

John Ek Commando

by Phillip Krumholz

It looks pretty crude-kind of reminds you of an old hog butchering knife, and a cheap one at that. The razor sharp blade, however, belies that notion that this cutlery piece was cheaply made. One would expect that the rock maple handles of this knife would be held on by brass rivets, but such is not the case. The rivets are made of a dull gray metal which looks, amazingly enough, like (Ugh!) lead.

What you see is one of the biggest "sleepers" in the cutlery or militaria collectible world today. This humble knife is in reality a John Ek "Commando" knife, World War II vintage, and they are rare indeed.

John Ek Industries began officially producing knives in 1941, and the company is substantially the same today, but making the famous military knives in Richmond, Virginia.

Ek started producing his knives in the small Whitney Machine Shop at 1242 Whitney Avenue, Hamden, CT. Ek was a "Superpatriot" who answered his country's frantic call for personal cutlery for its fighting men, and Ek believed in his duty to such a degree that he would only sell knives to or for active military personnel. Each knife went through an elaborate registration procedure. Each knife was also serially numbered and the registered serviceman's name was kept with the serial number on file at the Ek company office.

The serial numbering was simple. The first digit, a number, stood for the model designation. The second digit, a letter, represented the "thousand" of the knives produced of that model. "A" was the first thousand, or rather 999, "B" the second, and so on. The last digits, all numbers, were the sequentially-assigned serial numbers. The World War II Ek knife featured here is numbered 91148, which means it was the I series (8000) of Model 9, or Marine Commando Knife; this was the 8,147th knife produced.

Ek's rugged, high quality knives quickly became

legends. Thousands were ordered as "private purchase" military accoutrements; production during WWII reached a heyday of about 1000 knives per week with an estimated 100,000 produced during the war.

Why was a knife so plain so very popular? Well, for one thing, it did the job. The wooden handles stood up well in tropical climates, and the lead rivets, if loose, could be quickly pounded tight again with rifle butt or rock. The feel of the knife was one of balance, and the edge keen. Most models even came with an extended tang which could be used either to open an ammo box or crush a skull.

To aid in teaching the techniques of knife fighting, Ek put out a booklet entitled "Your Silent Partner". It was well received. He also lived by the slogan, "Made in America, By Americans, For Americans."

The company continued to produce military knives for servicemen, but moved to Miami (and St. Augustine), Florida in 1949. Any knife you find marked Hamden, CT, then, is one of the earlier ones. During the "Miami Years", knives were made for the Korean and Vietnam "conflicts." Ek himself died in 1976, but the firm he founded lived on and relocated in Richmond in 1982.

The highly sought after WW II knives were made in the following models: #1 Commando- spear point dagger.

#2 Combat Commando- spear point dagger with 1 edge, one false edge.

#3 Bolo- Spear point.

#4 New Guinea Brush Knife- Gladius style blade.

#5 Navy- clip point bowie
#6 Ranger- spear style blade

#7 Jungle- spear style

#8 Paratrooper- clip point bowie

#9 Marine- clip point bowie

#10 Floating- clip point bowie

The example shown is the WWII Marine No.9, with early tang which had no thong hole. It was, of course, manufactured in Hamden,

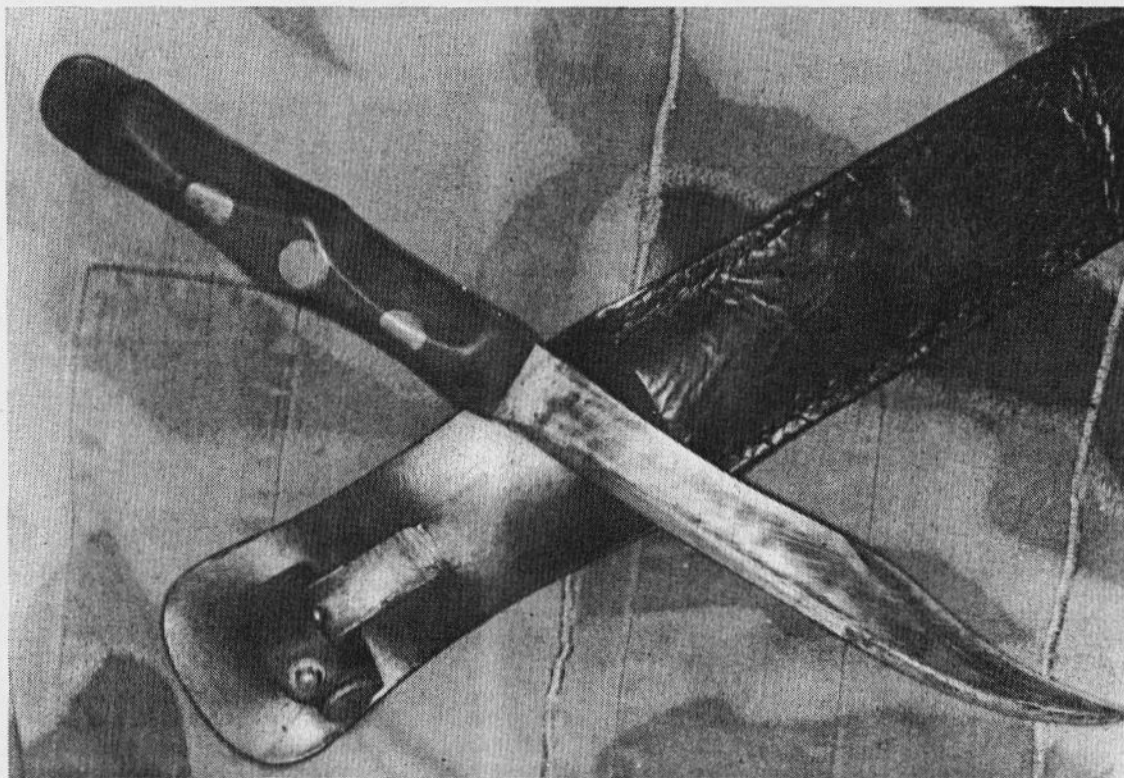
CT, as were all Marine No.9's. The blade is 7" long, Bowie style, and the handle is 4-3/4" long. The extended tang or skullcrusher extends 5/8" beyond the grips. The blade has seen some field use and resharpening but exhibits little actual wear. Collectors should expect to pay

\$200-\$250 for an Ek such as the one shown.

Those who obtain Ek knives should be aware of the fact that the Ek company can tell you who the original owner was and when the knife was purchased if you call or write them. Unfortunately, a flood several

years ago in the Miami plant destroyed quite a few of the early records, including those for Marine knife No.91148.

Author's Note: I would like to thank the Ek Commando Knife Company for help offered in preparation of this article.



This No.9 model is the "Marine" Ek Commando Knife. It came with a leather sheath and a booklet on knife fighting.



Closeup of the Ek logo and the unique serial number.