

# The Ek Commando Knife

by Bob Campbell

When we say 'commando,' the mental image that appears is that of a super-human soldier, well trained and armed and prevailing against all odds. This can be an accurate depiction, but most often the reality is a man trained better than the average soldier, of superior dedication, who travels lighter than some. The soldier on the ground often must carry enough equip-

ment to allow him to subsist while taking and holding ground. The commando has a specific objective that he must overtake. As such, he is heavy on close quarters weapons such as the knife and pistol, and may carry a compact carbine or submachine gun. I often think of the success of the legendary British Commandos, but the American Rangers, Canadian and Australian units, and the German

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Two modern Ek knives with crossguards and micarta grips. At top is the single edge (actually, edge-and-a-half) M3, popular with troops in Iraq; below the double edge M4. Two crossed Ek M4s are the centerpiece of the U.S. Army's "Boat Ranger" trophy.

Kommandos also performed with distinction during the War.

When it comes to the arms of the commandos, there are many of us that enjoy owning and collecting tools such as the Colt 1911 and the Browning High-Powers, two of the most widely used commando arms of all time. Each is still being put these to good use world wide, via the Special Air Services, Rangers, and others. The edged tools used by these units are also interesting. The plain old K-Bar has seen more use than most. I may have angered sentimentalists and historians, but in a recent article I stated that if the K-Bar had shed buckets of blood, the grand old bowie had shed

perhaps a dribble in comparison. But those are the facts, just as the Colt Single Action Army's wartime use cannot compare with the 1911's. But I digress. One of the most overlooked and perhaps underestimated fighting implements of all time is the Ek Commando Knife. The Ek was produced by hand under the watchful eye of a great patriot, a man of principle, and used by fighting men against an Evil Empire. Over 100,000 were produced and the great majority went to fighting men.

Let's take a look at John Ek. Ek was a machinist by trade, something of an expert on knives and a student of the lethal component of the edged tool. He knew that a bayonet, while

strong, was too cumbersome for effective use at intimate range. He decided to experiment and develop the most efficient fighting knife possible, and many believe he succeeded. He interviewed sailors, marines and soldiers, finally coming up with what he believed to be the perfect fighting knife.

In order to deliver a lethal blow and to penetrate web gear, a seven inch blade was considered ideal. The handles were of rock maple, too hard to checker but very tough and rot resistant. These were attached to the one piece full tang with rivets of poured lead, which served not only to positively anchor handle to blade, but also to achieve the perfect balance. The blades were all

*Continued on page 15*

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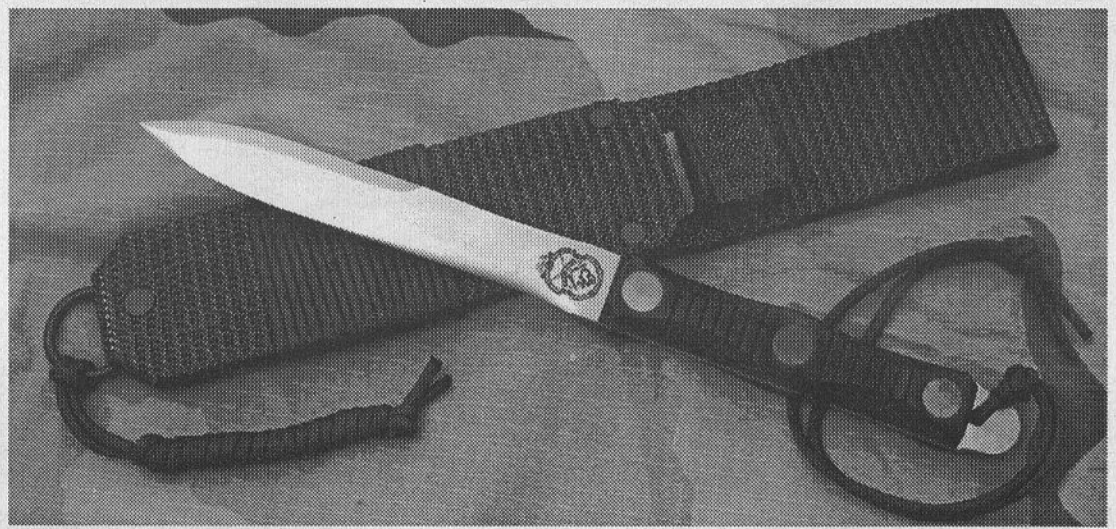
*Continued from page 14*

of top quality tempered tool steel. The first spear points were rather thin, only about 1/8 inch thick; but the edge bevel was cut only a quarter-inch into the steel, retaining an important measure of strength. Obviously, Ek believed in the stab, not the slash.

Ek knives were first produced in 1941. He did not settle upon his first models, but continually improved the knives. John Ek's experiments led to ten models being offered by the end of the War. The variations included single and double edged blades, and there were versions with bolo type handles – such as the Navy Model, with a clip point and bolo handle. Ek did not usually produce knives with crossguards, but he did offer a few due to popular demand, and also bowed to a larger blade with the nine inch blade Paratrooper model. One version even featured lighter rivets and a handle that allowed it to float.

On the subject of crossguards, during the war

John Ek was prevailed upon to produce a knife with a crossguard. Like many skilled with knives, Ek did not like crossguards on a fighting knife. They are useless to snag an enemy's knife, as is the assumed purpose. The real purpose of a guard is to prevent the user's hand from sliding forward on the handle and running it across his own blade, resulting in a serious injury. It is rather difficult to impale an enemy with a knife, human beings being a mix of hard muscle and bone, and the possibility of the hand sliding forward is real. A guard can also be used as leverage to pry the knife away, in case it sticks. But John Ek believed, like others, that a guard may simply snag when drawn or otherwise impede the soldier. Ek demonstrated the ability of his scalloped handle design by greasing his hand and drawing a knife up, driving it forcibly into a hardwood floor. Not only did the knife drive into the floor, his hand did not move from the handle. Just the same, Ek bowed to demand



**John Ek's original first pattern – the Model 1, here a modern version with poured lead rivets and micarta grips. Each is accompanied by a heavy duty sheath more rugged and capable than anything Ek could have envisioned.**

and produced some knives with crossguards.

The Ek knives were rather plain, as were many knives of the period, but they seem much less evolved than the K-Bar only until one actually hefts and uses an Ek. There are many interesting stories surrounding the Ek knife, including the inevitable tales of the knife used in combat. The Ek did indeed see a lot of use in intimate

warfare, and was much appreciated by servicemen. During the war Ek kept careful records and made certain the knives went to the men at arms who really needed them. The price of the knives during the War was reasonable. The simplest version was \$6.95, but special over-length versions could cost \$19.50, about the price of a decent handgun. Business was good, with more orders than knives

during most of the production. On average he employed nearly forty workers during the war, and each was handicapped in some manner. While records were kept, all have not survived, and an exact figure on production is very difficult to pinpoint. The lowest estimate is 30,000 knives, but some estimates run to 100,000 knives. The knives are so rare today that the

*Continued on page 16*

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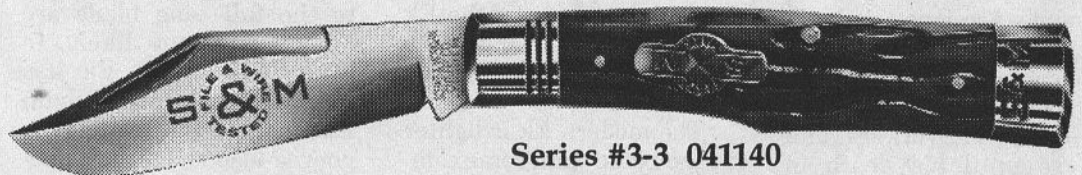
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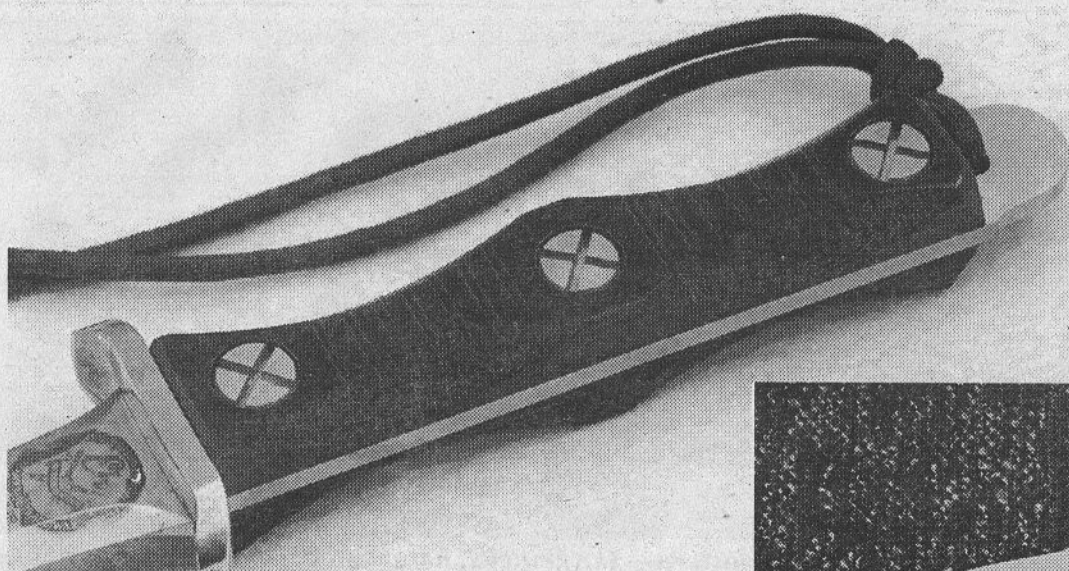
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*John Ek's scalloped handle design offers maximum purchase, but the current para cord wrapped models are great options at lower cost. Model at right is the Bowie from the Desert Patrol series, pictured below in its sheath along with the double edged Ek Raider / MCMAP knife tested for this article.*



stubbing while managing to be as snag-free as a guard can be. This knife is as impressive as anything I have ever hefted. The balance is there, and the fit and finish are excellent. The stainless blade is polished to a high degree and the legendary Ek emblem is acid etched in black on the base of the blade. All told,

will make all of the difference, this is a great knife for our young warriors. In their tawny arms it can do the business if need be.

While I have examined few of the original Ek knives, these modern versions seem comparable in design and intent. Modern materials offer a superior package, and the fit and fin-

this is a beautiful knife, but one that is ready for action in the grimmest of circumstances. Similar models are also available in a variety of blade and handle configurations.

There are lighter models available as well. These knives feature para cord wrapped handles with less purchase than the larger knives, but which offer a lighter, less obtrusive option for paratroopers and the like. The knife I tested is a great knife, large in the traditional sense for a dagger, but an excellent design. This knife offers comparable penetration to the scalloped handle Ek, a neat trick. While the man or woman behind the blade

ish of the new knives is presentation grade.

Overall, I am well pleased with my examples. Well, they are not actually mine any more. Each has gone its separate way into the hands of our young warriors, one of whom is also named Campbell. That is as high a recommendation as I can give. These are good knives; whether you have a soldier's presentation knife in mind, or one for a warrior is beginning his or her tour, I can think of nothing better. They are wonderful examples of the American combat blade.

For more information contact the Ek Commando Knife Co. at 804-257-7144 or visit [www.ekknife.com](http://www.ekknife.com).

*Continued from page 15*  
higher figure must be taken with a grain of salt, but during the War millions of implements were mass produced by relatively small shops.

The original Ek knives I have seen have been marked JOHN EK KNIFE / HAMDEN, CONN. Evidently some of the early examples were unmarked, but I have not seen them. After the war, Ek moved to Florida and continued to produce knives, now marked JOHN EK KNIFE / MIAMI, FLA. These knives were produced in small numbers compared to the wartime versions, and are even scarcer. During his long career as a knifemaker, Ek continued to employ handicapped workers and did so until his death in 1976.

Today, a company in Virginia continues the tradition by producing the Ek

knife. These knives bear the name and I am certain they would have made John Ek proud. While I do not mean to take anything away from either the originals or the present knives, they are quite different; the present knives are clearly the next progression up in fit, finish and material. These knives are well designed, and more than ready for combat. In fact, more than a few are in daily use by our combat forces, and they are also a favored knife for presentation to soldiers graduating from Ranger or other special team schools. They are fitted and finished to a high standard, worthy of the Ek legend but also comparable to any modern fighting knife.

The modern Ek is lighter in the blade than some combat knives, such as the Extrema Ratio. The hard work the modern all-around knife is designed to perform

demands a heavier blade. The Ek is light and lovely, lively in the hand and extraordinarily quick. It is easy to handle. The Ek is not a knife to open crates or rations with. It is a fighting knife, designed to leap into the hand and spring into action. The twelve and one-half inch long Ek M4 is not a six inch utility knife, it is a Commando Knife. Double edged, the knife features the trademark Ek scallops that give the handle such a reassuring purchase. These scallops work as designed, making the knife very secure in the hand. The screws holding the handle to the full tang blade are heavy, and not likely to work loose. [Note: Ek has recently reintroduced John Ek's famous trademark poured-lead rivets, on a special order basis.] There is also a small crossguard that accomplishes the neat trick of protecting the hand from

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