

**UPDATES:**

**FIRST DOWNLOAD COPY - available December 2024**

[Edition 5](#) is the first web-based version. Previous versions were prepared in a standard A4 page format that made updating both difficult and time-consuming. There are some changes to content, particularly an update regarding the role of the Joseph Rodgers 'multitool knife' ([see section 5.5.2](#)), and the formatting has changed significantly.

[Edition 4](#) (October 2021) provided an update on the rare "Pilots & Engineers knife" – see section 6.1.

[Edition 3](#) (August 2021) provided details of the hard-to-find Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife Pattern 1632" – see Appendix 2, together with some minor text updates and clarifications.

[Edition 2](#) (January 2021) updated the previous Edition 1 to include details of two previously unknown (to me at least) versions of the Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633", together with details of the standard wire cutter tool that was in use in the Second Boer War and most likely the First World War, and which may be the basis for the design of the Joseph Rodgers Military Knife P.1633.

[Edition 1](#) was produced in September 2020.

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## 1 PURPOSE

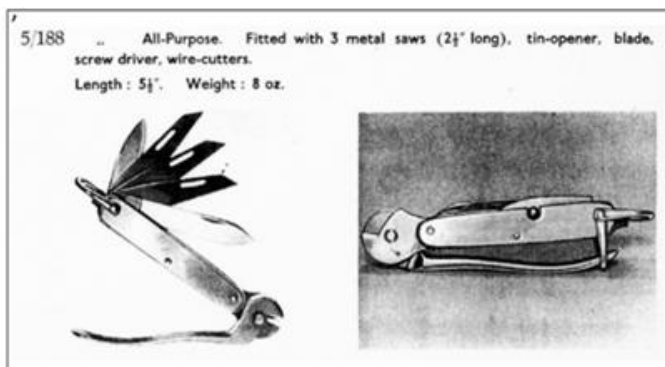
The purpose of this **Collector Note** is to review readily available sources in-order to document the process of evolution of the **OSS/SOE Escape Knife** (the "escape knife") from its original form in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century to its final form as an "all purpose" knife (commonly described as an "escape and evasion") tool, produced for the UK Ministry of Supply and supplied to the UK Special Operations Executive (SOE), and to the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS), between 1942 and 1945.

## 2 ATTRACTION

All versions of the OSS/SOE Escape Knife have been popular with collectors on both sides of the Atlantic (and elsewhere) since the publication in 1979 of M. H. Cole's books "U.S. Military Knives: Bayonets & Machetes"<sup>1</sup> – specifically Book III, probably due to the mystique associated with "secret agents" operating behind enemy lines in WW2. The fact that there is such a back-story associated with these knives, together with the knowledge that they were hand-made in relatively small quantities, adds to the enjoyment of ownership. All of the so far identified twelve versions of the escape knife described in this Collector Note occasionally become available for purchase and they do not need to be in top condition to be enjoyed. A visual summary of these twelve versions is provided in [section 8](#). following.

## 3 DESCRIPTION

Much has been written over many years about the escape knife, some of which can be unintentionally misleading and not now supported by available evidence. For me, the primary reference regarding the escape knife was the book "*British and Commonwealth Military Knives*"<sup>2</sup> (refer page 48) written by Ron Flook (an eminent UK military knife historian) and first published in 1999.



Source: Article "Is it or isn't it SOE?" by Ron Flook in April 2009 edition of Knife World P. 26

More recent research undertaken by Flook of documents in the UK Public Records Office, as published in his article in the April 2009 edition of Knife World: "*Is it or Isn't it SOE?*", identifies a catalogue<sup>3</sup> that provides precise details of the original escape knife, as having "*the catalog number of 5/188 along*

5.5 [Phase 4: Post WWII – 1950s.](#)

5.5.1 [Joseph Rodgers & Sons “All-Purpose” Knife](#)

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[APPENDIX 4: Copied from article in “The American Blade” magazine Volume 11, Number 4 - May/June 1975.](#)

with a description of “KNIVES ALL-PURPOSE” - see insert opposite.

For the collector, this is what an “OSS/SOE Escape knife” should look like. Any differentiation from this image (perhaps apart from the “Ibberson” version detailed later in this Collector Note – see [section 5.4.2](#)) indicates that the knife is less than complete (e.g. broken sawblades, missing saw blades, etc.) or has been re-assembled from parts.

Any suggestion that a non-conforming example is a “prototype”, “rare version”, etc. is often an intention to mis-lead (a possible example of this is the Joseph Rodgers “parts knife” described in the [section 6](#) “Loose Ends” of this Collector Note). The valid exceptions, of course, are the examples detailed in Cole III where there is a provenance that connects these pre- and post-production knives back to the Joseph Rodgers factory – see explanation and elaboration in the later [section 5.4](#). “Phase 3: the OSS/SOE Escape Knife, circa 1941 – 1945” of this Collector Note, and in [Appendix 2](#).

In addition, a most informative article: “*The Elusive MI9 Escape Knife*”<sup>4</sup> by Brian Moysé & Roy Shadbolt in the September 2014 edition of Knife World magazine provides a detailed World War 2 and post-War context for the Escape Knife.

After completing the final draft of this Collector Note, a colleague directed me to a more recent article in the October 2016 edition of Knife World by Brian Moysé & Allan Moysé titled “*A Rodgers Military Special*”<sup>5</sup> which provides extensive details of the precursor of the OSS/SOE Escape Knife – being the Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633” and its variants – see following. There is a strong commonality between what I had written in the final draft about this knife and what the Moyses’ had written, so I have adopted their terminology to differentiate between the four known versions of the “Military Knife P.1633” and hopefully achieve some consistency in the terminology used by collectors.

## 4 EVOLUTION

In summary, it appears to me that there are four phases in the evolution of the OSS/SOE Escape Knife, as follows:

- **Phase 1: Early 20th Century – Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633”.**
  - Original “flat-latch” version (with examples that refer to both Queen Victoria and King Edward VII).
  - First variant (with examples that refer to both King Edward VII and King George V).
  - Second variant (with examples that only refer to King George V).
- **Phase 2: probably circa 1930’s – Joseph Rodgers & Sons.**
  - Third variant – the “sawblade” version.
- **Phase 3: the OSS/SOE Escape Knife, circa 1942 – 1945.**
- **Phase 4: Post WWII – 1950s.**

This has resulted in a total of twelve versions of the knife which are graphically summarised in the [section 8](#). “VISUAL SUMMARY OF THE FULL SET OF KNOWN EXAMPLES” later in this Collector Note.

## 5 DETAILS

### 5.1 [The British military wire cutter tool](#)

The use of barbed wire in wartime became a feature of the Boer War and consequently generated the need for wire cutters to be carried by servicemen when in the field of battle. A wire cutter was predominately a ‘stand-alone’ tool made by many different toolmakers – most likely in Sheffield. Flook has quoted a UK military regulation that required military officers to include a wire-cutter as part of their kit. I recently (November 2020) purchased the following example from a UK dealer which clearly exhibits the characteristics that may have been the inspiration for the design by Joseph Rodgers of their Military Knife P.1633.

[APPENDIX 5: The back cover \(and sales details\) from "North West Knives and Collectibles" November 2000 sales catalog](#)

[APPENDIX 6: Author's collection](#)



The wire cutter is stamped "HOLTZAPFFEL & Co LONDON" and was dated by the seller as c.1903. It comes with a leather pouch of a style that is consistent with the Boer War era.

An internet search provided details of a very similar example made by WILKINSON (also with a leather pouch) and another UK example from WW2

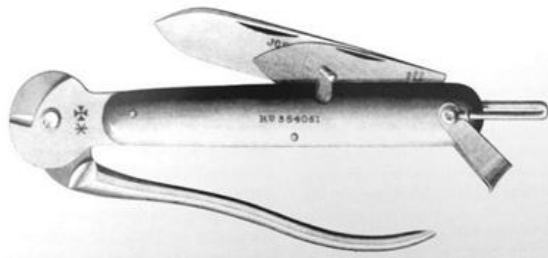
known as the "Type 6" although neither of these examples were spring assisted.

## [5.2 Phase 1: Early 20th Century – Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."](#)

This was a commercial production knife made by Joseph Rodgers in their factory at No.6 Norfolk St. Sheffield and was probably available for sale c.1900. It was promoted by Rodgers as a 'private purchase' item aimed at military personnel.

There are two primary documentary sources for this knife, as follows:

- Joseph Rodgers' sales catalogues – circa early 1902 and circa 1912.
- Registered Design number "Rd. 354051" stamped on the nickel silver scales - indicating a date of May 1900. In their article "*The Elusive M19 Escape Knife*" Moyses & Shadbolt state that the Registered Design was specifically for a "*Military Wire Cutter knife*"



The adjacent illustration is copied from the Joseph Rodgers catalogue circa 1902, and the illustration in the Joseph Rodgers catalog circa 1912 is identical. In both catalogues the subject is identified as "P.1633" and is one of three knives depicted under the heading "Military Knives". The stamp "Rd.354051" is

clearly illustrated. A brief note on the other two knives in the illustration is included in [Appendix 1](#) to this **Collector Note**. Interestingly, the illustration shows the Rd. number stamped on the mark-side<sup>6</sup> scale, whereas it is actually stamped on the pile side scale on all known examples. There are three acknowledged versions of this [Phase 1](#) pattern P.1633 as follows:

### [5.2.1 Original "flat-latch" version](#)

As depicted in both the circa 1902 catalog and the circa 1912 Joseph Rodgers catalogue - where the (flat) latch secures the wire cutter from opening when not in use, and the standard bail also pivots from the same pin. This original version was first produced with the tin opener stamped "RODGERS CUTLERS TO HER MAJESTY" – being a reference to Queen Victoria. The knife shown in the following photo is such a "Her Majesty" example.



SOURCE: Author's collection

Given that Queen Victoria died on January 22, 1901, such stamping would only have been in use for a very short time and was replaced by the stamping "E[Crown]R RODGERS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY" – being a reference to Edward VII who became King immediately following the death of his mother Queen Victoria. The actual date when the stamping changed is not known but it is assumed to be soon after Edward

became King in 1901 and lasted until the introduction of the First variant at some date prior to his death in 1910. Therefore, a date range of c.1900 – c.1905 is suggested. Examples of both knives are now quite rare, especially the "Her Majesty" example;

Moses' appear to have been only aware of the "His Majesty" example when they wrote their article in 2016.

I note that a "flat-latch" version is illustrated in Stephens' *"Fighting Knives" Chapter 9: 'Knives of the Second World War'* (illustration 434 on page 85 - tang stamp not shown), and an excellent example sold on eBay in 2010 that was a "E[crown]R" tang stamp example. Interestingly, the Joseph Rodgers' sales catalogues dated circa 1912 (a date which is well after George V became King) displays the original flat-latch version although there are no known examples of the original flat latch version that show the G[crown]R stamp.

Two distinguishing features of the "Original flat-latch version" and the following "First variant" are:

- (1) The inside of the nickel silver slab handles are slightly concave and rough (as it was when it came out of the mould), and
- (2) The tin opener tool has a nail nick in addition to the pin.

An interesting variation of the "flat-latch" version was recently (November 2020) sold by a UK based dealer JC Militaria. The significant variation is that instead of a tin opener, it has a standard sheepfoot cutting blade – see photo following courtesy of JC Militaria. Given its lack of a tin opener, which in my opinion is a fundamental feature of a 'military' clasp knife from the mid-Boer War to WW1, it is perhaps incorrect to assume that is a 'military knife' especially as it has an inscription on one scale that reads: "*T. Mills. On leaving Sharsted Court. From E. Faunce de Laune. 1902*", which does not appear to have any military association. This is the only example of this variation that I am aware of. This date of 1902 is consistent with other known "flat-latch" versions of Rodgers' Military Knife P.1633.



In terms of construction this knife is also consistent with other known "flat-latch" versions of Rodgers' Military Knife P.1633, except that both nickel silver scales are uniform; that is, the absence of the tin opener tool means that there is no need for the indent in one scale to accommodate the pin attached to the tin opener. This is also a feature of the 'Third variant' of Rodgers' Military Knife P.1633 – see [section 5.3.1](#) following.

### 5.2.2 [First variant](#)

The flat-latch has been replaced by a strong wire latch to secure the wire cutter from opening, and the standard bale is attached to the latch rather than from the pivot pin - see illustration following.



SOURCE: Author's collection

It is not known when this first variation was introduced; as noted by Moses' "Knives of this design are known with either of two tang stamps on the can opener: E[crown]R and G[crown]R which refers to King George V (1910 – 1936, with the latter being more common". So, the start date was at some point in the reign of Edward VII (died 1910), and the finish date was probably early in the reign of George V

(1910 – 1936). Therefore, a date range for this First variant of 1905 – 1911 is suggested. The knife shown in the above photo is a more common 'G[crown]R' tang stamp example.

### 5.2.3 [Second variant](#)

This is easily distinguishable from the First variant due to the lack of the nail nick on the can opener, and the inside of the nickel silver slabs being flat and polished smooth. As noted by Moyses': this variant always has the G[crown]R tang stamp. See photo following.



SOURCE: Author's collection

It is not known when this variant was introduced, or why? One line of speculation is that it was to facilitate production because of increased demand for the knife following the outbreak of WW1 in 1914. For this reason, the suggested date range for this Second variant is c.1914 – c.1930. Evidence of this could be provided if owners of Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633" with a known WW1 provenance checked to identify if such knives were a First variant or a Second Variant (i.e. either concave handle slabs or smooth-inside handle slabs and is with/without a nail nick on the tin opener).

A recent purchase (November 2020) by me has however cast some doubt on my suggestion for distinguishing between the First and Second variants, as it has characteristics of both. The knife is a further interesting variation of the standard Rodgers' Military Knife P.1633 in that it also includes a large button hook - see photo following.



There is no doubt that the knife is factory made as it has a 'fit and finish' throughout that is identical to the other knives shown in this Section, except that it has an additional backspring that is necessary to accommodate the button hook. There are however issues with the main blade that complicate matters; it appears to have been ground down on the mark-side face to remove the nail nick, and a new nail nick has been cut-in near the point. One possible assumption is that the inclusion of the button hook made the original nail nick difficult to access. The characteristics that make it difficult to distinguish as to whether it is a First or Second variant are: 1) the tin opener has both a nail nick and the 'G[crown]R' tang stamp which is common to the First variant, and 2) it has smooth-inside handle slabs which is common to the Second variant. I am not aware of any other examples of this variation.

## 5.3 [Phase 2: probably circa 1930's – Joseph Rodgers & Sons.](#)

### 5.3.1 [Third variant:](#)

As defined in the Moyses' article, and herein referred to by me as the "sawblade" version. I suggest that the variations, when compared to the minor changes that created the First and Second variants as described above, are sufficiently significant to justify it as a separate **Phase 2** in the evolution of the OSS/SOE Escape Knife. Given that there is a total lack of original or contemporary documentation regarding this knife, and given the absence of a tin opener, I have refrained from using the terminology "Military Knife P.1633" in describing it.

Examples of this knife can be found by a Google Image search of "OSS/SOE escape knife" and were previously documented some years ago (e.g. on the Multi-Tool Museum website and Blade Forum website - although I have been unable to find/access them in recent years). I purchased mine on eBay in 2018 – see illustration following:



SOURCE: Author's collection

The knife is identical in size and shape with the previous "Phase 1: Early 20th Century – Rodgers' "Military Knife P.1633" variants, especially having the nickel silver scales stamped with the Registered Design number "Rd. 354051". The inside of the nickel silver slabs is flat and polished smooth in common with the Second variant detailed above. Based on currently available information, it appears that there is only one version of this knife, which involves the following variations to the Phase 1

examples detailed above:

1. the removal of the tin opener,
2. the introduction of the three hacksaw blades with a 'blued' finish,
3. the provision of strong wire latch which secures the wire cutter from opening, together with a standard bail which also pivots from the same pin.

The example that I have (as shown in the above photo) has each of the hacksaw blades marked with the word "ECLIPSE"<sup>8</sup>, together with the Registered Design number Rd. "76613" and the designation "23G" (which I am advised refers to the thickness gauge of the saw blade), see following photo.



All English "Rd." numbers have six numerals whereas there are only five shown on the saw blades, however a close inspection indicates that the last number is most likely covered by the small piece of sheet metal that has been welded to the tang to increase its thickness (this feature is also evident on

the hacksaw blades of the Escape Knife). If this assumption is correct, the Registered Design number corresponds to the date 1931, and most likely only refers to the date of registration of the design of the hacksaw blades rather than the whole knife.

Conventional wisdom has it that the "sawblade" version was a 'prototype' for the design of the Escape Knife in 1941, (most likely by Clayton Hutton<sup>9</sup> who is assumed to be the



'designer' of the escape knife). My initial challenge to this conventional view was motivated by a post by Martin Cook ("Cooky") on the "Military Knives and Daggers of the World" website dated December 2014 titled "Clayton Hutton's Personal Knife". Cooky states as follows: "Here are images of the Rodgers Rd 354051 'Escape Knife' that is in the Royal

Air Force Museum in Stafford. It is Item number 72/S/1413 and was the personal property of the person credited to be its inventor Christopher Clayton Hutton. This was his personal knife which he bequeathed to the museum". One of the photos in the post is copied above. It is clearly evident that the Hutton knife and mine are identical – even to the 'blued' hacksaw blades.

Also, I have on-file a copy of a post by "JOOIESEWS" on the "Blade Forums" website dated July 2006 that includes a photo of an almost identical knife (the only difference being that the main blade on the JOOLIESEWS knife appears to be blued also) - see top knife in the following photo.



I can no-longer access this post however I recall that JOOLIESEWS was the author of a detailed discussion of the “Escape Knife” on the Multi-Tools forum at around the same time (which I also can no-longer access). Note that the middle knife in the adjacent photo has a single shackle – rather than either of the two versions of the combined shackles that is common to all other known versions, and as shown on the other two knives in the photo.

I have details on file of another five examples of this knife that I sourced by a Google Image search, noting however that mine is the only one that I have actually handled, and therefore I cannot determine if the other examples mentioned here also have the “ECLIPSE” etc. stamp on the hacksaw blades. Given the absence of any mention of such marking it is best to assume that they were not so marked. Also, another collector has advised me that an example that he once owned was not so marked. Therefore, given the current state of knowledge it is better to assume that my “Eclipse” marked example is the exception rather than the rule.

My conclusion is that this (*so-called by me*) Joseph Rodgers “sawblade” version was produced in commercial quantities (given that I have knowledge of six examples) most likely during the 1930s. More specifically, it appears evident to me that Clayton Hutton based the escape knife directly on his own Rodgers “sawblade” knife rather than on the earlier versions of the Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633” as has been previously assumed, and thus the sawblade knife is the intermediate phase in the evolution of the Escape Knife.

I am aware of another view amongst collectors that the Rodgers “sawblade” knife was in-fact produced much earlier than the circa-1930s – possibly even during or immediately after WW1. Whilst this is a possibility, I do not see why the tin-opener tool would have been specifically excluded as part of this modification at that time.



Further, I have in my collection a tool shown in the adjacent photo which has the following details stamped on the handle: “MADE IN ENGLAND ‘ENOX’ POCKET SAW No. 28 Rd. No. 771436” which dates it as 1932. Given that the ‘blued’ hacksaw blades are identical in shape and finish to those featured in the Rodgers “sawblade” knife suggests the early-1930s date attributed to the sawblade knife has merit and is also consistent with the 1931 Registered Design date for the ECLIPSE stamp

detailed above.

The question still remains as to what prompted Joseph Rodgers to produce the “sawblade” knife in the early 1930’s (or earlier?) in the first place? Was it produced for some specific purpose that required the ‘design’ and subsequent registration of the hacksaw blades suitable for inclusion in a pocketknife? Or was it seen as an updating/upgrading of the “Military Knife P.1633” to suit changes in military requirements. Due to the current lack of any documentation regarding this “sawblade” knife, we may never know the answer. One area of speculation however is the occasional reference in literature regarding the escape

knife as having an RAF connection. To-date, I have seen no evidence of this, however I have seen reference to Clayton Hutton being originally an RAF officer – so, is it possible that the “sawblade” knife was produced for the RAF in the 1930s? (see also the reference to “pilot’s and engineers’ knife” later in this Collector Note at [section 6.1](#)).

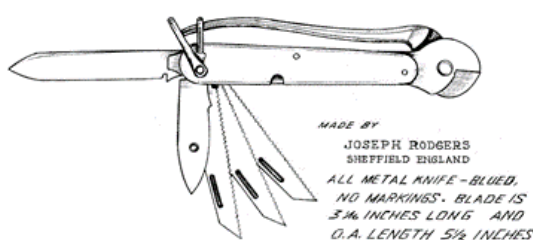
#### 5.4 [Phase 3: the OSS/SOE Escape Knife \(known officially as the “ALL-PURPOSE” KNIFE\), circa 1942 – 1945](#)

There has been much speculation regarding how the design of the OSS/SOE Escape Knife came about. The scenario that I favour is that Clayton Hutton was tasked by the SOE to produce an **“all-purpose” tool** (i.e. not a weapon) that would be part of the survival kit provided to allied ‘secret agents’ who operated behind enemy lines - assisting partisans in combating axis forces in France, the Balkans, Norway, etc. Clayton Hutton already had his own Joseph Rodgers “sawblade” knife (i.e. the one in the RAF museum mentioned above) and deemed it suitable for this purpose, albeit with some minor modifications; he may have also been familiar with the predecessor of the “sawblade” knife, being the **Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633”**.

To this end, my speculation is that Clayton Hutton proposed the following reasonably simple and practical modifications to the Rodgers “sawblade” knife:

1. The re-inclusion of the tin opener tool that was standard in the “Military Knife P.1633”. Interestingly, this style of tin opener was no-longer included in clasp knives supplied to British forces in WW2, having been superseded early in the war by a more efficient tin-opening tool. It is therefore assumed that Clayton Hutton re-introduced the older-style tin opener as a useful multi-purpose blade – including for opening tins.
2. the extension of the central liner to form a screwdriver as was common in the broad range of horseman’s and sportsman’s knives produced in Sheffield for at-least 80 -100 years prior and was also used on WW2 British Army and Navy clasp knives from 1939,
3. the replacement of the nickel silver scales with more utilitarian all-metal scales,
4. A ‘blued’ finish to all parts, and
5. The removal of all stamping so that the knife was ‘sterile’.

The illustration in Cole III (page 159 top) - see [Appendix 2](#) to this **Collector Note**, clearly



shows what an original “OSS/SOE Escape knife” should look like:

It is now generally acknowledged by collectors that there were probably two Sheffield manufacturers of the Escape Knife, being Joseph Rodgers and Geo. Ibberson. It is assumed that knives produce by the two are almost identical

- apart from one minor difference detailed in [section 5.4.2](#) on **Ibberson** knives following.

##### 5.4.1 [Joseph Rodgers & Sons](#)

The vast majority of the knives that are available to collectors appear to have been manufactured by Joseph Rodgers and Sons at their factory at No.6 Norfolk Street Sheffield. Collectors are fortunate that a well-known US collector William C. (Bill) Adams obtained several of what appear to be both pre and post-production examples of the escape knife from the Joseph Rodgers factory in the late 1960s – which were then described and carefully illustrated by M. H. Cole<sup>10</sup> in his seminal series of books “U.S. Military Knives: Bayonets & Machetes” – specifically in “Book III” (published in 1979) - of which the relevant pages 158 (also annotated by me) and 159 are copied in full in [Appendix 2](#) to this Collector Note. The dates of the illustrations appear to be 1971 and 1972. Cole’s description on page 159 is well-worth repeating here, as follows: “*These knives belong to William C. Adams of Atlanta who obtained them from the Joseph Rodgers factory in Sheffield England. Mr*



Adams stated he talked to the old-time factory workers who told him these knives were made for the Americans during W.W. II and that Joseph Rodgers was the only maker of these knives". More recent documentation as described elsewhere in this **Collector Note** (and as noted also be Cole) suggest that this latter comment may not be correct – see [section 5.4.2](#) on Geo. Ibberson following.

It is also important to note that the illustration numbering 1 - 5 of these pre and post-production knives (including the production "issue knife") prepared by Cole - are for illustrative purposes only (i.e. by Cole) and are not part of any formal numbering system by Rodgers – as has erroneously been inferred by commentators/sellers in the past.

An interesting observation of the illustrations on Coles III page 158 is that the main blade of the knife in illustration 1 (which is described as being "made from parts on hand") has the blade stamping "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS" which is consistent with the stamping on the main blade of the earlier Rodgers "sawblade" knife discussed above, whereas the main blade of the knife in illustration 4 has the stamping "G crown R" together with the text "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY SHEFFIELD \*+ ENGLAND". This is a blade stamping that was in more common usage in post-WW2 – 1950s era Joseph Rodgers' knives and is discussed further in that [section 5.5](#) of this **Collector Note**.

There are another two important documents relevant to the development of the escape knife that have been brought to my attention – courtesy of Ron Flook, as follows:

1. The first is an article "*Knives of the OSS*" by Adrian Van Dyk (a "*noted military collector and military knife expert*" in USA) in the May/June, 1975 edition of American Blade magazine<sup>11</sup> (see copy attached in [Appendix 3](#) and [Appendix 4](#)), which shows a photo of seven of the knives believed to have been sourced by Bill Adams from the Joseph Rodgers factory in the late 1960s – four of which are illustrated in Cole III – see above, and which are also referenced elsewhere in this **Collector Note** where relevant.
2. The back cover of November 2000 sales catalog for *North West Knives and Collectibles*<sup>12</sup> which shows five of the knives from the Adrian Van Dyk collection that were available for purchase – see [Appendix 5](#) which also includes details of the proposed sale items.



The adjacent photo shows an unused unsharpened Escape Knife in my collection that is totally consistent with the detailed description of the "all purpose" knife in the "*Secret Agent's Handbook of Special Devices*" referenced in [section 3](#) "DESCRIPTION" of this Collector Note, and also with illustration 5 "all metal not marked issue knife" in Cole III page 158

Moyses and Shadbolt in their article: "*The Elusive MI9 Escape Knife*" have also noted that there are examples of the escape knife with the letter M "*stamped at the bottom of the inside arm of the wire cutter*". The knife in the adjacent photo is similarly stamped – see following photo. My other example of this knife (which is in 'relic' condition) is not so marked.



Note that the Adrian Van Dyk article (see [Appendix 3](#)) suggests that the M stamped knife “is thought to be a pattern piece that was used to check against production specimens to see if they conformed to specifications. The “M” is thought to stand for “model” or “master”. Also, Cole’s illustration of what is assumed to be this same knife refers to it as: “No.2 Factory Pattern – all metal is bright except the three saw blades”. Given however that one of my knives is similarly stamped, and to the best of my knowledge

was the property of an Australian commando officer during WW2, it is probable that such “M” stamped knives were not a one-off or factory pattern example. Bernard Levine, in private correspondence, has suggested that the stamp is not an M and is perhaps “more nearly a W” or possibly some other unknown stamping. I consider that there is merit in this suggestion and hopefully further research can shine some light on its meaning.



The adjacent example belongs to an escape knife in relic condition that is currently (December 2021) offered for sale by a UK dealer; this is the first example that I have seen that doesn’t appear to be double-stamped and distinctly shows the letter **M** in a serif font.

#### 5.4.2 [Geo. Ibberson & Co.](#)

In an on-line article: “*The Fanciful World of OSS Weapons & Equipment*” by Les Hughes (source: *insigne.org*) the author provides details on how to distinguish between Ibberson escape knives and Rodgers escape knives - as follows: “A number of years ago, Mr. Billy Ibberson told me the way to do it. He said: “The Rodgers knives have a pretty sharp point on the backs of the saw blades. We smoothed ours off; ours have a slight curve”. I have not physically inspected an actual example of an assumed Ibberson escape knife, and an on-line search of Google Images (search: OSS/SOE escape knives) indicates that most images are clearly of knives having “a pretty sharp point on the backs of the saw blades” (i.e. they are Joseph Rodgers knives).

There is however one obvious example - shown in Silvey’s book “*Pocket Knives of the United States Military*”<sup>13</sup> (page 77) where all of the “backs of the saw blades ... [have] a slight curve”. See photo following:



It is interesting to speculate whether most of the knives with a “slight curve” to the backs of the saw blades are held by US collectors, which could indicate that the Ibberson knives were supplied to the OSS. Such a conclusion is also supported by Cole III page 159 in the following terms “NOTE: it is also said that Geo. Ibberson of Sheffield made

the O.S.S. Escape Knife”. Flook has advised that in-reality the OSS “obtained them from the British ... with only very few being asked for or received”. Flook’s point being that OSS did not contract directly with a UK manufacturer but sourced the knives from the UK Ministry of Supply, and that the actual number supplied to the OSS was small. To add to the confusion however, there are examples of Escape Knives found in a Google Images search

that appear to show both the sharp and rounded condition on the hacksaw blades on the one knife.

The following photo is of an Escape knife in my collection. It is in 'relic' condition but two of the hacksaw blades have clearly been rounded on the topside – perhaps a field modification by the original owner?



Source: Author's collection

A word of caution: my notes here regarding **Ibberson** are gathered from known sources (i.e. not from any original research by me) and therefore are not a basis for forming definitive conclusions. In line with other commentators, I concur with the view that Ibberson's role in the manufacture of the escape knife is still a matter of conjecture. I am aware of research undertaken by Dr John Brenner

regarding the OSS escape knife - and published in his book "*OSS Weapons*" but I have not seen a copy. This is an issue that deserves more detailed research in term of the role of the **Ibberson** knife in the total OSS/SOE narrative.

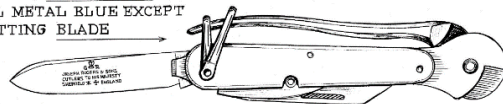
## 5.5 [Phase 4: Post WWII – 1950s.](#)

### 5.5.1 [Joseph Rodgers & Sons "All-Purpose" Knife.](#)

In an article "*Makers of SOE Knives revealed*"<sup>14</sup> by Ron Flook in September 2012 edition of Knife World (page. 29), he details his research of the Contract Record Books in the Archive of the Ministry of Supply that have become available from the UK Public Records Office. According to Flook, the Archive indicates that "... in December 1952, a contract was placed with Joseph Rodgers for 250 of these knives" – assumed to be the "ALL-PURPOSE" knife which is the 'official' name of what we collectors call the OSS/SOE Escape Knife – see [section 3](#). "DESCRIPTION" at the start of this Collector Note.

I am unaware of any other documentation regarding this 1952 contract knife, and Flook also raises the question at the conclusion of his article: "... why and for whom were knives associated with the SOE (which had been disbanded in 1946) still being ordered in 1952?". I have no precise answer to such question – except perhaps to observe that the date 1952 corresponds with the start of the "*Mau Mau*" terrorist 'uprising' (independence movement) in the then British colony of Kenya, and perhaps the knives were considered by the UK Ministry of Supply as being suitable for UK military and/or police Special Branch personnel engaged in the conflict. I can however suggest a candidate for the knife: being that illustrated as: "*No. 4. Trial piece all metal blue except cutting blade*" on page 158 of Coles III – as detailed in the previous [section 5.4.1](#) of this Collector Note. A copy of the illustration follows:

NO. 4 TRIAL PIECE  
ALL METAL BLUE EXCEPT  
CUTTING BLADE



158

My reasoning for this suggestion is that the knives detailed in Cole III (page 158) were obtained by Bill Adams in the late 1960s during the closure of the Joseph Rodgers business, which is 15 or so

years after the Ministry of Supply contract was awarded to Rodgers – probably enough time for there to be vagaries regarding the exact details of contract, and of the role of the knife in illustration No.4. This doesn't mean that the description attributed to the factory workers is incorrect, as it may also have been the "factory pattern" for the knives in the 1952 contract – especially given that the blade stamping of illustration 4 above is not consistent with the blade stamping shown in illustration No.1; my assumption being that all main elements of the escape knife that were part of the pre-production process (in 1942) would likely be the same – especially the blade stamping which is the more simple "Joseph Rodgers and Sons".



I am aware of three probable examples of this knife: the first is the photo on page 76 of Mike Silvey's book "Pocket Knives of the United States Military", see photo extract following, noting that the main blade is shown as well-worn and bright whereas the rest of the knife is blued, however the blade is clearly stamped: "G[crown]R" together with the text "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY SHEFFIELD \*+

ENGLAND" - being the same as the knife in Cole's illustration No.4.



The second is a knife sold by a UK auction house in March 2016 that is totally consistent with the detailed description of the "all purpose" knife referenced in [section 3](#) "DESCRIPTION" of this Collector Note, except that it is also blade stamped as for the knife in Cole's illustration No.4. (see following photos sourced from the internet). It is unclear from the photos whether the master blade is "bright" or blued.

I have on-file details derived from an internet search of another knife sold by a UK auction house that appears to be identical to the above, see photos adjacent. All of which suggests



to me that this knife was produced in sufficient quantities by Joseph Rodgers that could equate to a military contract. All of this however is conjecture on my part until further examples of the "ALL-PURPOSE" escape knife with a stamped main blade are found - hopefully!

Although, given that there were only 250 pieces specified in the Ministry of Supply contract, this is probably unlikely.

### 5.5.2 [Joseph Rodgers 'multitool knife'](#) (my name for it).



I purchased this knife in late 2019 from a UK dealer 'JC Militaria' because it was the only other example of a Joseph Rodgers knife that I am aware of that also incorporates the "ECLIPSE" style hacksaw blades - that I believe were first used in the (so called) **Rodgers' "sawblade" knife** in the early 1930s as detailed in [section 5.3.1](#) above, and subsequently incorporated into the **OSS/SOE Escape Knife** in the early 1940s. The knife was described by the

dealer as: "a Joseph Rodgers & Sons of Sheffield pocketknife with a blade, 2 saw blades, a pricker and a can opener. One end of the knife has a screwdriver, and the other end has a lanyard ring. The grips are made of stippled gutta percha and are undamaged".

A photo of an identical knife (together with a variant - see knife 12 in the "VISUAL SUMMARY OF THE FULL SET OF KNOWN EXAMPLES" in [section 8](#) following) is included in the article by Adrian Van Dyk (page 17) discussed above and included here as [Appendix 3](#).

Ron Flook has advised me as follows: *“These Rodgers multi tool knives have incorrectly been attributed by Van Dyk as experimental OSS knives. There are two variants of this knife and I have owned both types. However, the grip material is not Gutta Percha but some other form of plastic material and in addition the grip stippled pattern is the same as that used on the RAF flight suit knives from the post war years. (1960's/70's)”*. Flook also advised: *“Although there is no firm evidence to support this, I am sure these were an attempt by Rodgers to produce some form of survival knife for the Military that was never adopted”*. In support of this conclusion by Flook I note that the can opener configuration is a of post-war type. If this is correct, it can be assumed that this Joseph Rodgers “multitool” knife (and its variant) perhaps marks the 1950s – 1960s conclusion of the evolution of the escape knife that commenced with the production of the Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633” in the early 1900s; that is, the final chapter in the OSS/SOE Escape Knife narrative.

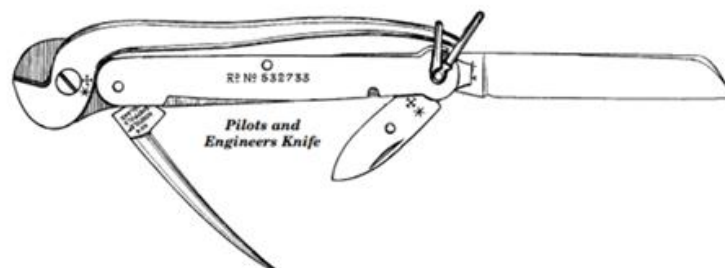
Confirmation of this RAF connection was recently (December 2021) provided by UK collector Neil Champion who advised that his late father was, for most of his working life, involved in research and development of aircraft related equipment – firstly with the RAF, and later with BAC and RAE. Neil recalled that *“On several occasions in the 1970s he produced from his pockets examples of the J Rodgers type A hack saw bladed “multitool” shown in your article, he said that they had been put into Survival kits on the Aircraft for a short while (trial) but were not used anymore and sat in their stores.”* Neil also added *“My personal take on these knives is that they could have only been prototype/trials pieces as until more recent times hardly any were evident in collecting/research circles, and they aren’t exactly numerous now”*. Based on this first-hand knowledge I consider it safe to assume that these knives were only ever a prototype and not produced in commercial quantities. It is however unclear if this same role can be applied to Variant 2, or whether it was intended as an update of Variant 1 that never proceeded.

## 6 [LOOSE ENDS](#)

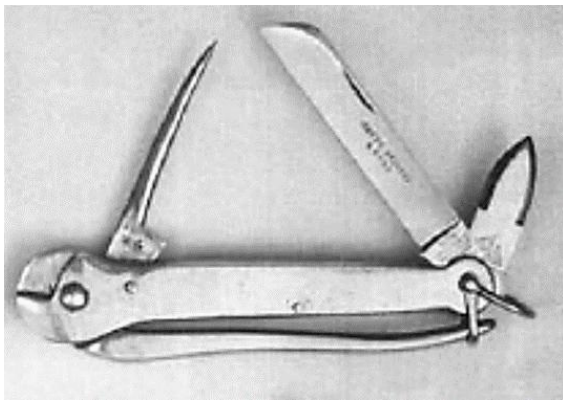
There are other knives that I am aware of that possibly have some valid connection to this **OSS/SOE Escape Knife** evolution narrative, but which are not part of the mainstream, as follows:

### 6.1 [Joseph Rodgers “Pilots and Engineers” knife.](#)

I have included this knife because of the wire cutter – which is common to all principal knife patterns associated with the evolution of the OSS/SOE Escape Knife. There are however significant differences between this and the escape knife that need to be considered. There appear to be only two known examples of this knife that I am aware of: the first is in an article by Bill Karsten: “US. MILITARY FOLDING KNIVES” originally published in KNIFE WORLD in July 1981 and also included in the book: MILITARY KNIVES – A REFERENCE BOOK<sup>15</sup>. The illustration below is copied from that book. Karsten describes the knife on page 215 as follows: *“The plated pilot’s and engineers’ knife consisted of a four and one-eighth inch sheepfoot blade, can opener, marlin spike, wire cutters, screwdriver and a bail. Closed, it measured six and seven-eighths inches. It bore the name of Joseph Rodgers, the star and cross trademark, and was marked “GR” indicating it was made during the reign of King George VI, 1936-1952”*.



Source: “Military Knives – a reference book” page 215



The second example is a photo (adjacent) copied from the first illustration in the article "*Knives of the OSS*" by Adrian Van Dyke (see [Appendix 3](#)) and is described as "a knife usually referred to as a "*Pilots and Engineer's knife*"; I assume it was one of the knives obtained by Bill Adams from the Joseph Rodgers factory in the late 1960s – as detailed elsewhere in the Collector Note. I am not aware of any other documentation regarding this knife. It is possible that the illustration

taken from the Kasten article is actually of the knife in the above photo.

The matters for consideration include the following:

1. The Registered Design number stamped on the scale is: "Rd. No.532733" which indicates a date of 1908. As with other "Rd. No." discussed elsewhere in the Collector Note, it is unclear as to which element of the knife the date refers to – is it just the scales, the wire cutters, or the knife as a whole? Note that the Royal Flying Corps (the forerunner of the RAF) was formed in April 1912 – four years after the 1908 date associated with the Rd. No.
2. The size of the knife and some of its components are significantly larger than for the escape knife; for example: the length closed is "*six and seven-eighths inches*" whereas the escape knife is 5½ inches; the main blade "*consisted of a four and one-eighth inch sheepfoot blade*" whereas the escape knife blade was always a spearpoint blade and 2 ½ inches long.
3. The frame and overall shape of the knife has more similarity to a 'Champagne pattern multiblade' knife than to an "escape knife".
4. Dating the knife is difficult; the Rd. No. indicates a date of 1908 (a date for what - is not known); Karsten however suggest that the "GR" is a reference to the reign of King George VI, whereas it could equally apply to the reign of King George V (1910 – 1936).
5. The stamping on the blade is "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS" which is the same as all four versions of the Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633" that were manufactured from c.1900 to c.1930.
6. If the knife was in-fact of the post-WW2 era, it may also be a candidate for the 1952 UK Ministry of Supply contract with Joseph Rodgers for the supply of 250 "general purpose" knives as detailed earlier in this Collector Note in reference to an article by Ron Flook in the September 2012 edition of Knife World (page 29.)

Given these considerations, and in the absence of any further examples, it is suggested that any connection to the OSS/SOE Escape Knife is tenuous. At best, it may be that the "Pilots and Engineers" knife was developed in parallel with the pre-WW2 versions of the escape knife.



Recently (October 2021) I was contacted by U.S. collector Steve Fox – who is the proud owner of the 'pilots and engineers knife shown in the adjacent photo (together with an OSS/SOE Escape Knife for comparison). Steve has advised that he became aware of these knives in the 1970s when two examples became available for sale over the space of a few months – one of

which he purchased. He has also advised that "*About 5 or 6 years ago one came up for auction in California. That is the 3rd one, however there is always the possibility that it*

could be the first one that I did not buy, in which case there would be only two that I know of. The one in the auction was in the same condition as mine, appearing in excellent or unused condition". I am not aware of other examples of this knife, so I doubt that the 'pilots and engineers' knife was produced in commercial quantities.

## 6.2 [Joseph Rodgers 'modern wire cutter knife'](#) (my name for it).

This knife is certainly a mystery. It was initially observed by me during an internet search of Google images, which showed that it was sold on eBay by a well-respected US dealer "NorthWest Knives and Collectibles" in November 2011 under the heading: "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS, MULTI-BLADED BRITISH MILITARY KNIFE, c. 1890-1910", and which generated extensive bidding interest. The full description by the seller states: "4 ¾" MULTI-BLADE BRITISH MILITARY KNIFE (PATTERN FOR OSS ESCAPE KNIFE), master flat spear blade, British style can opener, wire-cutter pliers on the pommel, handle running the length of the knife, with spring. We have never seen one of these scarce knives with the spring on the plier handle. Two bails. One is for fastening the pliers. Stamped "G Crown R, Cutlers to His Majesty." Bright stainless scales, with a few light scratches. NEAR MINT CONDITION". Interestingly, it appears that this same knife was previously included in the November 2000 sales catalog produced by "NorthWest Knives and Collectibles" previously mentioned in this Collector Note (see [Appendix 5](#) for details) as being part of a seven-knife collection owned Adrian Van Dyk and featured in his article "Knives of the OSS" in the "The American Blade" magazine dated May/June, 1975 (see [Appendix 4](#)).



The only information provided by Van Dyke was the description "unknown variant". It is generally acknowledged however that this knife was part of the group obtained from the Joseph Rodgers factory by Bill Adams in the late 1960s – as previously discussed, and later sold to Van Dyk. The knife has the same general characteristics as the Early 20th Century – Rodgers' "Military Knife P.1633." (see [section 5.2 "Phase 1"](#) above) however based on the scant

information provided there are several concerns that suggest any actual role in the 'evolution of the escape knife' is limited, as follows:

1. The seller's description suggests that the overall length of the knife is "4 ¾", whereas the standard for all versions of the escape knife is 5 ½ inches.
2. There is no stamping of the Rd. No. 354051 on the scales.
3. The scales are described as "bright stainless steel" whereas the Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633." had nickel silver scales.
4. The wire cutter spring mechanism is different to the standard escape knife
5. The 'style' of the knife is similar to the "Military Knife P.1633" however the two-bail configuration is from the so-called "wire cutter" version and also the escape knife.
6. The wire cutters are not stamped with the Joseph Rodgers logo whereas the early commercial versions of the escape knife are so stamped.

Given that the knife's provenance is known, and on the basis that no other known examples have been identified, my assumption is that this was a one-off trial knife assembled by Rodgers, possibly to ascertain if there was interest from the military establishment, but which didn't proceed to production.

## 6.3 [Joseph Rodgers 'parts knife'](#) (my name for it).

This knife is much less of a mystery than the one discussed previously. It was sold on eBay in February 2015 under the heading "Antique Joseph Rodgers of Sheffield wire cutter

knife” and also generated extensive bidding interest. The seller described it as follows: *“This is a scarce Joseph Rodgers knife combined with wire cutters. Blade is marked Joseph Rodgers and No.6 Norfolk Street Sheffield England, button hook is marked GR Cutlers to his Majesty. Nickel silver scales marked RD 354051, which is the registered design number. The knife is well worn and with pitting, chip to one side of the wire cutters, I think it is missing its bail to retain the wire cutters when not in use. Later modified versions of this knife had saw blades and were used by SOE in WW2. A hard to find Rodgers tool”*



I have several concerns regarding this knife for the following reasons:

1. The obvious one – as acknowledged by the seller, is that it is “missing” (in fact never had) the two-bail mechanism - that was an essential component (albeit in three different forms) of all versions of the escape knife. Why would Joseph Rodgers produce such a knife that lacked a bail necessary to retain the wire cutter handle in the closed position?
2. A button hook was never a component of any known version of the escape knife, apart from this single example (see more recent information following).
3. The earliest nickel silver scales version of the escape knife was displayed in both the circa early 1900s and the circa 1912 versions of the Joseph Rodgers sales catalog, however this knife is not displayed in either catalog.
4. The nickel silver scales for this knife appear to be from the so-called “Rodgers’ “sawblade” knife from the early 1930s – as such scales were not intended to house the tin opener pin. Further, an examination of a Joseph Rodgers catalog assumed to be from the 1930s does not show this knife nor any knife that includes a “button hook” - possibly because button hooks were considered to be a redundant item by that date.
5. All three of the pins in the scales appear different to the pins in the earlier nickel scale versions of the escape knife, and also appear to be replacements.
6. There are no other known examples of this pattern.

These reasons lead me to the conclusion that the knife is assembled from parts, and if correct - it has no role to play in the evolution of the OSS/SOE escape knife. Note however that the Second Edition of this Collector Note included details of a previously unknown variation of Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633” which includes a button hook – see [section 5.2.3](#) “Second variant” above.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

This Collector Note describes my understanding regarding the evolution of the OSS/SOE Escape Knife from its beginnings as a private purchase “Military Wire Cutter knife” manufactured by Joseph Rodgers in the late Victorian era, through an intermediate stage in the 1930s when the sawblades were introduced, to its final form as an “All Purpose” tool supplied to “secret agents” operating behind enemy lines during World War 2, and possibly again produced in the early 1950s. The Collector Note is an attempt to ‘join the dots’ between the various pieces of information that are now available.

All versions of the of the escape knife as described in this Note are highly regarded by collectors and have always been quite difficult to collect. The great majority of the earlier nickel silver scale versions of the knife that do become available to collectors appear to be in quite good condition. In contrast, the wartime version (i.e. the actual “escape knife”) is commonly found with broken or missing sawblades. This should be acknowledged as a common characteristic of the knife – rather than be seen as a negative, as these knives were designed for hard work and the sawblades were perhaps provided in triplicate to compensate for their vulnerability to damage.



The lack of definitive documentary evidence regarding the knives in each of the presumed four stages in the evolution of the escape knife (apart from as described above), is the main hindrance to the completion of this narrative. If any collector has examples or information that may assist in the documentation – I am sure that the collector community would be most grateful if they would publicise such information on any of the suitable websites available on the internet.

## 8 VISUAL SUMMARY OF THE FULL SET OF KNOWN EXAMPLES

The following is a depiction of my contrarian history of the evolution of OSS/SOE Escape knife based on the currently available evidence – as I interpret it. All knives are in the Author’s collection unless stated otherwise. It would be greatly appreciated if any collector with suitable photos of the missing items 2 and 4 could provide them to me for inclusion in this schedule.

1



**Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633.”**

Original “Flat latch” version – dated c.1900 to c.1902.

Queen Victoria stamp.

Examples noted have the blade stamped JOSEPH “RODGERS & SONS” and the tang of the can opener stamped “RODGERS CUTLERS TO HER MAJESTY”. One side of the wire-cutter head is stamped with the Rodgers logo, as is the reverse side of the tin opener.

2

NO PHOTO AVAILABLE  
Visually identical to the above

**Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633.”**

Original “Flat latch” version – dated c.1902 to c.1905 (assumed date, no details available)

King Edward VII stamp

Examples noted all have the blade stamped JOSEPH “RODGERS & SONS” and the tang of the can opener stamped “E[crown]R RODGERS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY”. One side of the wire-cutter head is stamped with the Rodgers logo, as is the reverse side of the tin opener

3



**Joseph Rodgers & Sons - probable non-military variation**

Original “Flat latch” version – given the lack of specific details regarding this knife it is difficult to provide a possible date, however a range of 1900 – c.1905 is suggested – being the assumed range for all known version of the flat latch version.

4

NO PHOTO AVAILABLE  
Visually identical to knife 5 following

**Joseph Rodgers “Military Knife P.1633.”**

First variant– assume dated circa 1905 – circa 1911.

King Edward VII stamp

Examples noted all have the blade stamped JOSEPH “RODGERS & SONS” and the tang of the can opener stamped E[crown]R RODGERS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY”. One side of the wire-cutter head is stamped with the Rodgers logo, as is the reverse side of the tin opener

5



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**First variant**— assume dated circa 1911 – circa 1914.

King George V stamp

Examples noted all have the blade stamped JOSEPH "RODGERS & SONS" and the tang of the can opener stamped G[crown]R RODGERS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY". One side of the wire-cutter head is stamped with the Rodgers logo, as is the reverse side of the tin opener.

6



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**Second variant**— assume dated circa 1914 – circa 1930.

King George V stamp

Examples noted all have the blade stamped JOSEPH "RODGERS & SONS" and the tang of the can opener stamped G[crown]R RODGERS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY". One side of the wire-cutter head is stamped with the Rodgers logo, as is the reverse side of the tin opener.

7



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**Unknown variant**— assume dated circa 1914 – circa 1930.

King George V stamp

The blade shows remnants of the JOSEPH "RODGERS & SONS" and the tang of the can opener is stamped G[crown]R RODGERS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY". One side of the wire-cutter head is stamped with the Rodgers logo, as is the reverse side of the tin opener.

8



**Joseph Rodgers & Sons**

**"Sawblade" knife.** Assume dated circa 1930s. No reference to a Monarch but assumed to be during the reign of King George V (died 1936).

Examples noted all have the main blade stamped JOSEPH "RODGERS & SONS" and the tang stamped "No. 6 NORFOLK ST SHEFFIELD ENGLAND". One side of the wire-cutter head is stamped with the Rodgers logo.

9



**Joseph Rodgers & Sons**

**OSS/SOE Escape Knife** - (known officially as the **"ALL-PURPOSE" KNIFE**), circa 1942 – 1945. Unmarked ("sterile") although some examples such as this one have been noted with the letter M "stamped at the bottom of the inside arm of the wire cutter".

10



**Joseph Rodgers & Sons**

**"ALL-PURPOSE" KNIFE – post-WW2 version**

Identical to above, apart from the main blade which appears to be uncoated metallic on some examples and blued on others, assume dated 1952.

The blade is stamped "G crown R" together with the text "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS CUTLERS TO HIS MAJESTY SHEFFIELD \*+"

11



**Joseph Rodgers 'multitool knife'**, assume circa 1950s - 1960s.

**Version A**

The cutting blade is stamped "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS" and the tang is stamped with the Rodgers logo on the mark side and "SHEFFIELD ENGLAND" on the pile side. The relevance of this knife in the OSS/SOE escape knife narrative is still a matter of conjecture.

12



SOURCE: photo courtesy of Ron Flook

**Joseph Rodgers 'multitool knife'**, assume circa 1950s - 1960s.

**Version B**

The cutting blade is stamped "JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS" and the tang is stamped with the Rodgers logo on the mark side and "SHEFFIELD ENGLAND" on the pile side.

Note that the tin/bottle opener blade is a wartime version, whereas Version A (above) is post-war. The relevance of this knife in the OSS/SOE escape knife narrative is still a matter of conjecture.

## 9 [CONTEXT](#)

For me, understanding the context surrounding the evolution of a knife pattern or style, where possible, adds to the enjoyment of ownership. In regard to the OSS/SOE Escape Knife, one way of doing this is to identify other knives from the same era that appear to be designed for a similar purpose. I have identified two knives in my accumulation that have some similarities to the OSS/SOE Escape Knife and/or to those that preceded it, as follows:



1. **Barnett Plyer Knife** manufacture by the "O. BARNETT TOOL CO. NEWARK NJ" which is stamped on the tang of the cutting blade, together with "TRADE HHH MARK" stamped on the arm of the plyer. Length closed is 4.125 inches. What is of interest is that copyright for the knife was registered in 1900 which is the same as the date of the Registered Design for

the original Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."

Source: Author's collection



2. **John Watts wire cutter knife**, having "JOHN WATTS SHEFFIELD ENGLAND" stamped on the tang of the cutting blade and WATT'S PATENT stamped on the arm of the wire-cutter. Length closed is 4.5 inches. It is difficult to date this knife, but note that the tin opener is that same as was in common usage in WW1 and most of the components (except the cutting blade) are

nickel-plated which suggests that it was made most likely between the introduction of commercial Ni plating electrolyte in 1916 and the late 1920s, and therefore perhaps should also be viewed in the context of the original Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."

Source: Author's collection

## 10 [ACKNOWLEDGEMENT](#)

The technical knowledge and advice provided by UK collectors and commentators Ron Flook and Martin Cook, and US knife expert Bernard Levine greatly assisted me in understanding the broader links in the OSS/SOE Escape Knife narrative, which ensured that this Collector Note is far more comprehensive than I had initially envisaged.

## 11 [UPDATES, ELABORATIONS & CORRECTIONS](#)

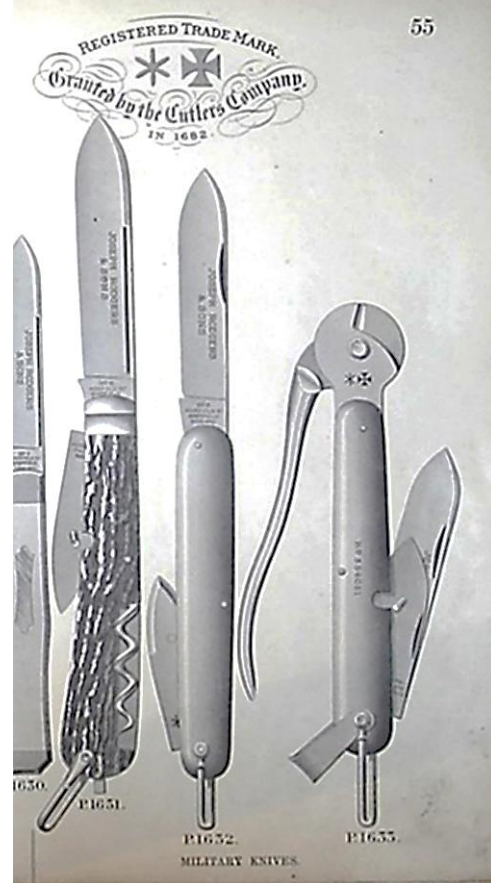
Much of the value of 'web notes' such as this **Collector Note** lie in their ability to be regularly updated, elaborated and corrected, so that in-reality there is no final version – it is in-fact a *'never-ending story'*. My purpose is to assist in filling the knowledge gap regarding antique Sheffield pocket knives and folding knives that was very apparent to me all through my collecting years - to encourage/assist new collectors, and to generally promote the pleasure associated with such collecting. To this end, any suggestions/contributions that fellow collectors may have that will improve the content of this **Collector Note** and thus expand the knowledge base will be most welcome, and I am sure will be greatly appreciated by all present and future collectors of the **OSS/SOE Escape Knife**.

## 12 [AUTHOR](#)

Lawrie Wilson

### [APPENDIX 1: Joseph Rodgers "Military Knives" patterns](#)

The following is a screen-snip taken from the Joseph Rodgers & Sons catalog circa early 1900s (page 55) showing the three knives that are designated as "MILITARY KNIVES", being pattern Nos: P.1651, P.1652 and P.1653. It appears that an identical illustration was used in the circa 1912 Joseph Rodgers catalog.

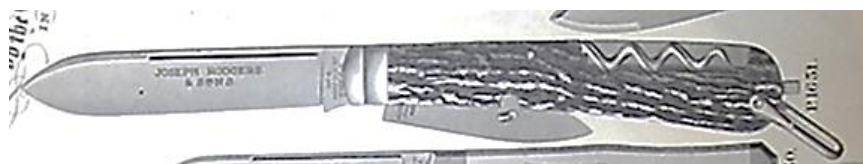


Source: Authors manuscript collection

As far as can be currently ascertained, knife **P.1633** was the first Joseph Rodgers knife to incorporate the wire cutter tool - that 40 years later evolved into the "OSS/SOE Escape knife".

These three knives may also have been the first Joseph Rodgers knives to incorporate a tin opener tool. Interestingly, the "service knives" produced by Rodgers for WW1 incorporated a slightly different tin opener – that was both shorter and broader, whereas the knives that evolved from the P.1653 knife continued with this longer version through to the early 1950s.

Regarding knife **P.1632** (see next page), after many years of searching I have finally obtained an example from a UK based dealer. Regarding knife **P.1631** (see following), I have been able to collect two examples – both well worn, but ultimately easy to recognise. See photos following, with a copy of the catalog image for comparison:





Source: Author's collection



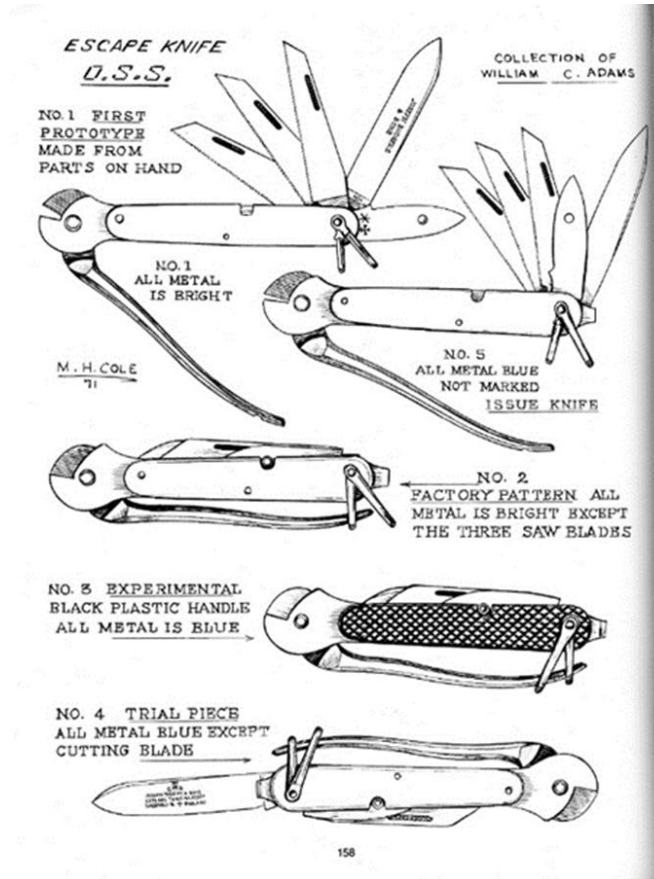
Source: Author's collection

## [APPENDIX 2: Coles III, pages 158 & 159.](#)

(together with additional Collector Note comments).

**Availability to collectors** – based on observations documented elsewhere in this Collector Note:

### PAGE 158



**Illustration No.1** – “*First prototype made from parts*”. This is probably a one-off and can be distinguished from the earlier “sawblade” knife by the inclusion of tin-opener tool - and consequently the nickel silver scales are from the original Rodgers’ “Military Knife P.1633”.

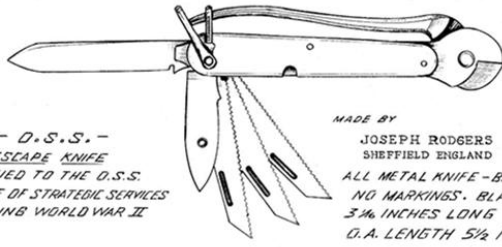
**Illustration No.2** – “*Factory pattern all metal is bright except the saw blades*”. This is a pre-production item and therefore would have been produced in very limited quantities.

**Illustration No.3** – “*Experimental black plastic handle all metal is blue*”. This is most likely a one-off item. It is shown in the Van Dyk article but was not included in the later North West Knives sales catalog dated Nov. 2000.

**Illustration No.4** – “*Trial piece all metal is blue except the cutting blade*”. The role of this knife in the OSS/SOE Escape Knife narrative is described earlier in the Collector Note under the heading 1. Escape knife – ‘All purpose’ version’ in the

[section 5.5](#) “Phase 4: Post WWII – 1950s”. Based on evidence that there have been two sales in recent years of what appears to be an identical knife, together with a photo of a similar knife in Silvey’s book “*Pocket Knives of the United States Military*”, it is assumed that this knife was produced in sufficient quantities (i.e. 250) to fulfill a military contract and therefore is available to collectors – albeit that production numbers were in-reality quite small.

**Illustration No.5** – “*All metal blue not marked issue knife*”. This is the OSS/SOE Escape Knife, as described in detail on the following page extracted from Cole III – page 159 and is the primary subject of this **Collector Note**.



- D.S.S. -  
 ESCAPE KNIFE  
 ISSUED TO THE D.S.S.  
 OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES  
 DURING WORLD WAR II

MADE BY  
 JOSEPH RODGERS  
 SHEFFIELD ENGLAND  
 ALL METAL KNIFE - BLUED,  
 NO MARKINGS. BLADE IS  
 3 1/16 INCHES LONG AND  
 O.A. LENGTH 5 1/2 INCHES



M. H. COLE  
 72



COLLECTION OF  
 WILLIAM C. ADAMS  
 OF ATLANTA GA.

A FIVE BLADE KNIFE WITH ONE REGULAR CUTTING BLADE, THREE SAW BLADES, AND A CAN OPENER. IT ALSO HAS A SCREW DRIVER AT ONE END AND A PAIR OF WIRE CUTTERS AT THE OTHER. THE ISSUE KNIFE WAS ALL METAL AND BLUED THROUGHOUT, WITH NO MARKS OF ANY KIND. THE SAW BLADES WERE MADE VERY THIN AND COULD EASILY BE BROKEN, WHICH PROBABLY ACCOUNTS FOR THE THREE IDENTICAL BLADES.

NOTE: IT IS ALSO SAID THAT GEO. IBBERTSON OF SHEFFIELD MADE THE D.S.S. ESCAPE KNIFE

THESE KNIVES BELONG TO WILLIAM C. ADAMS OF ATLANTA WHO OBTAINED THEM FROM THE JOSEPH RODGERS FACTORY IN SHEFFIELD ENGLAND. MR ADAMS STATED HE TALKED TO THE OLD TIME FACTORY WORKERS WHO TOLD HIM THESE KNIVES WERE MADE FOR THE AMERICANS DURING W.W.II, AND JOSEPH RODGERS WAS THE ONLY MAKERS OF THESE KNIVES.

BY ADRIAN VAN DYK

In August of 1941, five months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt created a new organization innocuously named The Office of the Coordinator of Information (COI). The head of this organization was William (Wild Bill) Joseph Donovan, a 58 year old millionaire Wall Street lawyer and WWI hero who had received America's three highest decorations. It was his duty to direct an organization that was formed to initiate and carry out espionage, sabotage, "black" propaganda, guerilla warfare and other activities that were considered to be very un-American.

From the start, the effectiveness of the COI was severely hampered by personality conflicts and open hostility among its members. Therefore, in June of 1942 the propaganda division was severed from the COI and became part of a new Office of War Information. The COI was then renamed the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and was given an ambiguous mandate to "plan and operate such special services as may be directed by the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff". Along with this mandate went an almost unlimited budget with which to buy the services of administrators, agents, and all of the necessary material needed to make an espionage agency function. A large chunk of these funds was put into experimental and developmental work to produce better methods and equipment to make this agency function. A portion of this developmental work produced some very interesting knives.

Perhaps the best known knife used by this organization was the OSS escape knife. This was a large pocket knife, measuring 6" long when closed. Its most unusual feature was a plier-type wire cutter that was built right into the knife. In addition to a regular knife blade, it had a British-style can opener, 3 hacksaw blades and a screwdriver. All of the issue

Volume II Number 4 — May/June, 1975

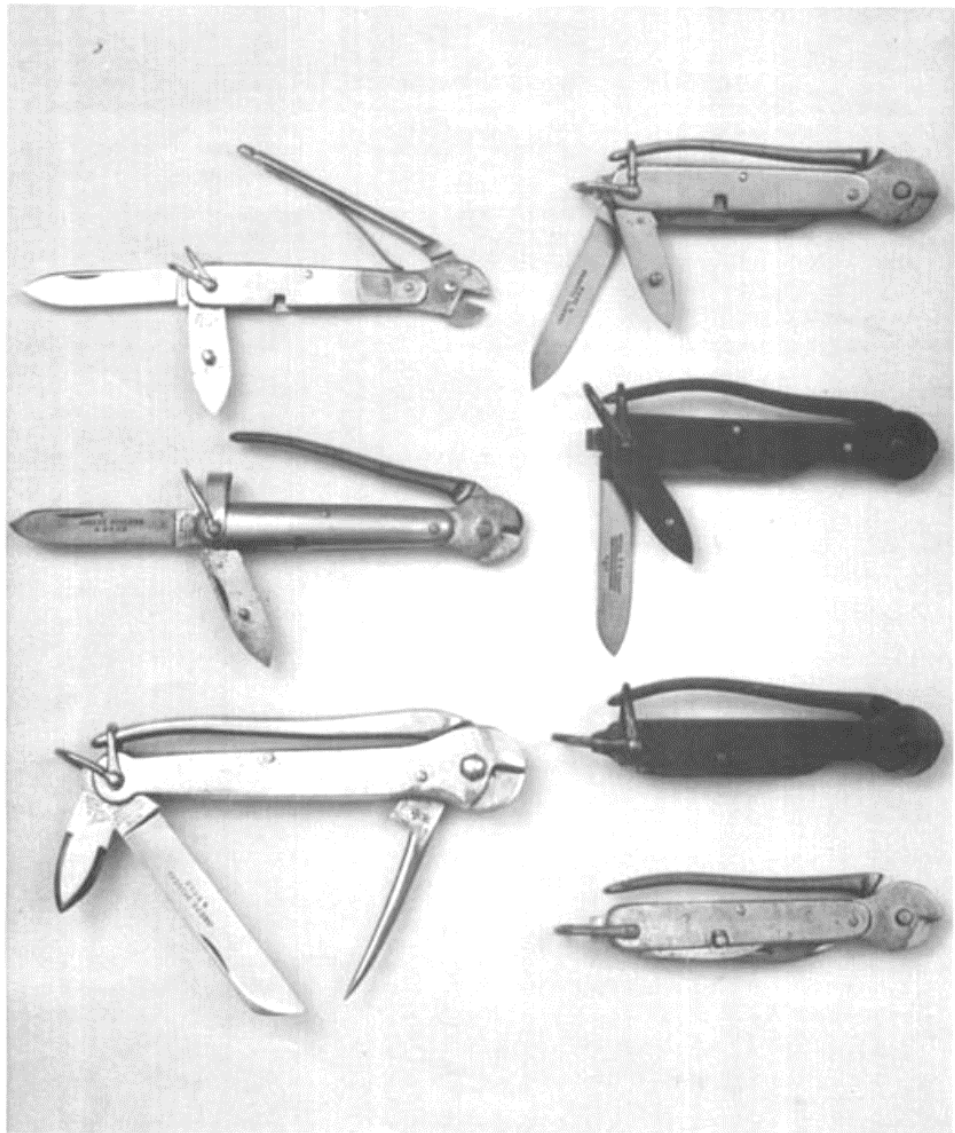
# knives of the OSS

specimens examined were completely blued, and as with most items issued to the OSS, were completely unmarked. This was done so that an agent operating behind enemy lines could not be identified as to country of origin if he was captured or killed. Recently a very small quantity of these knives was obtained from the original manufacturer, namely Joseph Rodgers of Sheffield, England. In this group were several trial pieces and experimental variations of this knife. Some of these were marked with the name of the manufacturer. This was done so that a knife being evaluated could be identified as to its source of manufacture.

The design for the OSS escape knife was taken from a British military knife that was originally manufactured by Joseph Rodgers. A specimen of this knife is illustrated in a turn of the century catalog distributed by this firm. Unlike the final issue version of the OSS escape knife, this knife had oval nickel silver handles, was finished bright, and besides the wire cutters, had only a can opener and standard knife blade. Reportedly only two manufacturers produced the issue version of the OSS escape knife, namely Joseph Rodgers and George Ibberson, both of Sheffield, England.

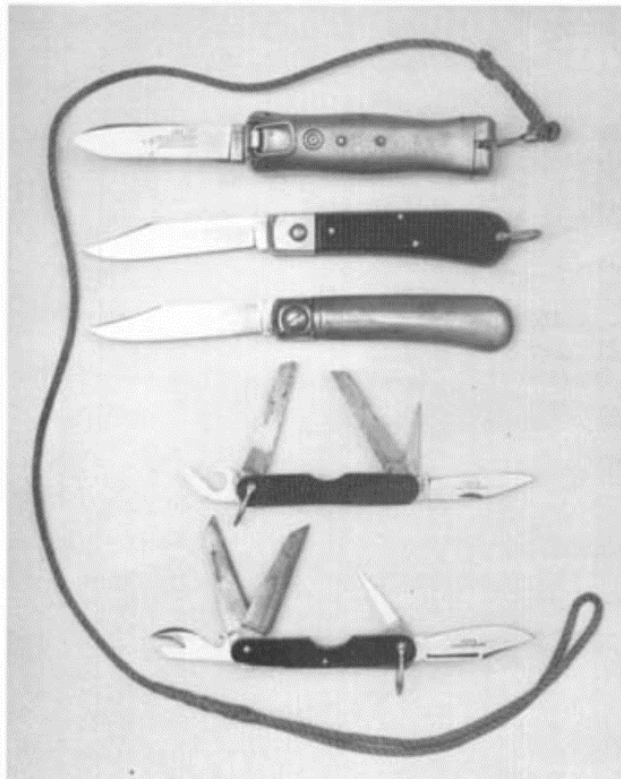
Since OSS agents were often parachuted into enemy territory, a need was seen for a knife that could be used to cut shroud lines or perform other cutting functions in case of emergencies. Typically, parachutists' knives are designed so that they can be used with only one hand. This is a very practical requirement since one arm could easily be broken in a quick descent in rough terrain, or might be needed to prevent a parachutist from falling from a precarious position while he cuts himself free of entanglements with the other. Therefore, the ability to put the knife into action with one hand was set as a criteria for development. Apparently quite a number of styles were tried and evaluated. Some of these were spring operated





*Left group, top to bottom: OSS escape knife, finished bright, the only marking is an "M" stamped on the inside of the wire cutter handle. This piece is thought to be a pattern piece that was used to check against production specimens to see if they conformed to specifications. The "M" is thought to stand for "model" or "master"; experimental variant with black plastic checkered handles; trial piece with the manufacturer's name marked on the blade; this knife is thought to be the first prototype of the OSS escape knife and was made from parts on hand. The handles are made of nickel silver and blades are marked with the normal markings of a commercial knife. Right group, top to bottom: a knife usually referred to as a "Pilot's and Engineer's knife". This is reported to be a WWII period British issue knife; knife on which the design for the OSS escape knife was based (see text); unknown variant.*

**NOTE:** the text at the bottom of the photo does not equate with knives shown. To correct this problem the photo needs to be rotated 180 degrees – then it all makes sense. The following [APPENDIX 4](#) shows this same page with the photo rotated.



*Top to bottom: 3 knives thought to be experimental OSS parachutists' knives, upper specimen is gravity operated and has a gravity operated marlin spike on the other side of the blade; completely unmarked push button spring operated knife with black plastic handles; spring operated knife with solid brass handles. The 2 lower knives are thought to be prototypes for the OSS escape knife. Both knives have 2 hacksaw blades.*

push button knives, while others were gravity operated types. Fortunately a number of the prototypes and experimental pieces developed were rescued from the manufacturers in the late 1960's. Specimens of these can be seen illustrated in "A Primer of Military Knives" by Gordon Hughes & Barry Jenkins, and additional illustrations of variations accompany this article. The parachutist's knife finally selected was a direct copy of the German WWII paratroop gravity knife. It differed from the German version only in that it was completely unmarked and had

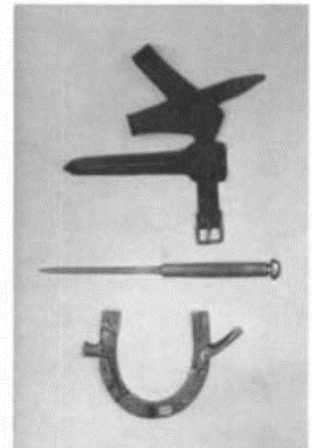
Volume II Number 4 — May/June, 1975

checkered hard rubber handles. As far as is known, the only manufacturer of this knife was George Ibberson.

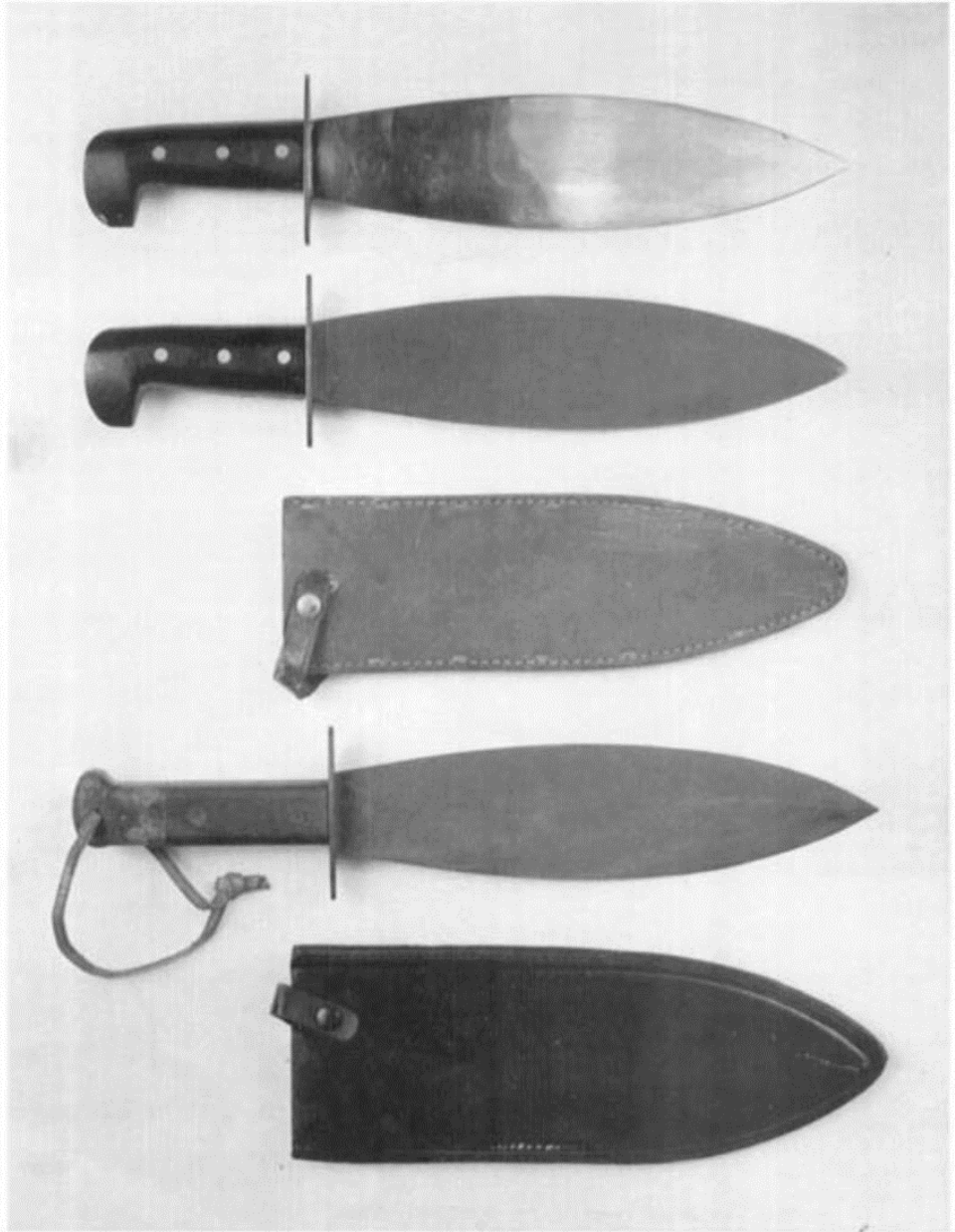
One of the most well known of the British Commando knives was the Fairbairn-Sykes stiletto. A version of this knife was manufactured specifically for the OSS. It had a 6¾" double edged blued blade, solid brass knurled handle and a very unusual sheath. The majority of the sheath was made from a single piece of metal painted olive drab. The metal formed a solid support behind the leather blade casing and formed around

the tip to prevent the knife from coming through and injuring the wearer. The top of the metal was used to affix the sheath to the belt and had 4 slots cut into it so that the sheath could be adjusted to various positions and angles on the belt. A small moon-shaped cut out on this section held a rubber "O" ring that held the handle in place. This portion of the sheath so much resembled a pancake turner that it was given the name "pancake - flapper" sheath by knife collectors. It is thought that this knife was manufactured by Joseph Rodgers.

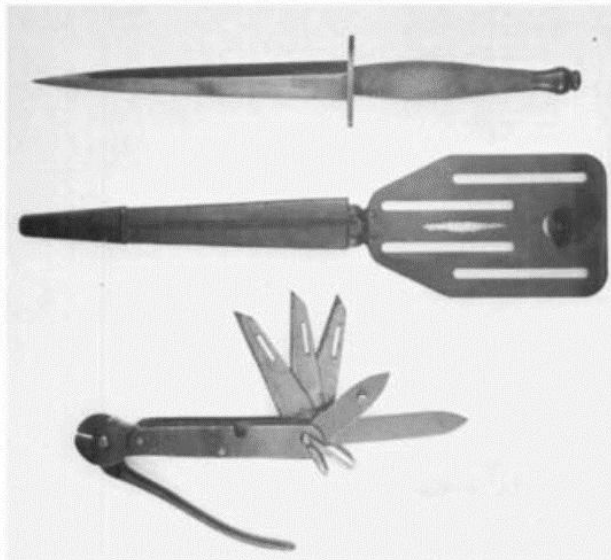
For heavy duty chopping and brush clearing operations the OSS man was issued a "smatchet". The name apparently derived from its intended use since it could serve both as a machete and a hatchet. This knife was probably a design derivation of the Welsh machine gunner's sidearm which is illustrated in the Hughes book previously mentioned. It was also designed as a fighting weapon and techniques for using it in combat are described in the book GET TOUGH by Fairbairn, one of the designers of the Fairbairn-Sykes commando knife. OSS issued ver-



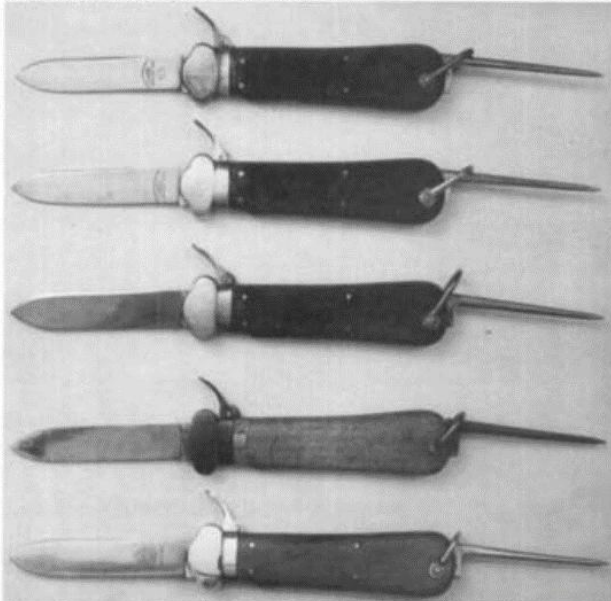
*Top: OSS "spike" or "nail", a small concealable stiletto. Bottom: OSS boot heel knife.*



*Top to Bottom: Bright blade OSS smatchet; very scarce variation of the upper specimen with parkerized blade; wood handled OSS smatchet.*



*Top: OSS stiletto with the "pancake-flapper" sheath. Bottom: standard issue OSS escape knife, completely blued and unmarked.*



*Top to bottom: OSS gravity knife, trial piece with George Ibberson blade markings; variation of blade marking; unmarked issue specimen; WWII German issue, take down model; WWII German issue non-take down model.*

sions were manufactured by Case Cutlery in the U.S. and were completely unmarked. Some variations are encountered that have British military proof marks and these are thought to have been issued to the British commandos.

Various styles of highly concealable knives were also issued, some of them highly unique in design. One was a boot heel knife having 2 blades. The blades were incorporated into a horseshoe shaped cleat that was fastened to the bottom of a combat boot. The idea apparently was to cut the bindings of an agent if he was captured.

The OSS "nail" or "spike" was designed as a hideout assassination weapon of maximum concealability. The knife was made of one piece of metal with a triangular cross section blade. The sheath was designed so that it could be strapped to the arm or leg and still be quickly accessible.

In addition to this, various wrist daggers and lapel daggers were also issued. No specimens were available for study although some photographs do exist. These again were knives of a stiletto pattern, meant to be concealed on the body and used for purposes of assassination and self-defense.

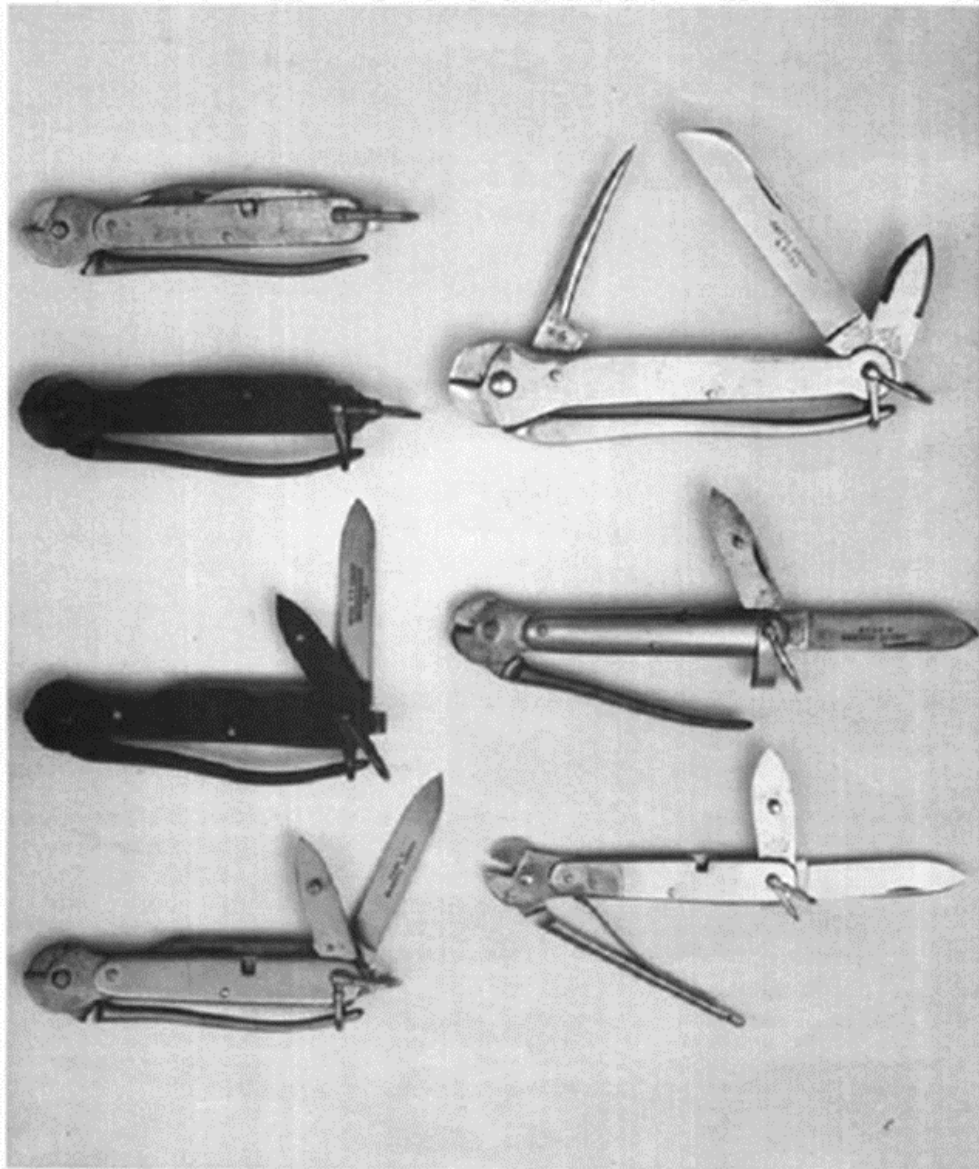
When the OSS was disbanded and the CIA took over the functions previously carried out by this organization, a number of these items were utilized by this new organization. It is known that CIA operatives were issued the OSS stiletto during the Bay of Pigs invasion. It is very likely that some of the other knives described here may have been issued to the CIA also.

This then is the complete story as it is known of knives used by this organization. Should any of our readers have any additional information on knives of this type, we would appreciate hearing from you. *Adrian Van Dyk*



[APPENDIX 4: Copied from article in "The American Blade" magazine Volume 11, Number 4 - May/June 1975. \(Page 16\)](#)

NOTE: The illustration has been rotated 180 degrees to make sense of the description following and includes annotations (in red) that indicate other references.



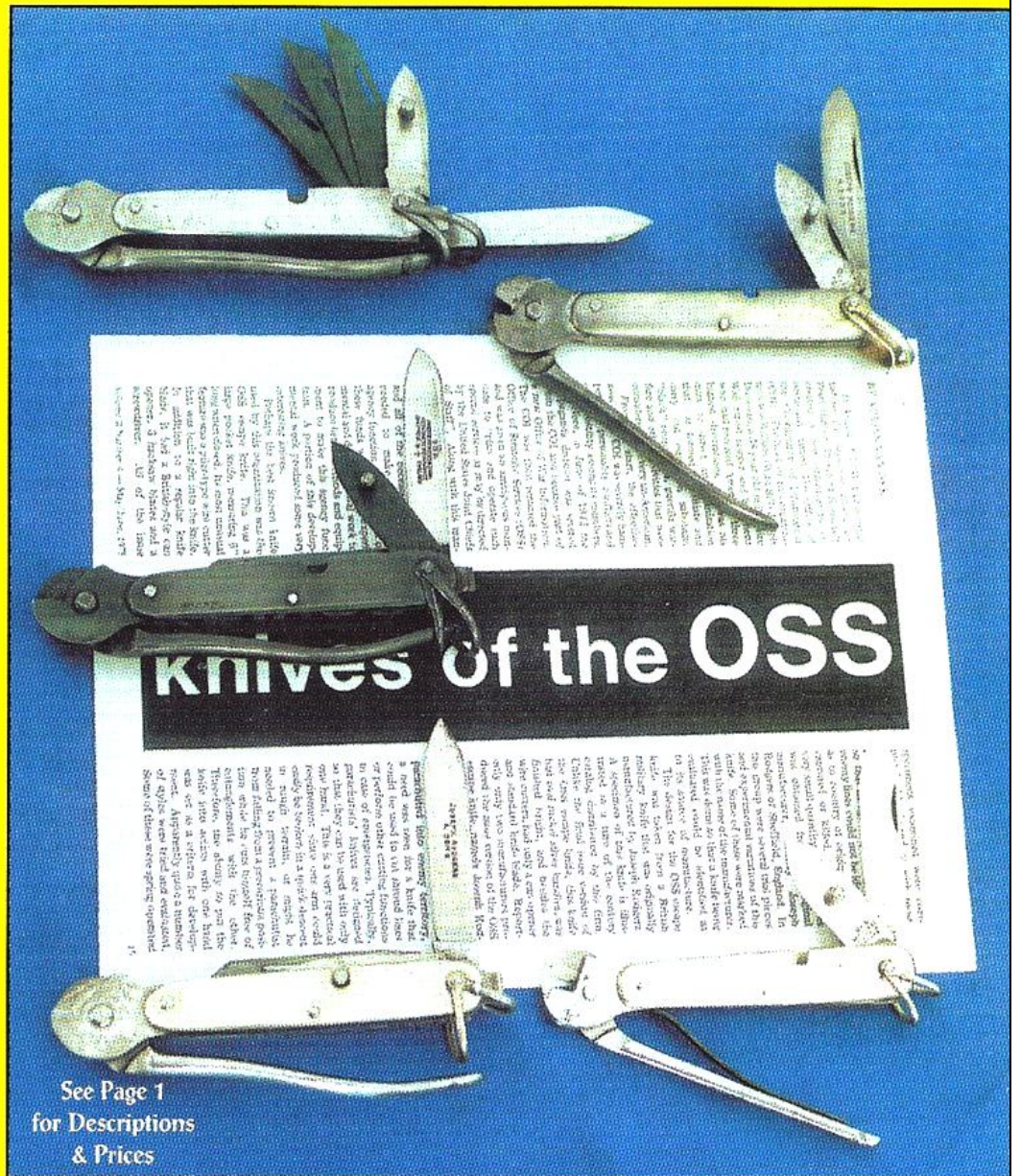
Left group, top to bottom:

1. OSS escape knife, finished bright, the only marking is an "M" stamped on the inside of the wire cutter handle. It had been suggested that this piece was a pattern piece that was used to check against production specimens to see if they conformed to specifications. The "M" is thought to stand for "model" or "master". This suggestion is now in contention; **Cole illustration No.2, also included in NW Knives sales catalog dated Nov. 2000**
2. experimental variant with black plastic checkered handles; **Cole illustration No.3,**
3. *trial piece with the manufacturer's name marked on the blade*; Cole illustration No.4, also included in NW Knives sales catalog dated Nov. 2000
4. this knife is thought to be the first prototype of the OSS escape knife and was made from parts on hand. The handles are made of nickel silver and blades are marked with the normal markings of a commercial knife. **Cole illustration No.1, also included in NW Knives sales catalog dated Nov. 2000**

Right group, top to bottom:

5. a knife usually referred to as a "Pilots and Engineer's knife". **also included in NW Knives sales catalog dated November 2000**
6. This is reported to be a WWII period British issue knife; knife on which the design for the OSS escape knife was based (see text); **also included in NW Knives sales catalog dated Nov. 2000**
7. *unknown variant.* also included in NW Knives sales catalog dated Nov. 2000 and Nov. 2011

[APPENDIX 5: The back cover \(and sales details\) from “North West Knives and Collectibles” November 2000 sales catalog](#)



**BACK COVER**

**2-6. JOSEPH RODGERS & SONS-GROUP OF 5 WELL KNOWN OSS ESCAPE KNIVES**, all of which are pictured on page 16 of "THE AMERICAN BLADE" magazine, Volume II, Number 4, May/June, 1975. There are seven knives pictured on page 16 of the magazine. The picture is part of an article written by noted military collector and military knife expert Adrian Van Dyk. Five of the seven knives pictured in the article are included in this fabulous one of a kind collection. Included in the Article are the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> knives on the left side of the page, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> knives on the right side of the page. The knives are pictured on our cover in the same position as in Adrian Van Dyk's picture of the same knives. This Article makes for outstanding reading and a copy of the Article will accompany the knives. These knives will only be sold as a set. All of the knives are marked J. RODGERS & SONS, with the exception of the master knife which has an "M" stamped on the inside of the plier handle, indicating that this was a "Model" or "Master" knife. Each of the knives has a plier-type wire cutter that is built right into the handle, as well as a master spear blade and a British style can opener. Three of the knives also have three hacksaw blades and a screwdriver. All of the knives have two bails, one for holding the plier handle and the other for a lanyard to attach. These knives are all owned by Adrian Van Dyk and came from his collection. The condition on four of the pieces is mint, and one has some slight sharpening and blade wear. The top knife on the right side of the page in the Article reportedly sold sometime ago for \$3,500.00. The price for the set of five knives is \$ 13,950.00

## APPENDIX 6: Author's collection

1



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**Original "Flat latch" version** – dated c.1901 to c.1902

**Queen Victoria stamp**

This knife has the rough concave finish on the insides of the nickel silver slabs.

2



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**First variant** – assume dated circa 1911 – circa 1914.

**King George V stamp**

This knife has the rough concave finish on the insides of the nickel silver slabs.

3



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**Second variant** – assume dated circa 1914 – circa 1930.

**King George V stamp**

This knife has the smooth finish on the insides of the nickel silver slabs.

4



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**Unknown variant** – assume dated circa 1914 – circa 1930.

**King George V stamp**

This knife has the smooth finish on the insides of the nickel silver slabs

5



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1633."**

**"Sawblade" knife.** Assume dated circa 1930s.

This knife has the smooth finish on the insides of the nickel silver slabs.

6



**Joseph Rodgers & Sons**

**OSS/SOE Escape Knife** - (known officially as the "ALL-PURPOSE" KNIFE), circa 1942 – 1945.

Unused and unsharpened condition, stamped M on the inside arm of the wire cutter.

7



**Joseph Rodgers & Sons  
OSS/SOE Escape Knife** - (known officially as the "ALL-PURPOSE" KNIFE), circa 1942 – 1945.  
'Relic' condition, including the loss of the wire latch which secures the wire cutter from opening, together with a standard bail.

8



**Joseph Rodgers 'multitool knife'**, assume circa 1950s - 1960s.  
**Version A**

9



**Barnett "Plyer" Knife** manufacture by the "O. BARNETT TOOL CO. NEWARK NJ" which is stamped on the tang of the cutting blade, together with "TRADE HHH MARK" stamped on the arm of the plyer. Length closed is 4.125 inches.

10



**John Watts wire cutter knife**, having "JOHN WATTS SHEFFIELD ENGLAND" stamped on the tang of the cutting blade and "WATT'S PATENT" stamped on the arm of the wire-cutter. Length closed is 4.5 inches.

11



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1632"**  
**Original "Flat latch" version** – dated c.1901 to c.1902  
**Queen Victoria stamp**  
This knife has the concave 'rough finish' on the insides of the nickel silver slabs.

12



**Joseph Rodgers "Military Knife P.1631"**  
dated c.1901 to c.1902  
**Queen Victoria stamp**

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> M. H. Cole, U.S. Military Knives, Bayonets and Machetes, Book III. Published by the author, 1979

<sup>2</sup> Ron Flook, British and Commonwealth Military Knives. Howell Press, 1999

<sup>3</sup> "Secret Agent's Handbook of Special Devices" Public Records Office, London 2000

<sup>4</sup> Brian Moyses & Roy Shadbolt "The Elusive M19 Escape Knife" article in the September 2014 edition of Knife World magazine



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<sup>5</sup> Brian M Moyse & Allan H Moyse “A Rodgers Military Special” article in the October 2016 edition of Knife World magazine.

<sup>6</sup> “mark side” being the side of the knife that normally displays blade stamps and tang stamp; the “pile side” is the reverse side. Some commentators use “obverse” and “reverse” instead – which means the same.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick J. Stephens, Fighting Knives, An Illustrated Guide to Fighting Knives and Military Survival Weapons of the World. Arms and Armour Press, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Ron Flook has advised me that “Eclipse” is a well-known UK blade maker that was established in 1909.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Clayton Hutton - see details on page 6 of article: “The Elusive MI9 Escape Knife” by Brian Moyse & Roy Shadbolt in the September 2014 edition of Knife World magazine

<sup>10</sup> M. H. Cole: - see previous.

<sup>11</sup> American Blade magazine Volume 11 Number 4 - May/June 1975.

<sup>12</sup> North West Knives and Collectibles November 2000 sales catalog

<sup>13</sup> Michael W. Silvey. Pocket Knives of the United States Military. Published by the author, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Ron Flook: article “Makers of SOE Knives revealed” in September 2012 edition of Knife World magazine

<sup>15</sup> “Military Knives – a reference book” © Copyright 2001 Knife World Publications.