Ballistic Knives

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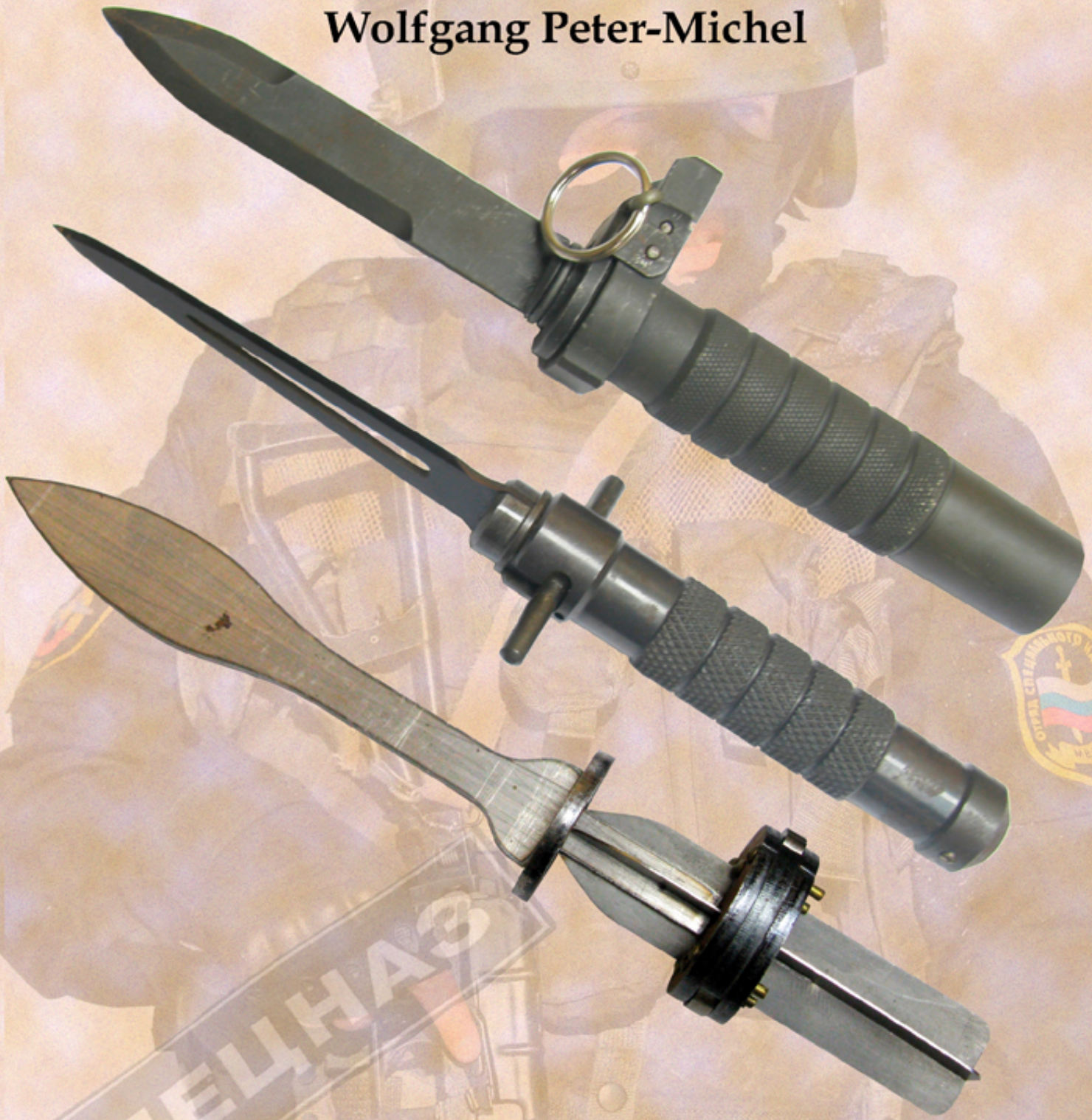

Weapons for Secret Services and Special Forces

Cover designed by using a photo kindly provided by Vitaly Kuzmin, http://vitalykuzmin.net.

To Gabi and Eva.

A.

Contents

Photo 1: Different variants of ballistic knives.

Preface

This book deals with knives which are classified in most countries as prohibited items. This means that collectors are not allowed to own them; to buy or sell them; and most of all, to carry them in their pockets when leaving the house. This has made it almost impossible for the author of this book to gain access to appropriate pieces in order to examine and photograph them. Fortunately, a collector of ballistic knives who lives in a country outside the EU was found after long research. He provided some interesting pieces and gave his kind permission to inspect and photograph his collection and even to carry out firing trials with them. Writing this book would not have been possible without his kind assistance.

The author is also indebted to the Arms Museum (Музей історії зброї) in Sapporoschja, Ukraine. From there, the author received vital information about the origin of the knife, as well as extensive image material.

Many thanks to Ilona for her kind assistance in translating from Russian.

Achim Erdmann played a central role in the creation of this book. His international contacts contributed significantly to its development. Furthermore, his expertise was a great help in the assessment of the knife.

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Scott Lindsay played a vital role in the creation of this book, because he, as an English native speaker, proofread the whole manuscript and corrected all the little mistakes, the German author made. Many thanks for that!

Photo 2: Russian Spetsnaz team of the „FSB-Centre for Special Operations“ (Центр специального назначения ФСБ) during a rappelling exercise. (With kind permission of Vitaly Kuzmin, http://vitalykuzmin.net)

Introduction

The knife is one of mankind’s oldest weapons. By the Stone Age, man was fighting with blades made of flint. Bladed weapons developed over the millennia using materials like copper, bronze, iron, and finally steel. But their blades were always connected firmly to their handle. Thus, there is no historic model for a ballistic knife. In some cases, the entire knife might have been thrown by practiced knife throwers, however this is more likely to have been connected to show business rather than to close quarter combat.

The reason for this is obvious. In the past, the lack of appropriate materials made it impossible to produce sufficiently strong springs which were capable of propelling a blade with sufficient force out of a knife‘s handle. By the end of the twentieth century, this had changed. And so, in the 1980s, the first ballistic knives appeared in the Western collectors’ market. It was rumoured that they originated in the Soviet Union as a clandestine weapon used by the KGB or special units such as the Spetsnaz.

These claims have never been proven. Related research was almost impossible at the time because the Iron Curtain was still in place and the Russians were, as it was widely assumed, our sworn enemy. Nevertheless, the first ballistic knives that emerged in the West had quite an Eastern European “feel” about them. They were solidly manufactured weapons of average quality; pretty much like a Kalashnikov assault rifle. Their design was strictly functional with little regard for appearances. Even their

smell matched this assumption; because, as experts on East European weapons technology agree, the varnishes and greases used in this region had a very particular odour about them.

Photo 3: Signet of the Soviet Secret Service KGB.

Photo 4: Three versions of ballistic knives.

The first ballistic knives achieved prices of more than US$1,000 each on the collectors' market and after a very short period of time, more pieces started to appear. Seemingly more Western in their whole design; they exhibited glossy, finely finished surfaces; and soon, improved firing mechanisms. Prices declined with the greater availability. But before ballistic knives could become mass products which were affordable for everyone, the legislators intervened. In the United States, the „Ballistic Knife Prohibition Act" from 1986 initiated the ban of these silent weapons. In most European countries, ballistic knives had been classified as prohibited items a long time

previously. As a result, the trade of ballistic knives has collapsed and most knife collectors only know about these edged weapons by hearsay.

The reason for this book is to introduce the reader to the known variants of ballistic knives and to explain their evolution.

Photo 5: An early example of the first variant in the exhibition at the Arms Museum, Sapporoschja, Ukraine.

Photo 6: Blade and handle of type 1. (With kind permission of A. A. Boroda, Arms Museum, Sapporoschja, Ukraine)

Variant 1 – the First Production Model

The version that is named as being the first in this book doesn’t necessarily mean it was the very first version of a ballistic knife to be produced. Rather, it is simply considered to be so as it was the first version to become known in the West. This is always the problem when it comes to weapons from the arsenals of the intelligence services. The variant that first becomes known to the public will continue to stand as the first until an even earlier version emerges. Unfortunately, with the „supplies“ to the collectors’ market of ballistic knives being restricted by law, it is only museums that can legally acquire any new or previously unknown items of this kind.

So, the earliest known „original model“ of the ballistic knife so far is located in the collection of the Arms Museum (Музей історії зброї) in Sapporoschja, Ukraine. In the museum, the knife is labelled as *„Knife for Special Forces (with propelled blade), Eastern European origin, final decades of the 20th century“*.

The classification as original version seems obvious. When compared to the other ones which have been examined, it is this version that appears to be the simplest and crudest form. The design is based on a piece of solid steel tubing, either drawn over a mandrel or milled from solid stock, to form the handle of the knife. At the rear end, a threaded pommel is secured by a small screw. A powerful (55 N – 12.36 lbf) coil spring is inserted in the front end. It is not attached to the inside of the pommel nut; thus it can slide

freely within the tubing. The blade element consists of a machined steel body that is bevelled at the handle end to fit into the tubing. A pin made of hardened steel is inserted at a 90 degree angle and fits in a bayonet lock in the handle.

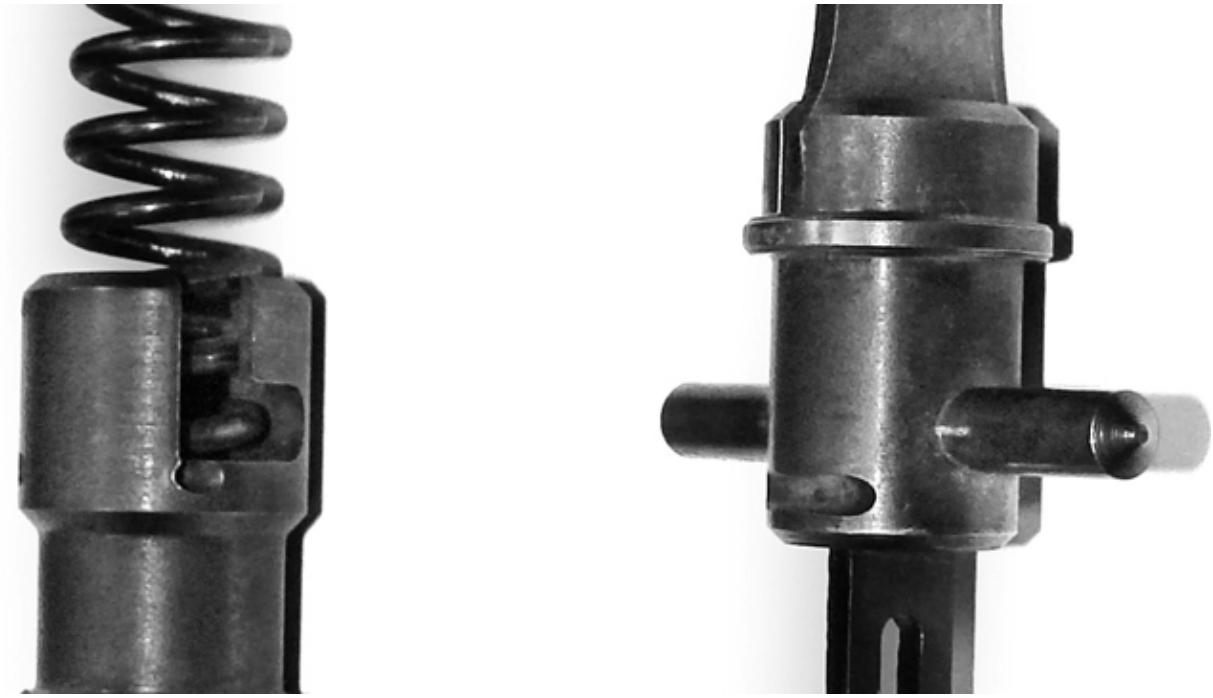

Photo 7: The blade is secured by a bayonet lock in the cocked position.
(With kind permission of A. A. Boroda, Arms Museum, Sapporoschja, Ukraine)

The first known pieces provided no protection against accidental discharge. Soon after serial production had started, the designer of the knife seems to have recognized this as an accident risk, as later models are equipped with a cotter pin that locks the blade element securely in the handle. The hole for the cotter pin can also be found on the blade element of the present piece. The pin itself must have been lost before the knife was acquired by the Ukrainian Museum.