

## A 1912-DATED EXPERIMENTAL BOLO BAYONET FOR THE M1903 SPRINGFIELD RIFLE

by Fred Gaede



After the recent passing of Ed Kemp, friend and fellow member of the Maryland Arms Collectors Association, Inc., his widow, Elsie, approached me to learn more about an unusual bayonet that Ed treasured. She brought it to a recent club meeting, where I examined the item and took the pictures that are in this article.

Although I recognized it as a bolo bayonet for the M1903 Springfield Rifle, it was hardly in the mainstream of what I have researched and collected. Upon my first examination the bayonet was unusual, to me at least, in several respects. It was in excellent condition, which was unexpected for what I perceived to be a scarce bayonet; the date of 1912 for what I thought was a M1915 bayonet; and it lacked a serial number, seemingly always present on Springfield manufactured items during this period. Until I determined what this example represented I demurred on giving an answer to Elsie.

My only immediate sources of information were Al Hardin's somewhat dated typology, as put forth in his 1964 book on American bayonets,<sup>1</sup> and SABC member Frank Trzaska's two part article in this *Journal* on U.S. bolo bayonets.<sup>2</sup> Trzaska had written a comprehensive history of bolo bayonets, both for the Krag and the Springfield, and the second part of his article was particularly helpful in providing clues to identifying what I believe this bayonet represents. His inclusion of a similar bolo bayonet dated 1912 with serial number 40 was particularly enlightening. Member Jim Maddox also provided sources of information on this bayonet, and subsequently a bit more information was found in Colvin and Viall's *United States Rifles and Machine Guns*, and Cole's *Knives*.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, member Al Demchak shared his notes on bayonets in the Springfield Armory collection, which he compiled in September 1969. At that time in the armory collection was another 1912-dated bolo bayonet

for the M1903 Springfield Rifle, accession number 2093. It appeared about identical to the bayonet illustrated, except it included a serial number of 52. I contacted the armory to confirm whether they still had the item, and a few details for the benefit of SABC readers interested in this item.

Before providing more information on what I will term the 'Kemp bayonet,' and another at the Springfield Armory, some background on this type of bayonet may be helpful for newer members of SABC. A bolo bayonet had been developed and issued for trial for the Krag rifle.<sup>4</sup> Although the Krag bolo received generally favorable comments, its late manufacture (1902-3) was too close to the adoption of the M1903 Springfield Rifle, so it never got beyond the trial stage. In late 1911 another effort was made to produce a bolo bayonet that would be compatible with the M1903 rifle. The initial efforts to create one, based on the M1909 bolo knife,<sup>5</sup> had not yielded satisfactory results. The project continued, with a drawing by Captain Robert Dickson, endorsed by Major Hanson Ely, providing the basis for 50 bayonets being authorized to be made and sent to the Philippines for field testing. In 1912 the *Annual Report of the Secretary of War* reported 52 experimental bolo bayonets had been completed, serial numbered and inspected. They were subjected to slight alterations, to make the wood-to-metal fit of the grip smoother, and to clean up the lug slot. Upon completion of scabbards at Rock Island Arsenal, one bolo bayonet and scabbard (Fig. 1) were sent to the chief of ordnance in Washington, and another to the Springfield Armory. It is assumed serial number 51 went to the chief since number





Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

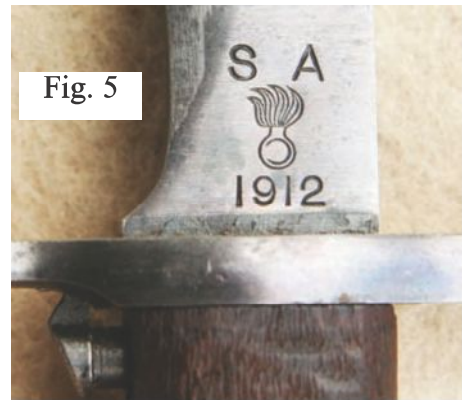


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8 View of the grip from above.



Fig. 9 View of the grip from below.





Fig. 10

52 is still at the Springfield Armory. The remaining 50 were sent to the Manila Ordnance Depot in the Philippines, for testing by the Philippine Scouts.<sup>6</sup>

The Kemp bayonet (Figs. 2 through 10) adheres closely to the machinist drawing included in the second part of Trzaska's article, on page 16, and included here for reference as Fig. 11.<sup>7</sup> Demonstrating the highest quality workmanship, it is 21 inches long overall, with a completely, but lightly, blued blade 15.875 inches long and grip of 4.875 inches. The cross guard of .25 inch thickness completes the overall dimension. The blade is .244 inch thick near the cross guard, compared to a dimension of .222 inch in the drawing. The hole for the barrel muzzle is .618 inch in diameter. The Springfield Armory marking is complete, including

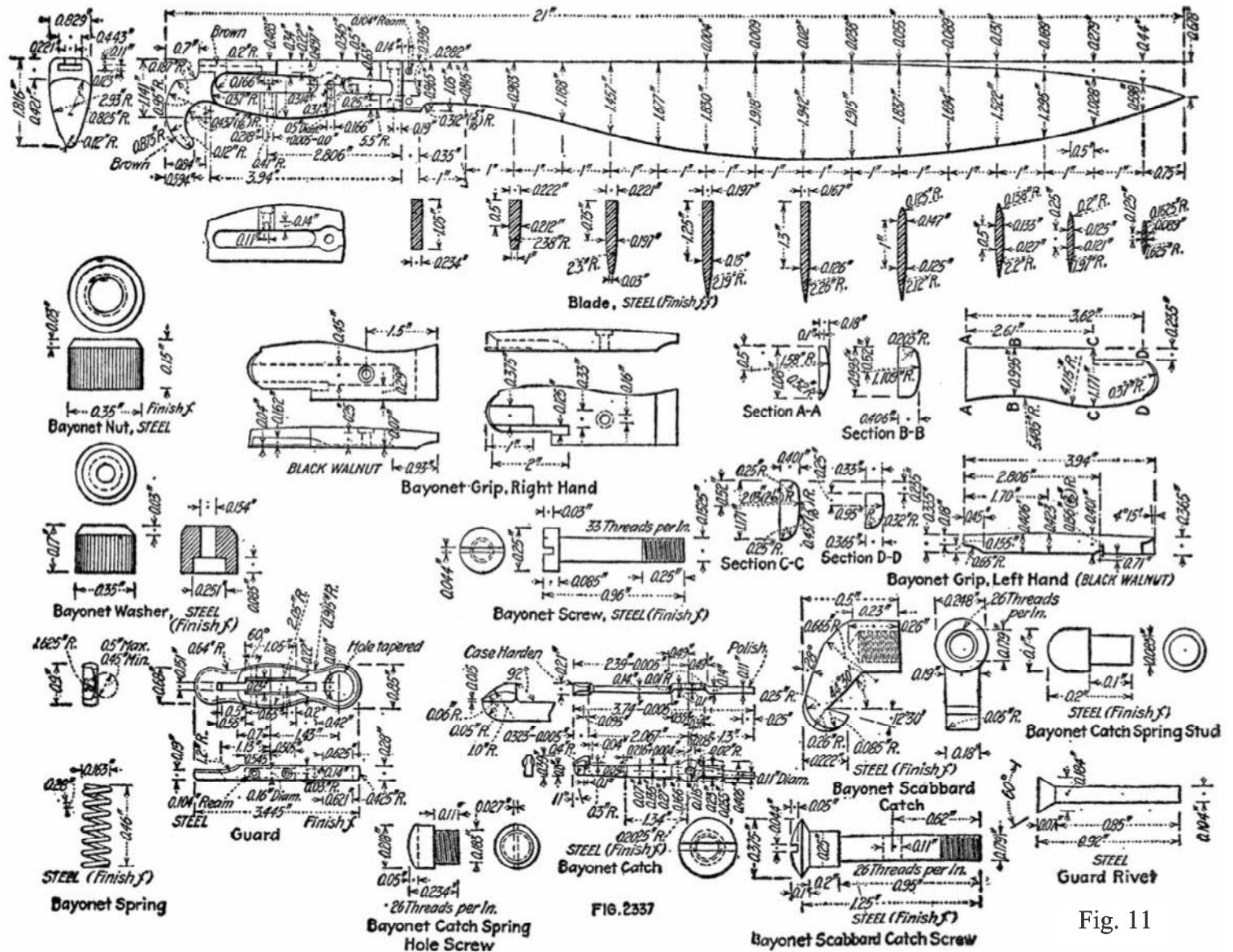


Fig. 11

an ordnance bomb (Fig. 5), although on the opposite side it lacks a serial number under the US (Fig. 6), both of which are on the other two known examples.<sup>8</sup> The catch mechanism follows that of the M1905 bayonet, with a button on the bottom of the grip (Fig. 7). The blued finish on the blade may have been completed once it was determined a serial number was not to be applied as the ricasso is better finished than the rest of the blade (Fig. 4). The bluing on the blade actually appears now like a light gray because the entire blade does not appear to have received a polished finish like the ricasso before bluing. Alternatively, since the example in the Springfield Armory collection has a bright blade, there may have been an attempt at the armory to remove the blued finish on a polished blade once a decision was made to finish the blades bright.

Confirmation of a few key aspects of the Springfield Armory example was provided by Alex MacKenzie, Curator. The specimen is indeed still part of the collection (Figs.12 and 13), although the artifact number is now SPAR 1086. The basic dimensions match that of the Kemp example. The entire blade has been finished in the white, including the area around the markings on both sides of the ricasso. In this case it appears the blade was polished in its entirety before the marking was added in the ricasso area. As noted, this example bears the serial number of 52 and is also dated 1912. The same M1905 catch mechanism is on this bayonet, as it is also on bolo bayonet with serial number 40. The last noted bayonet, it might be mentioned, has

no original finish remaining on its blade.

Since its markings match what Trzaska shows in the second part of his article,<sup>9</sup> and the information provided by the Springfield Armory,<sup>10</sup> with this background the likeliest explanation for the existence of the Kemp bayonet is that it was an 'extra,' made during the 1912 manufacturing process, with room allowed for the addition of a serial number had it been needed to replace another damaged before the 50 needed were completed. Alternatively, "there could have been some minor defect along the way that caused it to be rejected..."<sup>11</sup> As already suggested, this bayonet may have been among the first completed, if not the first, and finished with a deeply blued blade. At that point there may have been a decision to finish the remainder in the white, and an attempt to remove the blue finish from this example, causing the bayonet to be 'defective' in the opinion of the armory personnel.

In either case, heretofore only 52 experimental bolo bayonets were known to have been manufactured in 1912. Now a fifty-third example is known. That accounts for the excellent condition of the unnumbered Kemp example. When the experimental 1912 bolo bayonets were completed only the authorized fifty, and two retained samples, were numbered. The authorized fifty were sent to the Philippines, tested and subsequently used up because they were so popular, except for serial number 40. The current condition of number 40 attests to the prolonged and hard use they received. One retained sample survived and remains in the Springfield Armory



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



collection, serial numbered 52. The disposition of the other retained sample, presumably numbered 51, is currently unknown.<sup>12</sup> However, this chain of events could account for the existence and condition of the Kemp example.

With the existence of this example becoming known to the collecting community the number of 1912-dated experimental bolo bayonets was increased by 50%, to three. It was gratifying to have been part of the process of discovering why it survived as it has.

*Acknowledgements: Thanks to the late Ed Kemp, as well as Elsie Kemp. I appreciate the cogent contributions to this article by SABC members Frank Trzaska, Jim Maddox and Al Demchak. Thanks, too, to NPS Curator Alex MacKenzie, Springfield Armory National Historic Site; Les Jensen, Arms Curator, West Point Museum; David Miller, Arms Curator, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution; and Chris Semancik, Chief Curator, U.S. Army Museum System.*

*Endnotes:*


1. Albert N. Hardin, Jr., *The American Bayonet, 1776-1964* (Philadelphia: Riling and Lentz, 1964), Chapter 8, 216-21.
2. Frank Trzaska, "The U.S. Bolo Bayonets in the Philippines," *SABC Journals* No. 62 (Winter 2007), Part 1, 15-20; and No. 63, (Spring 2008), Part 2, 15-9; hereafter referred to as Trzaska, "Bolo Bayonets."
3. Fred H. Colvin and Ethan Viall, *United States Rifles and Machine Guns* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1917); 301; hereafter Colvin & Viall, *US Rifles*. See also M.H. Cole, *U.S. Military Knives, Bayonets & Machetes* (Birmingham, AL: M.H. Cole, Second printing, 1991), Book IV, 20-1; hereafter Cole, *Knives*. See also Gary M. Cunningham, *American Military Bayonets of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Export, PA: Scott A. Duff Publications, Third printing, 1999). 33.
4. Donald J. Hartman, *The U.S. Krag Bayonets: History, Variations, Modifications* (Springfield, New Jersey: D&D Blade Research, 2008), Chapter 6.
5. A number of fakes of the 1909 bolo bayonet have been made using original 1909 bolo knives.
6. Trzaska, "Bolo Bayonets," Part 1, 19, 20.
7. Colvin & Viall, *US Rifles*, 301. The drawing is of the 1915 bolo bayonet, which was dimensionally unchanged from the 1912 examples.
8. The well used example in Frank Trzaska's article is serial numbered 40, while the Springfield Armory example is

numbered 52. It appears number 40 was ground to either prolong its life, or return it to a closer approximation of its original appearance.

9. Trzaska, "Bolo Bayonets," Part 2, 15-6.
10. Personal communications from NPS Curator Alex MacKenzie to the author, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and October 30<sup>th</sup> 2014.
11. Personal communication from member Jim Maddox to the author, September 16, 2014.
12. Checks of the US Army museum system's artifact database by Les Jensen and Chris Semancik did not turn up any mention of a bolo bayonet with serial number 51. Since a number of Army artifacts went to the Smithsonian early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a check of its collection was requested of David Miller, with only one completely unmarked bolo bayonet noted. It "was labeled a 'variant' by the Ordnance clerks." Personal communication from David Miller to the author, October 24, 2014.



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