

Collecting and Shooting the Military Surplus Rifle



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KO-TONIC



Article by [Ralph Cobb](#)

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Why collect bayonets? Because it's a great way to add depth to your rifle collecting activities! Bayonets have their own rich history often separate and apart from the rifles they mount to and the search for bayonets sometimes leads to places a rifle collector wouldn't normally go. In this first article I will discuss how the bayonet came to be, different types of bayonets, how to get started collecting bayonets, and where to look for bayonets.

My foray into bayonet collecting began innocently enough in 1998 with the desire to acquire a few bayonets to go with the rifles in my collection. As is so often is the case with collectors, one thing lead to another and bayonets soon took on a life of their own to become a collection in their own right.

Bayonet
bay-o-net noun: A blade adapted to fit the muzzle end of a rifle and used as a weapon in close combat.
Word History: It is not unusual for a word to come from a place name. Cheddar, from the name of a village in southwest England; hamburger, after Hamburg, Germany; and mayonnaise, possibly from Mahón, the

capital of Minorca, are often found together on our tables. The word bayonet, a very undomestic sort of word, also derives from a place name, that of Bayonne, a town in southwest France where the weapon was first made. The French word baïonnette could also mean "a dagger or a knife," and the English word bayonet is first found in 1672 with this meaning. The word is first recorded in its present sense in 1704.

Source: <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=bayonet>

History

The bayonet came about as a hunting implement before it became a military weapon. In the mid-1500s firearms began to be used for hunting in Europe. In particular boar hunting was a rich man's sport. Unlike most animals who attempt to flee when wounded the boar is notorious for charging its assailant with the intent to do grievous bodily harm. The smooth-bore firearms of the mid-1500s were inaccurate short range, single-shot weapons that took a long time to load. You can see the hunter's dilemma.

The boar spear was the accepted secondary implement for the hunter to finish off his quarry before it finished him off. I can imagine carting two six-foot long implements through the woods while trying to stalk game must have been a pain in the neck. If one could only attach the spear point to the end of the firearm when needed then things would be much simpler. Around 1570, the bayonet was born.

The bayonet moved into the military realm in Sweden around 1600 when Gustavus Adolphus created the first State-sponsored professional army. Gustavus Adolphus pioneered many concepts which still hold true for armies today: conscription, a paid standing army, fed and equipped by the government, to name a few. As the nation-state became the primary means of projecting world power, the bayonet became standard military equipment.

Bayonet Types

The first bayonets were what we refer to today as 'plug bayonets.' As the name implies they were daggers with a slender, round, tapered handle that fit right in to the bore of the musket. Once fitted the musket could not be loaded or fired. While this was probably adequate for hunting as a military arm it was far from ideal.

Around 1700 two alternative approaches emerged that allowed loading and firing while the bayonet was fixed: the socket bayonet and the sword bayonet. The socket bayonet utilized a slender thrusting blade attached to a sleeve that slid around the outside of the muzzle. The early sword bayonet was an attempt to make a dual-purpose weapon that could either be used alone as a sword or affixed to the musket as a bayonet. Both types of bayonets saw extensive use for the next 200 years.

In the late 1800s as the advent of smokeless powder caused a radical advance in firearms design bayonets began to evolve as well. With a few exceptions the socket bayonet faded away. The sword bayonet also began to give way to a shorter version called the the knife bayonet. There is not a hard and fast dividing line between the sword and knife bayonet.

In my collection I classify blades ten inches or under as knife bayonets. The sword bayonet slowly gave way fading completely away by the 1950s.

Getting Started

There are more varieties of bayonets than there are rifles, so some reading is definitely in order. Books are important, and something that you can't do without. Bayonet books tend to be published in small numbers and prices go through the roof once they go out of print. Get 'em while you can is the order of the day, when it comes to bayonet books. That said, there are some very good, affordable bayonet books available today.

If you are just getting started then [Bayonets from Janzen's Notebook by Jerry Janzen](#), is probably the first book that you should buy. It covers about 1,000 bayonets from all over the world and is arranged by country. It is still in print and can be purchased very reasonably from the major online booksellers. It was my first bayonet book and has paid for itself many, many, times over by helping me avoid bad purchases and cluing me in to some really good finds.

There are many other books some focusing on one country or type of bayonet. I list what I have in my reference library, on the library page of my website.

There is also a tremendous amount of information available on the Internet. The [links page](#) at Surplusrifle.com has some bayonet-related links, including a link to my website. On [my website \(http://webpages.charter.net/cobbfmly/home/\)](http://webpages.charter.net/cobbfmly/home/) I also have a listing of bayonet-related links that have been most useful to me over the years.

The [98k Bayonet Collectors' Network](#) (BCN) is a very innovative collecting organization that uses e-mail and the Internet to overcome many of the obstacles imposed by distance. Founded in 1996 by John C. Jacobi, the BCN began as an organization focused around collecting of the German SG84/98 III bayonet used on the WW II German Mauser Kar 98k rifle. The BCN has since branched out to encompass international bayonets and includes collectors from around the world. Many leading authors of bayonet books are BCN members and hardly a bayonet book is published any more that doesn't include contributions from BCN members. The BCN publishes a daily e-mail digest of member posts of questions, answers, and discussion of collecting topics. The e-mail digest is currently compiled in Australia and sent to members worldwide.

Where to Look For Bayonets

One of the fun things about bayonet collecting is that bayonets can turn up just about anywhere. If you have done your book-work you can recognize the gold nuggets when you see them. One of the exciting things about collecting is that not every gold nugget comes labeled **gold nugget**. There are regional differences that impact the venues in which one is likely to hit pay dirt so you'll have to try different approaches to find what works best for you.

If gun shows in your area are productive, then they're a good bet. Even if everything is too

overpriced to buy gun shows are still an excellent place to put your acquired knowledge to practice in identifying bayonets. If local pawn shops deal in firearms then you are also likely to find bayonets. I'm on the west coast, in Northern California, so gun shows are getting to be the pits and only a few pawn shops deal in firearms.

Gun shops are a good place to look if you know what to look for. While you would think that gun shops would know what they were selling and have the bayonets price accordingly I have still made some excellent finds at gun shops.

Good deals used to be found on eBay and eBay certainly helped jump start my bayonet collecting activity. In my experience a lot of the glitter is gone from eBay. There is too much junk listed and when you find something good people bid the price into the stratosphere. I no longer do much looking there.

Hands down antique shops and antique malls have yielded my best finds. I attribute this to a couple of factors. First, some antique dealers tend to price stuff they don't know (or care) about rather arbitrarily. They typically price high but sometimes you will find just the opposite. Recently I picked up a mint (and I mean mint) WW II U. S. M-4 bayonet for only \$30 from a dealer's space at an antique mall. It would have easily sold to an advanced collector, and fairly quickly, at \$150.

Second antique dealers often don't recognize rare variations that can make a piece much more valuable. They may price a piece at the high end for a run-of-the-mill example. However if you have done your homework and can spot the rare variations then sometimes you can really score.

Many of the importers and wholesalers of collectible military rifles also sell bayonets very reasonably. Get on their mailing lists!

Getting to know other collectors is also a good way to add to your collection. One thing that I like about bayonet collecting is that the collecting community is smaller and more intimate. Joining the BCN really helped build my knowledge and interest. Often collectors specialize in certain bayonets, but have to take others in order to get the pieces they want. Steering them to nice pieces in their chosen genre often results in some buying opportunities for you. Collectors love to trade. Having some trading stock on hand is also a good thing.

In the next article we will get into some of the more technical aspects: terminology; points of identification; condition issues; care, storage, and display; and frogs (frogs?). Yes, frogs.

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