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Six Blade Pocket Knives

by Dennis Ellingsen

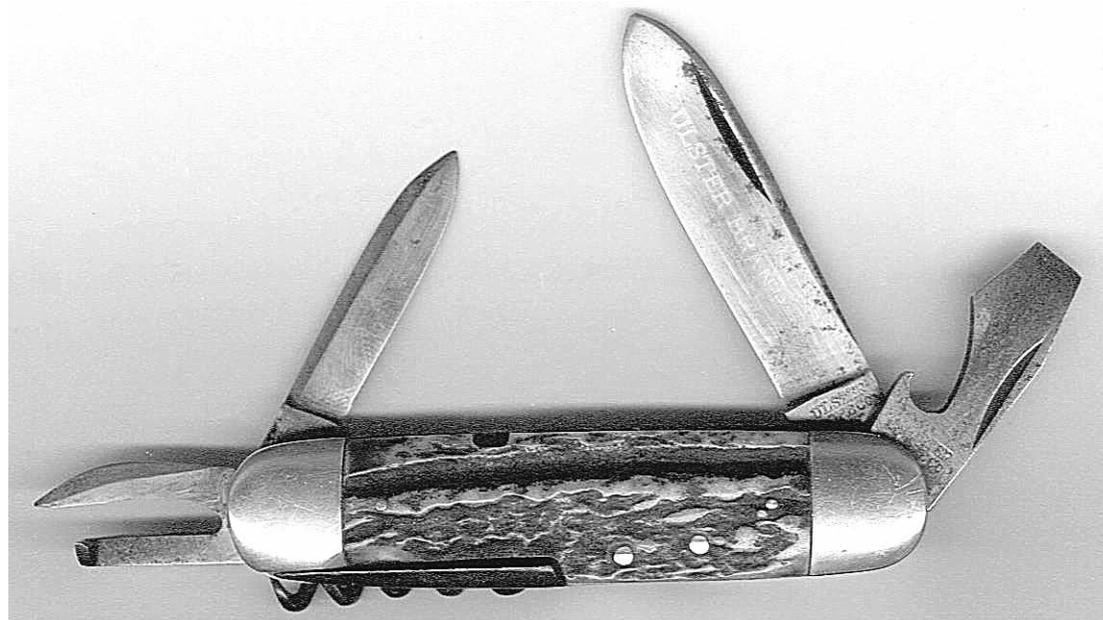
Folding knives that have four blades or less have been the standard for popular use. When a knife exceeds four blades, it is designed for special purposes. However, in days gone by, a multi-blade knife was a show piece that was meant to show the art of the cutler. In fact the more blades, the better the show piece. Then there were the tool knives that not only had cutting blades but specialized tools. The horseman's knife is but one folding knife with many blades that were used for specific tasks.

Around the turn of the century a multi-blade

knife got the world's attention, and it became known as the Swiss Army knife. Today the world's attention has been diverted to the Leatherman that features tools, tools and more tools in a folding array.

To tell the story of all the multi-blade pocket tools would be to write numerous books of considerable breath and depth. In fact I tried to tell the story of the six blade pocket knife and got bogged down in the complexity of the story. Therefore to make the story more focused, I used the Remington R3843 as the pivotal point of my research. This information could

Continued on page 2



*This pre 1920's Ulster knife is handled in rare stag.
This USA made knife looks very European.*

Continued from page 1
also apply to the other American made six blade knives that you may encounter.

The R3843 is a six blade pocket tool that gained considerable popularity in the American scene beginning in the early 1920's. Leave it to Remington to market and popularize the knife interests of America. Remington did not invent this knife as its roots go

back to European heritage. In fact we might be so bold as to say the pattern and design were invented by Victorinox in 1897 with the Officer's knife.

I am fascinated by the six blade utility pocket knife. These multi-blade knives were once the ultimate in "a multi functional tool in a pocket." They were well made and were targeted for the sportsman and for recreational use.

Every blade had a purpose and many were special that could help to date these knives. The leather punch, corkscrew, can opener and shell extractor blade are seldom used today, and there are many that do not understand the functions of some of these blades. Tools that are a window into a time gone by.

The multi-blade utility knife is a work of art, both

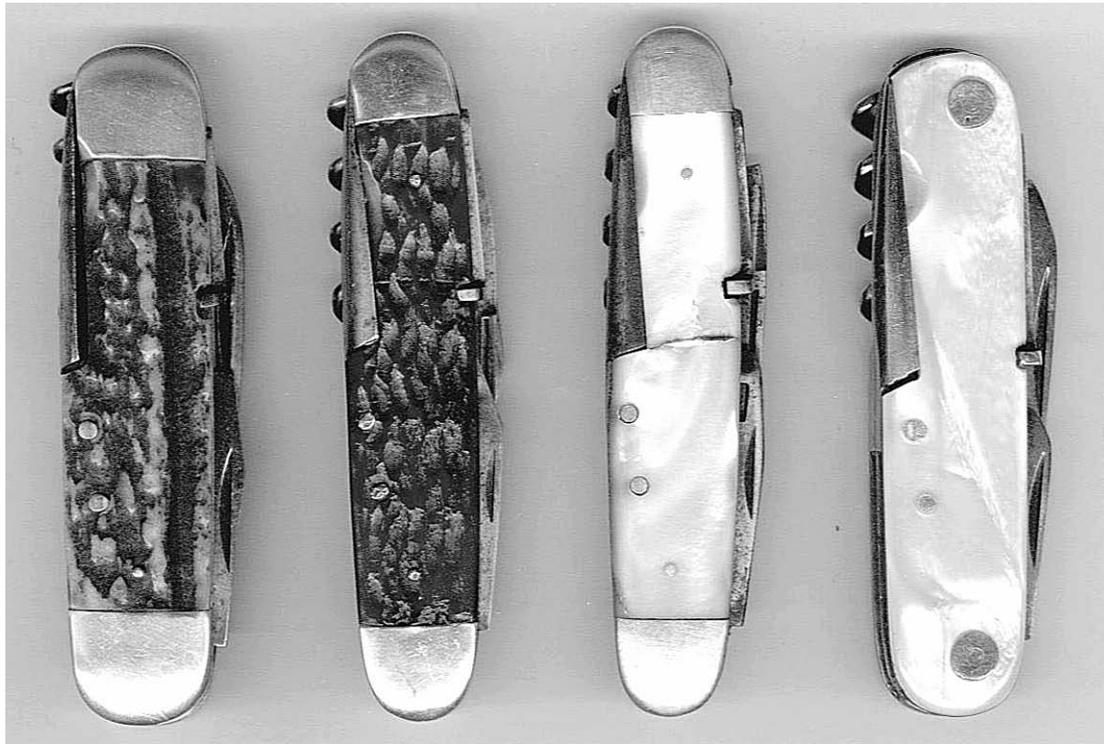
mechanically and artistically. We marvel at these pieces, and a few marvel at the mechanics that make this all fit together. So it is with the six blade camp knife. But the six blade utility pattern knife not only has to be functional, but has to be stout and strong to withstand the rigors of every day use. The quality of these knives by the American makers was tops. In fact it is rare to find one that doesn't have at least half sunk joints. Sunk joints reduce pocket wear and sharp edges on a folding knife, but the making of this style knife requires more time and effort than a standard pocket knife.

The six blades consist of the main cutting blade, the screwdriver/cap lifter blade, the can opener blade, a small pen blade, a

punch blade and a corkscrew. This combination of blades meant that many names were attached to this knife. It is referred to as the sportsman knife, camp knife, camper's knife, picnic knife, utility knife, scout knife, outing knife, hunter's knife and outdoor knife.

The corkscrew is the most interesting of the blades because it gives this pattern the camper's appeal. But of course every outing had to have a jug of wine along. To paraphrase an expression, "...a loaf of bread, a brick of cheese, a bottle of wine and thou." Water sources were not always pure and carrying water was not convenient, so there was an excuse to carry wine. So you forgot the

Continued on page 3



Camp knives without bails. (L to R) Ulster stag, Camillus bone, Camillus pearl, and Challenge celluloid handle knives.



Abused Camillus rare pearl handle camp knife. Note Presto-O-Lite key.

Continued from page 2
corkscrew, but ah ha, you didn't forget your handy dandy camp knife with the corkscrew on it just as you did not forget "thou." And it was this same pocketknife that could assist in repairs to your automobile or to the leather on the alternate form of transportation called the "horse."

The mechanical design of the six blade knife is unique since there are only two back springs for all six blades. In other words the four standard blades use the ends of the springs for pressure while the punch and corkscrew use the near center of the springs

for tension and pressure. Of course the springs are needed to keep the blades tight within the knife when closed and keep them open when the blades are extended for use. It is strongly recommended that not more than one blade be open at the same time. The spring could break with all the extra added force.

The shape of the Remington six blade knife narrows at the bail. This shape, other than reducing bulk and weight, aids the gripping of the knife when using the punch or corkscrew. The forefinger wraps around the narrow portion of the handle and

the remaining fingers have a place to grip on the rest of the handle. This rock solid grip gives the tool a strong basis for the corkscrew and the extra leverage for the use of the leather punch blade. A

most clever design.

While the design of the corkscrew is taken for granted, there were some strong considerations when making this device. Making a twisted piece of metal that is symmetrical

and consistent in shape is no easy task. Likewise the tip of the corkscrew must end so it is protected by the handle of the knife. If that point were to aim out, it could tear a pocket in a

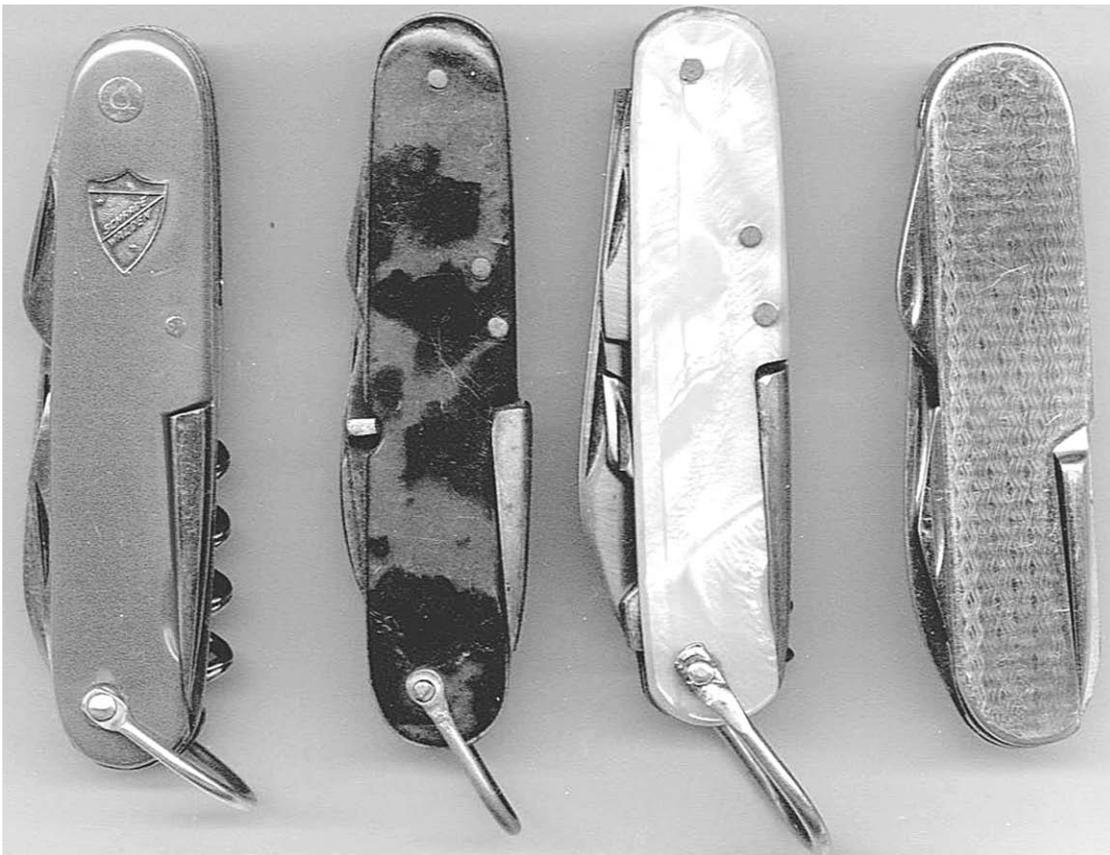
Continued on page 4



1935 Farwell, Ozmun, Kirk & Co. Hardware catalog listed this Henry Sears & Son Outing knife.



Knives of a feather flock together. (L to R) Two Remington knives 1990's; Boker, Remington pre-1940.



(L to R) Schrade Walden red plastic, USAQMC tortoise shell, Kutmaster celluloid and Syracuse metal handle knives.

Continued from page 3

heart beat. Now all the corkscrews I have seen are right handed. That means that the action of inserting the screw is clockwise, and the bottle rotates counter clockwise. A left handed corkscrew would screw counter clockwise while the bottle rotates clockwise. This usually applies to bottles that are used in the northern hemisphere. Of course dear Elayne suggests that this topic of discussion is best addressed after ten jugs of wine are consumed.

The punch or reamer blade on the majority of six blade knives is a solid triangular shaped blade. So it will lay neatly and blend smoothly into the handle. The handles of the knives actually have the handle material cut out to allow for this tool. This is also true for the corkscrew. The Remington style knives use a different approach with their punch blades. The blade lays within the liner and is a 90

degree bent style blade. Either the triangular reamer or the angled reamer will do the same job, and it is a matter of personal choice as to which works better.

Early six blade knives were handled in bone. Later ones were handled in synthetic material like plastic, celluloid and delrin. In between we have stag, metal and pearl. Pearl is the ultimate in bad choices for handle material as it is too fragile for a tool device. But then again you can understand that if you had the finances then, a first class impress-the-neighbors device would be a pearl handled six blade camp knife. This knife would be ideal to loan to your butler or chauffeur when you went out camping. Life is hard sometimes.

A great way to tell if a six blade knife is really old (pre 1930's) is if the can opener blade has a shell extractor built into it. (If

Continued on page 5

**HERE'S the Bird for K.P.—
the Remington Camp Knife**

THE Remington Camp Knife is a fine all-purpose steel tool for camp life. And it'll do nearly anything—peel potatoes, slice bacon, snip into canned goods, open a bottle with corkscrew or cap lifter, mend straps, tighten up the screws about the car or camp kit, etc.

A Man's Knife—Remington Steel, made to the exacting Remington standards of quality and accuracy—with clean cutting edges that stay keen a long time.

Some knife—as you have a right to expect from Remington.

And this is just one of Remington's Specific Knives for Specific Purposes—*Knives for Everybody* and every practical use.

To be sure of a good Pocket Knife see that it's a Remington—with the name Remington stamped on the tang of the blade.

Stick a Remington Camp Knife in your pocket—you'll need it a dozen times a day.

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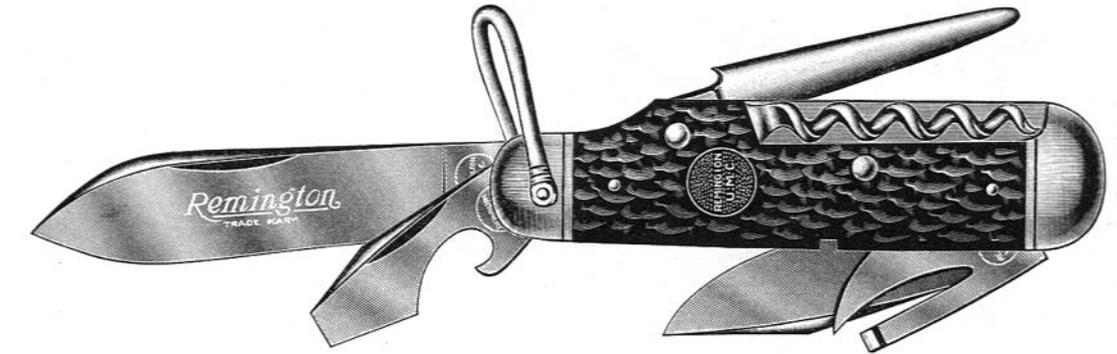
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the can opener has a sharp edge lift tab, this is the shell extractor device.) Shell extractors and Prest-O-Lite keys are time stamped devices. The shotguns of old used paper shells. This material was prone to absorb moisture and could swell in the chamber of the shotgun. Usually the brass head of the shell would rip loose from the paper, leaving the paper in the chamber. If this happened, it would be necessary to manually extract the shell casing from inside the chamber. The can opener blade fit quite nicely into a 20 gauge or larger shotgun chamber. A hook or pointed angled device would be handy, and that was supplied by the sharp angled part of the can opener blade. Of course its other function was to provide a lift for the can opener blade. The sharpness of the extractor that often poked you was its secondary duty. Later designs eliminated the shell extractor tool as the

importance of this tool declined. As a result of this, the can opener lift now took on a smooth easy-to-use shape.

Remington manufactured their pattern R3843 pocket knife that they called the camp knife. Remington also called it a scout/utility knife or picnic knife. The Remington R3843 knife was made from 1922 until about 1939. It was very popular at that time since the country had time and money to spare in the heyday of the roaring 1920's. Camping, hunting and motor touring were big pastimes; and a six bladed tool was a handy in-the-pocket insurance program. Advertising was abundant for this pattern knife, and I have seen many fancy and expensive color ads on posters and in magazines. However, as popular as the R3843 pattern was it never gained recognition as an official scouting organization knife.

All old Remington R3843 knives had bone



Remington Camp Knife from Remington C5 catalog.

handles. When the Remington bullet pattern became popular in the mid 1920's, the R3843 was sometimes bundled in as a member of this family. The "bullet" on the handle represented a cartridge profile, and the round shield of the R3843 was considered a profile of the base of the cartridge.

For the collector, the unique Remington variations come mainly from the can opener design. There is the one piece can opener design (1922 - 1923); the two piece can opener stamped Remington (1924 - 1927) and the two piece

can opener stamped with Remington and the patent number on it (1927 - 1939). The other collector variation is shield error issue, two of the letters "N" are backwards on the round shield. It is not obvious unless you look through a magnifying glass. In viewing specimens which have this error, it seems this shield must have been used for several years before it was corrected. Sometimes we don't notice a difference because we assume the obvious and don't examine closely. Does this "mistake" add collector's value to this

knife? It would if it were rare, but there are numerous specimens that are like this thus making it "just" another variation. The error occurred sometime within the 1924 to 1927 time window.

The Remington R3843 is quite collectable, and one in good shape is a real find. In fact if you really like this pattern for use you can get one today; since it is currently offered. The bone has given way to a more modern handle material called delrin and the blades are now 440 stainless. It is still the pattern

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5
R3843 and is a great tool and a great knife.

Although Remington is the leader in collectable six blade knives, there are some other makers that warrant attention. A favorite knife in my collection is the Ulster stag handle six blade knife. This is a pre 1920's knife that clearly illustrates the European influence in the pattern. The first glance at this knife has everyone saying Europe, but it is an Ulster USA knife. It certainly is possible that the knife was created by European workers that were employed by Ulster thus explaining the look. The stag is choice, and the construction is superb.

Another favorite of mine is a used up, beat up, left to die Camillus six blade knife. This is a pre 1920's knife and is especially

unique since it has pearl handles. It is so difficult for me to comprehend the mass marketing of such a fragile handle material on a tool designed for stout. The only explanation that fits is that this was created as a factory special, and then was abused by someone who had little regard for the rarity of the knife. But to say it was abused is an understatement.

Bob Enders got my attention at a show in 1995 when he brought out a custom made six blade pocket knife. This knife was fairly faithful to the old Boker and Remington pattern, however it was able to be dated by the modern safety can opener. Bob was more interested in making a useable tool than an historical clone, and he will tell you the agony and pain that it took to make this knife. However it is an execution

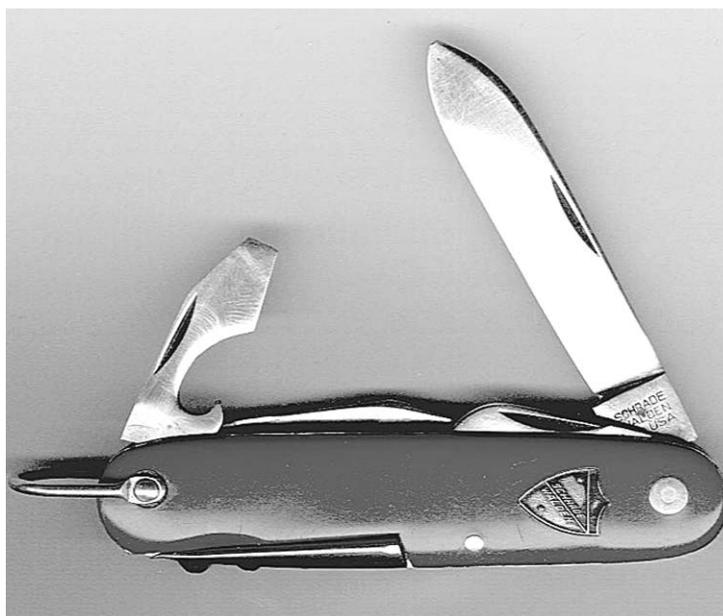
of beauty and functionality. The one blade that caused him the most grief was the corkscrew.

Remington, Ulster, Challenge and Camillus made six blade camp knives. Camillus also made a bone handle pattern in addition to pearl. In the late 1930's Kutmaster introduced a six blade knife with celluloid handles and the half moon style can opener. The quality of this knife was quite good. Schrade Walden came out with this pattern knife in the 1950's. It had red plastic handles. I have not mentioned the European knives of this pattern in this article but failure to mention Boker would be a slight. It is said that Boker originated the design of the six blade that was used by Remington. In fact putting a Remington and a Boker side by side presents a challenge to identify the maker without close scrutiny.

It is interesting to note that the popularity surges of the camp knife closely follow economic prosperity. The 1920's parallel the 1950's in the years following great wars where money and free time allowed sporting and camping pleasures. It was during these times that a



Custom sportsman bone handle knife made by Bob Enders. This knife patterns itself on the Remington/Boker style six blade knife.



In the 1950's Schrade Walden introduced this six blade knife.

utility pattern knife like the six blade would sell and be in demand. And with a little stretch of the imagination, our own times in the 1990's parallel economic growth where the Swiss Army knife and the multi tool knife are the rage in pocket tools.

Knife history is challenging but we are sometimes able to identify patterns by periods and also the times when certain tools were popular. The punch blade was essential for the farmer and his leather harness devices. The Prest-O-Lite tank key was essential to car lights prior to the electric lights. Even of late the cap lifter has been made obsolete by the twist top caps. The only thing that hasn't seemed to fade out in the march of progress is the cutting blade and the corkscrew. Long live the six blade knife and the corkscrew.