

A Thing Called Bail



Every bail in my collection of scout/utility knives is placed on the end opposite the main blade – except for the Remington R3843 six-blade camp knife.

By Dennis Ellingsen



Some early 20th century knives had a chain attached to the bail designed for youngsters who had a tendency to lose their knives. The chain would loop onto a button on one's clothing. Remington also offered this chain with button catch to bigger boys who played with explosives. See this advertising knife for Halifax Explosives.

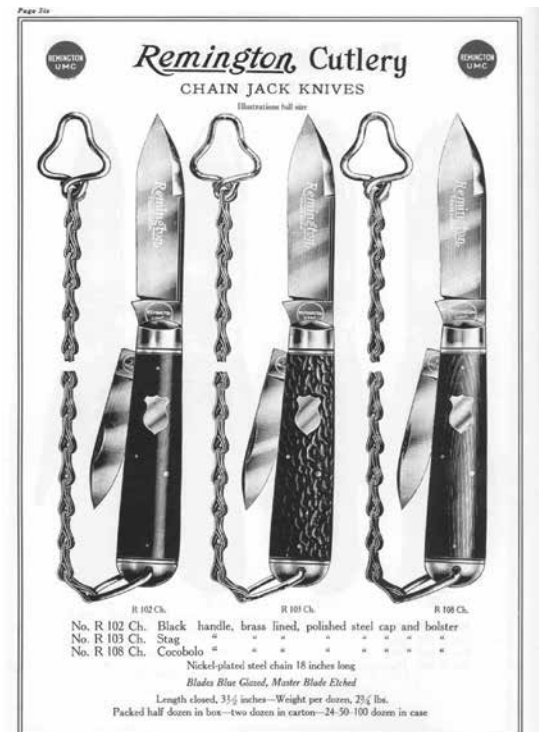
As a collector of scout/utility pattern knives, I am always suspicious of the metal loop, ring thing/device referred to as the "bail." For such a simple piece of metal it certainly presents more than its share of puzzles to the collector. What is the correct nomenclature for this metal loop ring thing? Is it original, has it been "fixed," or why was it made this way? As you will learn, there can be variations on variations and questions after questions about bails.

Whenever I look at a "new" scout/utility with no bail, I start the litany... is it as original, was it customized by the owner or the restorer and was it done correctly? If it is one of the removable bails, where in the world am I going to find another just like the one that was there? Well, hopefully, I can "bail" you out concerning some of the curiosities about "bails."

As to nomenclature or appellation, the word "bail" causes confusion. I "bail" water out of the boat. I grab the "bail" on the

bucket or is it the "handle?" Is the "handle" on the bucket the same as a "handle" on a knife? (Of course the "handle" is the part of a folding knife that covers the blades, it is the front and back and looks nothing like the "bail" of a bucket.) Do I think of the farmer who has a "bale" of hay or do I call the "bail" bondsman to "bail" me out of jail? How does this relate to the person who "bails" out of an airplane? If this is fascinating to you, please note the section at the end of this article. Dear elayne has already bailed out of this discussion.

So let's add more confusion to this "metal loop ring thing" that we call a "bail." Sometimes it is called a bail ring, belt loop, clevis, "D" ring, detachable ring, hoop, lanyard, lanyard loop, lanyard ring, loop ring, ring, shackle, staple or a plethora of other names. Sometimes it is described with adjectives such as a German silver shackle, nickel plated shackle, nickel silver shackle or silver loop shackle. Or even



A page from the Remington C-5 catalog (1925) that shows chain knives.

more confusing, why is a knife that has a bail called a pocketknife when its purpose in life, if equipped with a bail, is to hang on your belt or around your neck and not be put in your pocket? The whole issue is confusing at best. Let's see if we can sort through this "metal loop ring thing"

My first thoughts about bails are the use on boys' knives. A boy's knife had a long chain that attached to a bail on the knife while the other end had a metal or leather



Remington used a unique method to add bails on their knives. A hollow tube served to hold the blades in place, and a pin inside this tube held the bail. This pin bail arrangement made it easy for the bail to swivel. If the bail arrangement is removed (broken or when removing blades out of the frame), the best knife repair can't get it like the original. From left to right: Original Remington bail, the spot where the bail was, and a removable bail from another non-Remington knife. The far right knife was an attempt to duplicate an original, but the bail used is not a Remington. Compare this with the far left original bail.



A Boy Scout uniform in 1919. Note the knife hanging by the bail on the belt. The shields on these early knives were marked "Be Prepared."



Knives that have flat bails appeared in the early part of the 20th century. The design would be less bulky due to the thinner profile. Most of the samples of flat bails we have are by Cameron, Crown, Kings Quality, Romo, Royal Hardware, Shapleigh Hardware and Sharpe Cut Co., suggesting these knives were contract knives. I have no clue who the made these knives. The metal handled knives were made by Empire Knife Company.

fastener with a keyhole shape hole in it. The metal/leather fastener would attach over a button on a boy's trousers or to his bib overalls. This would make it more difficult to lose the knife. The chain made the knife more readily accessible, like pulling on the chain to locate where the knife might be. A boy's pocket could contain a myriad of this's and that's, so a chain could be a quick path to a needed pocketknife. Suspenders and buttons were common in the early part of this century but, like many things, were a passing part of fashion. These early knives were aimed for the youth market and were usually single blade, inexpensive knives. These, of course, were directly opposite to the fine jewelry type pocketknives with silver and gold handles that were carried by a "gentleman." Dear elayne sez "Fat chance I'll ever have one of those."

Gentleman's knives had a bail to which ornate chains were attached. The chain, albeit ornate, was also functional. It helped to locate the pocketknife when needed. Unlike the boy's pocket which could be chock full, a gentleman's pocket might be so tight that even fingers couldn't fit were a knife slid into a pocket. So here we have a bail that serves two classes of user.

The Boy Scouts of America first started in 1909 and ushered in the official way to



The Boy Scouts of America started before 1920, and the bails first manufactured by the New York Knife Company were oversized, big bails which were designed to fit on the scout's belts. Because of their size they were subject to bending out of shape. These are early pre-1920 knives. Note the Prest-O-Lite tank key wrench which was used on the acetylene powered headlamps that preceded electric automobile headlamps. L to R: Ulster, New York Knife, Ulster, Rikers Drug Store, Valley Forge and Miller Brothers on the bottom. The tank tool is on the screwdriver blade.



During WWII Ulster made knives specifically for the mountain U.S. Ski Patrols. At one point Phillips head screws were used on the ski bindings. This called for a five blade pocket tool with a Phillips driver for unexpected repair. The first design had this tool on the bail. Later designs incorporated the driver in the frame. Later bails had a hefty U.S. marked bail and then a bail that was unmarked.

carry a folding knife. The first dress code for the scouts saw the "Scout Knife" carried on a belt loop lanyard ring. The cutlery manufacturers wanted the "scouting" market, and the four blade generic knife with a bail became extremely common and popular. In my opinion scouts' activities did not typically take advantage of the bail, as the knife was usually carried in the pocket. A short thong could be attached to the bail, and the end could dangle out of the pocket. When the knife was needed, it could be pulled out of the pocket by use of the thong.



Craftsman marked knives, manufactured by Ulster, had a unique bail that fit over the belt. There was a patent got this design, dated June 24, 1958. Handy as it seems, this bulky bail tends to get in the way when using other functions of the knife.



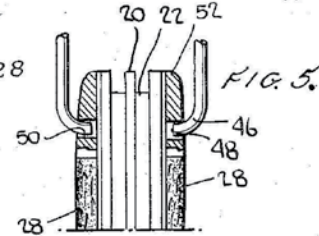
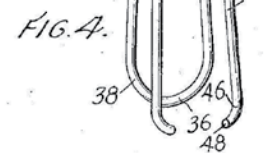
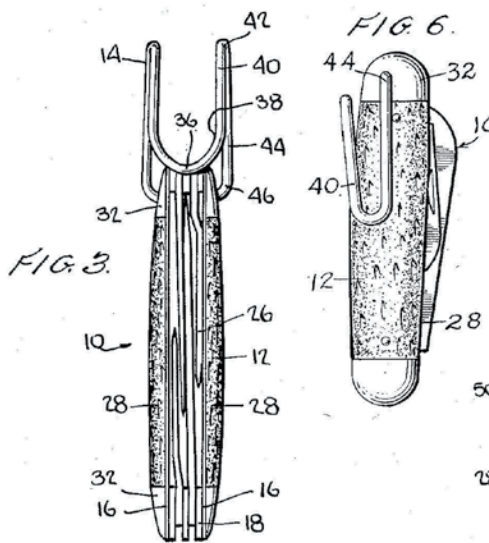
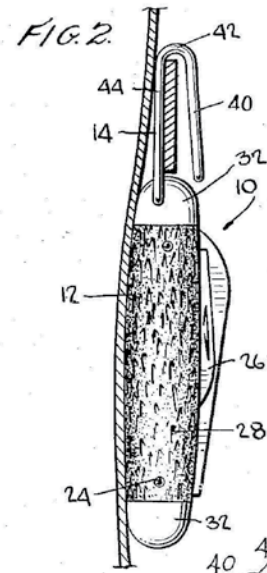
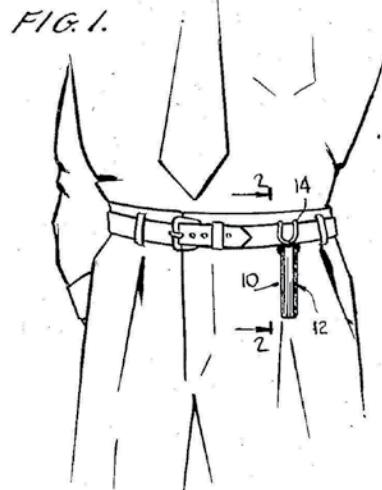
Imperial made inexpensive knives that were meant to look like their more expensive knife lines. The bails appear to be integral to the knife but are snap-in removable bails on simulated lined bolsters. The plastic shell handles look like pearl but are not even close. These knives are award knives made in 1959 and 1987.

(MIL-K-818-D) were supplied without tang stamps. After the war many MIL-K knives bore names on the clevis. These names and marks were Kingston, Stevenson and Ulster. Most of us know the history of Kingston (WWII joint effort Imperial and Ulster). It took much research, but the name Stevenson points to Robeson.

During WWII the Mil-K blades were made of carbon steel, and the clevis and handle of the knife were made of stainless steel. In 1957 the Mil-K was reintroduced as an all stainless knife - blades, clevis and springs handles. These all stainless knives are still made today and are marked with the manufacturer's name and the date of manufacture on the tang.

There are numerous styles and innovations of bails, and every once in a while I run into an experiment or "new" idea. The first new idea was the New York Knife company oversized bail. This bail first appeared in the mid 1915 era. This didn't last long as the more standardized smaller size bail soon took over. As mentioned, the removable bail was a New York Knife Company idea. In the 1950s a Craftsman bail was made that was oversized and had a bend in it for draping over the belt. This was unique. It did not become popular and added greatly to the bulk of the knife.

My favorite of all bails on the utility pattern knife is the flat style bail. This was popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The bail, instead of being made of a round stock of metal, was made from a thin flattened piece of metal. This design allowed a thinner profile and reduced the overall bulk of the



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A 1958 patent by H. Baer that was assigned to Ulster. I have only seen this style bail on Craftsman (Sears) knives.

knife. The flat bail also was characteristic of the gentleman style bail mentioned earlier and had appeal both as ornamental and functional. Makers of the "flat bail" knives were Case, Empire, LF&C, Schrade Cutlery, Shapleigh and Utica Knife and Razor Co. Other names that appear on these knives suggest that they were contract knives geared for a more discriminating clientele. Those names are Cameron, Crown Cutlery, Enterprise Cutlery, Kings Quality and Sharpe Cut. Co. (Just think of all those names and consider the reference to each as upper class names and brands.) The repeated reference to New York City on these knives supports the idea of a specialized clientele.

So what do I think of the bails on knives? Well, I don't use them myself; however they do have a purpose. Sometimes they are used for that purpose. But more importantly, they represent a clue to the historical path of cutlery and its development. I have noticed that knife descriptions of old generally referred to the bail as a shackle. Today the term shackle is rarely used. Well, for now I will "bail" out of writing more on this subject. □

- Bail - The loop found on the end of pocketknives
- Bail - Security exchanged for the release of an arrested person
- Bail - The arched, hoop like handle of a container
- Bail - The hoop that is used to support the top of a covered wagon
- Bail - The hinged bar of a typewriter that holds the paper against the platen
- Bail - To remove water out of a boat
- Bail - Noun - A container used for emptying water from a boat - English
- Bail - A bar used to confine or separate animals
- Bail - One of two crossbars that form the top of a wicket in Cricket
- Bail Out - To parachute out of an airplane
- Bail Out - To abandon a project
- Bailing out of trouble
- Bale - A large package of material tightly bound with twine or wire
- Bail - The state of release upon being bailed.