Schmick
President

Rick Hollis
Vice-President

Lawrence Keener-Farley
Treasurer

George Nagle
Secretary

Directors:
Glenda Blair
Sandra Gusler
Terry Hartzell
Thomas Hilbish
Robin Lighty
Patty Schmick
Linda Stepp
Robert Stimeling

Ex Officio Member
Rev. John L. Kurtz
Camp Curtin Memorial-
Mitchell U.M. Church

Send articles and
photographs to:

Editor
Camp Curtin Historical Society
P. O. Box 5601
Harrisburg, PA 17110

Email:
[**CampCurtin@verizon.net**](mailto:CampCurtin@verizon.net)

Civil War Swords and Sabres

Over 500,000 swords and sabres (also known as edged weapons with bayonets and knives) were purchased by the Union Army from various manufacturers during the Civil War. Sabres have curved blades while swords usually have straight blades although some have a slight curve. Army manuals at the time used the French spelling “sabre” rather than the English spelling “saber” that has become more common in modern times.

The U. S. Army had several patterns (“P” followed by its year of adoption) or models of swords and sabres authorized for various branches and ranks. Almost all were copies or redesigned versions of French models. Most were designed as fighting weapons, but some were purely ornamental and a symbol of rank.

Swords and sabres were manufactured by private companies on contract from the Army. The Ames Manufacturing Company of Chicopee, Massachusetts was the largest supplier. Other makers included Mansfield & Lamb, Roby & Company, Emerson & Silver, P. S. Justice, D. J. Millard, and Providence Tool Company. Their names and locations usually appear on the blades. Weapons were also marked by a government inspector’s initials and the year of manufacture or acceptance by the Army.

Enlistedmen and noncommissioned officers (sergeants and corporals) were issued swords and sabres. Commissioned officers had to purchase their own either from the Army or a private manufacturer. Some of these private purchases vary somewhat from the “official” patterns adopted by the Army.

P1832 Foot Artillery Sword

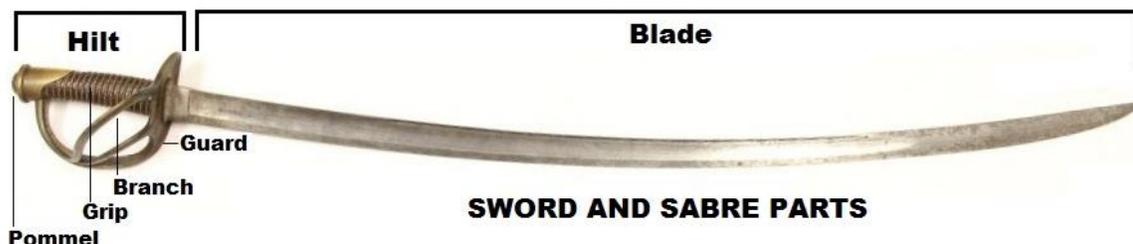


This sword was issued to the foot artillerymen, cannoners who walked alongside their guns or rode on the limbers (as distinguished from the “horse artillery,” where every man rode a horse for faster movement). It was modelled after a French design that was itself derived from a Roman sword. Its blade was 19 inches long and had a leather scabbard with brass mounts. The hilt was brass with an eagle engraved in the pommel. This sword was not very practical for combat but was a useful tool for clearing a path or a field of fire in front of a cannon, much like a machete.

P1840 Non-Commissioned Officer Sword



This sword was issued to sergeants of infantry and sometimes foot artillery and heavy artillery. Its blade was 32 inches long and had a leather scabbard with brass mounts. The entire hilt was made of brass. It is distinguished by its “clamshell” guards on the hilt.



P1840 Musician Sword



This sword was issued to musicians (drummers, fifers, and bandsmen). It was similar to the Noncommissioned Officer Sword but the blade was only 28.25 inches long. It also had a leather scabbard with brass mounts. It differed from the NCO Sword in that its guard was a simple "D" shape with one branch but without the "clamshells" on the hilt.



P1840 Heavy Cavalry Sabre



This sabre was issued to the cavalry, called dragoons when it was first designed. Its blade was 36 inches long and had a metal scabbard. It had a wooden grip that was wrapped in leather and bound with brass wire. The guard was brass with three branches. There was also an officer version that had an etched blade and a floral design in the brass hilt. This was standard edged weapon of the mounted troops before the war, and thousands were in arsenals ready for use in 1861. More were purchased before the later model became the standard.



P1840 Horse Artillery Sabre



This sabre is referred to in U.S. Army manuals as either a Horse Artillery or Light Artillery Sabre. It was issued to those artillerymen who actually rode horses rather than marching beside their guns or riding on the limbers (foot artillery). The blade was 32 inches long. The guard was brass with one "D" shaped branch, and the grip was leather wrapped. There was also an officer version that had an etched blade and a floral design in the brass guard.



P1840 Medical and Paymaster Sword



This was a very light ceremonial sword worn by medical officers and paymasters. It has a very decorative brass hilt with an eagle and floral design. The surgeon's version has an "M.S." for Medical Staff on the hilt while the paymaster's sword has a "P.D." for Pay Department. The blade was 30.25 inches long, and the scabbard was made of brass.



P1850 Staff and Field Officer Sword



This sword was authorized for all field grade officers (major, lieutenant colonel and colonel) of infantry and artillery, and all officers (second lieutenant to colonel) of the staff departments (Adjutant, Quartermaster, Ordnance, Commissary, etc.). Some general officers also carried this model since they already owned one from previous service. Unlike the later 1860 version (bottom right), it was relatively strong and could be used in a fight if needed. The blade was inches 34 long and etched with “U.S.” and other martial designs. The scabbard could be either leather or metal. It had a wooden grip that was usually wrapped in shark skin and bound with brass wire. The guard was large and curved back over the hand. The letters “U S” cut out of the brass guard distinguish it from the Foot Officer Sword.



P1850 Foot Officer Sword



This sword was carried by lieutenants and captains of infantry and foot artillery. Some higher ranking officers also carried this model after they were promoted to a higher rank. It is similar to the 1850 Staff and Field Officer Sword. The blade was shorter at 30.25 inches. It was also made with a leather or metal scabbard and had a wooden grip that was usually wrapped in shark skin and bound with brass wire. The guard was not as large and did not have the letters “U S” cut out of the brass.



P1860 Light Cavalry Sabre



This sabre was actually designed in 1858 after a French model. At the time of the Civil War, it was usually referred to as the “New Pattern Cavalry Sabre” or just the “Light Cavalry Sabre” without a year. Over a quarter million were made, and it became the standard weapon of mounted troops. After the Civil War it was designated the P1860 even though it actually dated to two years earlier. Its blade was 34.5 inches long and had a metal scabbard. Like the earlier heavy cavalry sabre, it had a wooden grip that was wrapped in leather, bound with brass wire, and the guard was brass. There was also an officer version that had an etched blade and a floral design in the brass guard.



P1860 Staff and Field Officer Sword



This sword was adopted just before the Civil War began and was a light ceremonial sword that was an option for those who authorized to use the 1850 version (upper left). It is often seen in photographs of general officers. The blade was 28 inches long, thin and weak, and apparently this sword was rarely carried in battle. It had a “clamshell” guard somewhat similar to the P1840 NCO Sword (above) but on this version the right side was engraved with an eagle and flags, and the left side folded down when worn on a belt.



The purpose of straight swords, usually carried by foot soldiers, was to thrust into an enemy. The purpose of curved sabres, usually carried by horse soldiers, was to slash and break bone (rather like hitting someone with a baseball bat). One of the pre-war defenses to the downward slash were the metallic shoulder scales, often seen in photographs (right).



The one thing that all of the swords and sabres had in common is that they were manufactured without sharpened blades. Part of the odd military ethics of the time deemed that sharpened edges were an uncivilized practice. During the Civil War, some units on both sides sharpened their blades in the field, but this action was generally considered unacceptable.

In 1862, when several Union cavalry regiments in Col. H. G. Minty's brigade in the Shenandoah Valley sharpened their blades, it raised "a tremendous furor," and the Confederates made an official protest. Joseph Vale, brigade historian, reported the Southerners said that the use of sharpened sabres was barbarous and contrary to the rules of modern warfare and threatened instant death to all officers and men captured possessing them.

In the 1st Ohio Cavalry, when the commander, Col. O. P. Ransom was away, officers in the regiment told the men to sharpen their blades. When Ransom returned, he was "very indignant" and ordered the sabres reground to their original dullness because sharpened sabres were not only "against the rules of civilized warfare" they were also dangerous in drilling.

As a practical matter, edged weapons of all types – swords, sabres, bayonets, and knives – were rarely used simply because the vast number of combatants never got close enough to use them in hand-to-hand combat. Such combat did occur and is usually described in vivid detail in diaries and regimental histories but it usually involved small numbers of troops for a short period of time. Take Pickett's Charge, for example. About 12,000 Confederates started the charge, but only a few hundred actually crossed the wall at the angle and engaged in hand-to-hand fighting.

The cavalry had been the primary user of edged weapons but a change in weapons technology redefined the role of cavalry during the Civil War. In previous wars, infantry was armed with smoothbore muskets that were only effective for about 100 yards. If cavalry charged infantry they might only have to face two volleys before they reached the infantry and then started swinging their sabres and slamming into men on foot with their horses.

The development of the rifle musket expanded the danger zone for cavalry. These weapons could shoot 1,000 yards and still have considerable penetration power. Even if the infantry started shooting at 300 yards, the cavalry would be hit by many more volleys and it was not necessary to hit the cavalryman, hitting the larger target of the horse was actually more effective. Rarely did cavalry attack massed infantry formations during the Civil War as had been common in earlier wars.

Confederates used many of the pre-war weapons that were in Southern arsenals when the Civil War began. They also made copies of the standard Union swords and sabres and imported European versions.

Although thousands of swords and sabres were on Civil War battlefields, they really belonged to another age of warfare. These weapons epitomized the early war fantasy of chivalric knights armed with a weapon of personal combat that was quickly dispelled in the mass slaughter of one of the first modern wars.



Gettysburg Winter Lectures

All lectures begin at 1:30PM and are free. They are held in the Gettysburg National Military Park Visitor Center, 1195 Baltimore Pike (Route 97), Gettysburg, PA 17325. For more information about the lectures, visit the Park's website at www.nps.gov/gett/planyourvisit/interpretation.htm. The lectures series began on January 9 and all of the lectures will be posted on YouTube.

Saturday, March 5

"It was, indeed, a scene of unsurpassed grandeur and majesty" - An Audio-Visual Presentation of the National Park Service's Coverage of the 150th Anniversary of the American Civil War - Jason Martz, Gettysburg National Military Park

Sunday, March 6

"Our once beautiful but now desolated Valley" - Post-War Shenandoah Valley, Virginia - Shannon Moeck, Cedar Creek and Belle Grove National Historical Park

Saturday, March 12

The Aftermath of Pickett's Charge: Was There a Second Wave? - Troy Harman, Gettysburg National Military Park

Sunday, March 13

"We have made the most costly sacrifices" - The Consequences of War - Evangelina Rubalcava-Joyce, Gettysburg National Military Park

Saturday, March 19

Freedom, the Civil War, and its Complicated Legacy - John Hennessy, Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park

Sunday, March 20

The Rhetoric of Reconstruction and Reconciliation - What Does it All Mean? - Bert Barnett, Gettysburg National Military Park

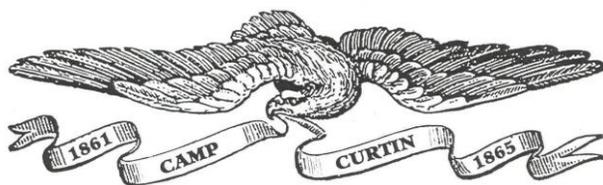
Preservation Ball Supports Gettysburg Monuments

The 13th Annual Civil War Preservation Ball will be held in the rotunda of the Pennsylvania Capitol Building on Saturday, April 2. This event raises money for the Gettysburg Pennsylvania Monuments Project Endowment Trust Fund. In the past twelve years, the ball has raised over \$83,000 for the trust fund that pays for the maintenance and repair of Pennsylvania monuments placed on the Gettysburg Battlefield by the veterans of the Civil War. The cost of the ball is \$65 per couple, \$35 per single.



Dance music will be provided by the Philadelphia Brigade Band and the Victorian Dance Ensemble, the performing troupe of the Civil War Dance Foundation, will lead the dancing. Dance experience is not required since the VDE will demonstrate each dance and assist guests during the dancing. To help guests prepare for the ball, a free Civil War Dance Class will be offered 2:00PM to 4:00PM, Sunday, March 13, at the Penn State – Harrisburg Campus. For information about the ball or class, visit www.CivilWarDance.org or email PreservationBall@CivilWarDance.org.

The Camp Curtin Historical Society and Civil War Round Table, Inc., is a non-profit corporation chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Contributions are tax deductible under IRC Section 501(c)(3). The Society is properly registered with the Pennsylvania Department of State as a charitable organization. A copy of the registration and financial information may be obtained by telephoning toll free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



Camp Curtin Historical Society

presents

Bob O'Connor

speaking on

The Amazing Legacy of James E. Hanger, Civil War Soldier

2:00PM, Sunday, February 28, 2016

Camp Curtin Memorial-Mitchell United Methodist Church

2221 North Sixth Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Bob O'Connor graduated from Dixon High School in Illinois and from Northern Illinois University. He now lives in Charles Town, West Virginia. While Director of Tourism in Washington County, Maryland, he instituted the July Independence Concert and the December Memorial Illumination at Antietam Battlefield. He has written ten books on a wide variety of Civil War topics and has given numerous talks throughout the mid-Atlantic region. Bob will be speaking on his book *The Amazing Legacy of James E. Hanger, Civil War Soldier*. Hanger, a member of the 14th Virginia Cavalry, was wounded at the Battle of Philippi on June 3, 1861 and became the first amputee of the American Civil War. He hated the Yankee peg leg his Union doctor gave him. Instead, he used his ingenuity and engineering background to invent an artificial leg with a joint at the knee and a hinge at the ankle. He patented his Hanger Limb. His invention revolutionized the prosthetic industry. The company Mr. Hanger founded still operates today as one of the world's largest providers of artificial limbs.

This presentation is free and open to the public. Bring a friend.

The program will be preceded by the Camp Curtin Historical Society's annual meeting, including presentation of reports and elections.

For information call 717-732-5115 or email genjenkins@aol.com