

June 24, 2020

A Legend is Born

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, T. Gum, Site Admin.)

World War One (WWI) saw innovations never before imagined and many that were better left in the imaginations than see daylight. It was the humble knife that would draw ire from many however toward the end of WWI. Trench warfare was in many ways static as compared to the battles and campaigns of World War Two (WWII) when men and machine were pushed to their limits on land and in the air, or for some, from the air. Thus, it was time for the knife to get a much needed updated, even if those brass rings are catchy.



Photo of Mark I Trench Knife,

The Mark I Trench Knife, primarily designed for hand to hand combat in trenches, was not favored by troops in WWII as it was years prior; some reasons included its design, grip, blade strength & resilience, and ability to be easily used for more common tasks... this does not include the cost of production.



Photo of USMC Mark 2 combat knife, "Ka-Bar"

It was during the early war period of WWII that limited production blades, such as daggers were being procured and used - though many Marines would end up purchasing their personal choice of fixed blade knife based on what was in available in-theater or sent from home. Lacking an issue-knife that was able to meet the needs of the Corps, officials requested designs be submitted to find a replacement.



Photo of Marine in Pacific, "Ka-Bar" on Hip.

After extensive testing and argument, which was settled by the Commandant of the USMC, a knife was chosen and officially adopted in November of 1942. Produced by the Camillus Cutlery Company in New York, the first production was completed in January of 1943.



Photo of U.S. Navy utility knife, Mark 2, "Ka-Bar"

Camillus was not the sole manufacturer of the new knife. There were three other companies contracted to produce the knife during WWII, one of them being the Union Cutlery Company. Naming the knife was bit more involved. Officially the knife was first known as the 1219C2 combat knife and later the USMC Mark 2 combat knife, which was often shortened to Knife, Fighting Utility. When the U.S. Navy adopted the knife it they designated it the U.S. Navy utility knife, Mark 2.

As part of company heritage, knives produced by the Union Cutlery Company incorporated “Ka-Bar” into the names of their knives leading to it being trademarked by the company and stamped on their production knives - including the contract knives for the USMC. Thus a legend was born; toward the end of WWII regardless of who manufactured the knife, the USMC Mark 2 combat knife was affectionately referred to as a Ka-Bar.



Photo of Marine, “Ka-Bar” bottom left of plate carrier.

Carried and used by a countless service men and women since 1943, the knife also has a loyal following in the civilian and collector worlds. To this day, the Ka-Bar is carried by hunters & anglers, and relied upon by brave men and women going downrange.