

SWORDS BY F.W. WIDMANN, W.H. HORSTMANN and the United States Marines

by Stanley B. Smullen



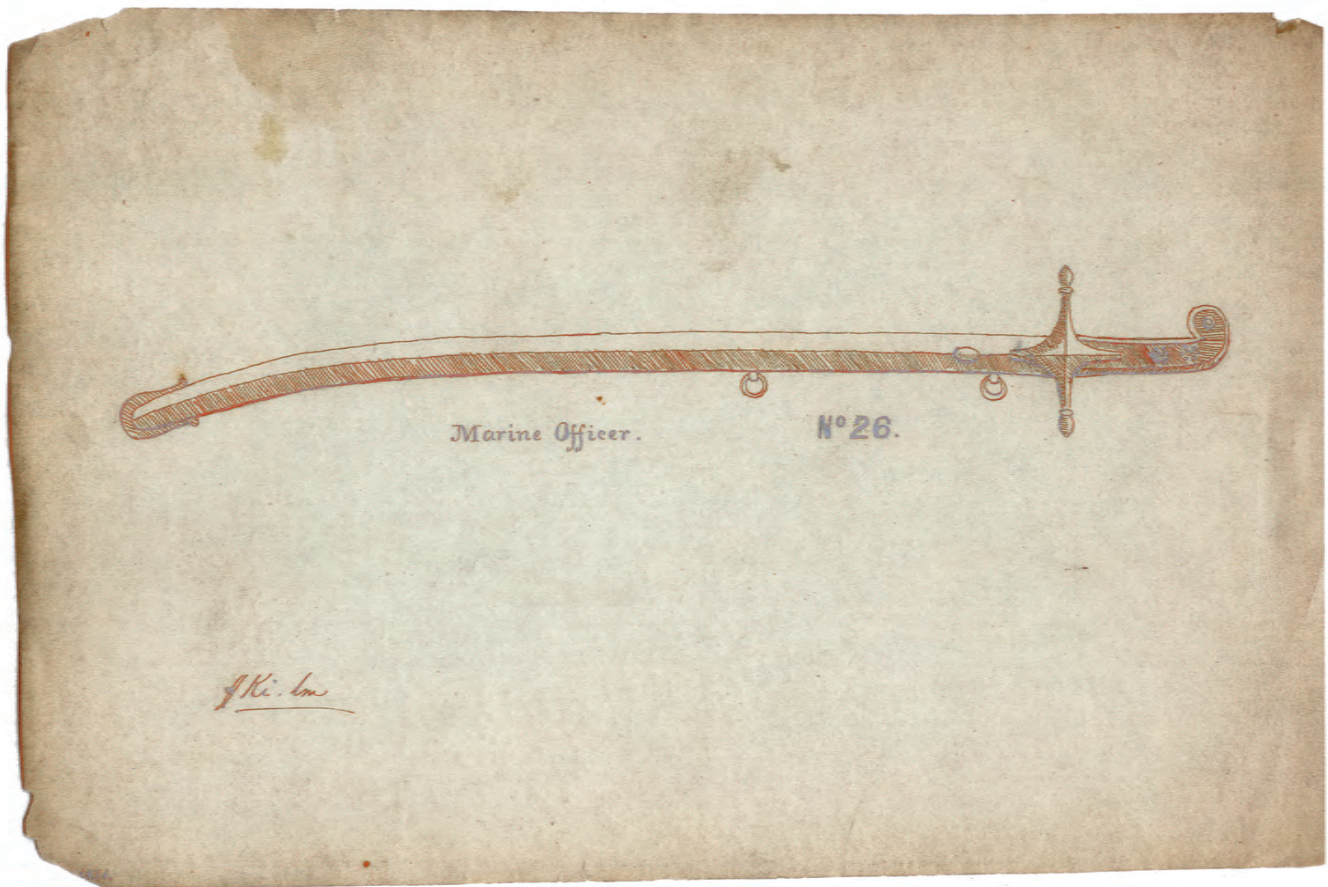
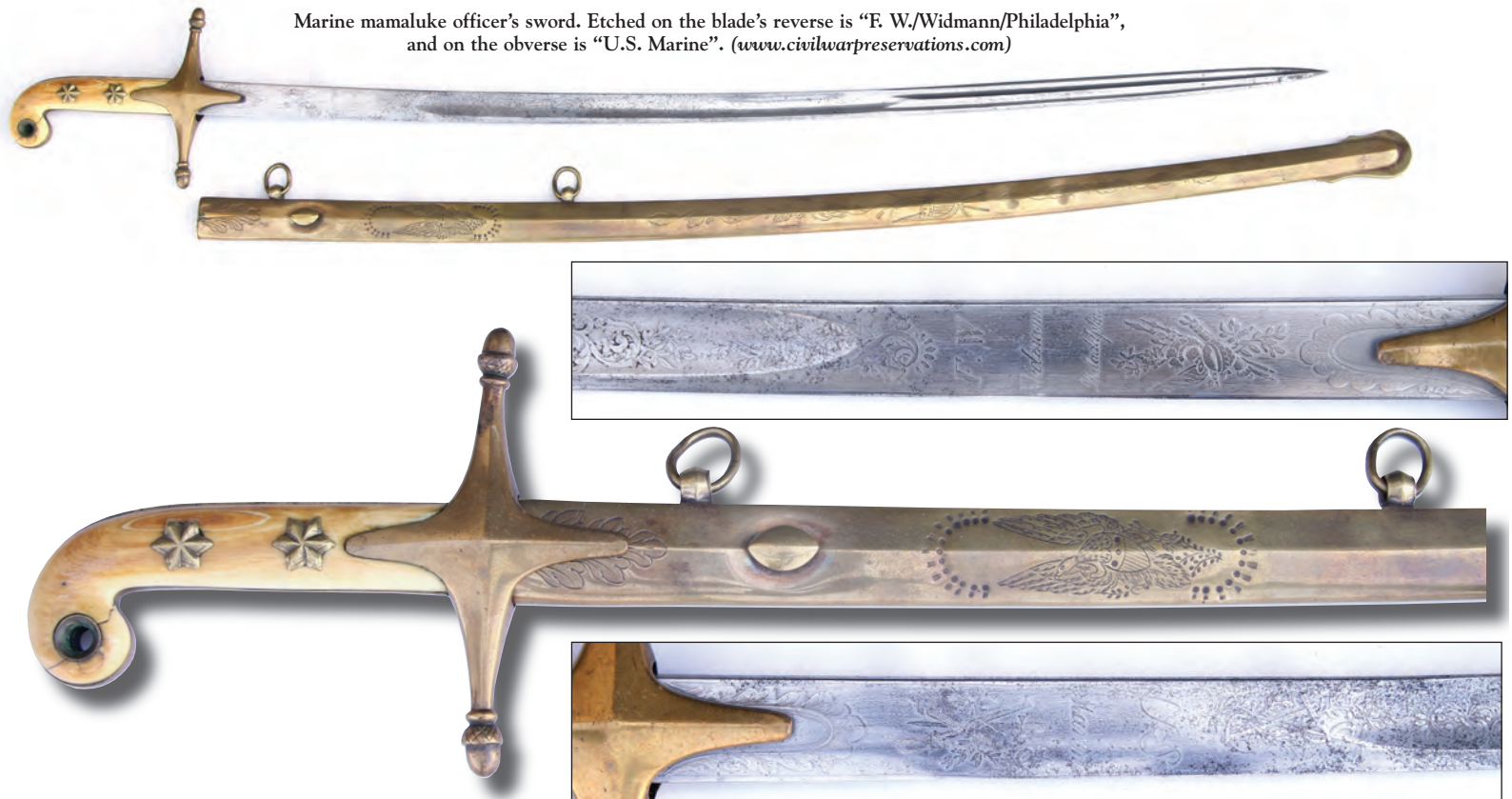
FOR YEARS, the distinctive swords covered in this article have variously been identified as "infantry hangers," "mounted or foot artillery swords" and "non-commissioned officers swords." These non-specific labels have resulted in confusion about their true identification and dating. This article will demonstrate that these swords have an association with the United States Marines and will illustrate and describe the known types.

The reason why we can now tie these swords to the Marines is because of a stroke of good luck. A number of years ago, noted antique arms author Norman Flayderman acquired some papers and work drawings of the Horstmann Company of Philadelphia — one of the foremost makers of American swords during the 19th century. These papers included drawings of enlistedmen's swords, dated Sept. 1851, which show sword types labeled "Marine Musician," "Marine Music Boy" and "Marine Sergeant Sword." What makes this especially

exciting is that groups of swords survive today that conform quite closely to the types illustrated in those drawings.

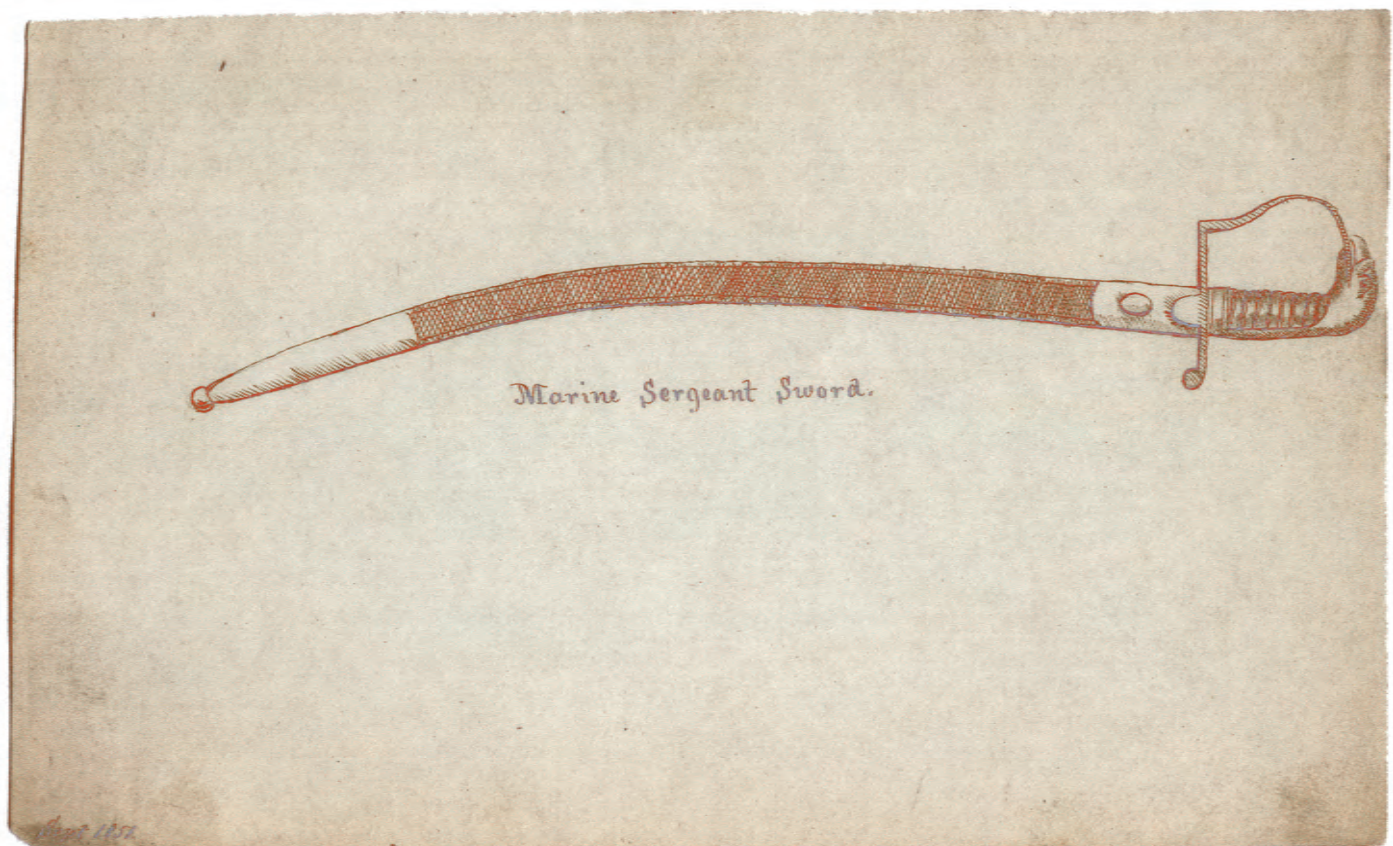
A fourth drawing, also dated 1851 and labeled "Marine Officer," was also included. And sure enough, the "Marine Officer" sword illustrated in this drawing is quite similar to the pattern presently in use by the Marine Corps. It is not known what motivated the production of these drawings, who did them or why they are identified as "Marine." Many of the swords that we have found conforming to these patterns were clearly made well before 1851. So we have a bit of an enigma on our hands. But regardless of whatever questions we may have about the original intent of the drawings, they clearly indicate the actual use (or, at the very least, the consideration) of these patterns by the United States Marines. Perhaps the drawings are illustrating a pattern that had already been in use by the Marines for quite some time...or maybe the Marines were thinking about standardizing upon a well-established pat-

Marine mamaluke officer's sword. Etched on the blade's reverse is "F. W./Widmann/Philadelphia", and on the obverse is "U.S. Marine". (www.civilwarpreservations.com)



tern of sword with a long service history...we just don't know. Without swords of these patterns having firm Marine provenance, there is a limit to how much we can hope to learn.

There are, however, some tempting hints. In McClellan's *Uniforms of the American Marines 1775-1929* (p. 62), Sergeants and Music's swords are discussed but not described:



“August 11, 1819 (Enlisted Men): fourteen Sergeant’s and six Music’s swords which I have purchased at \$5.00 each and delivered them to the Navy Store Keeper. They are of an excellent quality & considered cheap. I could not procure these for the music as short as you directed, but if you approve, three of the number can be shortened to the length you directed either here or by your armourer.” (William Read for George Harrison Philadelphia to Gale, 17 August 1819, Marine Corps archives.)

It is interesting to note the use of the term “Sergeant” when the swords were being mentioned. This term was also used on the drawings, as opposed to the more commonly used “non-commissioned” officer’s sword designation (i.e., the 1813 contract with Nathan Starr to provide “two Thousand non-Commissioned officers swords” [see Hicks, p. 56]). Perhaps this is a clue that the swords are, in fact, Marine Corps patterns and that the Sergeant’s sword was already regulation c.1820.

Examples of the “Marine Sergeant” and “Marine Musician” sword are found with both the Widmann and Horstmann company stamp under the counterguard. It is also likely that a “Marine Musician” sword was produced by Widmann, but to date, the author has not seen or heard of one. The reason the existence of Widmann-marked swords is interesting is because Widmann died in 1848, well before the date of Mr. Flayderman’s drawings. Horstmann took over the Widmann operation soon afterwards, explaining why swords survive marked to both makers.

The Drawings

Let us now discuss the drawings in more detail, copies of which appear here with Mr. Flayderman’s kind permission.

From what we have seen, these Horstmann Company drawings appear to be of sword designs previously produced by Frederick W. Widmann and were probably existing patterns that Widmann had been providing to militia companies and to the Marines. It is possible that the Marines had purchased some “Marine Sergeant’s” swords from Widmann as early as c.1820. Frederick Widmann died in 1848, and shortly after his death, many of the assets of his firm were purchased, and some key employees were hired, by the William H. Horstmann Company of Philadelphia. From surviving swords, it would appear that the design of at least two of the swords was Widmann’s and that Horstmann adopted these designs when they acquired the Widmann company assets, which likely included a quantity of parts. Horstmann also continued the manufacture of other Widmann pattern swords for a period of time, so this all makes sense. The quality of the Horstman and the Widmann-manufactured swords are approximately equal. While Widmann seems to have been consistent in locating his identifying stamp under the counterguard, various identifying marks in different locations are found on the Horstmann products.

Widmann Examples

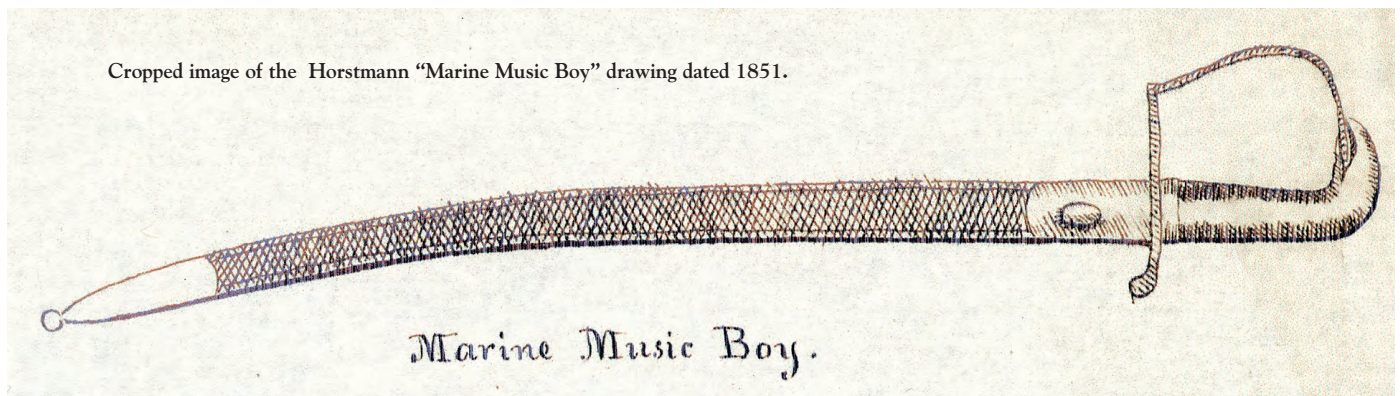
As was discussed above, on both the Widmann “Marine Sergeant” and “Marine Music Boy” swords, the maker’s mark is on the underside of the counterguard and consists of: “F.W. WIDMANN/PHILAD^A” as shown here.



A Widmann sword conforming to the "Marine Sergeant Sword" pattern.



Cropped image of the Horstmann "Marine Music Boy" drawing dated 1851.



A Widmann-marked sword appearing to conform to the "Marine Music Boy" pattern.

