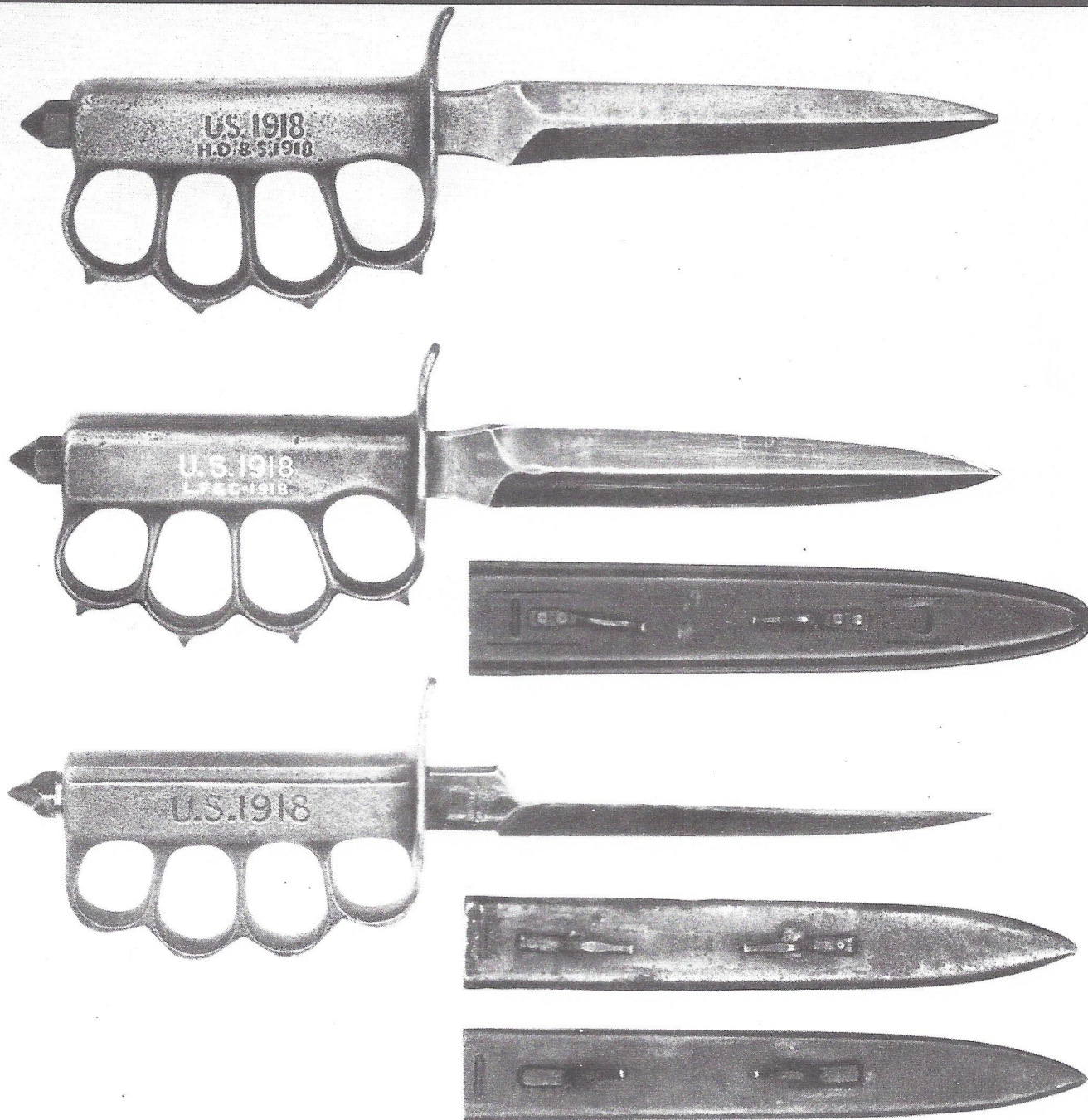


KNUCKLEKNIVES OF WORLD WAR I



3 variations of the MKI Trench Knife. The upper specimen was made by Henry Disston and Sons; middle specimen by Landers, Frary and Clark; while on the bottom is the French variation with the fluted handle.

By Adrian Van Dyk / Photos By Richard K. Halter

A knife style that attracts a great deal of collector interest is the "knuckle" knife. This knife style evolved from the knuckle guard that was found on various swords. As part of a sword, the knuckle guard served primarily a defensive function, that is, to protect the knuckles, and sometimes the entire hand, from the blows of the opponent's sword. It was not until the Civil War that a large quantity of knives were manufactured with this feature. These large side knives with the "D" shaped knuckle guard were used primarily by the Confederates and are appropriately referred to as "D Guard" bowies. Here again, the guard served primarily a defensive function since the knives were too large and unwieldy to allow the use of the guard as an offensive weapon.

The entrance of the United States into the First World War introduced us to a new type of warfare. Here every square inch of land was contested. Fierce charges "over the top" quite frequently ended in hand-to-hand combat in the close quarters of the trench. Under these conditions, the man with an '03 Springfield equipped with a 16" bayonet was at a decided disadvantage. The soldier fortunate enough to have a 1911 .45 automatic and plenty of loaded magazines could hold his own in this type of battle. Others not so fortunate, (or out of ammunition) found the U.S. issue knuckle knife to be quite an asset.

There were three basic styles of knuckle knives issued during WWI. These consisted of the 1917, the 1918 and the Mark I. The 1917 and 1918 knuckle knives were quite similar. Both had wood handles with finger grooves, a "D" shaped knuckle guard, and a triangular cross-section, blued blade. The knuckle guards on these knives were no longer the defensive type guards of the Civil War side knives, but had either pyramid projections on the outside of the knuckle bow, as in the case of the 1917 trench knife, or a double row of teeth-like flanged points, as in the case of the 1918 trench knife.

So far, two variations of the 1917 trench knife have been identified. Both of these were made by Landers, Frary and Clark and were marked on the blade side of the upper guard: "U.S./L.F.&C./1917". The only discernible difference between the two variations is the number of pyramid projections found on the guard. One specimen has 7 such projections (including the one that serves as a pommel) while the other has 8.

As for the 1918 knuckle knife, 3 variations have been identified to date. Each of these variations was produced by a different manufacturer. The specimens made by Oneida Community Ltd. are marked on the blade side of the upper guard: "U.S./O.C.L./1918". Specimens made by Henry Disston and Sons are marked in the same place: "U.S./

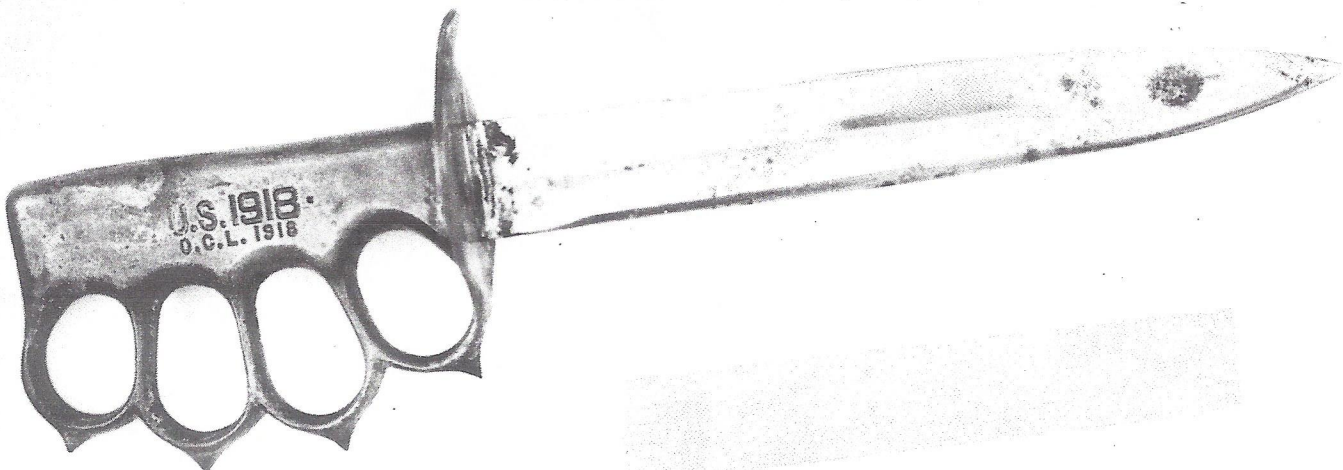
H.D.&S./1918". Specimens made by the American Cutlery Co. are marked on the inside of the knuckle bow opposite the handle "A.C.CO. USA 1917". The HD&S and ACCO specimens are virtually identical while the one made by OCL has a handle that is flat on both sides rather than rounded like the other 2 specimens.

There are 3 known sheath variations for the 1917 and 1918 trench knives, and all three variations will fit either model. The most commonly found sheath type consists of a tapered cylindrical leather tube, painted green, with a metal throat and tip. The throat has a wire hook attachment for the GI pistol belt.

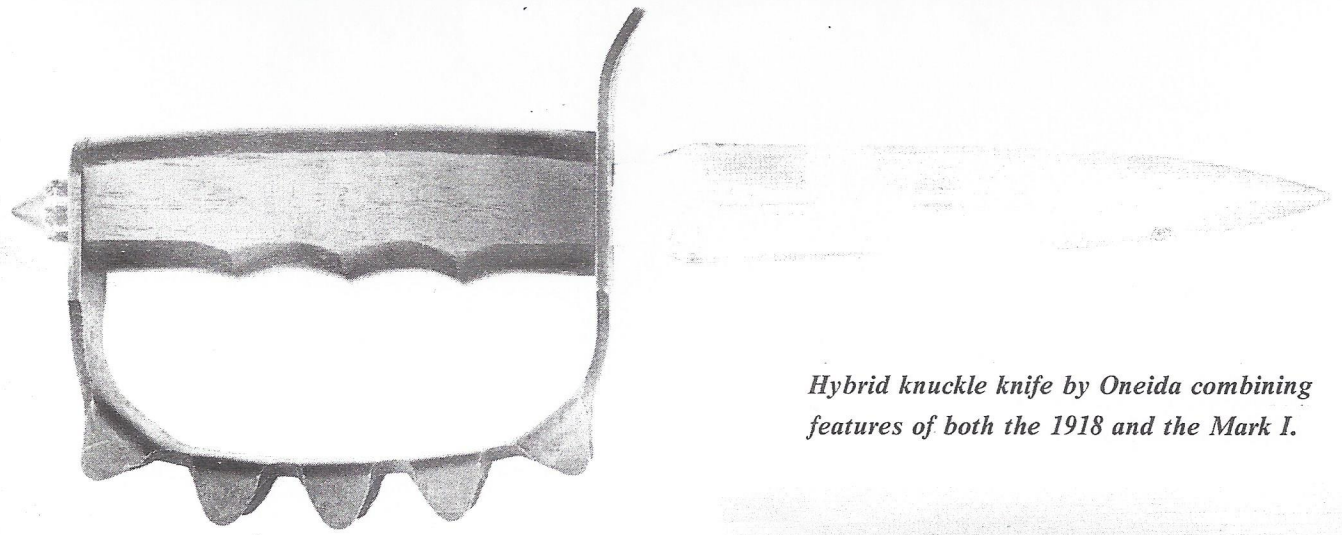
The second sheath variation is made from two pieces of leather sewn and riveted together at the sides. The front piece has a semicircular bend in it to allow room for the triangular blade. The back piece has two slots for attachment to the belt, and a snap loop to fasten around the handle of the knife.

Sheath variation three is the simplest of all and consists of a small strip of leather, folded double and sewn together. The leather has 3 bends to accommodate the shape of the triangular blade. A small belt loop is fastened to the throat of the sheath.

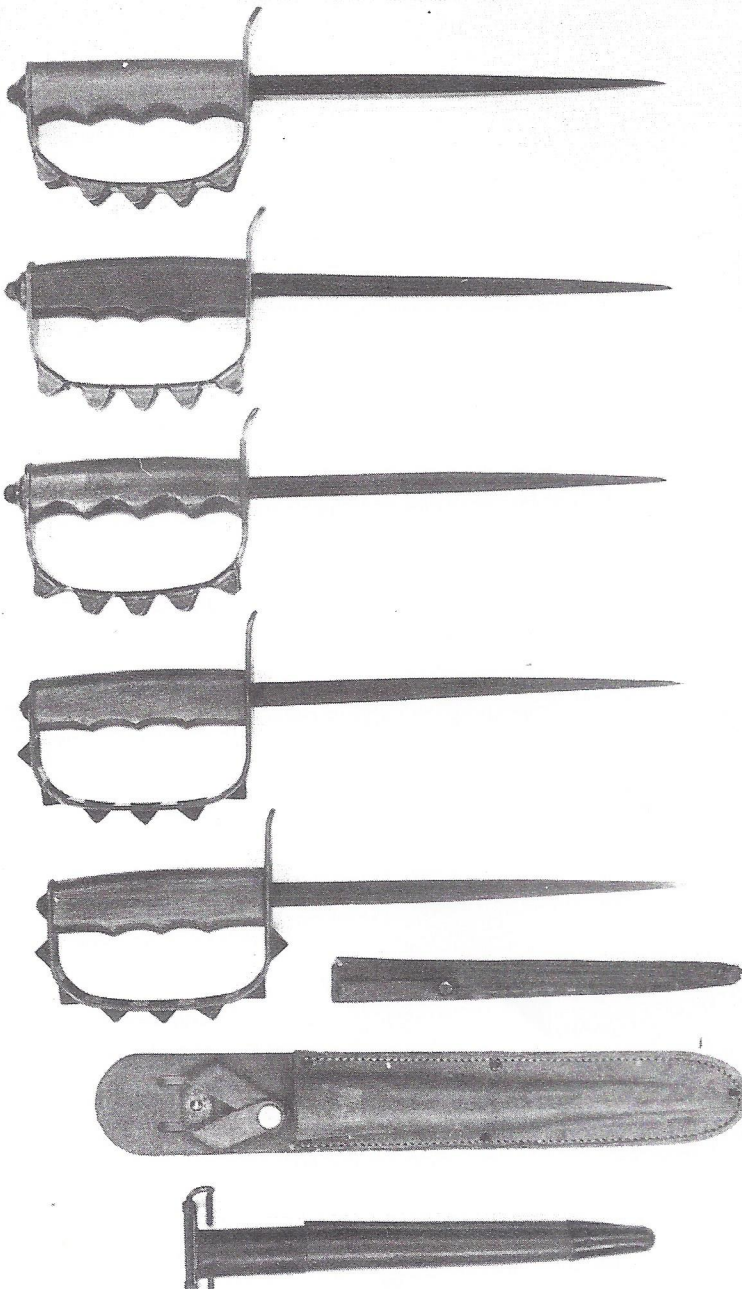
Since the triangular blade of the 1917 and 1918 trench knife was very limited as to its usefulness, a new knife, the Mark I, was designed in 1918. This knife had a solid brass cast



Long blade experimental variant of the Mark I made by Oneida Community Ltd.



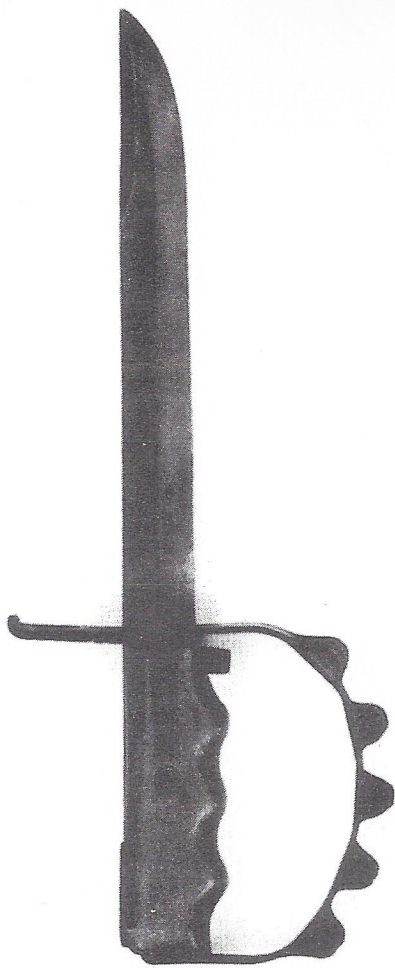
Hybrid knuckle knife by Oneida combining features of both the 1918 and the Mark I.



handle with individual knuckle loops for each finger. The blade was double edged, of stiletto pattern. According to the book *America's Munitions*, the design for this knife was derived by combining the best points of the 1917 trench knife, the French trench knife, the Hughes and the British knuckle knife. Indeed, the pointed pommel of the Mark I is reminiscent of the pommel on the 1917 trench knife. The blade is a carbon copy of the WWI French trench knife, with the exception of the markings. As to what the Hughes knife is, this writer is completely in the dark. The British knuckle knife referred to could be of the style of the "BC 41" knuckle knife used during WWII. Reportedly, aluminum handled variations of this knife were used during WWI from which the MKI knuckles could have been copied.

There are two common variations of the MKI knuckle knife, the Au Lion variation as made in France, and an American made specimen produced by Landers, Frary and Clark. The latter has a blued blade and is marked on the handle: "U.S. 1918/L.F.&C.-1918". The French specimen has a bright blade that is marked on the ricasso with a reclining lion over the words "AU LION". The handle is marked "U.S. 1918". There are two handle variations of the French MKI, one is rounded on the upper side like the LF&C version, while the other has a groove cast into the upper left and right side of the handle. Variations of MKI knuckle knives other than these are quite

All of the known variations of the 1917 and 1918 knuckle knives. Top to bottom: 1918 made by A.C. Co.; 1918 made by O.C.L.; 1918 made by H.D.&S.; 2 specimens of the 1917 by L.F.&C., the lower specimen has the extra pyramid projection; 3 sheath variations for these knives.



A triple duty knife! Knuckles, knife and bayonet function combined as one.

scarce and only a few have been observed by this writer.

Several authentic specimens of MKI knuckle knives made by Henry Disston have been observed. These were marked on the handle "U.S. 1918/H.D.&S. 1918". In the past 5 years a quantity of fake MKI knuckle knives with both the LF&C and HD&S markings have been brought into the country from England. Therefore, a buyer planning to purchase one of these should exercise extreme caution.

Three specimens of the MKI made by Oneida Community Ltd. have been observed. One consisted of just the handle, since this specimen was never completed. The second specimen had a blued blade identical to the LF&C knife. The distinguishing feature was that this specimen had a nickel or silver plated handle. The third specimen had a 7-7/8" bright stiletto blade silver soldered into the handle and did not have the familiar pommel skull crusher nut of the other MKI knuckle knives. All specimens

were marked on the handle: "U.S. 1918/O.C.L. 1918".

One specimen of the MKI observed again consisted of only the handle. The handle was marked "U.S. 1918" in the same place as the other MKI's observed. However, in addition, the markings "STERLING BRONZE CO. /NEW YORK/10:18" were found on the blade side of the quillion of the guard.

One of the most interesting specimens observed was a French made model with the typical "AU LION" marked ricasso. The blade of this knife was etched in a simulated damascus pattern. The handle had a leaf and berry design cast into it and a small panel in the center of the handle was marked "U.S./1918" in an upside-down position. The sheath was a standard metal type that had been covered with leather. The story that accompanied this knife was that it was one of a small quantity presented to members of an American inspection team touring the French knife-producing factory.

The next knuckle knife studied was a hybrid cross between the MKI knuckle knife and the 1918 trench knife. This knife had the complete handle of the OCL 1918 knuckle knife, and the blade and skull crusher pommel cap of the Mark I. The blade on this specimen was bright. This specimen and the long blade MKI by OCL previously mentioned, and the knuckle knife-bayonet that will be mentioned next all reportedly came from the same place, the tool room of Oneida Community Ltd.

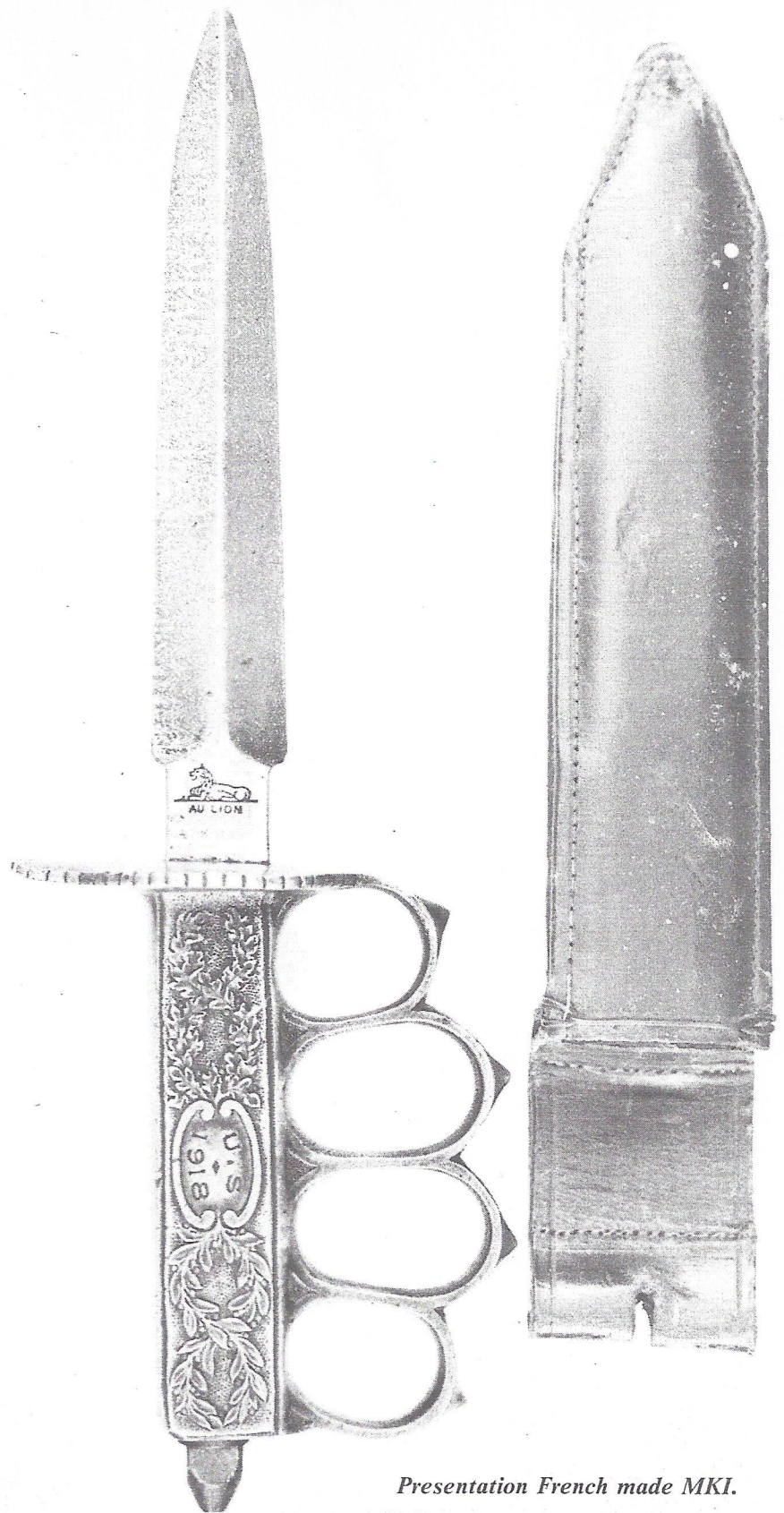
The knuckle knife-bayonet combination had a set of knuckles that were quite similar to the 1918 style. The 8½" blade was of the bowie style, with a clipped point. The handle closely resembled the 1918 except that it was made of 2 pieces of wood held together with a screw and ferrule arrangement. This bayonet fit either the '03 Springfield or the .30-40 Krag. Of course, the standard '03 bayonet and the Krag bayonet will fit either rifle, a fact few collectors appreciate.

All metal parts of this knuckle knife-bayonet were blued. The blade was faintly marked "PAT./APPL./FOR/O.L.".

The last specimen of a knuckle knife studied was not actually a knife, but a pattern for one. This piece was cast completely out of brass and looked quite professionally done. The blade was of a bolo pattern and quite resembled the 1910-1917 pattern of



All brass pattern piece for a knuckle knife — Bolo combination.



Presentation French made MKI.

bolo. The handle was quite similar to the MKI, the only major difference being the skull crusher, which was considerably longer than that found on the standard Mark I. This specimen and at least one other were reported to have come out of Springfield Armory a number of years ago.

The end of WWI pretty much

signaled the end of the knuckle knife as an item of issue for the U.S. Certainly some of the left over MKI's were issued in WWII, and even a few new patterns of knuckle knives appeared. But, like the doughboy helmet of WWI, they remained as relics of an earlier age.

Adrian Van Dyk

The American Blade