

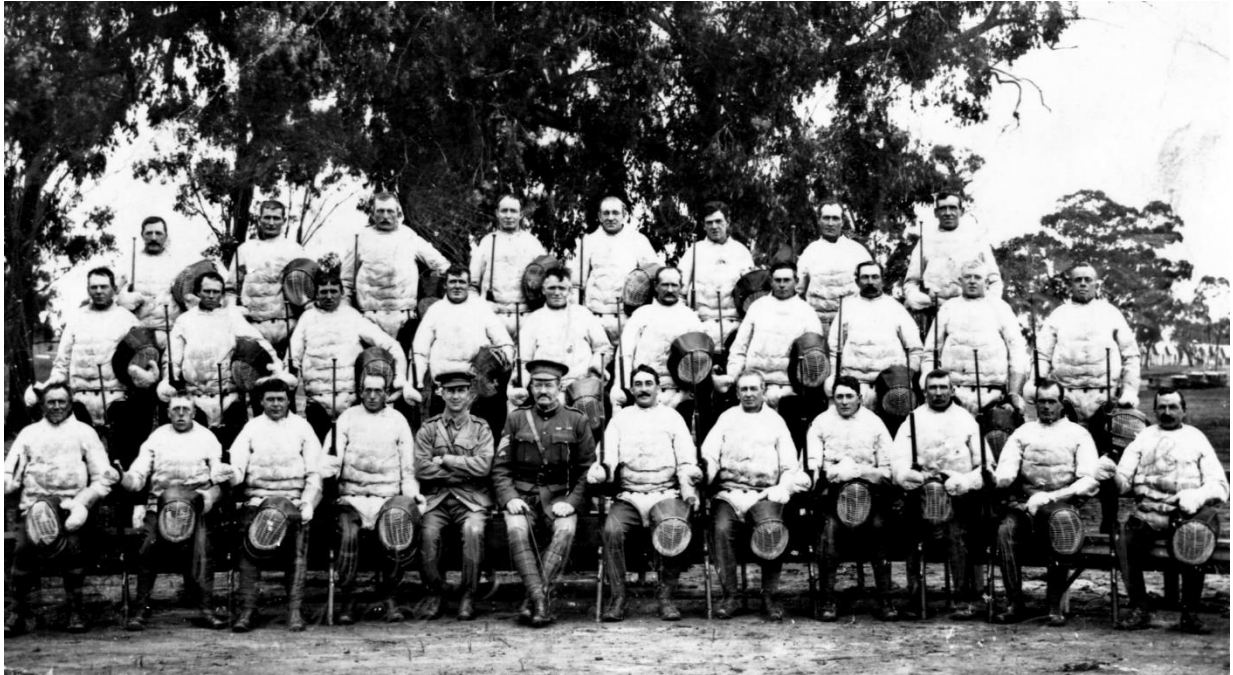
YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 68

TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the Museum's collection and their background stories. The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing apply.

BAYONET TRAINING – PLUNGER RIFLE



Infantry platoon kitted for bayonet training with plunger rifle - Perth 1910

In a bayonet assault all ranks go forward to kill or be killed, and only those who have developed skill and strength by constant training will be able to kill.

The bayonet is essentially an offensive weapon—go straight at an opponent with the point threatening his throat and deliver a thrust wherever an opening presents itself. If no opening is obvious, then create one by beating off the opponent's weapon or making a "feint thrust" in order to make him uncover himself.

To attack with the bayonet effectively requires *good direction, strength and quickness* during a state of wild excitement and probably physical exhaustion. The limit of the range of a bayonet is about five feet (measured from the opponent's eyes), but more often the killing is at close quarters, at a range of two feet or less, when troops are struggling *corps à corps* in trenches or darkness.

Hand-to-hand fighting with the bayonet is individual, which means that a man must think and act for himself and rely on his own resources and skill; but, as in games, he must play as one of a team and not for himself alone. *In a bayonet assault all ranks go forward to kill or be killed, and only those who have developed skill and strength by constant training will be able to kill.*

Introductory paragraphs from a British Bayonet Training Manual

The Fencing Musket / Plunger Rifle Exhibit

Bayonet fighting had long been a core element of a soldier's training. In the late 19th century, the British Army adopted an ingenious training tool, the spring-loaded fencing musket. Fencing muskets were replicas of the standard issue rifle, but the rifled barrel was replaced by a tube with rubber or a spring inside it, topped by a plunger. This plunger or button-ended rod represented the bayonet and the spring inside the tube allowed soldiers to make lunges at practice opponents without the fear of killing them.



The plunger rifle bayonet training ensemble exhibit in the World War One Gallery contains the padded vest and barred mask worn during training with the plunger bayonet training rifle. The spring compression of the plunger would simulate the sinking in of the bayonet during an assault strike. Training realism was achieved with a one against one scenario and a live opponent.

Equipment on this scale was expensive, given the robustness needed for the face guard and vest to withstand hard use. With the onset of the mass training requirements of the Australian Imperial force, straw stuffed targets and actual weapons were used in bayonet training.





Bayonets imply aggression and aggression in close quarter's fighting is remarkably important. Aggression and anger allow you to overcome fear and panic. Attaching bayonets and running an assault course unlocks a degree of aggression many may have never tapped into prior to training.

Shooting something can often be surgical and emotionally removed. When you have you have to sink a 7-inch blade into a simulated opponent, you *have* to tap into aggression and emotion. Bayonets might still act as knives and be somewhat useful, but their biggest use comes from unlocking that aggression. They instill a warrior spirit and release something in people they may not have been aware they had.

Let's end with a quote from the U.S. Army's FM 23-25:

The will to meet and destroy the enemy in hand-to-hand combat is the spirit of the bayonet. It springs from the fighter's confidence, courage, and grim determination, and is the result of vigorous training. Through training, the fighting instinct of the individual soldier is developed to the highest point. The will to use the bayonet first appears in the trainee when he begins to handle it with facility and increases as his confidence grows. The full development of his physical prowess and complete confidence in his weapon culminates in the final expression of the spirit of the bayonet — fierce and relentless destruction of the enemy.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2010/0928/One-less-skill-for-soldiers-to-master-at-boot-camp-bayonet-training>

The use of the bayonet to instill an aggressive spirit is evident in the World War One Gallery, where a display features a wide variety of bayonets from both sides of the conflict. The origins of the sawback bayonet as a field engineering tool in both the British and German armies is also featured in the Pre 1914 Gallery. This feature on issued bayonets was later made use of in propoganda as an example of German "frightfulness".

Bayonets and the Rising Sun Badge



Proudly worn by soldiers of the 1st and 2nd Australian Imperial Force in both World Wars and onward, the 'Rising Sun' badge has become an integral part of the digger tradition. The distinctive shape of the badge, worn on the upturned side of a slouch hat, is commonly identified with the spirit of Anzac. In 1901, a badge was urgently sought for the Australian contingents raised after Federation for service in South Africa during the 2nd Anglo Boer War. The most widely accepted version of the origin of this badge attributes the selection of its design to a British Officer, Major General Sir Edward Hutton, the newly appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Forces. Hutton had a 'Trophy-of-Arms' composed of mounted cut and thrust swords and triangular Martini-Henry bayonets that were arranged in a semi-circle around the Crown. To General Hutton, the shield was symbolic of the cooperation between the naval and military forces of the Empire.

<https://www.navyhistory.org.au/the-story-behind-the-rising-sun-trophy-of-arms/>

<https://www.army.gov.au/our-heritage/traditions/rising-sun-badge>

Bayonets, Rising Suns and WW1 AIF Tac Signs

During WW1 the Rising Sun was used in a stylised format on formation (TAC) signs for the Corps and for the Divisions. Note that 1 & 2 Anzac Corps and 1st Division were the only units to get the 13 point Rising Sun. All other units got the 9 point Rising Sun on TAC signs. Cadet unit badges had 7 points.

