

CIVIL WAR RIFLES



The vast majority of Union Army units were equipped with the Springfield Armory Model M1861, rifled musket. The M1861 and upgraded variants M1863 and M1864. The rifled barrel M1861 was a great improvement over previous smooth bore rifles, as it had greater accuracy and range. The M1861 and later models fired the .58 caliber Minie ball.

The Springfield musket was capable of firing 3 rounds per minute by a well-trained soldier. The rifle weighed 9 pounds and 58-1/2" long, with a 40" barrel.

The Springfield rifle was developed and built by the Springfield Armory in Springfield, Massachusetts. Demand was so high during the war that the Armory could not keep up and approximately twenty subcontractors produced the rifle under the Springfield pattern. The Colt Arms Company was the largest of these contractors. Production of the M1861 and its variants surpassed 1.5 million rifles during the War years.

The unit price of a M1861 Rifle was \$14.93.



Christopher Spencer invented a lever action repeating rifle in about 1860. The Spencer Rifle fired a .52 caliber metallic cartridge from a magazine tube holding 7 rounds. The Rifle was 47" long with a 30" barrel and was also produced in a 39.25" Carbine version. The rifle weighed in at 10 pounds.

Spencer submitted his design to the Union Army but it was rejected on the grounds soldiers would waste too much ammunition.

Christopher Spencer, however, was able to gain an audience with President Lincoln, who invited him to a shooting match on the lawn of the White House. Lincoln was favorably impressed and authorized the purchase of the rifle.

Approximately 200,000 were issued to Union troops, the majority of them being Carbines which were popular with the Cavalry due to their shorter length.

The unit cost of a Spencer Rifle was \$40.00



Less popular was the Henry lever action repeating rifle, the M1860. Benjamin Tyler Henry designed the rifle in 1860. The Henry Rifle fired a .44 caliber bullet, fed from a 15 round tube magazine. The rifle was 44.75" long, with a 24" barrel. It weighed 9lb 4oz.

The Henry Repeating Rifle was not adopted in large numbers, its relatively short range and lower velocity making it unpopular with the War Department. Just 1,730 were purchased by the government, another 12,000 or so saw their way into the hands of soldiers who purchased them privately. The 7th Illinois Infantry, being a prime example, as all the men in the regiment purchased their own Henry Repeaters at \$50.00 each.



Christian Sharp designed a breech loading, single shot rifle in 1848. By the time of the Civil War, many adjustments had been made to the original design and the Model 1859 found service in the Civil War. The rifle was 47" long, weighed 9.5 pounds and fired a .52 caliber bullet.

Only about 11,000 of the rifles were produced during the war and most found their way into the hands of snipers and sharpshooters due to their accuracy and rate of fire.

The Carbine version was 39" long with a 22" barrel. The carbine was widely adopted by Union Cavalry units during the war and about 100,000 were purchased by the Union Army.

The unit price of a Sharps rifle was \$30.00.

There were several other rifle types in use during the war, specifically those manufactured by Ballard and Enfield, but none saw the widespread use of these other arms.