

CLARIFYING THE NOMENCLATURE ASSOCIATED WITH EARLY CZECHOSLOVAKIAN MAUSER BAYONETS

by Ralph E. Cobb



Czechoslovakian collector/researcher, Mr. Michal Uher, contacted me regarding the nomenclature many western bayonet references use to refer to the VZ-23 bayonet. (VZ is an abbreviation of *Vzor*, which translates to ‘Model’ in English.) He indicated that the nomenclature commonly used in western publications (and reflected on the worldbayonets.com website) to describe early Czech Mauser bayonets (i.e., prior to adoption of the VZ-24) is not correct. His research is based on original Ministry of National Defense documents from 1924, which he accessed at the National Library of the Czech Republic. Also, information published in the 2016 book by Jan Šmíd, *Pušky a bodáky vz. 24 (Rifles and Bayonets VZ-24)*, which draws heavily on documents from the *Zbrojovka (Arsenal), Brno* archives.

This article summarizes the period nomenclature used in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document and the relevant history provided by Mr. Uher.

Mr. Uher provided images of from what appears to be the Czech Ministry of National Defense 1924 Budget describing the rifles and bayonets then in use. These show the nomenclature used in Czechoslovakia for these early Czech Mauser rifles and bayonets.

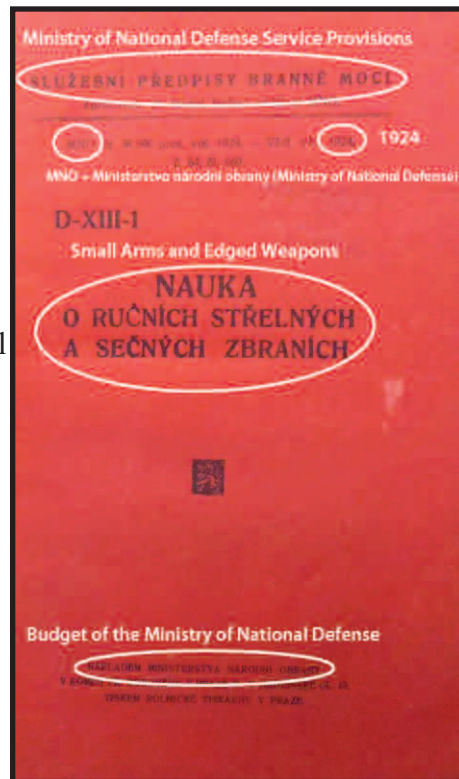


Fig.1 Cover of 1924 Ministry of National Defense document (with author’s English annotations).

Introduction

In its first years, Czechoslovakia purchased surplus Mannlicher M1895 rifles and Mauser *Gewehr 98* infantry rifles; and *Kar 98AZ* Carbines. The Mannlicher rifles lacked bayonets, so the newly-established *Zbrojovka, Brno* started to produce Austrian M1895 bayonets to equip the repaired Mannlicher rifles.



Fig. 2 Mauser Rifle VZ-98 as depicted in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document. This rifle was designated *Gewehr 98* (Rifle 98) by Germany.

Zbrojovka, Brno also obtained from Germany, many *Gewehr 98* parts and also tooling for a complete production line. While the purchased *Gewehr 98* rifles and *Kar 98AZ* carbines came with German bayonets, there were no bayonets for the Mauser rifles newly-assembled at Zbrojovka, Brno from German parts. This created the need for Czechoslovakia to design and produce a Mauser bayonet.



Fig.3 Mauser Carbine VZ-98 as depicted in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document. This carbine was designated Kar 98AZ by Germany (*Karabiner 98 mit Aufpflanz und Zusammensetzvorrichtung*). In English, Carbine 98 with bayonet attachment and stacking hook.



Fig. 4 Czech VZ-98 rifle assembled at Zbrojovka, Brno from German parts. The barrel and many other parts bear German inspection marks. (Author's collection.)



Fig. 5 VZ-98/22 rifle wholly-manufactured at Zbrojovka, Brno as depicted in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document.

The VZ-22 Bayonet



Fig. 6 VZ-22 bayonet. (Author's collection.)

The bayonet commonly known to collectors as the VZ-23 Short bayonet (250mm blade) was developed for use with VZ-98 rifles assembled from German parts (figure 4) and VZ-98/22 rifles (figure 5) wholly-manufactured at Zbrojovka, Brno. This bayonet was designated VZ-22 by Czechoslovakia, as shown in the following image.

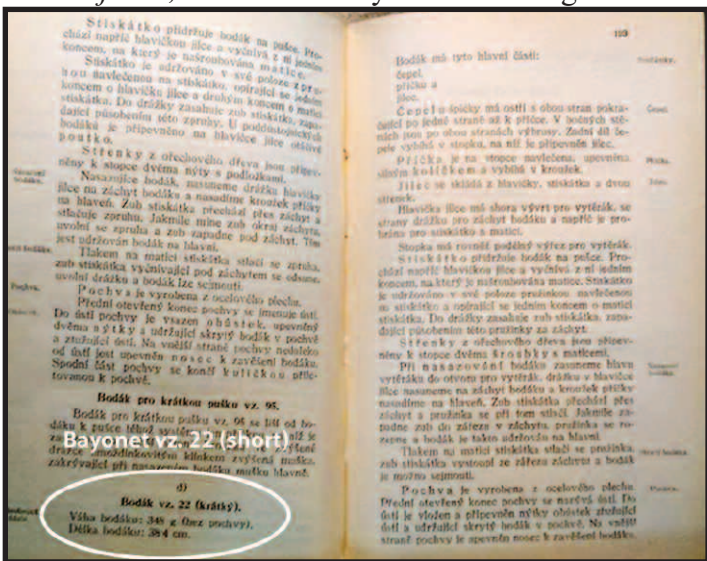


Fig. 7 VZ-22 bayonet designation used in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document (with author's English annotation).

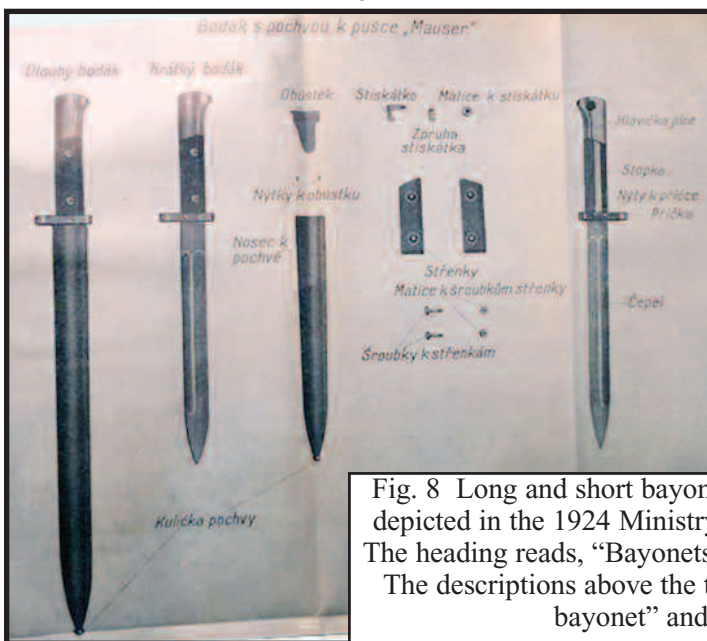


Fig. 8 Long and short bayonets used for VZ-23 rifle trials, as depicted in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document. The heading reads, "Bayonets and scabbards for rifle, Mauser." The descriptions above the two bayonets at left read, "Long bayonet" and "Short bayonet."

Mr. Uher attributes the confusion around this bayonet's designation to information published regarding development of the VZ-23 Short Rifle that stated, "for test of short Mauser rifle will be used new long bayonet and also short bayonet for Mauser rifle." This created a misperception that both the short and long bayonet were designated VZ-23. An additional contributor was the year of acceptance that is stamped on the VZ-22 bayonet, 1923.

Note that the blade of the short bayonet 'lp'Flki wtg': is shown with a conventional edge-down profile. Mr. Uher adds, that "for testing, the vz.23 rifle were produced 100 pieces of vz.23 bayonets with edge towards barrel, 100 pieces of vz.23 bayonets with edge towards ground and 100 pieces of vz.22 bayonets were taken from running production line to be tested at same time. After the tests it was chosen that the regular vz.23 bayonet will have edge towards barrel. After finishing the production of rifles vz.98/22 [production of] the bayonet vz.22 was discontinued." [author's annotation]



Fig. 9 1923 acceptance stamp on VZ-22 scabbard. (Author's collection.)

The VZ-23 Bayonet



Fig. 10 VZ-23 bayonet. This example is the Persian export variant, with the edge-down blade profile. (Author's collection.)

The bayonet commonly known to collectors as the VZ-23 Long bayonet (400 mm. blade) was developed for use with the VZ-23 rifle. The VZ-23 rifle was a shortened version of the VZ-98/22 and was the immediate predecessor to the VZ-24 rifle. This is the only bayonet officially designated VZ-23.

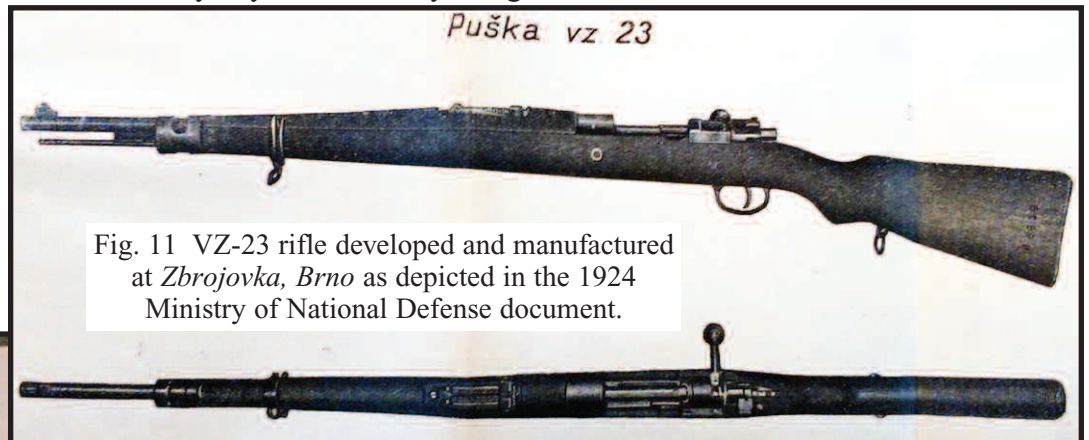


Fig. 11 VZ-23 rifle developed and manufactured at Zbrojovka, Brno as depicted in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document.

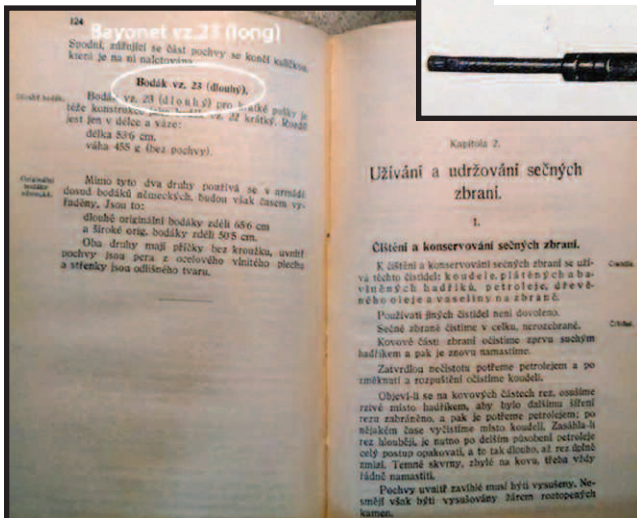


Fig. 12 VZ-23 bayonet designation used in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document (with author's English annotation).

The VZ-22 and VZ-23 bayonets were intended to supersede German bayonets that had come with the German-manufactured Mauser rifles and carbines purchased by Czechoslovakia. The 1924 Ministry of National Defense document describes use of what are clearly the German M1898 and M1898/05 bayonets, indicating that use of German bayonets would be phased out.

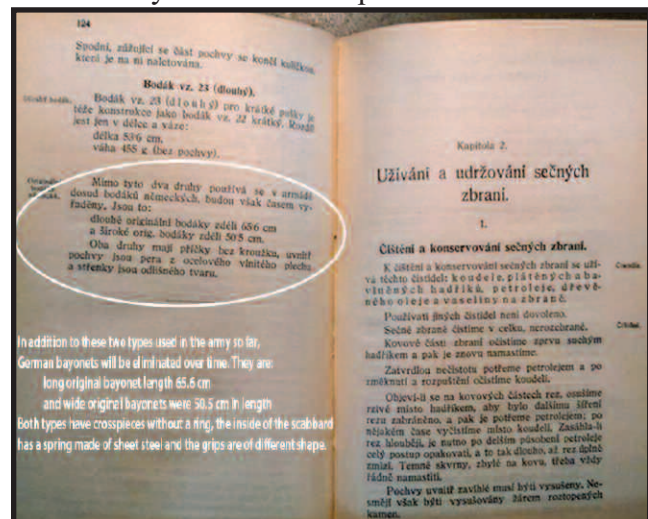


Fig. 13 Description of German bayonets in use and planned phase-out in the 1924 Ministry of National Defense document (with author's English annotations).

VZ-24 Bayonet

While the VZ-23 rifle and bayonet worked well for infantry, they were not optimal for cavalry use. Minor changes, such as the location and type of sling swivels and a front sight protector resulted in adoption of the VZ-24 rifle. The cavalry also asked that the 400 mm. VZ-23 bayonet blade be shortened by 100 mm. This resulted in the VZ-24 bayonet, with its 300 mm. blade, becoming standard issue with both the VZ-23 and VZ-24 rifles.¹

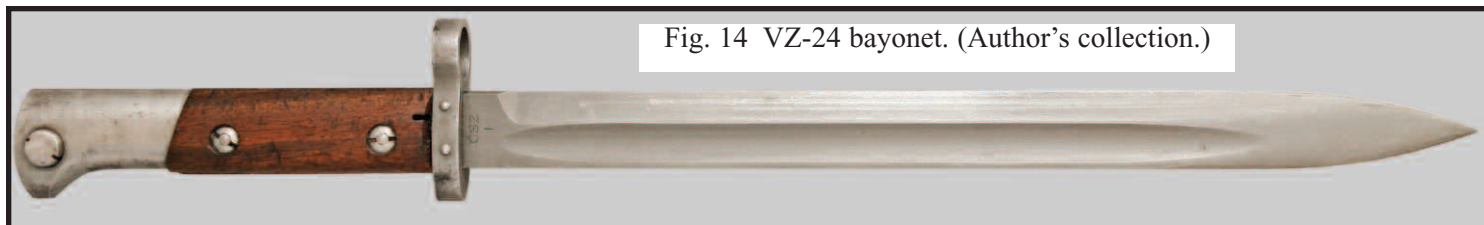


Fig. 14 VZ-24 bayonet. (Author's collection.)

Disposal of VZ-23 Bayonets

Existing Czech Army VZ-23 bayonets were offered for the initial deliveries to Persia; and to Lithuania, and Ecuador, with the Czech Army receiving a new VZ-24 bayonet from *Zbrojovka Brno* for each serviceable VZ-23 bayonet supplied from Army stores. 55,000 Czech Army VZ-23 bayonets were disposed of in this manner from 1935-1937. This helps explain the limited number of original Czech Army VZ-23 bayonets encountered today. Once the supply of serviceable VZ-23 bayonets were exhausted, *Zbrojovka Brno* produced new-made VZ-23 bayonets to fulfill remaining export orders.² Original Czech Army VZ-23 bayonets exported had an edge-up blade profile and scabbards with the same frog stud as VZ-22 and VZ-24 bayonets (ref. figure 9). New-made VZ-23 bayonets exported to Persia had blades with a conventional edge-down profile (ref. Figure 10) and scabbards with a wire frog loop, as shown below.



Fig. 15 Frog loop on scabbard of Persian export VZ-23 bayonet. The *Zbrojovka Brno* Circle-Z export mark is clearly visible on this example. (Author's collection.)

Conclusion

This research clarifies VZ-22 as the proper designation for the short (250 mm.) Czech Mauser bayonet and helps explain why so few Czech Army marked VZ-23 bayonets are encountered today.

I want to thank Michal Uher for contacting me; and, for providing the documentation and encouragement to make other collectors aware of the correct nomenclature used for the early Czechoslovakian Mauser bayonets.

Bibliography

Czechoslovakia, Ministry of National Defense, Budget of the Ministry of National Defense, Chapter D-XIII-1 Small Arms and Edged Weapons, 1924, Selected pages and images provided by Mr. Michal Uher, March 12, 2020.

Šmíd, Jan. *Pušky a Bodáky Vz. 24*. Nakladatelství Brigádýr, Prague, 2016.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Jan Šmíd, *Pušky a Bodáky Vz. 24* (Nakladatelství Brigádýr, Prague, 2016), 48-49
- ² Ibid, 47-48