

A British No. 7 bayonet prototype

One of the oddest bayonet configurations to emerge from Great Britain during the latter part of World War II was the No.7 knife bayonet, a marriage of the No.5 Jungle Carbine bayonet blade and the No.4 socket locking system. In the words of Graham Priest “*The No.7 was a complex item of engineering compared with earlier edged weapons.*” (i) An understatement, if ever there was one.

The design was a collaboration between the Ministry of Supply and the Wilkinson Sword Co. Ltd. A number of concepts were developed and rejected, culminating in a final design, with Wilkinson producing 1,000 prototypes in early 1944. Just where these prototypes ended up is unclear, but it appears most were scrapped in the 1950s.

Designated the No.7 Mk.1/L on 4th April 1944, general production commenced, with a number of suppliers delivering some 330,000 units. Wilkinson was not one of these, their focus no longer on government contracts. The full story of how this bayonet came about can be found in both ‘The Spirit of the Pike’, and ‘British & Commonwealth Bayonets’. (ii)

The identification of these 1,000 Wilkinson bayonets has been hampered by not having an identifiable example. But in recent years at least three No.7 bayonets have been found with sufficient differences from the production bayonets to draw the reasonable conclusion they were made by Wilkinson. The following illustrates these differences.



At first glance, nothing jumps out. Don't be misled by the grip colour, which varied considerably throughout regular production, although the Wilkinson appears to be Bakelite, rather than the Tufnel composite more usually found on production No. 7 bayonets.

The most obvious difference is the location of the grip bolts, set further into the hilt on the Wilkinson.



With one small exception, the Wilkinson is totally unmarked. The right side of the No.7 Mk 1/L is stamped with the wartime dispersal code M78 for maker Elkington, and a War Department broad arrow. The Wilkinson is blank.



The left side of the No.7 Mk 1/L bears the pattern designation, the Wilkinson is blank.



Other differences are more subtle. Nevertheless, they set the Wilkinson apart from regular production bayonets.

The socket locking pin is a bolt, not a slot head screw.



Perhaps the most subtle difference is a comparison of how the muzzle rings are finished. The production bayonet has a chamfered finish on the inside of the ring,



Indeed, this would lead one to suppose that, although the No.7 muzzle ring did not actually function as such, they were simply drawn from existing supplies, and assembled accordingly.



The Wilkinson muzzle ring is not finished, but simply a stamping. Note the lack of a chamfered edge. All three known examples of a Wilkinson

have the same crossguard finish.

The only marking to be found is a small number 4 stamped inside the front of the socket. It is only visible when the socket is swivelled in the 'fix bayonets' position. The two other known examples are numbered in the same location.



Finally, the casting of the socket on the Wilkinson is smooth, compared with production bayonets, which display a distinct ridge.

With three identical examples extant, it's reasonable to draw the conclusion that they are part of the 1,000 prototype No.7 bayonets produced by Wilkinson in 1944.

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- (i) *The Spirit of the Pike*, Uppem Publications, 2003
- (ii) Ian Skennerton and Robert Richardson, Skennerton, 1984