EDGED WEAPONS

Introduction

Cutting tools are a basic part of every culture. Most museums have a number of edged weapons in their collection that need care and attention. Care must always he taken when handling this class of artifact as carelessness can lead to serious injury. An old rusty jack-knife can be razor sharp and leave a nasty wound that can become infected. All edged weapons and tools should be treated with respect to prevent needless injuries.

The following is a breakdown of edged weapons by type--a standard method of description. This is followed by a section on handling and care. When filling out accession and catalog information, it is important for purposes of standardization that the following nomenclature be used.

Edged Swords

The most common type of edged weapon to be found in most general museum collections is the sword. It was the most preferred memento of the veteran and a traditional symbol of the warrior. Swords are classified as civilian or military. If civilian, they are either hunting swords or dueling swords. If military, they are divided into officer's and enlisted men's and then broken down as to service; i.e., cavalry, infantry, artillery, navy.

When describing the sword, a standard vocabulary must be used to avoid confusion. The description process will be carried out viewing the weapon in a horizontal position with the hilt to the left and the blade to the right. The side of the sword facing the onlooker is the obverse and the far side is the reverse. The following vocabulary will be used:

1. Sword: A classification of edged weapon where the blade is longer than the hilt or handle and the overall length is greater than that normally associated with a knife.
2. Small Sword: Straight light blade designed for thrusting.
3. Saber: Single-edged sword designed for slashing and cutting.
4. Blade: The cutting portion of the weapon forward of the hilt,
5. False Edge: Short edge at the point that runs along the back of the blade for a few inches.

6. True Edge: The edge of the blade designed for actual cutting.

7. Forte: The portion of the blade nearest the hilt that is strengthened to make it the strongest part of the blade.

8. Foible: The portion of the blade nearest the point that is the weakest part of the blade.

9. Point of Percussion: The point on the blade where the forte meets the foible, about two--thirds of the way up the blade toward the hilt.

10. Fuller: Groove cut in the center of the blade to reduce its weight.

11. Ricasso: The square area of the blade, just before the hilt, that has no edge.

12. Clipped Point: Where the true edge meets the back of the blade in a sharp concave arc.

13. Tang: The portion of the blade that passes through the hilt.

14. Hilt: Handle portion by which the weapon is held.

15. Grips: The portion of the hilt that is held by the hand.

16. Pommel: The part that ends the grips farthest from the blade.

17. Guard: The portion of the hilt that protects the hand.

18. Quillons: The portion of tile guard that forms a crossbar that is perpendicular to and lies between the blade and the hilt. The term is plural because each half of the bar is considered separately. Quillon (singular) means the half of the bar above the blade.

19. Knuckle Bow: The portion of the guard that protects the knuckles.

20. Counterguard: Besides the quillon, that portion of the guard that lies between the grins and the blade.

21. Langets: A portion of the guard attached to the quillons and parallel to the blade. They are designed to hold the sword more securely in the scabbard.

22. Scabbard: The sheath that holds the sword blade when not in use and protects the carrier. The scabbard h-as four major parts: a. body; b. throat; c. middle band; d. tip (when reinforced called the drag).

Knives

Knives are a type of everyday tool found in. most general museum collections. They are generally of two types, sheath knives and pocket or folding knives. The knife to be described will be held, like the sword, in a horizontal position with the point to the right, the hilt of the knife to the left, and the edge down. The side away from the viewer is the reverse and the side toward the viewer is the obverse. The folding knife is described with the largest blade or principal blade t-o the right with the edge down. The following terms will be used when describing a knife:

1. Knife: Weapon or tool, each blade has a single edge sometimes having a slight upper edge at the point.

2. Dirk: Variant of the knife, with tapered blade sharpened on one edge. Used for cutting and thrusting. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, all short sidearms carried by naval officers were referred to as dirks.

3. Blade: The principal part of the knife, forward of the hilt.

4. Edge: The sharpened side of the blade.

5. Back: The side opposite or above the edge of the blade.

6. False Edge: At the point the back is sharpened for a short distance.

7. Ewage: When the back of the blade is beveled rather than sharpened.

8. Fuller: A groove in the blade.

9. Short Groove: Found in pocketknives and used to open blade.

10. Nail Nick: The short groove found in pocketknives for opening.

11. Ricasso: Square section of blade near the hilt with no edge.

12. Bolster: Moulding between base of blade and grips.

13. Choil: The portion of the blade between the bolster on the narrow section and the edge at almost a right angle to the edge. It prevents the fingers from slipping forward along the edge of a knife without a guard.

14. Tang: The portion of the blade that is narrowest and passes through the hilt or handle.

Bayonets

A bayonet is a knife or dagger that is placed on the muzzle of a firearm to convert the weapon into a spear. Although it is a simple weapon, it is fairly recent in the rather long history of military weapons. It was, and is, used for everything from a candle holder to a can opener. Bayonets are of the following types:

1. Plug Bayonet: The earliest type of bayonet (l660 and 1700). It has a handle designed to fit in the muzzle of a musket like a cork and a dagger-like blade.

2. Socket Bayonet: It came into use about 1700 and is still used today. It has a cylindrical socket that fits over the muzzle and around the outside of the barrel rather than the muzzle as the plug bayonet does, allowing the piece to be loaded and fired while the bayonet is fixed on the piece. The shank is at a right angle to the socket and has a long, sharply-pointed spike with two, three, or four sides.

3. Knife Bayonet: The type most widely used today. It has a knife-like handle that has a slot cut in the base and with a locking lug and spring. This slot fits over the stud on the rifle made to receive it. The quillon

or guard has a loop in it that fits tightly over the muzzle of the weapon. The blade is flat and sharp on one edge like a knife.

Handling

1. Edged weapons consist of knives, swords, bayonets, axes, and pole arms.

2. Each weapon must be treated as though it were new and razor-sharp. A wound from a dirty rusty edge can easily become infected.

3. When handling edged weapons, always wear cotton gloves, for safety as well as protection of the object.

4. Keep the work area at a relative humidity of about 40% and make sure it is clean and dust free.

5. Never flex a knife or sword blade because it can easily bend or break,

6. Always check all parts of the weapon for markings and note accordingly.

7. If a sword, scabbard, belt, buckle, and sash come from a single source in a set treat it as a unit and number by parts.

8. If a sword or knife is stuck in a scabbard and does not come out under moderate pressure, call in a conservator.

9. Handle all pole arms with extreme care because their unwieldy length makes them prone to penetrate ceilings, walls, or people.

10. If the head of a pole arm unscrews from its base, number both parts.

11. A sword should never be grabbed by the hilt because the leather and wire grip could easily be dry and fragile and suffer damage. It should be handled with cotton gloves by the blade or scabbard. If it is handled by the blade, great care must always be taken.

13. When handling axes or hatchets, be sure that the head is tight on the handle. Never swing an ax or hatchet, because even if the head seems to be tight it can swing off.

Care

1. Never sharpen an edged weapon under any circumstances.

2. If a sword blade or any other type of blade is bent or twisted, do not attempt to straighten it. The weapon should be turned over to a conservator.

3. Some edged weapons consist of metal, leather, wood, and cloth, and should be handled only by a trained conservator.

4. Never, under any circumstances, use a wire wheel for cleaning or buffing an edged weapon.

5. Do not use acids, bleaches, or strong abrasives for cleaning edged weapons at any time.

6. Never polish the metal wire or wrap on a sword handle, because the polish may damage the wood or leather underneath.

7. Do not oil handle grip, handle, wood scabbard, or pole if there is damage. Oiling can easily prevent a proper repair from being made.

8. A weapon in good condition can be cleaned with a soft cloth. Always wipe a weapon lightly before storing.

9. Keep sword blades lightly waxed at all times. A good high-grade wax, such as butcher

wax, should be used for this purpose.

10. If a sword blade shows slight rust spots or fingerprints, they can be removed with grade 000 steel wool and sewing machine oil. This will remove the rust without scratching. After polishing, apply a thin coat of wax. For very light rust, dry Bon Ami on a dry cloth is good.

Storage

1. The temperature should he kept at about 60º F. and the relative humidity at about 45%.

2. Always keep the storage area clean and well ventilated.

3. With the exception of pole arms, weapons can be hung from wooden racks or pegboards, or stored on felt-padded shelves. They should be supported at all times in at least two places. If pegboard is used for storage purposes, make sure that the wire hooks used for hanging are carefully wrapped with masking tape or cloth to prevent scratching.

4. Store pole arms horizontally on wooden racks with support in at least three places.

5. Never, under any circumstances, store a weapon in plastic bag or wrapping. The metal and wood parts must “breathe.”

6. Never store pole arms by leaning them in a corner or stacking on top of one another. This can cause the poles to bend and warp.

7. Never hang a sword by its hilt.

8. If a scabbard is very loose on a blade, tie the scabbard to the hilt with cotton string. This will act as a reminder and also keep the sword from falling from the scabbard.

9. After handling a weapon in good condition, make sure to wipe it with a dry wax-treated cloth before storing.

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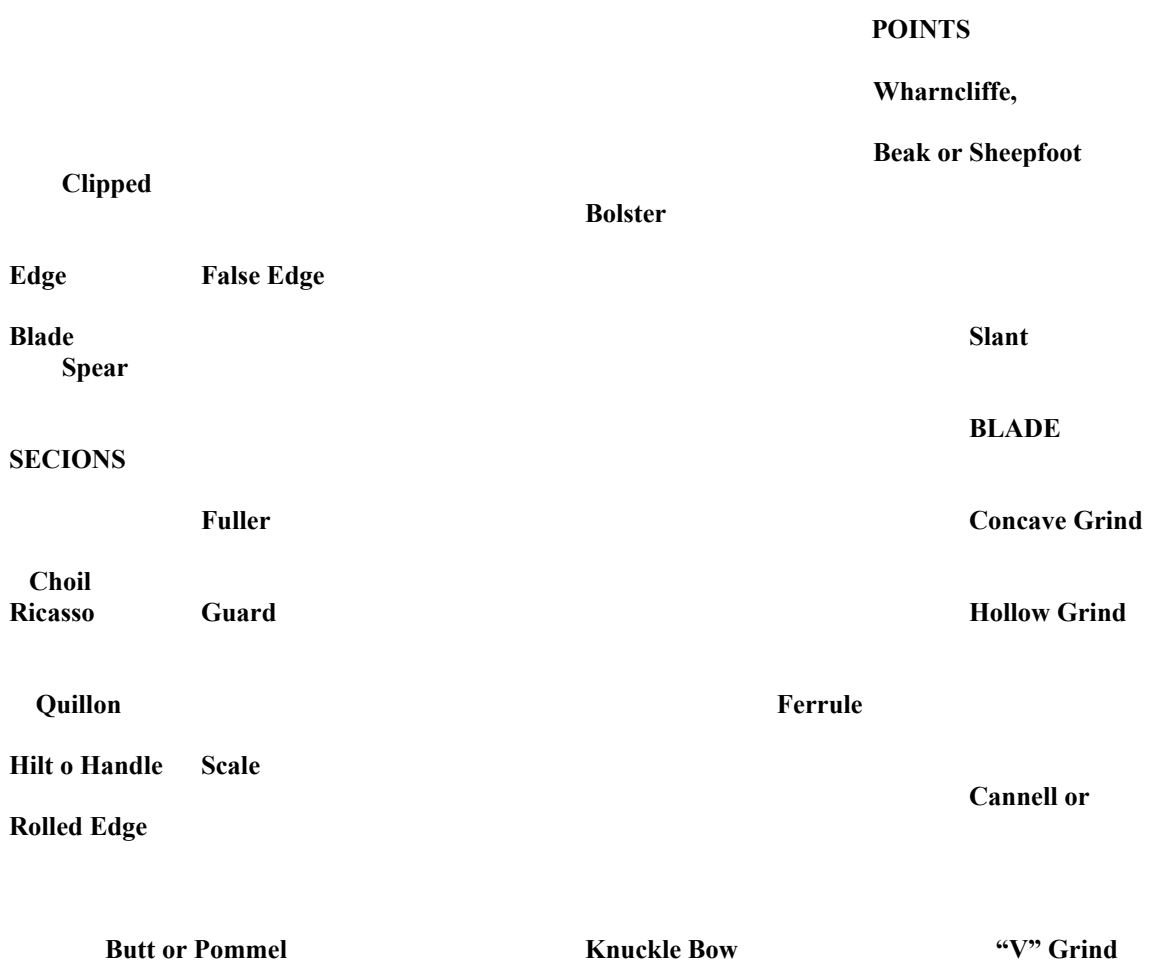
NOMENCLATURE OF THE POCKET KNIFE

KNIFE NOMENCLATURE



NOMENCLATURE OF THE POCKET KNIFE

Plug Bayonet

NOMENCLATURE OF THE SOCKET BAYONET

Socket Length

Transverse Locking Slot

Blade length

Shank Length

Elbow

Rear Reinforcing Collar

Blade Stop or Guard

Mounting slot

Clasp Closing Joint **Closing Bridge**

Blade Width

Inside Diameter

Locking Clasp **Outside Diameter**

Blade Shoulder

Retaining Band

Knife Bayonet

Guard

NOMENCLATURE OF THE HATCHET

Poll

Haft **Fore end**

Car

Butt **Eye**

Heel **Leading Edge**

THE MAKING OF A BLADE FOR A B ELT AXE

Lathing Hatchet **Shingling Hatchet**