

NAVAL CUTLASS BAYONETS

By John Carter



In 1858 a new bayonet for the navy was suggested using a cutlass style blade, with a guard designed by Colonel Dixon. The first type (above) pattern 1859 Naval Cutlass Bayonet was approved on 18th April 1859 and it followed the typical cutlass design with a heavy 26½ inch (675mm) unfullered blade, and a wide steel half basket hilt and wooden grips.



A second type (above) pattern 1959 Naval Cutlass Bayonet was approved on 1st May 1859, but had the wooden grips replaced with impressed leather ones. These bayonets were meant for the .577 cal short naval Enfield rifles, and Naval snider conversions. The scabbards were the same as the cutlass and interchangeable.

I have another pattern 1859 in rough condition, but this one has been crudely converted by bushing the socket to fit the Martini Henry. (next column)



Extract from the List of Change's:

**2713-- Bayonets, sword, Naval, with Cutlass Guard-- 11 July 1871
for Martini- Henry Rifles.**

**Sword, Iron Hilt, Royal Navy (Cutlass)
Scabbards, Leather, for the above**

Patterns have been sealed as follows :--

1. A Sword-bayonet with cutlass guard, and leather scabbard, to govern manufacture

Weight of sword – bayonet, 1lb. 15 ozs.

Weight of scabbard, 9½ ozs

Length of blade (from riveting plate to point) 25 5/8 inches

2. A sword – bayonet, with cutlass guard, and leather scabbard, to govern the alteration of sword – bayonets and scabbards of the pattern sealed 19th September 1861, so as to utilize them, and make them as nearly possible like No.1. the alterations consist in :--

The blade being ground straight, and made 1inch shorter.

The Guard being reduced in size, so as to be the same as that of 1.

The cross being new, and fitting the Martini – Henry rifle.

The scabbard being reduced in length to suit the shorter blade, and being furnished with a new mouth - piece, and with springs to keep the blade steady.

3.A cutlass to govern the alteration of existing cutlasses.

The alteration consists in the blade being ground as nearly as the metal will admit to the dimensions of that of 1.

The guard and scabbard are not altered.



Note the heavier construction of the 1859 pattern (top) compared with the 1871 pattern (bottom)

There was a delay in the manufacture of these Naval Cutlass Bayonets as in 1874 (three years later) Captain Boys RN inquired about the supply of new cutlass bayonets, he obviously never got an answer to his request as he inquired again in November 1874. nothing had been done after 1871.

The L.o.C's reference indicate that two versions of cutlass bayonets were approved, new manufacture and conversions.

I have looked closely at my 1871 pattern Naval Cutlass Bayonet, and I am of the opinion that it has been manufactured, rather than converted the proof mark on the blade is :- ^ over WD, Crown over E over 12 (Enfield), 6/75 date, other side of blade Victorian crown over VR

The last of my Cutlass Bayonets is the pattern 1879 sawback with groove in the blade, for the Martini-Henry Artillery carbine. I'm pretty sure the Royal Navy didn't issue M-H carbines, but it is possible that the RN may sometimes have used the saw back artillery bayonet of 1879 during the Boxer campaign of 1900 in China. As the Maritime Museum, Greenwich has two examples from that source. (see Swords for Sea Service page 90) That's good enough for me !



Pattern 1871 cutlass bayonet for the Martini Henry rifle



Pattern 1879 sawback cutlass bayonet for Martini Henry Artillery Carbine



British Naval Brigade manning the Gatling Guns during the Boer War, ammo supply rating wearing 1871 Martini Henry Naval Cutlass bayonet



- A. 1859 pattern (wood grips)**
- B. 1859 pattern (leather grips)**
- C. 1859 pattern (bushed for M-H Rifle)**
- D. 1871 pattern (for M-H Rifle)**
- E. 1879 pattern (for M-H Artillery Carbine)**

References:-

Swords for Sea Service by W.E. May RN & P.G. Annis Vol 1

British Commonwealth Bayonets by I Skennerton & R Richardson

List of Changes in War Material Vol 1



British seaman wearing "Landing Order" with M-H and cutlass bayonet