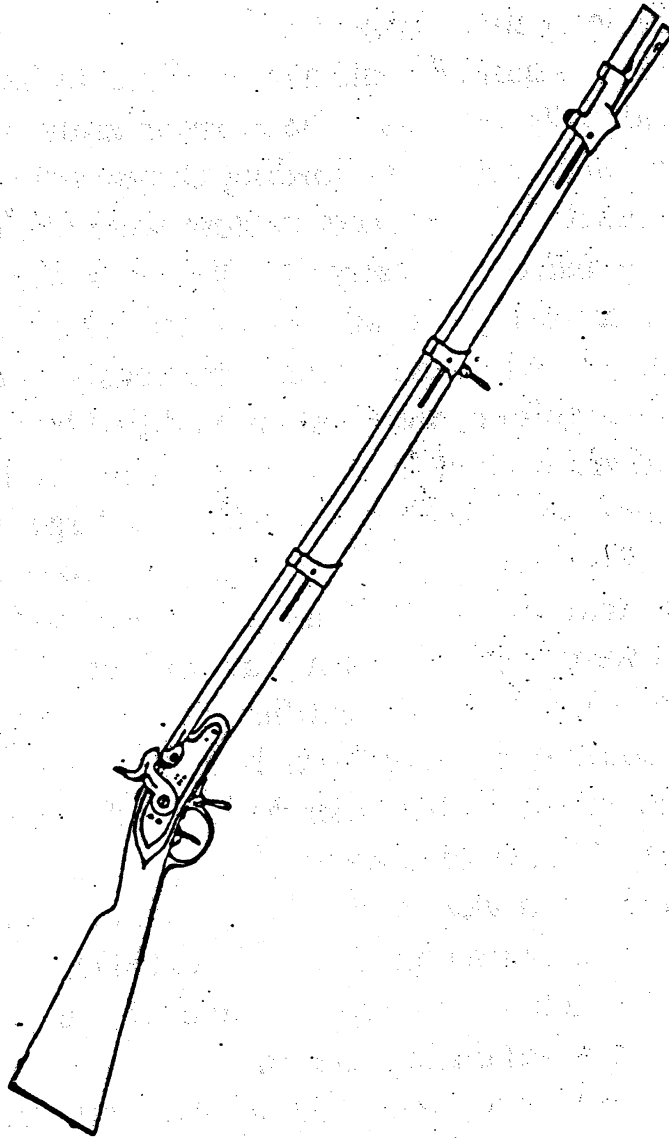


# THE PRUSSIAN MUSKET



THE CIVIL WAR LEGACY

The Prussian musket is one of the most recognizable firearms of the American Civil War although its value to the Union cause is largely unknown by many students of the war, or ignored, and unappreciated. It also can be argued that, until recently, it has been undervalued and undesirable by many collectors.

In 1855 Prussian arsenals held upwards to 380,000 Model 1809 and 1839 muskets. The Prussian army was beginning to rearm with the breech loading Dreyse rifle and the bulk of the model 1839 muskets in store were being updated by rifling the barrels. Nearly 200,000 arms were altered. In addition as many as 80,000 of the older Model 1809 muskets, which had been previously converted to percussion ignition, were further modified by rifling.

The American Civil War would provide the Prussians the opportunity to divest themselves of a large part of their largely obsolescent arms. Union purchasing records indicate that 165,073 Prussian smooth-bore and rifled muskets were obtained during the conflict. Included in this total are 89,417 arms identified as smooth-bore muskets and an additional 53,409 simply as muskets. These arms were undoubtedly the older Model 1809 muskets. The remaining 22,250 arms are identified as rifled muskets and for the most part were a mixed lot of rifled Model 1809 and 1839 muskets but within the total were also a number of variants, which have become some of the rarer types of firearms obtained during the war.

These muskets were among the very first types of foreign firearms to arrive, with shipments beginning in August of 1861. By the end of that December over 42,000 muskets had been received. These first shipments proved invaluable in alleviating the critical shortage of arms that existed at the beginning of the conflict.

Although it can be argued the weapons were largely obsolescent, they never less proved to be well made substantial arms and were rated in the same class as earlier U.S. muskets that had been converted to percussion.

To date, no documentation of any Confederate purchases of Prussian arms have been located. Weapons captured or salvaged from the battlefield were however undoubtedly utilized.

The following models are in this display.

### PRUSSIAN MODEL 1809 MUSKET

56.5 inches overall - 41.25 inch barrel - .71/.72 caliber

This model is the most common Prussian arm imported during the Civil War and is the model most encountered today. Ordnance records list 142,823 Prussian smoothbore muskets received. Undoubtedly, these were Model 1809 muskets. In addition, some which had been previously modified to rifled muskets are included in the totals for those arms.

The arms were received from eight different suppliers and were purchased at prices varying between four and eight dollars. All of the purchases took place in 1861 and 1862 when the need for arms was most urgent.

The weapon was originally manufactured as a flintlock but beginning in 1839 most were altered to the percussion system. Some were further modified to rifled muskets beginning in 1855. The weapon was manufactured at several armories and the lockplate will be stamped "Potsdam, Saarn, Neisse, Suhl or Dresden" depending upon its origin.

**PRUSSIAN MODEL 1839/55 RIFLED MUSKET**  
56.5 inches overall - 41.25 inch barrel - .69/.70 caliber

Union purchasing records indicate at least 22,250 of the Prussian muskets obtained were rifled arms. These were a mixture of Model 1809 and 1839 muskets and ranged in price from \$9.00 to \$17.50. It would appear from surviving examples the larger share were the older Model 1809's. The Model 1839 is fairly rare and only seldom encountered by collectors today.

The arm was originally manufactured as a smoothbore musket but was altered by rifling the barrels beginning in 1855. The arms were further modified with the addition of long-range sights. Like the older model 1809, the place of manufacture is stamped on the lock. The weapon was also manufactured by a number of commercial enterprises. The Prussian city of Suhl and the surrounding cities of Zella, Mehlis, and St. Blasien were the sites of a number of private armories that created an arms making complex that rivaled Leige or Birmingham. The principal product at the time of the Civil War was the Model 1839/55. This explains the existence of a number of differing variations of the basic model and the varying calibers recorded in the Union purchasing records.

The American Civil War provided the Prussians the opportunity to divest themselves of a large number of their largely obsolescent arms although they tended to retain most of their stocks of the Model 1839 in reserve while their army was being rearmed with the new breech-loading Dreyse rifle. Thus the relative scarcity of this model for today's collectors.

**Prussian Model 1855 Rifled Musket**  
56.5 inches overall - 41.25 inch barrel - .69 caliber

This weapon is a variation of the Model 1839/55 which differs in its construction with a back-action lock. A total of only 4,286 of these arms were imported by the firm of Herman Boker for sale to the U.S. Ordnance Department.

The arm was privately manufactured in the Prussian city of Suhl and can be found with variations in caliber, sights, and lock markings. Surviving examples are scarce and only rarely encountered.

**Prussian Model 1839/55 rifled Musket Variant**  
56.5 inches overall - 41.25 inch barrel - .69/70 caliber

This example differs with the basic Model 1839 only in its construction utilizing a bayonet stud on the underside of the barrel in place of the normal locking spring. Its bayonet is correspondently manufactured with a mortise and locking ring. This example, which is missing the lock, was most likely a product of one of the Suhl makers. In addition, a number of Model 1809 muskets have been observed in which have had their locking springs removed and been fitted with bayonet studs under the barrel. When this type of alteration was done and who performed it is unknown.

Another variant of this same type is known to have been manufactured with a .615 caliber rifled barrel. Purchasing records indicate that John Hoey delivered 1,810 caliber .615 Prussian rifles with bayonets on March 6, 1862.

**Prussian Model 1809 Rifled Musket Variant**  
56.5 inches overall - 41.25 inch barrel - .71/.72 caliber

To date there hasn't been any documented evidence of the modification of this weapon. The musket was originally manufactured at the Saarn arsenal as a standard Model 1809 musket. At an unknown later date the arm was modified by rifling the barrel, modifying the profile of the bolster, substituting a lug under the barrel in place of the standard bayonet retainer spring, and adding a long range type sight. The standard 1809 bayonet was modified by the addition of a bridge, mortise, and locking ring.

There isn't any doubt that the weapon was imported during the American Civil War. All of the examples examined thus far have the City of Philadelphia markings on the bolster area. An examination of the City of Philadelphia Home Guard records indicate Herman Boker likely supplied the arms. Sadly the report fails to specify the number provided. The quantity however must have been small as the arm is very rarely encountered.

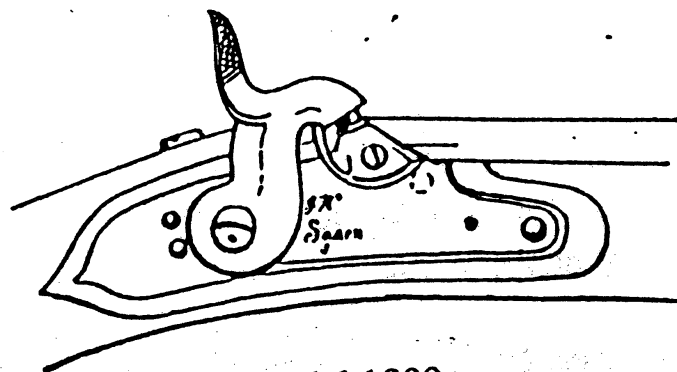
**German Federation Model 1849 Naval Musket**  
52.5 inches overall - 37 inch barrel - .71/.72 caliber

This weapon was originally manufactured in Suhl by the firm "Spangenberg & Consorten" for the short lived German Federal Navy (1848-1853). A total of 1,200 muskets were manufactured. The navy was created by the German Federation (1815-1866) in response to the Schleswig Holstein War with Denmark. The navy was

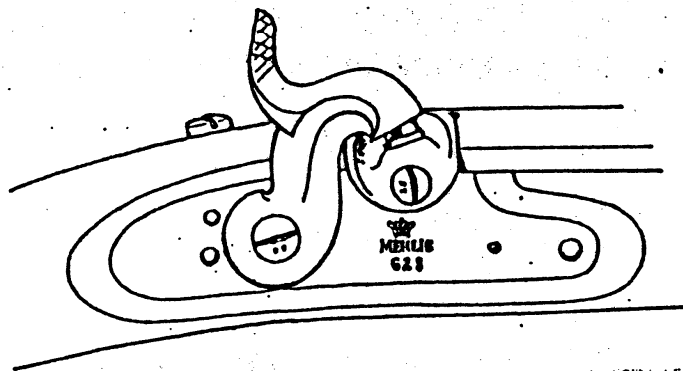
dissolved after the war. The ships and equipment were purchased by Prussia.

The weapon utilizes a stock, lock, and furniture similar to the Prussian model 1839 musket and the shortened barrel from a Prussian model 1809. The model 1839 bayonet is fitted to this arm.

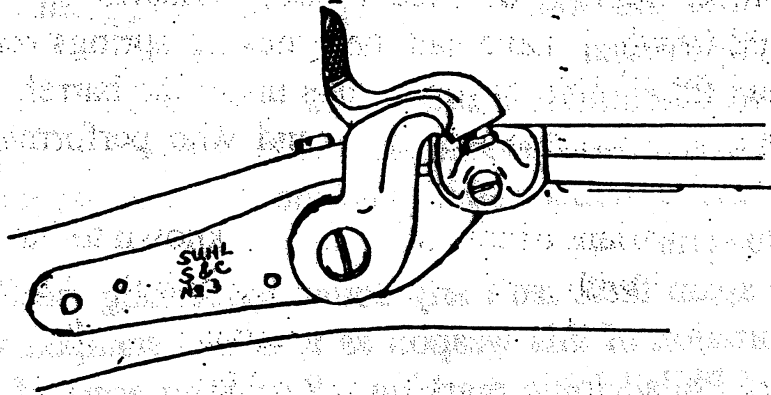
Once again there isn't any doubt concerning the Civil War importation of this weapon as it is also stamped with the City of Philadelphia marking. Surviving arms of this type are extremely rare.



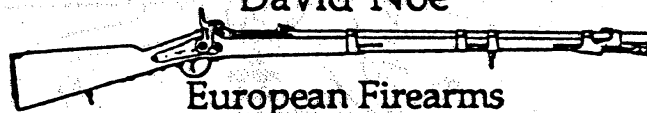
Model 1809



Model 1839



Model 1855



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