

The logo features the letters 'EK' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The 'E' is partially enclosed by a yellow semi-circle on its left side, which also overlaps the 'K'.

COMMANDO

KNIVES


A Legend Lives On!

BY ROBERT CAMPBELL

When a writer tells you a knife is proven, let him qualify that statement. Is the knife proven in personal, and therefore abbreviated testing, or is the knife proven in hard government testing? Has the knife been proven in use with the military over several decades? When held to this higher standard, the word "proven" takes on new meaning. Next, we must consider that even those knives with an impeccable lineage are seldom manufactured by the same concern for their lifetime. Is the original design intact and reverently respected? On the other hand, an original design produced on modern machinery, of top-flight modern steel, is another thing altogether.

The knives covered in this report are legendary in one respect, but doubtless many readers have never heard of the Ek knife. The history is fascinating, well worth a journey into the realms of the knife writer. Yet, history aside, the knives stand well on their own as fighting implements. And that is what they are: Fighters! There is nothing of the utilitarian crate or K ration opener in these. I doubt anyone would stoop to use an Ek in such a manner.

These are the first Ek knives I have held in my hand, although I have seen a few photographs of the legendary blades. I must admit they produced a profound effect, a

A close-up photograph of an Ek combat knife. The handle is dark blue with a textured, ribbed grip. The blade is partially visible, showing a silver-colored metal. The knife is resting on a green fabric surface, possibly a military uniform. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures and colors of the knife and the fabric.

One of the
leading private
purchase
combat knives
of WW-II is once
again available.

stirring of emotion. The pair were intended to be presented to my sons. Not as presents but as symbols of accomplishment as each enters respective branches of the military. The knives differ, as the mission of each service differs. By the same token, they represent the same end: To preserve life.

History

John Ek designed his first Commando knife early in 1939. The Number One was a spearpoint design with a false edge. A double-edged variant, resembling a large dagger, followed. Logical evolution led to the Number Six and Number Seven. While confusing, we must note that today's Model Three and Model Four correspond to the original Number Six and Number Seven.

By 1941, John Ek Commando knives were leaving Hamden, Connecticut in large numbers, and by 1943 several styles were in production. Three shifts now worked 24 hours a day to supply wartime demands for the Ek Commando knife. For reasons we will outline, the wartime production Ek knives were sequentially serial numbered. Serial numbers began with the Model number and a letter. Once 999 of a certain run was reached, the next letter of the alphabet indicated a change. For instance, 1B-400 indicated Model One, second run, 400th



Cut and slash tests showed the Ek has what it takes to be a top-notch combat performer.

The Para Cord wrapped Ek is a favorite of our high-speed low drag operatives. A pair of Eks was recently presented to top Ranger graduates.

(Handbook courtesy M. Henry Campbell.)

The para cord wrapped handle grows on you with use.



knife. Since the knives had a lifetime warranty the serial number was considered important in order to register each knife. Quite apart from giving the user a good knife and excellent warranty, Ek felt that a lifelong warranty would give him a chance to examine any knife that failed and to improve the design. As it turned out, very few knives were ever returned. Ek knives were as good as Ek's personal motto: "A good knife can save a life!"

Ek knives saw tremendous use by the military. Company records indicate every branch of the military received Ek knives. As a sidelight, the company had asked the British War Office for permission to use the moniker "Commando." Permission was granted. A great number of personalities used the Ek during the war. Among these was General George S. Patton Jr. Best known for his ivory-handled revolvers, he also favored the Ek knife. John Ek designed a special knife, which he called the



The Ek is a symbol of our top soldiers of this country, much the same as a Ranger's .45s or Beige Beret.

Patton Model. Patton had more qualifications than most to design a knife and Ek listened carefully to feedback from those engaged in action.

By the end of the war, Ek knives were being produced at the rate of one thousand knives per week. Despite this output, the knives are seldom seen at knife shows or in the hands of collectors. Output totaled at least 100,000 knives of all models.

During the war Ek restricted sales of his knives to active duty military personnel. His feelings toward his knives were understandable. Here was an implement with one reason for being—to give the user every advantage in combat. Ek felt the knife was deadlier than a gun at short range. As he stated: "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." This was another reason the Ek was serialized. This registration limited sales but satisfied Ek's personal scruples.

During the war, steel shortages were crippling to some light industries but Ek was always authorized strategic production. Skilled young men and women were in short supply. Ek hired handicapped workers and kept this practice in place until his death in 1976, long after production had moved to Florida.

Modern Knives

The Ek is of full tang construction. The one-piece tang results in a much stronger knife, with longer load bearing surfaces than those knives with a short tang fitted into a handle or the sporting knife's "rat tail" short tang. The tang goes not only the length but also the width of the handle, an important advantage.

This grip is 1-inch wide and 5 inches long. It is stronger than a short tang knife

"A great number of personalities used the Ek during the war. Among these was General George S. Patton Jr."

and stronger than most full tang knives. Another advantage of this system in a fighting knife is that the tang extends past the handle. This solid butt extension aids in a solid blow if need be. This extension allows the use of a tactic such as a sweeping uppercut. The handle itself was much praised in its day. In modern times its simple effectiveness must be respected. There are eight scallops on the wooden handled grips for greater gripping strength. I have tested my example extensively—its gripping power is tremendous when properly applied. I like this design very, very much.

I have always liked guards on knives to prevent stubbing or the hand running forward. A point of contention with the war production board was that the original Ek did not have a crossguard at all. Ek's feeling was that guards were apt to snag on clothing and that the scallop grip alone was sufficient to give proper purchase during fighting maneuvers. His demon-

stration before the board was dramatic. He grasped his knife in a greased hand and slammed it into a wooden floor so hard no one could remove it!

That solved the issue, but later Eks would have crossguards. I do prefer them. I am not the knife handler Ek was and you probably are not either. Crossguards work. Present Ek crossguards are well designed and unobtrusive, not likely to snag in the belt or parachute.

Testing

I have tested two Ek models extensively. The M4 is double edged and has a strong point. My dark Micarta gripped version sports eight scallops in the handle. I own quite a few blades, from Bowie types to the latest 6-inch military utility knives. The Ek is easily the best balanced. Certainly, I have never had a better-balanced knife in my hand. My collection, I might add, contains quite a few hand-built knives and more than one outstanding Bowie. The Ek is just right, just the right size and shape for what really goes on.

The SF 3 is a modern design, one which features a single edge and a para cord wrapped handle. Quite a few of our high-speed, low drag class of warriors prefers a para cord wrap. It is more compact than the other knife, and the single edge is probably marginally stronger than the double-edge, dagger-like blade of the SF 4. This knife conjures up images of places called Con Thien, Dak To, and Khe Sahn. The reality of the thing, however unpleasant, is there. The Ek is reality. When you wrap your hand around this handle, something says friend in no uncertain terms. A friend to the user, a harrower to the adversary.

I found each knife handled well in all drills. Defense, thrusts, and reverse attacks were successfully carried out. The Micarta handled knife offered the best gripping surface, but one of our testers claimed better speed with the other knife. The large handles of the former Ek can be trimmed to fit the individual user, a long suit of this handle design.

The Micarta handle separates palm from hand, lessening the shock of impact. On the other hand, the para cord handle mates the knife to the hand more closely. As I used each, I was glad to have both and the choice would be very difficult between the two.

After hard testing I find the Eks estimable indeed. But, again, this is simply personal experience. The history of the knife speaks louder. If you are in need—truly in need—of a fighting knife, look hard at the Ek. You will be in good company. **TK**