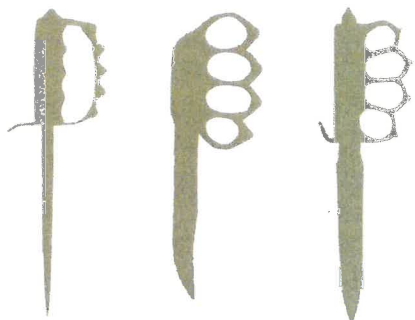


# Knives Find a New Role

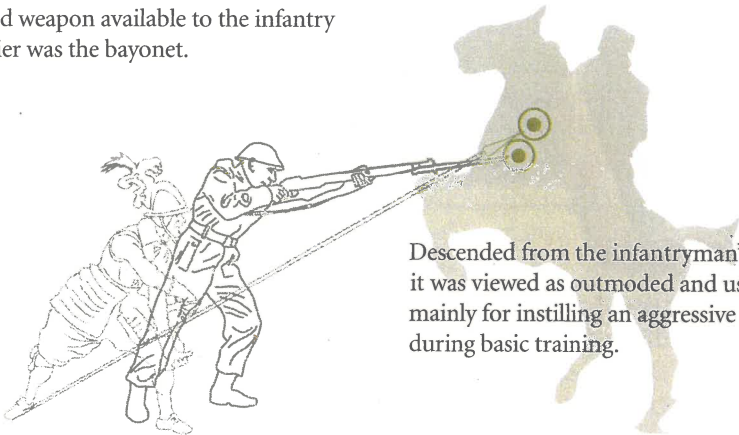
World War II commando raids gave new reason to revive a very old weapon

## How crude

In World War I, knives were seen as “ungentlemanly.” But hand-to-hand combat in the trenches led to the belated production of the trench knife.



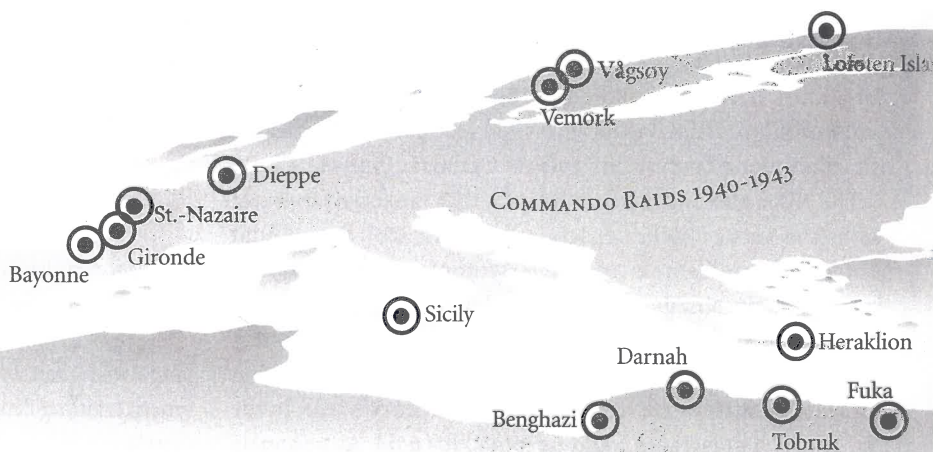
At the start of World War II, the main edged weapon available to the infantry soldier was the bayonet.



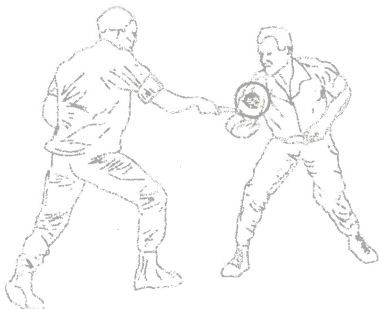
Descended from the infantryman’s pike, it was viewed as outmoded and useful mainly for instilling an aggressive spirit during basic training.

## The gloves come off

In 1940, Winston Churchill created the Special Operations Executive and the commandos, whose missions were sabotage and clandestine warfare. Striking throughout Europe, they carried out raids as part of a larger plan to keep Hitler guessing about where the D-Day invasion would come.



## The empire’s expert killers



Cpts. William Ewart Fairbairn and Eric Anthony Sykes were instructors at Achnacarry training camp in Scotland in 1940, teaching British and American special forces the art of silent killing.



They proposed a new weapon that would have the precision point of a rapier rather than the wide blade of a cutlass.

Shanghai fighting knife (ca. 1933)



British pattern bayonet (1903)



For a prototype, they used a custom-made knife from their days in the Shanghai riot police, which in turn had been reworked from a 1903 model bayonet.

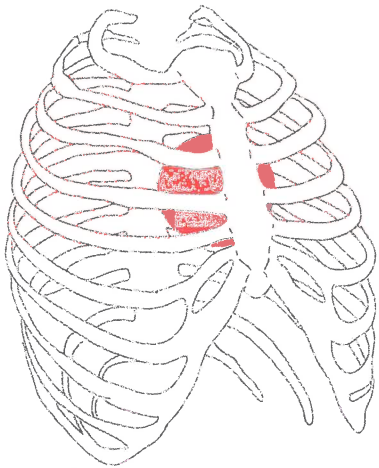
# The Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife

## Hitting home



### Cutting

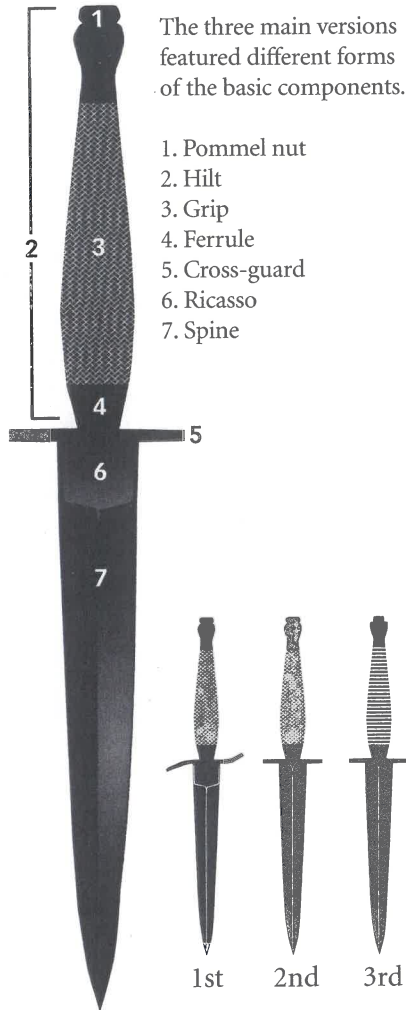
Fairbairn had learned that any wound with rough edges (from a dull blade) would heal more quickly than a clean cut. So he specified a double-edged, razor-sharp surface.



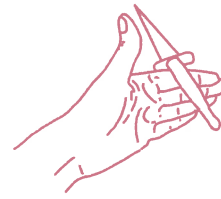
### Stabbing

He also required the blade to be slim enough to slip through the rib cage into the heart. Soldiers often filed the very tip to a blunt point so the knife would not get stuck in bone.

## Vital parts



## Grip



### Balance

Like a fencing foil, the knife was well-balanced, and the handle shaped for precision rather than slashing power.



### Force

To penetrate between the ribs, the knife was held with the blade facing up and the thumb pressed against the cross-guard.

## Case V-42 Stiletto

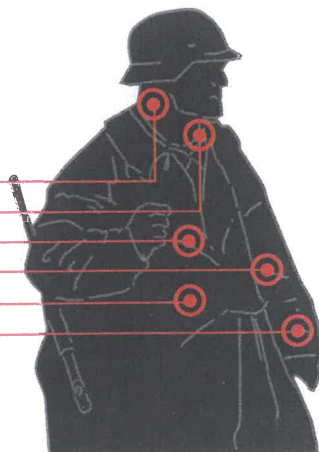


Another knife, designed by Lt. Col. Robert T. Frederick, had an indent on the ricasso to give the thumb a better purchase.

## Captain Fairbairn's Timetable of Death

Capt. Fairbairn taught his pupils how to inflict the maximum damage, ideally in total silence.

Location	Time from Stabbing to Death
Carotid artery	12 sec.
Subclavian artery	3.5 sec.
Heart	3 sec.
Brachial artery	1.5 min.
Stomach	Depends on depth
Radial artery	2 min.



## Desperate measures

German sentries started slinging their rifles over their right shoulders to make it harder for an attacker to hit the carotid artery or the heart.

