

VINTAGE EKs: FIGHTING KNIVES BRING THE BUCKS

by Steve Shackelford

Joe Cusumano knows knives but probably more about vintage Ek fighting knives than any other. With some documented one-of-a-kinds going for up to \$1,000, old Eks are plenty to satisfy him.

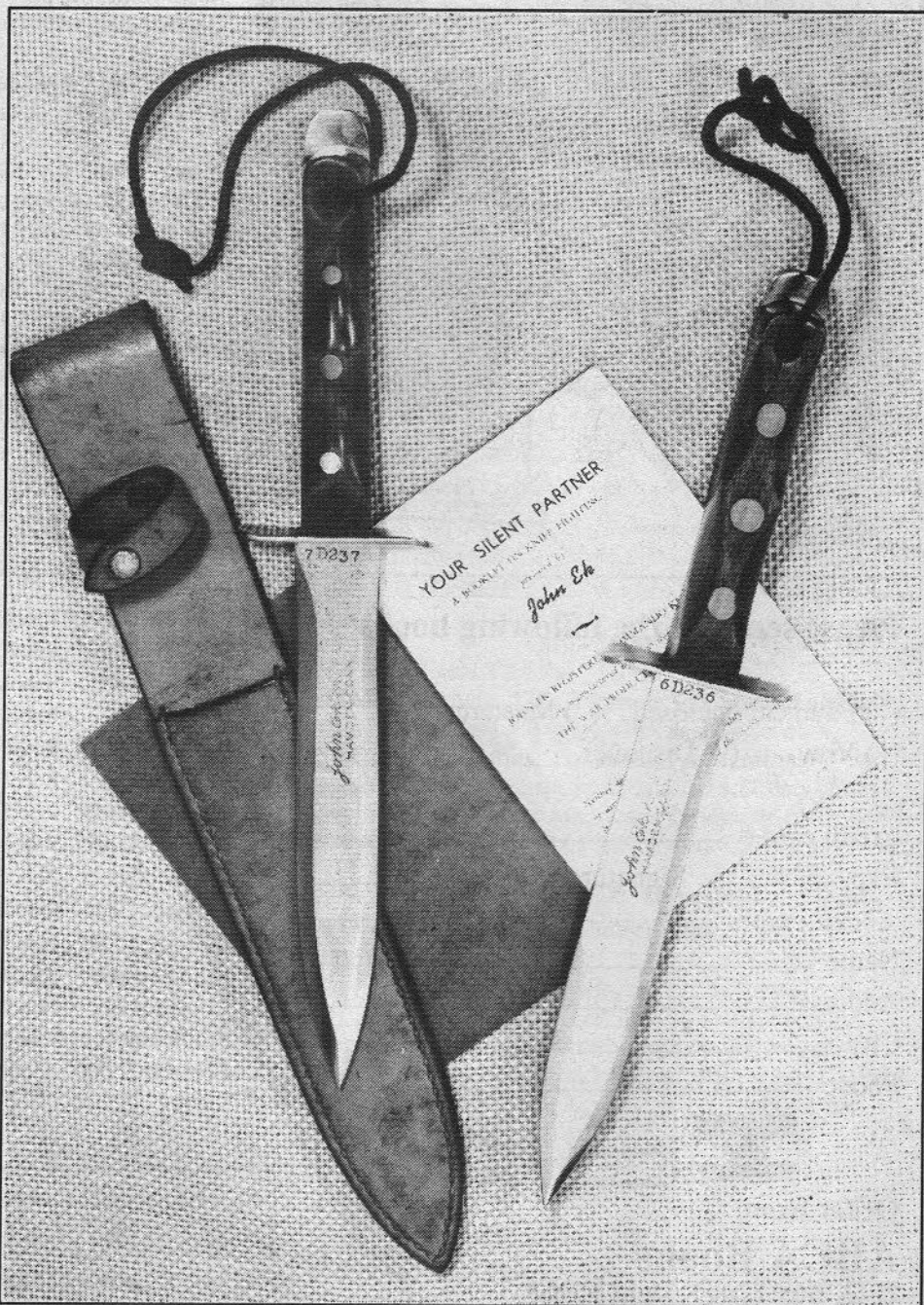
The general manager of Ek Commando Knife Co. from 1986-87, Cusumano helped brainstorm knife and reproduction designs for Ek and was also curator of the Knife And Bayonet, Stuart/Moseby and Marine Raider museums in Richmond, Virginia. He is president of the Virginia Arms Collector Organization.

He says though Ek is not well known like some collectible combat knives, it was one of the largest independent producers of fighting knives during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars, and that those who collect vintage Ek fighters do so earnestly. "I could put an old Ek fighting knife on my table for \$75 and many people would walk by and not know what it is," he

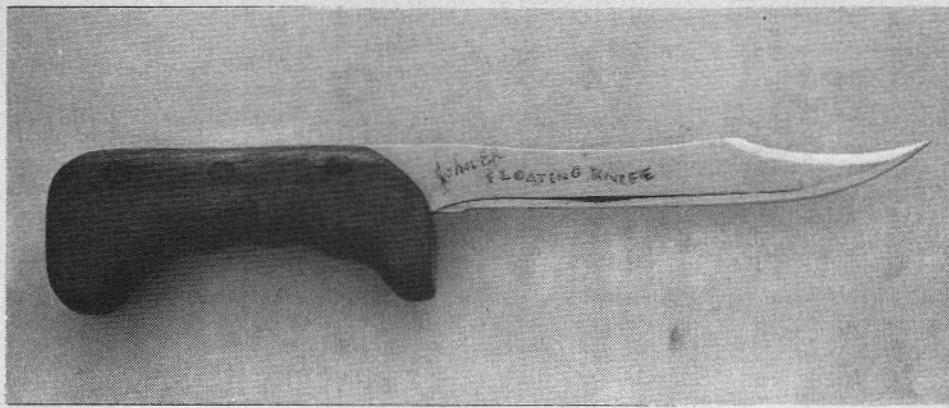
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Ek One-Of-A-Kinds

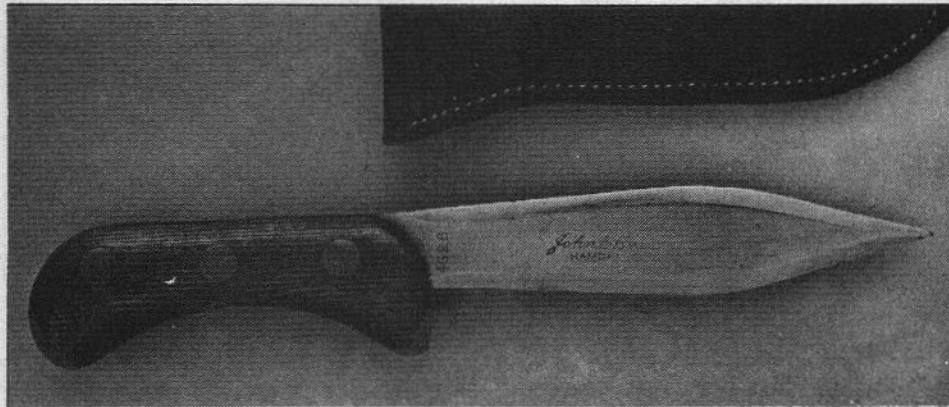
Joe Cusumano says there are many one-of-a-kind Ek fighters around because that's how Ek knives originally started—they were all custom orders. The closest thing Joe has to an Ek one-of-a-kind is the "Slim Jim," a fighting knife with a handle customized either in the factory or by hand. However, Joe seemed unsure whether the knife was a one-of-a-kind or a standard model that had been sanded down by the original owner with the sandpaper that Ek used to provide with each knife in case the handle was too big for the user's hand.



Models 6 (right) and 7, with a copy of the "Your Silent Partner" pamphlet that was, and still is, provided with each Ek knife. Note the "HAMDEN, CONN" mark, a sign of World War II vintage. The Model 6 has a single-edge blade, the Model 7 a double edge.



The Model 10 John Ek Floating Knife made during World War II. The knife would float "about 1 1/2 inches above" the water's surface. The handle was made unusually large in relation to the blade and wooden handle plugs replaced the usual lead rivets to enhance the knife's floating ability.

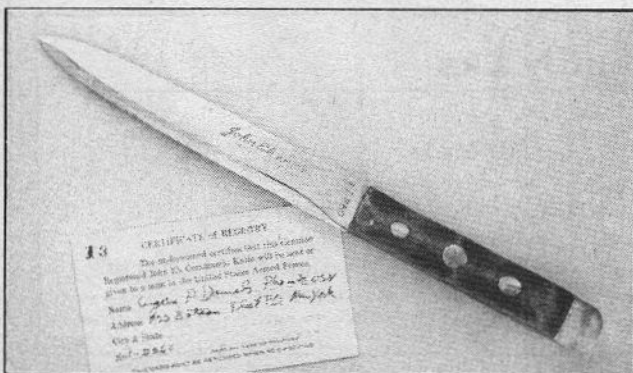


(Above) A World War II-era Model 4 New Guinea Bush Knife. The author says Ek made this style at the request of U.S. servicemen who fought in the jungle. The 7-inch blade tapers from 1 3/8 inches at its widest to 1 inch at the point. The 5 1/2-inch handle is rock maple.

Vintage Ek Values

Fighting Knife	Cusumano's Values*
World War II	\$250-\$700+
Korean War	Whatever market bears
Vietnam War	\$150-\$400+
One-of-a-kind	\$500-\$1,000

*The \$700+, \$400+ and \$1,000 values are for fighting knives in good-to-excellent condition with original sheaths and boxes, and documentation



(Left) World War II fighting knives with documentation are among the most valuable of Eks. This Model 1—one of the more popular Ek fighting knives—belonged to Eugene P. Daniels of the USS Bataan. According to the author, 260 Model 1s were made. John Ek registered his knives to the individual buyer and reportedly kept a file of same in his office.

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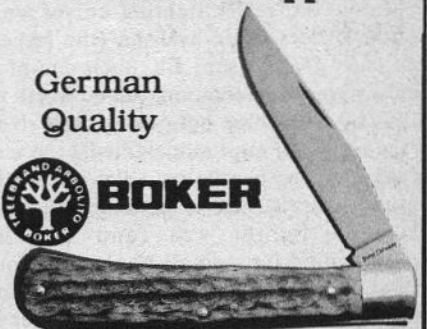
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VINTAGE EKS:

continued from page 46

says, "but in other circles I could put the same knife out for \$225 and people would be breaking each other's arms over it."

He says the World War II and Vietnam versions that saw action are more collectible because they are easier to document. Korean War Eks are more

"I could put an old Ek fighting knife on my table for \$75 and many people would walk by and not know what it is," he says, "but in other circles I could put the same knife out for \$225 and people would be breaking each other's arms over it"

difficult to document, perhaps, as he puts it, because few people seem to care about that era. Yet documented Korean War Eks are valuable. "Documenting a Korean War Ek would be a coup, certainly with the appetite of collectors trying to put together complete collections of Eks," notes Cusumano, himself a veteran of the Korean War's "Iron Triangle" battleground.

Many vintage Ek fighting knives were custom orders made by John (the father) and Gary (John's son) Ek. Such one-of-a-kinds, with documentation, can be worth up to \$1,000. The three hot-poured lead rivets in the handle of most models meant the user could bang the handle on a flat surface to tighten it up in case it loosened. Finally, each Ek fighter was (and still is) accompanied by a small booklet, "Your Silent Partner," with knife fighting and other information. Original World War II pamphlets are worth up to \$100.

Photos courtesy of Vince Signorelli of Ek Commando Knives.



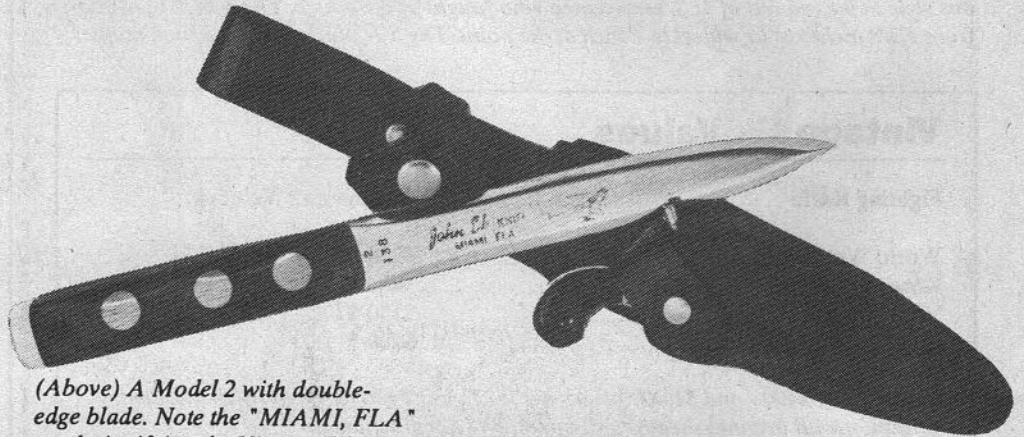
(Left) Vince Signorelli of Ek Commando Knives shows two interested observers some vintage Ek fighters on display at the company's offices.

Vintage World War II Ek Fighters

Model Numbers*	Features**
1	7", single-edge blade
2	Same as Model 1 but with double-edge blade
3	Same as Model 1 but bolo-style handle
4 (New Guinea Bush Knife)	7" blade, 1 3/8" at wide part to 1" at point
5 (Navy Knife)	7" blade, 1" wide; bolo handle
6	7", single-edge blade; crossguard
7	Same as Model 6 but with double-edge blade
8 (Paratrooper Knife)	9" saber blade, bolo-style handle
9	Same as Paratrooper but with standard handle
10 (Floating Knife)	Ground-away blade promoted flotation

*Ek later changed or discontinued several models

**All with leather or "Plast-Ek" sheaths and hard-rock maple handles; all handles had lead rivets except Model 10 with wood plugs



(Above) A Model 2 with double-edge blade. Note the "MIAMI, FLA" mark signifying the Vietnam War era. According to the author, though Ek knives were not as popular in Vietnam as during World War II, they were still more popular than John Ek thought they would be.

How To Date/Identify Eks

Era/Model	I.D. Marks
World War II	Hamden, Connecticut, stamp
Korean War	Documentation
Vietnam War	Miami or St. Augustine, Florida, stamps
One-of-a-kinds	Unique designs, documentation