

## British Pattern 1887 Mk.I Sword Bayonet for the Martini Henry Rifle.

It has long been held that the P1887 Mk.I sword bayonet was the first in a series of four Marks which evolved during the fading days of the Martini Henry rifle, the last of the single shot arms adopted by the British War Department.

The accepted history of this weapon is clearly laid out in two eminent reference works, the Bayonet Book (Watts & White) and British & Commonwealth Bayonets (Skennerton & Richardson).

However, the recent discovery of a handful of 'hybrid' versions of the bayonet by a leading expert and researcher of Western Australia arms prompted an effort to probe the history further.

In order to unravel a more detailed history of the P1887 Mk.I bayonet, it is necessary to take a step back to the evolution of the Martini Henry rifle itself, along with its close relative, the Enfield Martini rifle of 1886.

The Martini Henry rifle came about at a time of intense competition amongst European powers seeking to better each other in terms of firepower on the battlefield. In 1871 the British War Department selected a rifle that was simple to operate, easy to maintain, took a breach loaded brass cartridge round with sufficient stopping power to fell the most aggressive foe. The development of the Martini Henry service rifle was so rapid that it wasn't until five years following its introduction into service that a bayonet was specifically designed for it. Until then existing supplies of older pattern bayonets were modified and altered to fit the rifle. The first bayonet adopted exclusively for the rifle was the Pattern 1876, a socket bayonet with triangular form blade.



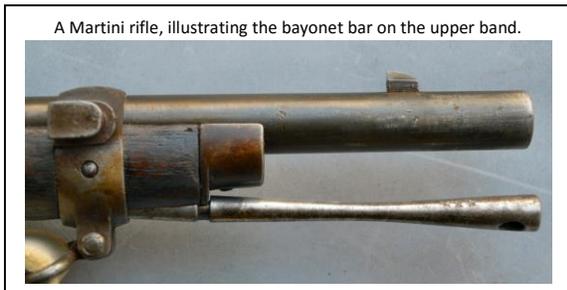
Pattern 1876 socket bayonet with brass mounted, black leather scabbard and white buff leather frog

The Martini Henry rifle and its derivatives, the Cavalry and Artillery Carbines were a success and a large step forward in British small arms development. But the pressure of foreign competition and development of firearm technology encouraged the Government to continue seeking further improvements.

One of the avenues pursued by the Royal Small Arms Factory (RSAF) at Enfield was a rifle that retained the Martini action, but took an Enfield designed barrel. The objective was to create a weapon with a smaller calibre (.402") projectile delivering a higher velocity, a huge improvement over the slower moving .450" bullet of the Martini Henry.

Designated the Enfield-Martini Rifle Pattern 1886 and prepared for troop trials, two models were produced, both of which were designed to take a sword bayonet rather than a socket bayonet.

The decision to equip the rifle with a sword bayonet in preference to a socket bayonet may well have been some form of unofficial acknowledgement and reaction to the widespread publicity of the failure of socket bayonets used by troops campaigning in the Sudan in 1884. The failure of the socket bayonet in action, which had a tendency to buckle or twist, led to a public outcry in the press. The sword bayonet designed for the Enfield-Martini rifle was a far more substantial weapon, unlikely to fail even with the roughest use.



The rifle was made with a bayonet bar on the upper barrel band onto which the slot in the bayonet pommel fit, held in place by a flat spring catch. A muzzle ring set into the bayonet crossguard slid over the end on the barrel, fixing the weapon securely to the rifle.

In a departure from previous practice, the first model bayonet was fixed to the rifle on a *vertical* plane, mounting a bar set beneath the barrel. The second smaller hole in the crossguard beneath the muzzle ring was to accommodate the rifle clearing rod.

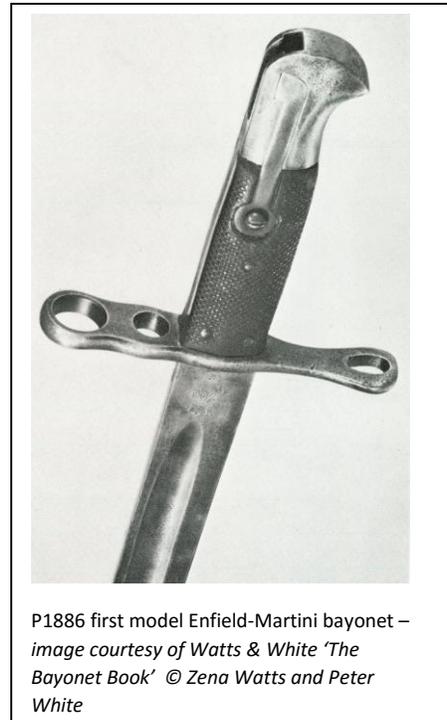
23,668 first model bayonets were made at RSAF Enfield during fiscal year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 1888. (i)

The second model bayonet differed in that it was



designed to fix in the conventional position, on a *horizontal* plane on the right side of the barrel. The crossguard incorporated a unique innovation with a foresight mounted on top and a lip to the rear of the muzzle ring that acted as a guide when

fixing the bayonet to the rifle. The purpose of the foresight was to adjust the shooters aim when firing with the bayonet fixed, thus compensating for deflection due to the additional weight on the right side.



P1886 first model Enfield-Martini bayonet – image courtesy of Watts & White 'The Bayonet Book' © Zena Watts and Peter White

P1886 Enfield Martini bayonet second model with foresight and barrel guide incorporated in the muzzle ring



RSAF Enfield manufactured 7,632 second model bayonets in fiscal year ending 31<sup>st</sup>. March 1888, with a further 23,569 produced during the following fiscal year. (i)

The reference to fiscal years is important in that a *fiscal year* spanned two *calendar* years. A fiscal year ran from 1 April through 31 March. During the period we are studying, it was common practice for a bayonet producer to stamp the calendar year of *production* into the blade of the finished product. This is not to be confused with the date stamped into blades for issue, or re-issue into service.

Thus a bayonet produced during the 1887/8 fiscal year could be stamped /87 or /88, depending on which calendar year it was made. This distinction has made research through public records of bayonet production a fascinating puzzle when comparing with blade markings of actual examples.

Therefore E-M P1886 second model bayonets produced during either fiscal year 1887/8 or 1888/9 could be stamped /87, /88 or /89.

For the purpose of unravelling the evolution of the Martini Henry P1887 Mk.I sword bayonet, we have first to focus on the production of the Enfield-Martini P1886 second model bayonet.

Whether the E-M rifle and bayonet were ultimately subjected to troop trials became irrelevant. The whole Enfield-Martini project ground to a halt when it became apparent that supplying a mix of .402" and .450" calibre ammunition to campaigning troops would prove a logistical nightmare. Add to that the rapid development of firearms with magazine capacity and greater ammunition technology, and the fate of the single shot Martini system was sealed.

The Enfield-Martini and its bayonets were relegated to storage.

Stamp showing the *calendar* year this bayonet was issued - 1887



However, with some 64,634 of the rifles having been produced, the temptation to put them to use proved irresistible. The Enfield-Martini was in effect a Martini Henry with a smaller calibre barrel. To retrofit the rifle with the larger bore Henry barrel was a relatively simple process, and this was undertaken at RSAF Enfield, creating the Martini Henry Mk. IV rifle in 1888. (ii)

Since the outside diameter of the Henry barrel was no different from the Enfield barrel and the bayonet lug was retained on the side of the top barrel band, the P1886 second model E-M sword bayonet fit like a glove. The only modification required for the bayonet was the removal of the foresight from the bayonet muzzle ring, as it had proved to be an impediment. Although the List of Changes (LoC5604) of 1/1/89 (iii) records that the foresight *and* guide were to be removed, all surviving examples indicate that only the foresight was ground off.

RSAF Enfield records for the fiscal year 1888/1889 show that 21,113 Enfield-Martini bayonets were 'sent to Birmingham for Store, and to have the front sight removed from the crosspiece'. (i)



*P1886 Enfield-Martini bayonet second model with foresight removed by grinding, and entered into service as Sword-Bayonet, Martini-Henry Rifle in 1887.*

These modified Enfield-Martini bayonets had initially been approved for service as 'Sword-Bayonet, Martini-Henry Rifle' on 13 May 1887. (iii)

At this point in time, no mention is made of a Mark, as it was the only purpose-made Martini Henry sword bayonet in service.

It was not until the introduction of improved sword bayonets with other design features (such as a non-fullered blade, internal coil spring for the catch, 'stepped' muzzle ring), that it became appropriate to assign Marks.

The LoC 5604 recorded that on 10 July 1888 the 'Sword-Bayonet, Martini-Henry Rifle' (the old E-M P1886 second model) officially became renamed yet again as the Pattern 1887 Mk. I, along with two others, each of which with their improved design features became designated P1887 Mk. II and P1887 Mk. III.

Up to this moment, the 'Sword-Bayonet, Martini-Henry Rifle' had existed quite happily in its original E-M crossguard form minus the foresight.

The P1887 Mk. II and Mk. III shared a more streamline crossguard and muzzle ring, the rear step effectively acting as the barrel guide 'lip' of the P1886 second model.

A decision was made to bring uniformity to all Sword Bayonets, thus during that same fiscal year 1888/9 the newly named P1887 Mk. I sword bayonets were despatched to RSAF Birmingham to have their old modified crossguards removed and replaced with the now more familiar 'stepped' configuration of the Mk. II and Mk. III.



*P1887 Mk.I bayonet with replaced, new 'stepped' muzzle ring*



Analysis of a number of Mk. I markings has led to the conclusion that these modified bayonets can usually be identified by the old E-M (Enfield Martini) stamp in the underside of the tang, and a unique RSAF Birmingham inspector stamp on the upper side of the updated crossguard. (v)

New-made crossguards would have been manufactured, submitted for inspection and passed as sound before replacing the old E-M crossguard.

Bayonets observed having been treated in this manner will bear an original full set of Enfield inspector stamps, a production date of /87 (or possibly /88) on the blade, the lone Birmingham inspector stamp on the replaced crossguard, and perhaps the remains of an E-M stamp on the tang. There may possibly be some BR (Birmingham Repair) inspection stamps elsewhere, but these will attest to other repairs not related to the crossguard replacement.



An additional 51,741 new-made Mk. I bayonets were produced at Enfield during 1887/8 and 1888/9 fiscal years. (iv). These may be encountered with BR inspector stamps applied at the time of a later repair, but bear no trace of EM marks, and have crossguards devoid of Birmingham inspection.

With the imminent adoption of the .303" Lee Metford rifle and P1888 bayonet, the majority of Martini Henry arms and their bayonets were eventually distributed amongst Empire troops in far flung corners of the world, the Royal Navy and a variety of second line and support units.

Of the four examples of 'Sword-Bayonet, Martini-Henry Rifle' (formerly P1886 second model, but with foresight removed) encountered to date, three have been discovered in Western Australia.

To recap the evolution of the P1887 Mk. I sword bayonet :

- E-M P1886 second model - Renamed 'Sword-Bayonet Martini-Henry Rifle' - 13 May 1887
- Sword-Bayonet M-H Rifle - 1 Jan 1889 sent to Bhm. for sight removal
- Renamed 'P1887 Mk.I' - 10 Jul 1888
- Upgraded c/guard - Fiscal year 1888/9



*Top : P1886 Enfield Martini bayonet second model with foresight removed by grinding, and entered into service as 'Sword-Bayonet, Martini-Henry Rifle' in 1887*

*Bottom : Sword-Bayonet, Martini-Henry Rifle with replaced, new, 'stepped' crossguard, and re-designated P1887 Mk.I*

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Derek Complin - Canada

Peter White - The County Palatine of Durham, England

Dennis Reeves - England

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#### *References :*

*i - Extracts from Annual Reports of RSAF Enfield*

*ii - Martini Henry Rifles and Carbines - <http://www.martinihenry.com/infantry.htm>*

*iii - LoC 5604*

*iv - British & Commonwealth Bayonets - pp 161/2*

*v - P1887 Mk. I marking survey*

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