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Pike, Halberd, and Bayonet: Sharp Weapons in Near Modern and Modern Warfare (Knives, Swords, and Bayonets: A World History of Edged Weapon Warfare)

Martina Sprague

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The polearms used by pikemen constituted the first stage of a military revolution that would force a change in the tactics of warfare. The pike, a two-handed polearm with a long spear-like tip, originated in the fourteenth century and was carried by infantry soldiers as defense against charging cavalry. The halberd, too, proved a fearsome and pragmatic weapon used in the armies of medieval and post-medieval Europe. When supplemented by pikemen, halberdiers became a formidable force.

Pikemen would dominate the battlefield until the late 1500s when new technology led to the implementation of muskets and later bayonets. Early bayonets were long sword-like weapons which, like the pike, were originally used to ward off cavalry charges. Part of the bayonet's utility rested with the fact that firearms were cumbersome to reload. If the initial firing failed to dispatch the enemy, a bayonet charge might prove necessary. Although the bayonet charge seldom, if ever, decided the victory, the bayonet proved useful in trench warfare in conjunction with other weapons such as a rifle and hand grenade.

This book begins with a discussion of the edged weapons that were the forerunners to the bayonet: the pike and the halberd. It then examines the physical drill and mental preparation required of the soldier to successfully engage an enemy combatant with the bayonet. Next it covers military operations in which the bayonet has served a primary function from the eighteenth century to modern day, followed by a study of the utility of the bayonet in the age of firearms, particularly in World War I. The concluding remarks focus on the popularity of the bayonet since its inception and the reasons why it survived as a weapon of the modern battlefield.

Knives, Swords, and Bayonets: A World History of Edged Weapon Warfare is a book series that examines the history of edged weapons in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Middle East and surrounding areas before gunpowder increased the distance between combatants. The book series takes a critical look at the relationship between the soldier, his weapon, and the social and political mores of the times. Each book examines the historical background and metallurgic science of the knife, sword, or bayonet respectively, and explores the handling characteristics and combat applications of each weapon. Save by purchasing the full 10-book series in a single paperback volume (538 pages). Look for Knives, Swords, and Bayonets: A World History of Edged Weapon Warfare (the full series).

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7. Sickle Sword and Battle Axe: Edged Weapons of Ancient Egypt

8. Gladius and Spatha: Swords and Warfare in the Classical World
9. Longsword and Saber: Swords and Swordsmen of Medieval and Modern Europe
10. Pike, Halberd, and Bayonet: Sharp Weapons in Near Modern and Modern Warfare

Note that the books are written for those with an interest in exploring the historical beginnings of edged weaponry, how edged weapons have been used in war in different parts of the world, and the value the soldier attached to his weapon. Military, social, and political history is discussed. Arms collectors or others with detailed interest in the finer points of weaponsmithing may want to look for books that are more heavily illustrated.

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