

Ek Knife Variations

by Harvey Reisberg

To date, there has not been a great deal written about varieties of Ek World War II era knives. Collectors of Ek knives are well aware of the more common ones; namely, numbers

one, two, five and six. There are some really outstanding photographs in Robert Burlein's book entitled, "Allied Military Fighting Knives and the Men That Made Them Famous".

A question to be asked of

most collectors would be, "Have you considered some of the companion items associated with the World War II Ek knives?"... for example, there are small promotional booklets (printed circa WWII), original

boxes, photographs, pre-war knives and a very special category, "re-handled EK Knives." Wait a minute, I have forgotten the elusive John Ek throwing knives and the sheaths that housed all of his blades.

The only original boxes that I have been able to obtain are constructed of tan colored cardboard (see photograph 1) that measure 14 inches long by 2.75 inches wide by 1.13 inches high. One box was hand stamped in block letters: "John Ek COMMANDO KNIVES Manufactured By Authorization Of The WAR PRODUCTION BOARD" and the other one had been preprinted to read: "JOHN EK COMMANDO KNIFE The Original Registered Fighting and Utility Knife Manufactured By Permission Of The War Production Board Manufactured in Hamden, Conn., U.S.A."

These two boxes were obtained with early Model #1 knives (manufactured without the now common wrist thong holes). These are the only WWII knives that I have personally observed with the original boxes.

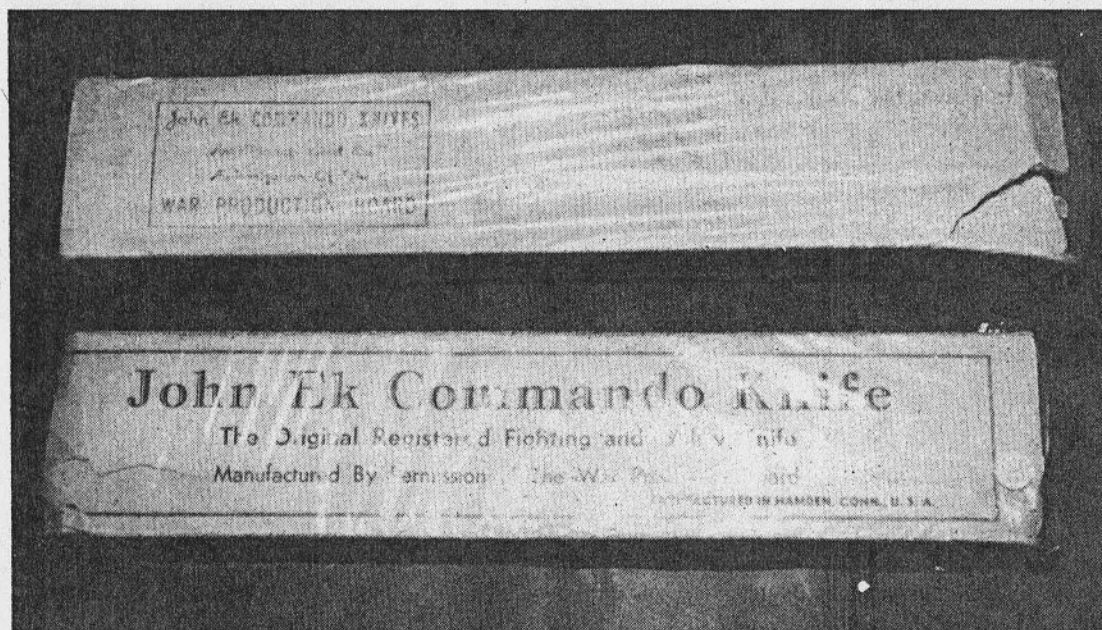
Another item that seemed to get lost quite often is the small advertising booklet that described all of the then available

knives (circa 1942)... I was fortunate to obtain an original in absolutely mint condition at a flea market but not for flea market prices. I had passed this item up twice before only due to the high asking price. Alas, I had never even seen one, let alone one in mint condition. I decided that I was indeed fortunate and should have it for my collection. Throwing caution to the wind I purchased it... currently, you can get one free (a re-print from the New John Ek Commando Knife Company) with the purchase of a NEW John Ek Commando Knife.

Well, another rather difficult piece of steel to locate is the John Ek throwing knives. The two shown in photograph 2 were obtained from John Ek personally (as this story goes) and were supposedly prototypes. They are unusual in the fact that they are not numbered nor do they bear any manufacturers' markings. As a collector, I have examined them rather closely and I am of the opinion that they are authentic. They are 9 inches and 8.75 inches respectively.

As someone once said, "Diamonds are forever but wood is not"...this is very true when it comes to heavy usage of Ek knives. I am

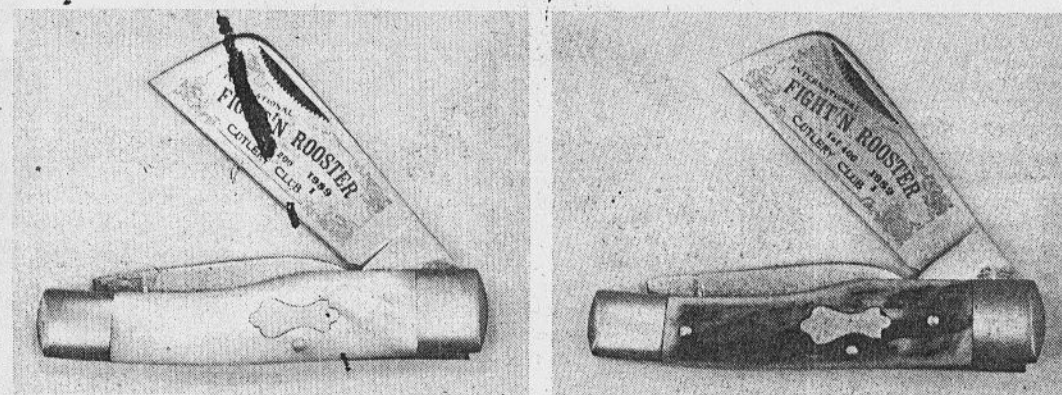
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Photograph #1

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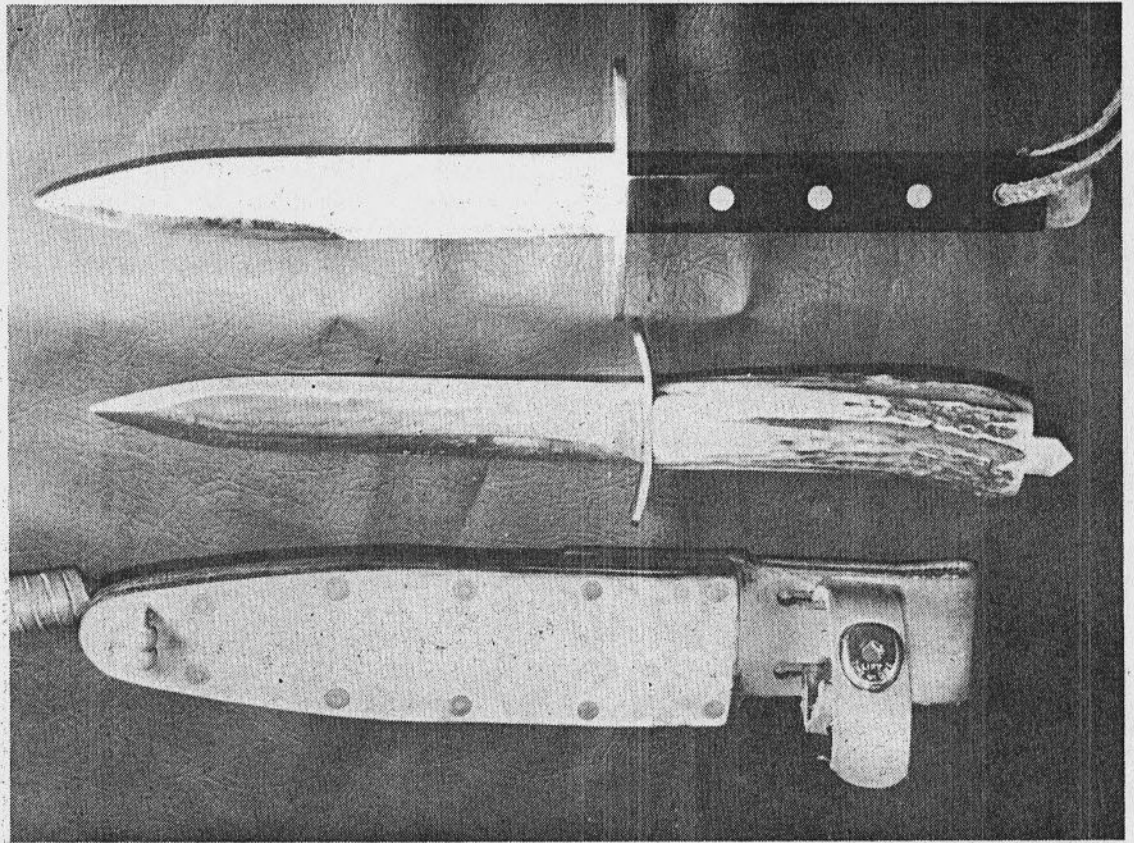
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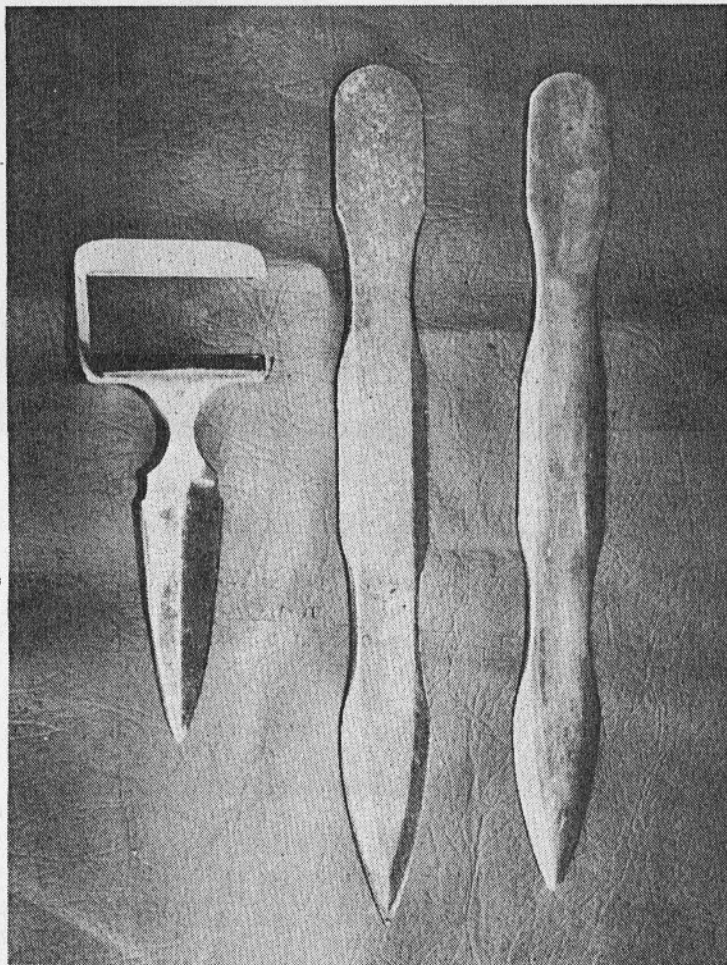
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 sure that after WWII many of the Ek knives were used as hunting and fishing knives thus being subjected to very hard use. Although uncomfortable and tough to use, people generally make use of what is readily available in order to cut bait. Handles rotted when subjected to abuse of water both salt and fresh water. Therefore many individuals either re-handled these knives themselves or had them professionally refurbished. The two shown in

photograph 3 were professionally re-handled. The first one is a Model #6 and has been re-handled using black micarta, three brass pins to attach the micarta and a brass guard. The dimensions of this knife are 12.31 inches overall length. I cannot ascertain whether or not this is a recent "job"; but my guess is that it is (within the last 10 years). The other knife has been re-handled in stag with a fancy butt cap on the metal butt protrusion. It is a

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Photograph #3



Photograph #2

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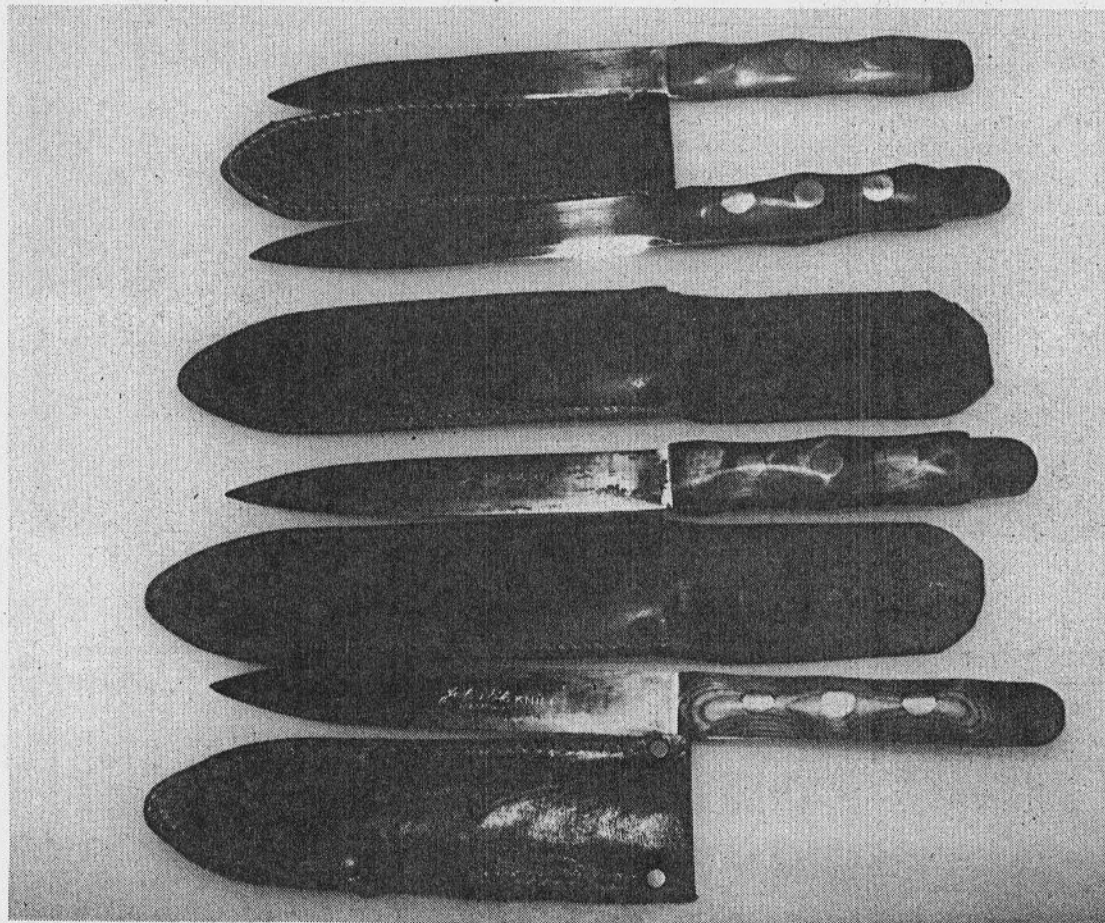
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 model #7 with the original cross guard used. The stag is exceptional in that it is quite old and shows its age beautifully. The overall length is 11.25 inches. Both of these knives are stamped John Ek Commando Knife Co. with the Hamden,

Conn. address and are serial numbered.

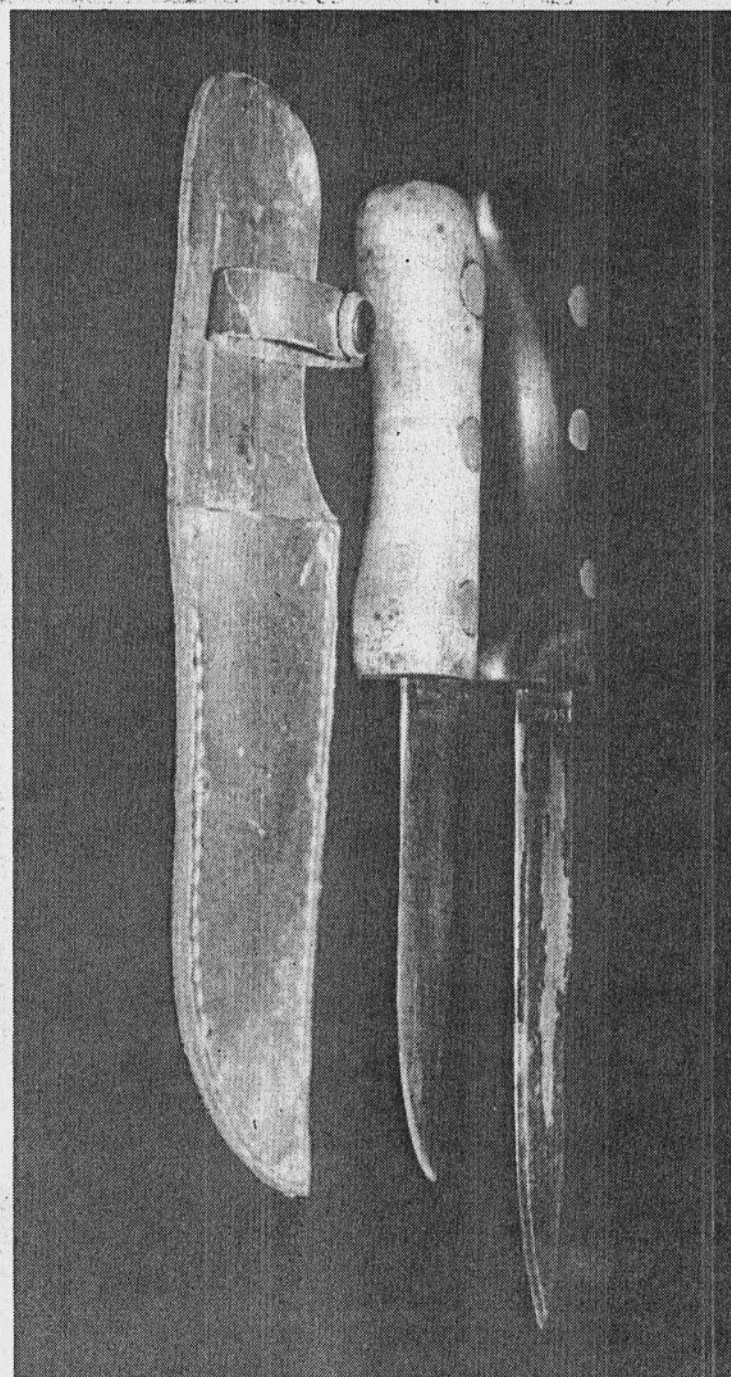
Another John Ek knife that I have purchased is a clip pointed knife that has no serial number nor is it shown in any of the research books. The gentleman that I purchased it from claimed that he had

purchased it "NEW" in late 1941 or early 1942 and it is legitimate. I really could not say when John Ek went to serial numbering knives but this is the second one that I have minus the number and it does have the Ek logo and the original sheath.

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Photograph #5



Photograph #4

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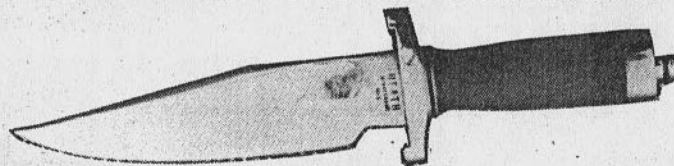
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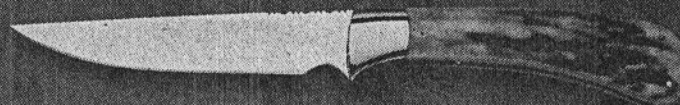


The knife pictured above was made for me by the late Pete Heath in or about 1970. In a weak moment at some distant time, I sold it, and I've regretted it ever since. If you currently own this knife or know of its whereabouts, I'd like to have it back, and I'd pay more for it than it's probably worth. If you can help me out, write giving full description.

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Original sheaths are another difficult item to find due to the very poor quality of the leather. Many Ek knives were discarded after the war and if the sheaths survived then they were discarded also. I would guess that due to the flimsy thin leather used they (the sheaths) just disintegrated in any type of battle conditions. No more discussion on quality because they are what they are. To the best of my knowledge there were three types of sheaths:

1) The first was real common... one thickness of leather with rivets at stress points (7) and a keeper strap that snaps around the wood grip. (see photograph 4).

2) The second type is similar to the first in that it also has one thickness of leather but only two rivets at the top of the sheath at the blade entry point. It has no keeper strap. This sheath (as seen in photograph 5) was obtained with real early Ek knives. The knives do not have the wrist thong hole in the upper handle scales.

3) The third type has no leather extension above the sheath body. There is a piece of leather loop sewed on the reverse of the scabbard. They are shown reinforced with four rivets for strength and then again with no rivets (see photographs 5 and 6 respectively).

All other sheaths shown in the photographs other than the ones described are

custom made for the particular knives and require no description.

This article would not be complete if I failed to address the current manufactured John Ek Knives. Most collectors of the WWII Ek knives are aware of the company, named, The John Ek Commando Knife Company, owned by other than the EK family. The new knives are indeed a quality knife that will serve a combat soldier well. Basically, there are two blade types and the main differences between models is based on specific handle (grip) material and whether or not a cross guard is included. Additionally, you can choose between a leather sheath (brown or black) or a nylon sheath. The sheaths are very well constructed of high quality material.

Getting back to the blades of the current Ek knives, they are either double or single edged of high quality and razor sharp. The handle materials are wood, micarta and nylon parachute cord. All knives are secured with either one or two keeper straps over the handle and secured by a velcro fastener. Additionally, the logo has been changed and modernized.

This new innovative company has seen fit to jump on the club bandwagon and has formed an EK COMMANDO KNIFE COLLECTORS CLUB. Membership is free if you purchase an Ek knife, or you may con-

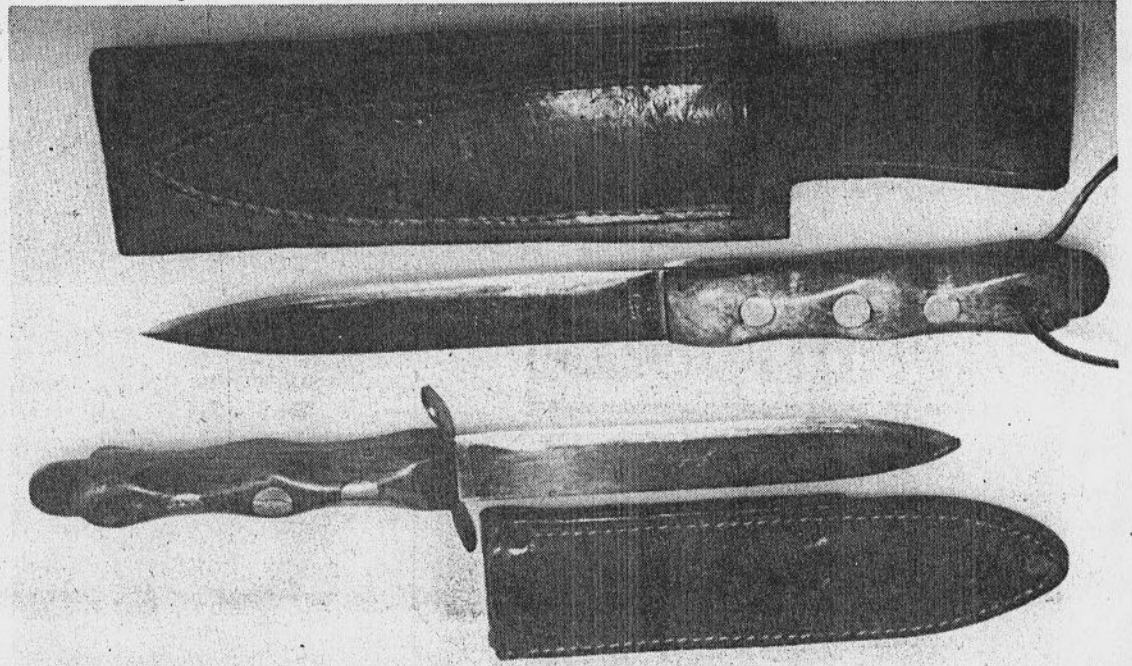
tribute an article to their newsletter or pay a five dollar membership fee. You can purchase an Ek cap, patch, T-shirt and get advanced information on newly produced knives.

Additionally, as we all know, when a particular knife maker becomes popular with collectors out of the woodwork comes the nefarious quick profit artist... beware of fake Ek WWII knives. I have seen two for sale and may have purchased one that I initially couldn't spot nor could the

collector that I purchased it from. I really want to believe that it is legitimate but I am not sure... when in doubt, I label it "FAKE" until proven otherwise. This knife appears to be a # 1 and can be seen in photograph 5 and is the first knife from the left. It is not marked John Ek anywhere on the blade... conforms to general dimension specifications and has poured lead rivets. If it is legitimate then it is very early Ek. Please beware of the "FAKERS".

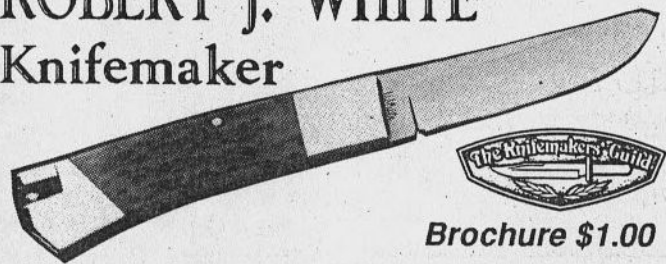
As a final word on Ek; evidently, John has a son named Gary who may or may not have followed in his father's footsteps. I haven't heard anything about this gentleman but I did come across a knife belt buckle with his name inscribed on it. See photograph 2 for a glimpse. Did he manufacture this belt-buckle knife? Did he purchase it and scratch his name on it? Your guess is as good as mine.

Note: All photographs by Jack Goldstein.



Photograph #6

ROBERT J. WHITE Knifemaker



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