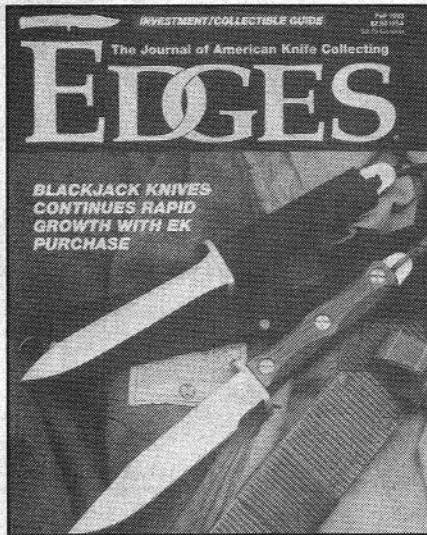


ON THE COVER

On the cover are the double-edged stiletto (top) and Warrior models, two of the Ek designs that Blackjack will be making in its new 12,900-sq.-ft. plant in Effingham, Illinois, as part of its recent acquisition of Ek Knife Co.

The stiletto comes in a black-parachute-cord grip and is 12 1/2 inches long overall. The Warrior offers a wood grip and bead-blasted Bowie blade. Overall length: 13 inches. Each knife fits in a nylon sheath



with velcro closure (stiletto/black, Warrior/green).

John Ek started making combat knives in 1941. According to old Ek press releases, Ek "holds the record for being the leading private-purchase military knife in American history." That release goes on to say that Ek made its "knives with more steel than any other knife of their size and type. They feature a full-length, full-width tang... (with which) you can take off one or both of the grips and still have a one-inch by five and one-half inch solid bar of steel." In addition to World War II, Ek knives were carried by servicemen in Korea, Vietnam and right through to the Gulf War.

Blackjack president Mike Stewart said his company would not be offering consumers all of the designs Ek was making at the time of the buy out, though at press time he did not have a complete list of the Ek knives that Blackjack would make available. However, he said that in addition to producing selected models in Ek's last catalog before the change in ownership, Blackjack would also bring back some of the old Ek designs from the 1940s-on.

For more information contact Blackjack Knives, attn: M. Stewart, Dept. E, 1307 W. Wabash, Effingham, IL 62401 (217) 347-7700 and read the story on pages 52-53 of this issue.

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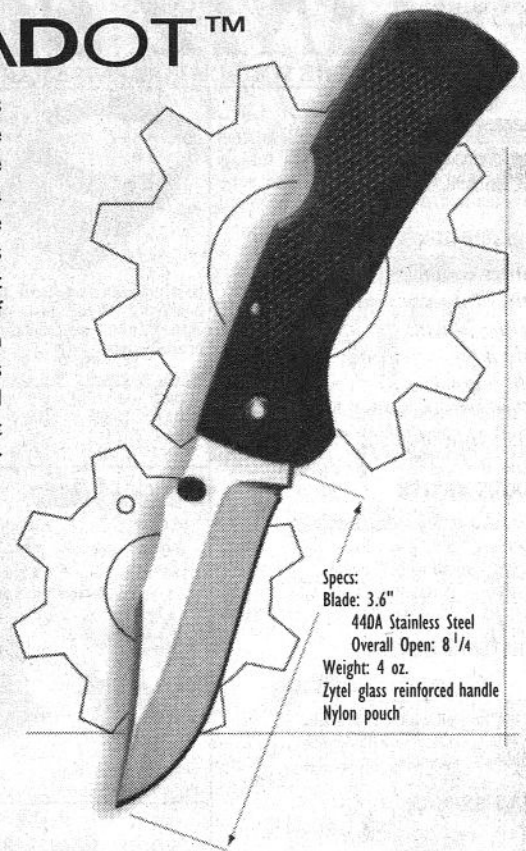
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Blackjack Completes Rash Of Acquisitions With Ek Buy Out

by Edges staff

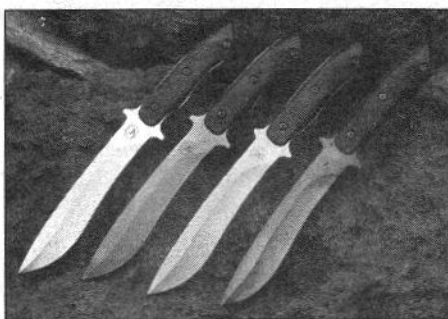
Blackjack's recent acquisition of Ek Knives concludes a program of expansion that saw the manufacturer of traditional utilitarian fixed-blades also buy Cripple Creek this year.

In April, Blackjack president Mike Stewart got word that Ek Knives, a long-time manufacturer of fighting knives, was for sale, and it later became the fifth acquisition in Blackjack's brief seven-year history. Blackjack's other corporate acquisitions include Becker Knife and tool, Hoffman Design, and Condor Knives, the latter being discontinued since the tooling is in Japan and Blackjack is now solely a domestic producer.

"We did not set out to buy Ek," commented Stewart, "but what that company does dovetails so well with Blackjack that it seemed a natural step. We began negotiating with the principals, came to a basic agreement in early June, and the sale was fully executed in mid-August."

Cripple Creek, on the other hand, represents a new direction for Blackjack into more expensive folding knives. "We purposely set out to buy Cripple Creek to get into the upper end of the folder market," explained Stewart. "Cripple Creek was logical for us, and Bob Cargill (who founded Cripple Creek in 1981) had done a marvelous job bringing the company along."

Blackjack, whose knives are now "100 percent manufactured" in the United States, was in the process of eliminating its Japanese production of folders. "Making fixed-blade knives and folders are two different things," Stewart pointed out. "We can make fixed-blade knives in our sleep. We've been doing that for years. Since all our folders had been made in Japan, how could we possibly have expanded into folders and gotten a better teacher than Cargill to help us make them properly?"



Blackjack, which is best known for such utilitarian fixed blades as these Mamba models, broke new ground with its acquisition of Cripple Creek, a maker of higher-end folding knives.

A veteran maker and a member of the Knifemakers Guild, Cargill is on an annual consulting retainer with Blackjack. "He's working with our people on training and developing new products," said Stewart. "That's not just with Cripple Creek but with Blackjack, too. Bob will have a hand in the design, training and product development of whatever folders we make." The deal with Cripple Creek was finalized and announced at the Blade Show & International Cutlery Fair in June.

In purchasing all of the assets, inventory, tooling, machinery and rights to the names Ek, H.G. Long and Co. and the Murphy Knife Co., Blackjack has acquired three labels rich in history and tradition. "As we've grown," commented Stewart, "we have acquired some companies with histories much broader than Blackjack could achieve in one generation, which leaves us sort of carrying the banner of companies with historical significance for a very long time. The thought of that is very exciting to us."

"Ek Knives is synonymous with American combat/technical knives," Stewart continued. "Murphy Knife Co. was

also famous for combat knives made during World War II and the Korean War, while H.G. Long was the original maker of the Fairbairn-Sykes knives, the Marine Raider knife and all the knives used by the OSS. The basic Ek fighting knife is just a stiletto, a dagger. The original name of the company was the Ek Commando Knife Company, and we still do put that name on certain models."

Only a couple of changes in direction have been planned for the future knife operations of Ek and Cripple Creek. The previous owners of Ek had already issued a five-knife series of hunting knives. Plans are for all future production of hunters to come under the Blackjack Classic Blades label, while all field knives will be introduced under the Becker Knife and Tool brand. According to Stewart, most of the Cripple Creek line has previously been in semi-custom-made, short-production-run pocketknives of very high quality.

Blackjack plans to continue short-run production of high-quality pocketknives in the Cargill style priced from \$45 to \$135. "It's a very high-quality knife that doesn't approach the cost of a custom knife but is a bit more expensive than some of the major brand factory knives," Stewart related.

The Blackjack president said consumers can expect a substantial savings on Ek knives produced by his company. "The original Ek knives were very utilitarian and not a thing of beauty," he opined. "Over the years, though, because of collector demand (see related story), Ek has transformed into a company making some really attractive knives with marvelous fit and finish. In order to do that Ek was subcontracting out to some fairly expensive sources to get the quality of components they were looking for. We, on the other hand, can manufacture our own components of the same quality, fit and finish which will net to the end user anywhere from



(Left) Blackjack president Mike Stewart said his company will continue to produce most of the current production Ek knives. The only external change to the Ek models is that "Made in Effingham, IL" will appear on one side of the blade.

a 15 to 40 percent price reduction across the board on the Ek models." Blackjack's original plant is 10,000 square feet on 2 1/2 acres and "we just recently bought a second plant with 12,900 square feet on 6 1/2 acres," Stewart pointed out.

The Ek manufacturing operation was

moved from Richmond, Virginia, to Effingham during the last week of August, and Ek products were built in the Blackjack facility in the first days of September. The only external change to the Ek models is that "Made in Effingham, IL" will appear on one side of the blade. Stewart



says that no changes are planned or new models are to be unveiled until the second quarter of 1994 when some new pieces will be introduced at the annual Blade Show & International Cutlery Fair May 20-22 at the Stouffer Waverly Hotel in Atlanta.

Buy Out Should Not Affect Vintage Ek Values

For years the family-produced Ek knives have been highly sought after by collectors. With the acquisition of Ek by Blackjack Knives of Effingham, Illinois, could Ek collectors see a change in prices of their prized possessions?

"I can't see how it could have any effect on the true collectible Ek knives, mainly those produced by the family in Connecticut and Florida," remarked Joe Cusumano (see story on Ek Values in "Edges" Fall 1991), one-time curator of the Knife and Bayonet Museum in Richmond, Virginia. "The more recent Ek knives are a new breed, and they don't have the collectibility of the older pieces. They're fine knives but are not really collectible."

According to Cusumano the most valuable Ek knives would be those with documentation of Korean War vintage. Others vary widely in price. For example: World War II models, \$250 to \$700; Vietnam models, \$150 to \$400; one-of-a-kind custom knives, from \$500 to \$1,000; and Korean blades whatever the market will bear.

Blackjack president Mike Stewart said his company will replicate some vintage Ek designs. "We are continuing to produce most of the current production Ek knives," he commented. "What the customer can look forward to is our reintroduction of genuine Ek patterns that will duplicate the actual originals made by John Ek with one exception—we cannot pour lead rivets," as was done on the original Eks.

(Left) Blackjack's Mike Stewart said consumers can expect a 15 to 40 percent price reduction across the board on Ek knives. Ek's original name was the Ek Commando Knife Co., and Stewart said his company will put that name on certain models.