

The British 1853 Cavalry Sword by Mark Cloke



The 1853 pattern was a change in direction for British swords in many respects.

- It was the last general pattern sword that had the three bar hilt. It was found that the wrought iron bars of the guard often broke and therefore all later cavalry swords had some form of bowl or pierced sheet guard.
- It was the first sword where the tang was an extension of the blade (which greatly increased its



strength).

- First sword designed for the use of ALL cavalry. Prior to this pattern sword were designated as Heavy or Light Cavalry Patterns.
- This was the start of the British era of dual-purpose blades. The 1853 pattern was designed for both the Cut and Thrust (but as with most swords with dual purpose it was regarded as not particularly good at either).

The sword was not popular with the regiments. (Although to be fair most swords of the era seem to have had an unfavorable reception) The sword's main failings are in two areas. The grip and the dual purpose blade. The grip being leather riveted to the blade tang was almost rounded which caused the sword to twist in the hand. Obviously this was a severe problem in action and apparently caused many injuries amongst troopers. The blade was also considered unsatisfactory. The strength of the blade was put into question causing the authorities to test production samples. These generally stood up well and the problems reported were put down to unauthorized testing. The dual purpose of the blade produced a sword that was not ideal for either.



The real test of the sword would come during the Crimea War. Although very few of the pattern were available when the regiments embarked, (most still carrying the 1821 pattern) during the course of the campaign many swords were sent across from the regiments left at home. By the time of the famous Charge of the Light and Heavy Brigades, possibly half the troops involved carried the pattern. There were mixed reports of the swords performance. "Our swords are very defective when our men made a thrust with the sword they all bent and would not go into a man's body". The cause of this may be explained by another quote "...the edge of the blade was used, for the greatcoats worn by the Russians were difficult to pierce with the point". However when the edge was used it does seem to have been effective in some instances ".....they (doctors) described to us that evening the effect of some of the sword-cuts inflicted by our Heavy dragoons on the heads of the Russians as appalling. In some cases the head-dress and skull being divided down to the chin."

In 1844 there was a change in the way that the British Army was supplied with swords. Instead of each regiment generally sourcing their own swords, the Board of Ordnance decreed that all swords should now be purchased and supplied by them. This followed a decline in sword production after the Napoleonic wars with many of the most famous names in sword production closing. In 1844 the only large-scale producers of swords was 'Robert Mole & Son' and the 'Royal Small Arms Factory' ('Wilkinson' was yet to become a main player). Mole's history starts in 1690 when a German immigrant named Herman Mohil arrived in England and founded the 'Hollow Sword Blade Company' at Shotley Bridge near Newcastle. Getting into trouble smuggling German blades he refounded the company in 1703 as 'Herman Mohil and Son'. In 1832 the company moved to Birmingham and anglicized its name to 'Robert Mole & Son'. The company became part of 'Wilkinson' in 1920.

The 1853 pattern survived until 1864 when a new guard was introduced. This was put on the existing 1853 pattern blade and the blade was not changed until as late as 1880.

