



### Connecticut Arms Industry During The Civil War

Previously in the *Connecticut Industry During Times of War* series, we discussed how Connecticut earned the moniker of “The Provision State” during the Revolutionary War for its steady supply of food, clothing and ammunition to the Continental Army. Connecticut would maintain its earned nickname in the Civil War, once again due to its industry and ingenuity. A clear departure from the Revolutionary War era, Connecticut had advanced considerably in manufacturing and industrial capacity by the early-mid 19th century. This can clearly be seen with the topic of our previous article on the Hazard Powder Company. While gunpowder manufacturing was small-scale during the Revolutionary Period, mostly taking place in small mills with a handful of workers, by the Civil War Connecticut was home to one of the largest gunpowder manufacturing facilities in the United States that spanned hundreds of buildings and provided nearly half of all the Union’s gunpowder.

The firearms industry saw a great deal of advancement in Connecticut. At the start of the war, Connecticut was home to: The Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Company, Whitney Armory, Colt’s Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company, Savage Revolving Firearms Company, New Haven Arms Company, and the Joslyn Firearms Company (1). All would provide their manufacturing capabilities to the war effort in either assisting with production of an established military arm or providing their own models, such as the Colt Model 1860 Army revolver, the Sharps rifles, and the Joslyn rifle. Various other businesses with the capacity to help supply the Union turned to rifle manufacturing as well. Norwich Arms and Eagleville Manufacturing Company, both textile manufacturers of Norwich, were contracted to build rifled muskets. Parker Snow & Company of Meriden switched from making kitchen utensils and sewing machines to firearms (1). Eli Whitney’s original idea of interchangeable parts for his rifles made in New Haven in the late 1700s, in a time where most rifles were individually hand fitted, had made great strides in the decades after his passing. It was this idea of interchangeable parts that allowed Connecticut to expand so rapidly in firearms manufacturing at the start of the war. Both the main armories and subcontractors of the standard Union rifle could produce parts to the same specifications, leading to synergy between Connecticut companies, ease of production, and later repair of the rifles if needed (2). By the end of the war in 1865, Connecticut had produced 43% of all the rifled muskets, breech loading rifles and carbines, and revolvers purchased by the War Department (1).

A notable figure in ammunition procurement was Benjamin Hotchkiss. Working at Hotchkiss and Sons in Sharon Connecticut, he was awarded multiple patents for artillery projectiles and the fuses to be used in them. His design of a cast iron projectile, often made of iron from North-West Connecticut, joined by a band of lead in the middle section allowed the

shell to better engage the grooves of a cannon's rifling, creating a more accurate projectile (3). The various artillery shell designs created and produced by Hotchkiss and Sons would be among the most commonly used during the war (4).

With Connecticut manufacturing mass quantities of rifles and pistols along with the ammunition to go with it at the Hazard Powder Company - the bayonet or sword was the missing component. Oftentimes the armory or contracted manufacturer would make bayonets in addition to the rifles they were already producing. However, the extremely well regarded Collins Company of Canton, Connecticut used their experience in edged tool and agricultural equipment making to manufacture swords and bayonets for Union forces (1). Angular



bayonets were then sent to Sharps, Whitney, and Colt companies of Connecticut to help supplement their own production. Collins Company catered to officers or wealthy cavalymen directly with swords or custom highly polished blades featuring elaborate etching (1).

The photo included in this article is sourced from the Library of Congress (5). It shows an unidentified Union Cavalryman sporting a Colt Army revolver and a Sharps Carbine - both made in Connecticut. The saber he holds could possibly be Collins made as well, but there's no way to know with any certainty. This ambrotype portrait serves as just a small example of how Connecticut helped arm the Union. Just as in the Revolutionary War, Connecticut industry proved again to be a symbol of America's industrial might and a vast wellspring for the Northern States to call on when needed.

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*The Gardiner Hall Jr Museum is open to the public Saturdays from 10:00am to 12:00pm. For more information, please call 518-791-9474.*

#### Citations

- (1). Nelson, Dean. "Civil War: Connecticut Arms the Union." *Connecticut Explored*, 2011.
- (2). "Eli Whitney (1765-1825): Connecticut History: A Cthumanities Project." *ConnecticutHistory.Org*, CT Humanities , 2017.
- (3). McCaul, E B. "Rapid Technological Innovation: The Evolution of the Artillery Fuze during the American Civil War." *OhioLINK ETD Center*, Doctoral Dissertation, Ohio State University, 2005.
- (4). Hackley, F W. US Naval School Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Indian Head, MD, 1960, *Civil War Explosive Ordnance*.
- (5). *Unidentified Soldier in Union Cavalry Uniform with Cavalry Sword, Colt Army Revolver, and Carbine*. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.