

EXCEPTIONAL KNIVES
FOR
MILITARY MEN,
LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL,
PROFESSIONAL ADVENTURERS
AND
COLLECTORS.



RICHMOND, VA

"BATTLE PROVEN IN FOUR WARS"™

Catalog No. 6698

“A GREAT KNIFE CAN SAVE A LIFE”

— John Ek, 1941

Considering the important 20th century American knife designers and makers, the name John Ek stands out with as much mystery as respect.

In a sense, he was the Jim Bowie of our century. As time passes and more is written about this man and his knives, his fame as a pioneer in American knife making will likely spread. Like Bowie, John Ek pioneered a classic design unlike any other. And his knives were made for fighting — by American military personnel.

John Ek knives are in that highly restricted category of knives that have been battle tested and battle proven by Americans in four wars — World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Desert Storm. As he said in the mid 1970's: "There's been hardly a break without some kind of military involvement since 1941, so we've been busy with knives ever since."

He called his knives "Ek Commando Knives." This was a reference to World War II Allied Commando-type units (such as the U.S. Marine Raiders, Rangers, First Special Service Force, and British Commandos), who were highly respected for their knife-fighting abilities. Ek often met with military personnel to discuss knife design and close-combat fighting. Company reports indicate that he requested — and received — permission from the British War Office to use the term "Commando."

It is reported that President Franklin D. Roosevelt kept a John Ek Commando Knife on his desk in the White House until the time of his death. This certainly seems possible, as photographs exist of John Ek with a large display of Ek Commando Knives on exhibit in the White House in 1944.

General George S. Patton, Jr. also owned a John Ek Commando Knife (as did several of his subordinates). John Ek even named his Model No. 6 the "Patton Knife." Captain Clark Gable, while not necessarily expecting to see combat, was none-the-less a customer of John Ek — thinking that if the situation took him in harm's way, he would have a dependable knife.

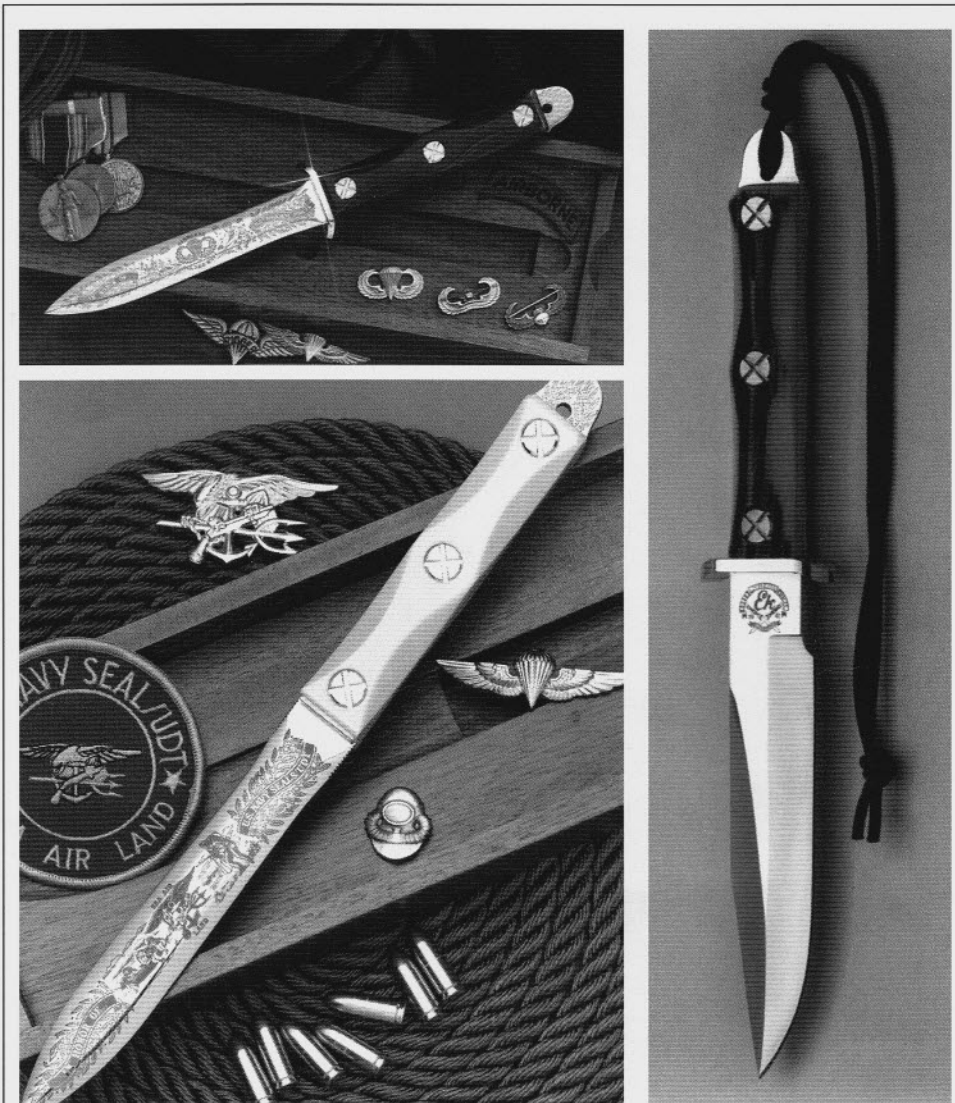
MILITARY FIGHTING KNIVES

However, the recorded information in our registry files shows that Ek knives

were and are owned by men of all ranks in every branch of service — Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine. Their mailing addresses prove that Ek knives were used in every theater of operation around the world.

Every so often, you see John Ek

Commando Knives at gun shows, but no one seems to know much about them. Yet his knives are among the most famous in the history of this country. In fact, Ek knives probably hold the record for being the leading privately-purchased military knives in American history. By the end of World War II



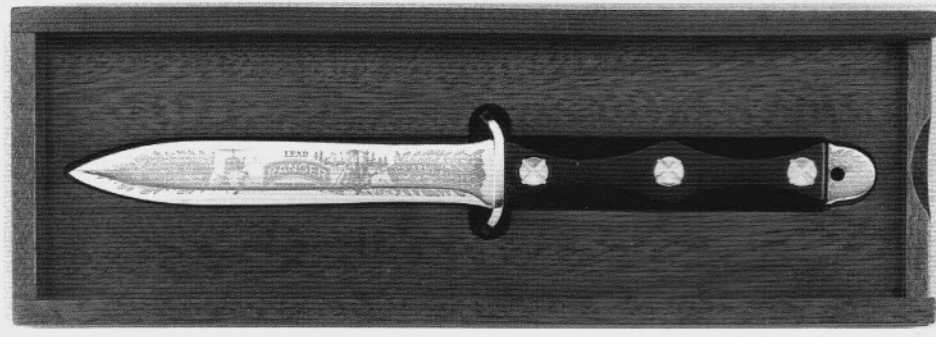
Ek Elite Forces Collection from the Ek Custom Shop — Limited Edition: 2,500 Each

Top: U. S. Army Airborne Ek Model No. 4, with Airborne Maroon Pacawood grips.

Above left: U. S. Navy Seals/UDT Ek Model No. 2, with white Micarta grips.

Above Right: A special Bowie, from the Ek Custom Shop, made with genuine Stag

grips, made on special order. Below: U. S. Army Rangers Ek Model No. 4, with black Micarta grips. (Also available, not shown, U. S. Marine Recon and U. S. Air Force Air Commandos.)



production reached 1,000 knives per seven-day work week, and virtually all were restricted to sale to U.S. military personnel.

One newspaper article indicated that Ek knives "became surrounded almost immediately by an aura of fame and invincibility." John Ek has even been referred to as "the Stradivarius of the blade."

That may come as a real surprise to many knife collectors, particularly since many have not even heard of this knife or the company. One of the reasons is that John Ek had very strong feelings about restricting his knives to active-duty servicemen. He did not want his knives to fall into the wrong hands. Ek felt his knives were the finest made and that they gave the user an advantage over any adversary. His philosophy was "A knife is more deadly than a gun. A gun will run out of ammunition, but as long as a person is behind a knife, it

can kill."

For this reason, during WWII each knife was individually serially numbered and registered in the owner's name. The purchaser had to fill out a registration card certifying that the owner was a member of the armed forces, giving his name, rank, and service serial number. This strict screening procedure also applied where knives were purchased by military men or individuals through dealers. Before the knife would be made available, the individual had to fill out the same form, and it had to be returned to the company. If a dealer failed to return a registration card, future orders were cut by the number of missing registrations until the missing card was returned.

John Ek could certainly have sold far more knives had he not been concerned about the strict registration procedure. But he was a strongly patriotic American, a newspaper headline once



Ek Bowie shown with black Micarta grip and black web sheath.

calling him a "Modern Day Thomas Paine."

During a time of steel shortages, the U.S. Government War Production Board tested and approved the designs of the Ek knives and authorized John Ek continued availability of the high-quality, nickel-chrome-moly steel. As a strategic material, this was scarce. It speaks well of the John Ek knife that the government wanted him to continue production and that he was admitted to the Army Ordnance Association.

RUGGED DESIGN

Several aspects of his design made his knives distinctive and rugged. First of all, the knife was of "full-width, full-length tang" construction. Not only did the tang (the extension of the blade



Several of the Micarta-gripped knives, including the recently re-introduced Model No.1 (at bottom), Model No. 2 (center), as well as the "old reliable" Model No. 3 (top).

which runs through the grip) run the entire length of the grip, but the tang was also the full width of the grip. In other words, the grip was about one inch wide and five inches long — and so was that portion of the steel blade. This provided maximum strength. By comparison, most knives of the day (even ones made today) had narrow “rat-tail” tangs — many running only one-third the length of the grip.

Also unusual was the extended butt, a direct extension of the blade and the blade tang itself. Depending upon the year of manufacture, the butt could vary in length anywhere from nearly one inch (early production) to approximately one-half inch beyond the grip. It could also be used as a pry bar for opening ammunition crates or, according to Ek’s 1944 manual, “Your Silent Partner”, for “an upstroke to lay your opponent out.” Another use of this pommel was to protect both the hand and wooden grips when the butt was used as a hammer.

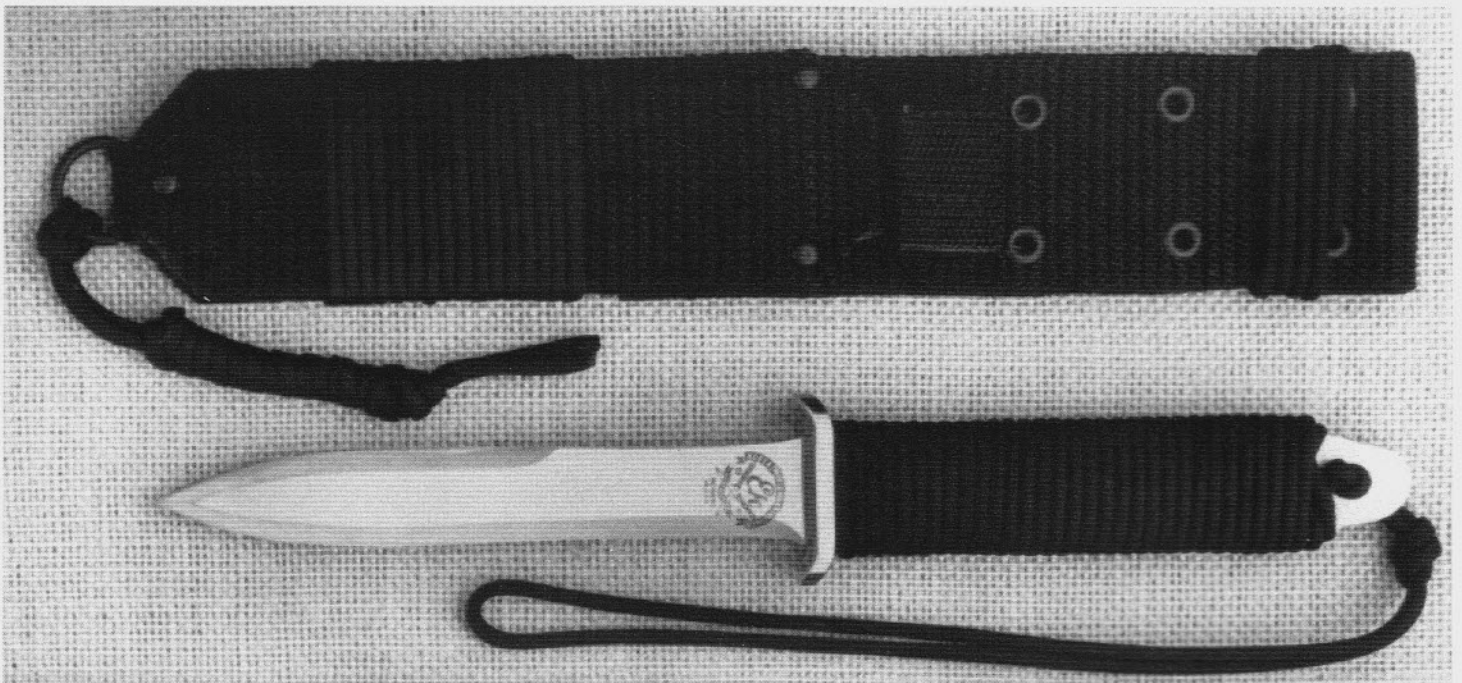
The extended butt of the Ek Commando Knife may possibly have inspired the design of the “skullcrusher” pommel on the First Special Service Force V-42 Stiletto, which appeared in 1943.

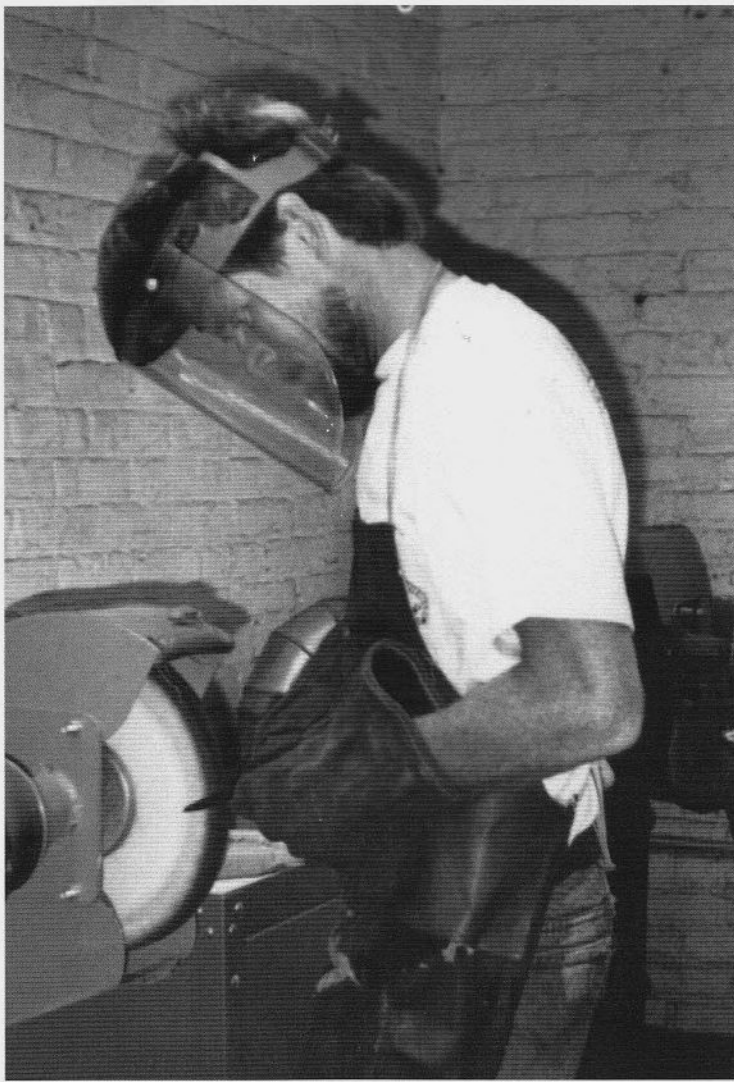
The grips were of Rock Maple, selected for a number of reasons. John Ek preferred wood to leather, as the latter rotted, particularly under tropical conditions. He also chose it over the brass/alloy grips of the British Fairbairn-Sykes Fighting Knives, finding it to be more comfortable and to provide better gripping power, especially when the hand was wet with perspiration. This also allowed the owner to custom fit the grip, by sanding, to the exact contour of his hand. For a number of years the company included a piece of flint paper with each knife for this purpose.

The grips on his more popular knives had eight scallops — four on each of two grips. The gripping power was so good that John Ek found that a crossguard was not necessary to prevent the hand from slipping. When questioned about this by the War Production Board, Ek greased his hand and



Above right: The Ultimate Military Fighting Knife — the Ek M4, with two, razor-sharp cutting edges and sturdy point. Note “gripping grooves” on the Micarta grips and the X-Head Fastener System. Below: Ek SWAT No. 3 with black P-cord grip and black web sheath.





The final step is the most important-polishing the cutting edge to razor sharpness!

plunged one of his knives into the wooden floor with such force that no one was able to pull it out. This dramatically demonstrated that the crossguard was not necessary to keep the hand from sliding onto the blade.

He preferred his knives without crossguards for ease of concealment and for quick withdrawal (no crossguard to snag on clothes). In fact, when his range of knives was finally expanded to 10 different sheath knives, only three of these models had crossguards. Evidently, military men agreed with him, as his Model No. 1 and Model No. 2 (single-edge and double-edge, respectively) were always his most popular knives, and neither of these had guards. (Note: The Model No. 1 and Model No. 2 were discontinued in the late 1980's but brought back, due to requests from collectors, in 1997.)

Also unusual and distinctive were the "poured-lead" rivets which were used to affix the two wooden grips to the blade tang. Most knives at the time used standard cutlery rivets or pins, or they were simply driven onto the rat-tail tang. The poured-lead rivets had the advantage that, if the handle ever became loose, it could be tightened in the field without any tools. All the owner needed to do was take a heavy object, such as a rock, and pound the lead rivets to tighten them.

Another advantage of the poured-lead rivets was the

extra weight which made the knife balance far better than most as it added weight to the hilt. This caused it to lie into the hand, rather than fall out of the hand.

VARIATIONS

Ek selected nickel-chrome-moly steel for his blades. He found this material to be extremely strong, yet to have some degree of stain and rust resistance. Of Swedish ancestry, Ek in later years would also use Swedish Sandvik stainless steel, upon request.

In April or May of 1939 John Ek designed the first John Ek Commando knife which he named, appropriately, the Model No. 1. Actually, he thought that one model would be all that would be needed. The Model No. 1 had a single-edged blade of spearpoint design, with a sharpened false edge extending approximately three inches along the back edge of the blade.

Later, a double-edged version of this (the Model No. 2) was developed. Then crossguards were added to these versions, making them the Model No. 6 and No. 7 respectively (today called the No. 3 and No. 4).

In January 1941 John Ek started producing knives in quantity in Hamden, Connecticut near Lake Whitney. By 1943 he had put six different styles of knives into production, and the quantity of production increased. By August 1944 demand for his knives had grown to the point where three shifts worked around the clock seven days a week, producing



Ek S/F 3, with O. D. P-chord grip and O. D. web sheath.

10 different models.

All knives made by John Ek were numbered. The first number on the blade is the model number; the subsequent numbers are the serial number, preceded by a letter of the alphabet. Starting with the 1000th knife of each model, the letter A preceded the serial number. Serial numbers following the alphabetical prefix went up to 999 prior to shifting over to the next letter of the alphabet. For example, a knife numbered 1B299 means this is a Model 1, serial number B299.

Ek serially numbered these knives to help the owners keep track of them if they were lost, and also because he guaranteed each knife for the lifetime of the original owner. By keeping the original owner's name on record, he could follow up his lifetime guarantee system.

Always interested in improving quality control, his lifetime guarantee increased the probability that he would learn of any mistakes he made. He received back very few of his knives because they were so rugged; there was very little to break or go wrong with them.

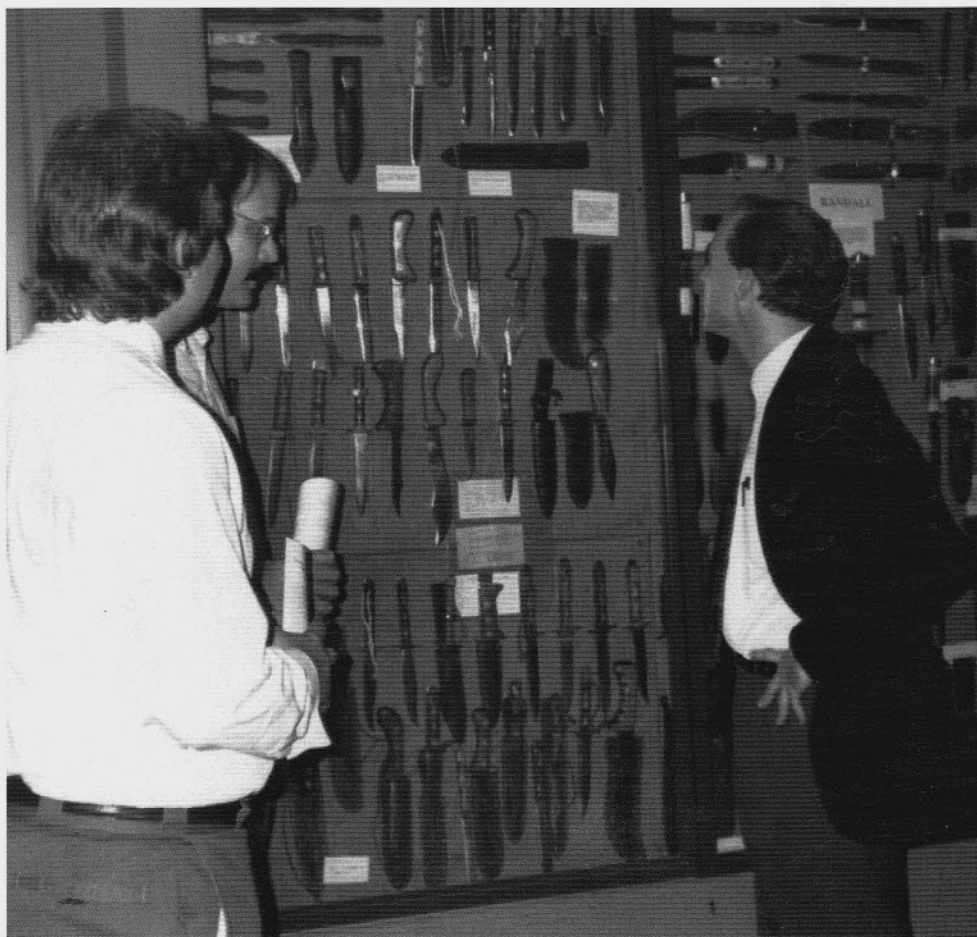
MIAMI PRODUCTION - 1949

In 1949 John Ek moved to Miami, Florida where he continued production of his famous knives. From here he provided knives to American forces during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Miami-produced knives were marked "John Ek Knives, Miami, Fla.", whereas earlier knives bore the "Hamden, Conn." identification.

As was the case with earlier production, the Vietnam production received acclaim from owners — such as this letter from a helicopter gunship crew chief received in 1965: "When your ship is shot down in VC territory, your rifle or pistol is of no use to you if you have to walk back to friendly lines. You can't afford that much noise, so your knife and knowing how to use it are your best weapons. The only knives suitable for this type of war and for survival use are your Commando knives."

Another trooper from the 101st Airborne wrote: "I don't know where we all will be going, but I'm sure it's back to the boonies again. I hope to have one of your knives when I return to the jungle. I heard about your unique knives from a friend back in the world who said they were the best in the world and made specially for combat fighting."

After his move to Florida, John Ek



Visitors to our office can see a vast array of Ek knives, including various knives that were actually used in WWII, Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf War.

also became involved as a deputy sheriff and private investigator. Through some other connections and with the encouragement of our CIA, he got to know Fidel Castro. He worked for the CIA for awhile, regularly visiting Castro in his office and, unknown to Castro, bringing back vital information. It is no surprise to learn that the CIA ordered knives from Ek, and some of these were used in the Bay of Pigs invasion.

John Ek died on 21 October 1976, but the business was continued by his son, Gary, who had worked for his father as a knifemaker prior to John Ek's death. Due to the growing crime rate in Miami, it was decided to relocate the operation. Interestingly enough, the Ek Commando Knife Company's new location in Richmond, Virginia was halfway between the earlier Connecticut and Florida locations.

RICHMOND PRODUCTION - 1982

Knife making began in Richmond, Virginia in 1982, when the company went under the direction of Robert A. Buerlein. Initial efforts concentrated on developing tighter technical specifica-

tions for the knives for higher and more consistent quality. For example, locations for the grip fastener system were standardized, and a new crossguard was also developed. This latter was thicker with quillons that curved forward slightly. Poured-lead rivets were initially used in all production for the first several years, but this gave way to the newly-developed "X-Head Fastener System." These were solid-brass precision-made screw fasteners which provided the desired weight of lead (for proper knife balance). Yet, they also allowed quick removal and easy replacement of grips, if the owner desired. Different sheath configurations were also developed, including the utilization of brown leather, black leather and later, olive drab, black and tan web material.

Although some Ek knives prior to the move to Richmond had been used on hunting trips, Ek management felt they weren't ideal, so a new line of Ek hunting knives was introduced.

RICHMOND "CUSTOM SHOP" - 1993

In 1993 Blackjack Knives, Ltd. took



Building a custom knife in the Ek Custom Shop, each Ek knife meets strict quality control standards.

In the process, the Ek Knife Co. has continued catering primarily to special requests from individuals, most of whom have known the company for many decades. The line of Ek hunting knives, out of production for a few years, will be reintroduced, it is hoped, in 1999. Development of new grip material and sheath materials are also currently in the works so that, following extensive field testing, these new variations can be made available to military men, law enforcement personnel, professional adventurers, and collectors the world over.

The tradition continues, always influenced by the words of John Ek: "A good knife can save a life."

Many an American life was saved in four wars by John Ek's Commando Knives. The thousands of letters he received during his lifetime from satisfied GIs were the ultimate satisfaction for this patriotic American. His name, his knives, and the Ek Knife Company live on today as a legacy of his ideas, his skills, and his patriotism.

over manufacture of "production" knives (for three years), while Ek Knife Co. in Richmond continued primarily with custom and commemorative knife-making and sales, through its Ek Custom Shop. Although various models were made, the majority of sales during this period were for the custom and commemorative/special edition knives, including the Desert Storm Special Edition, which had been introduced earlier. Also, knives from the Ek Elite Forces Collection were custom made, the majority of these being in honor of U.S. Marine Corps Recon. Also, the Model No. 1 (single-edge, without crossguard) and Model No. 2, (double-edge, without crossguard), which had been discontinued in the late 1980's, were re-introduced through the Custom Shop in 1997. In mid-1997, leather sheaths were discontinued, replaced by the web sheaths. In early 1998, poured-lead rivets were also re-introduced, but only on special order from the Custom Shop.

When Blackjack ceased their Ek efforts in the mid-1990's, the making of "production" knives returned to the Richmond operation, but back to its time-honored, benchmarking approach, with emphasis on quality, not quantity.



The Ek Hunters (call for availability).

Catalog effective 6 June 1998 and supercedes prior printings.



RICHMOND, VA

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