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RIPOSTE

THE 2003 BLADE SHOW

After a long absence and much urging from our loyal customers and fans, we decided to attend the Blade show in Atlanta one more time. Here are some of the high points and low points from our perspective.

HIGH POINTS...

CUSTOMERS AND FANS

Without a doubt, the single greatest high point of the show was the opportunity to visit with the literally thousands of people who stopped by our booth. Many had terrific stories to tell about our knives and what owning a Cold Steel blade has meant to them. We are, of course, grateful for all their sincere words of encouragement.

During the three day show, we were delighted to hand out over 2500 copies of our new "MORE PROOF" DVD. On our 41" Sony wide screen high definition TV's we were showing excerpts from "MORE PROOF" there in addition to the new "Swords in Action" feature and advance previews of our newly re-produced "Warrior's Edge" DVD.

ALTON BROWN

One of our favorite celebrities from the Food Network is Alton Brown, host of the "Good Eats" show. We were pleasantly surprised when he stopped by our booth to pay us a visit and chat with us. Alton revealed that he has been a long time fan of Cold Steel, and we presented him with one of our 12 piece Kitchen Classics knife sets. We will always be grateful to Alton for his fantastic show on how to cook the most delicious Prime Rib roast imaginable. We heartily endorse his cooking show and wish him the best in his career.

THE AMERICAN BLADESMITH SOCIETY

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CUTTING COMPETITION

This event was the final in a series of cutting competitions held throughout the country over the past year. This year the finalists were Jim Crowell, John Fitch, Ray Kirk, Mark Byer, and Kevin Cashen. Jerry Fisk did the honors as the Master of Ceremonies.

The cutting competition was held early in the afternoon on Sunday, the last day of the show. Contestants could use any blade shape they wanted provided that they had forged the blade themselves and that its length did not exceed 10 inches. A final constraint, one that proved to be one contestant's undoing, was that the edge of a contestant's knife could not crack, chip, bend or "roll over" at any time during the contest. This year, the contestants faced five tough challenges...

2X4 CHOP

This was a timed event. The goal was to chop through a 2X4 in the least amount of time. Only bona fide chopping strokes were allowed, and breaking the 2X4 in half would result in the contestant being disqualified.

STANDING COKE® CAN

The object of this challenge was to test sharpness and edge geometry by cutting a Coke® can. An empty can is positioned on top of another full can. The contestants are required to cut the empty can in half without knocking the full can off the table. Extra points would be granted if the bisected half of the empty can remained in its position on top of the full can at the conclusion of the stroke!

CAMPFIRE CUT

This was another timed event intended to test a contestant's knife and its ability to function effectively as a camp knife. For example, could the contestant use his knife to make kindling for a fire? The challenge here was to produce, in thirty seconds, a large quantity of splinters from a six inch 2X4.

HANGING PLASTIC BOTTLE

This extremely difficult test involved severing an empty 16 ounce plastic water bottle. The bottle was suspended in mid air by a single upholstery thread. The tricky part was cutting the bottle without breaking the thread in the process!

ROPE CUT

The final event of the day required each contestant to predict the total number of free hanging manila ropes he could sever in a single stroke. The difficult part, of course, involved living up to one's prediction. Failure to cut the predicted number of ropes would result in a no score.

Throughout the contest, spectators were entertained and educated by the folksy, down home banter of M.C. Jerry Fisk, who did a fantastic job keeping the event on course.

It became obvious in time that each contestant had one event that favored his knife and personal abilities. In the end, however, it was Jim Crowell who amassed the most points overall, ultimately emerging as the first place winner. John Hatch took home second place honors.

We were delighted by the opportunity to observe this contest and impressed by the good sportsmanship that prevailed amongst the competitors. We applaud the American Blade Smith Society for advancing the cause of high performance and creating public interest with such a well organized event.

JAPANESE SWORD CUTTING DEMONSTRATION

James Williams of Bugei Trading Company fame, treated the blade Show attendees to a rare show of skill with the Japanese sword. We were all quite impressed by Mr. Williams's poise and presentation as he used both one and two handed cutting techniques to sever 4 inch and even 5 inch bundles of Tatami (rice straw) mats. In particular, we enjoyed seeing Mr. Williams make multiple cuts in rapid succession and even sever falling mats in mid air. But perhaps the greatest exhibition of skill was the finale where Mr. Williams demonstrated how a highly skilled swordsman could suddenly drop low to the ground to avoid an opponent's blow while simultaneously drawing and cutting with his own blade. Most impressive!

While Bugei Trading is a fierce competitor of ours in the sword business, we never want to become so mean spirited that we can't recognize real skill and ability when we see it. We congratulate Mr. Williams on the fantastic demonstration we were privileged to watch and encourage all of our readers who love swords not to miss it next year!

LOW POINTS...

HIGH SPEED OPERATORS

No one loves our men and women in uniform more than Cold Steel. That's why, over the last 23 years, we have tried to honor them by never trying to profit by associating our knives with any branch of the service or special units like the Navy SEAL's or the Army's Delta Force. We feel our heroes in the armed forces are the only ones entitled to enjoy the reputation they and their forebearers have bought with their shed blood and countless sacrifices.

So this year at the Blade Show we were appalled by the profusion of attendees, and exhibitors alike pretending to be ex-military "High Speed Operators". It was so easy to spot them. All you had to do is look in the aisles or booths along the walls for smug faced men dressed head to toe in black or cammo "utilities" with their pant legs bloused into jump boots and wearing fearsome logos emblazoned on their backs.

We despise these dogs. They are without shame and are only too happy to dupe a gullible public into believing they or their knives are somehow endorsed by the military. We also refute their claims to being experts on knife manufacturing or knife fighting based on military experience as totally unfounded. You see, our ground troops, including the most elite special units, fight almost exclusively with firearms and sadly, receive little or no training in knife fighting.

So the next time you see someone at a gun or knife show dressed in a pseudo military costume selling two tone, spray painted battle blades with "de rigeur" para cord wrapped handles, know him for the charlatan that he is.

THE **IT AIN'T ALL THAT!** KARAMBIT

Currently, a collection of people (who are supported by Blade Magazine) are trying to pawn off, on an unsuspecting public, an obscure knife from Indonesia. This knife features a strongly curved, talon-like blade attached to a short handle that terminates in a finger ring. It is called the Karambit. What these people want to do is cash in on this knife by positioning it as the new weapon of choice for self-defense, or, as the saying goes, "the best thing since sliced bread." These folks claim that this knife offers big advantages over more conventional fixed and folding knives in a blade-to-blade encounter.

We will concede that ANY KNIFE is better than finger nails when you are forced to fight, however, we would also like to go on record as being singularly unimpressed by the Karambit, even though its been around for many years in the Pentjak-Silat community. So, here are a few nuggets of information you won't find in Blade Magazine, or even in the books and videos being touted by the Karambit's proponents. Please read them with intellectual honesty and remember that the comments presented here are the based on the experience of countless hours of sparring against the Karambit.



HERE ARE
JUST A FEW
OF THE
KARAMBITS
IN OUR
COLLECTION

HISTORY

As far as we can discern, the Karambit is a descendant of the ancient East Indian weapon known as the Bagh Nakh or Tiger's Claw. It was the favored weapon of thieves and assassins. It featured 4 or 5 curved steel "talons" that were secured to a flat steel cross bar. Welded or attached to the bar were two fixed rings sized to fit one's fingers. This design allowed the Bagh Nakh to be instantly available yet all the while to remain concealed in one's palm. It never became a socially accepted weapon and has been notoriously connected with one of the most nefariously brutal assassinations in history in which a treacherous Mahrattan general named Sivaji used a concealed Bagh Nakh to disembowel Afzal Khan during a formal peace conference.

During the fifth and sixth centuries, a massive Indian migration to Java began. In the process, the gamut of East Indian weaponry (most notably the predecessor of the Kris) was assimilated into the Indonesian culture. Over time, the warriors of Indonesia modified, experimented and refined the Bagh Nakh until it was distilled into its current form as the Karambit. These blades come in all shapes, sizes, and configurations, yet they have always played a minor role in the Indonesian hierarchy of weaponry, especially the Karambit, which was most prevalent in the central part of Java. In his outstanding 254-page book, *The Weapons and Fighting Arts of Indonesia*, Donn F. Draeger was so unmoved by the importance of the Karambit that he barely mentioned it in part of one paragraph, giving it only six sentences (compared to the Kris, which had thirteen and a half pages devoted to it).

ADVANTAGES

While we are big fans of Pentjak-Silat and admirers of the late Guru Herman Suwanda, we are not particularly fond of the Karambit (especially the folding variations). However, it does have a few undeniable advantages that are appealing to some people.

LIGHTWEIGHT, COMPACT AND CONCEALABLE

The primary reason the Karambit gained a foothold in central Java is that it was light enough (only partially made of steel) and compact enough to stash surreptitiously under the waistband of one's Sarong (a long, colorful length of cloth wrapped around the waist and frequently worn as *the only item* of clothing). In contemporary America, you will find precious few men, outside of those who attend a Pentjak-Silat school, wearing a Sarong, so the Karambit is no more concealable than the average sized boot knife or push dagger (with the possible exception of folding models).



THE KARAMBIT
HELD IN THE
EXTENDED
POSITION

FLASHY AND MENACING

Admittedly, the short, hooked blade of the Karambit looks menacing to the uninitiated, and flipping it from a retracted grip to the extended grip looks spellbindingly flashy and will intimidate many attackers into breaking off their assault and summarily fleeing.

POWERFUL CUTS, SLASHES & STABBING ATTACKS

At close range, and in the retracted grip, the Karambit can deliver a devastating range of cutting, slashing, ripping and stabbing attacks. This is because the retracted grip—with the wrist locked straight and the fist reinforced by the index finger being looped through the retention ring—makes it possible for one to apply the full force of the legs, hips, back, shoulder and arm with each blow. Additionally, there is very little danger of the wrist bending on impact and diminishing a blow's effectiveness.

DIFFICULT TO DROP—DIFFICULT TO DISARM

Two of the most compelling arguments a proponent of the Karambit will offer is that its unique finger ring virtually precludes accidentally dropping the knife in battle and that this ring makes it more difficult for an opponent to "beat", "strip", or otherwise dislodge it from the hand.

BLUNT EDGE CHOPPING

The Karambit's unique curved blade, in the retracted position, protrudes from the bottom of the fist, which allows one to make use of the unsharpened back of the blade. Powerful chopping or hacking motions, some which can break small bones and inflict a considerable amount of blunt force trauma to soft tissue, are possible and often will leave an opponent in considerable pain.



THE KARAMBIT
HELD IN THE
RETRACTED
POSITION

DISADVANTAGES

The drawbacks or disadvantages of using the Karambit as anything but a last ditch "hideout" weapon or "stash-knife" are legion. Space on these pages is scarce, so here, for the sake of brevity, is the short list...

PROBLEMS WITH THE EXTENDED POSITION

- The idea that one can deliver an effective cutting or hooking attack with the Karambit, held in the extended position, is ludicrous! This is because the thumb and middle finger (the ones that are bracing the blade) aren't

strong enough to keep it rigid under any meaningful impact, so the most damage one can inflict will be only a superficial wound.

- Hitting or slashing with the unsharpened back of the blade in this position isn't effective for three reasons. For starters, it's somewhat effete and doesn't inflict enough pain or damage to stop a ten year old. Secondly, as previously mentioned, the thumb and middle finger are too weak to support the blade, leaving one's own wrist vulnerable to being unintentionally cut when the fingers fail. Lastly, it needlessly exposes the hand and arm to a counter cut, while leaving the initiator powerless in this position.
- Using the Karambit to block or parry an attack is useless. The thumb, index finger and middle finger don't have the strength to keep the blade from folding sideways under impact.
- It is not difficult to "beat" the blade from the hand. All an opponent has to do is give the side or flat of the blade a substantial smack and it will go flying. There is a good chance, too, that your index finger could be broken in the process.
- From this position, the unsharpened back of the blade can be attacked from below with an empty hand and be forced backward into its user's own wrist or forearm, or possibly shoved, point first, into his body!
- Holding the Karambit in the extended grip makes it almost impossible to "lead" in a fight and precludes most long-range attacks like the snap cut and vertical whip.
- Anyone assuming the extended grip on a Karambit effectively abandons the option of switching the knife to his empty hand, as this process is incredibly slow and awkward.

PROBLEMS WITH THE RETRACTED GRIP

- The Karambit's greatest shortcoming is its woefully short reach. This may not be such a handicap when contending with an unarmed attacker, but it becomes an enormous problem when facing those armed with a blade. Even a neck knife or tactical folder with a 3 1/2 inch blade will out reach most Karambits, including those overly hyped folding models.
- Fighting an armed opponent is risky. The front and top of the fist are exposed giving any attack to these areas an excellent chance of succeeding.
- Parrying, blocking or counter cutting an incoming weapon arm, is seldom successful without the assistance of the empty hand. What happens when it's unavailable or out of position?
- Switching the Karambit from one hand to another while trying to maintain a retracted position grip is slow and awkward and will probably get you killed if you're facing an opponent armed with a more conventional knife.
- While punching or stabbing with the Karambit is very effective; it takes a whole lot of practice to develop pinpoint accuracy and will never rival what can be accomplished with a good push dagger!
- The notion that the Karambit can make two cuts in one arm motion is pure drivel. Yes, it looks feasible, especially if you use an aluminum trainer and have a very cooperative sparring partner. The reality is that the blade is going to be knocked or folded backward toward the little finger and be out of position to be "flipped" for the next cut.
- Cleverly dropping low to a kneeling posture with the intent of switching grips from the retracted to the extended positions, in order to gain an extended reach, thereby "sneaking-in" a high line attack sounds really great...in theory! Try this on an experienced long-range knife fighter, and you'll get kicked in the face or have the top of your head split open.
- Using a folding Karambit for chopping or hacking strokes, as mentioned in books, videos, and magazines is, in our opinion, an extremely dangerous practice. These types of blows utilize the unsharpened back of the blade and the force of impact goes directly against the locking mechanism. At Cold Steel, our considerable experience has shown that impact stress of this nature will quickly defeat almost any locking mechanism and result in catastrophic failure. Ultimately this might cost someone a finger or two.