

From the editors of **BLADE** magazine

COLLECTING Case[®] Knives

IDENTIFICATION AND PRICE GUIDE



The World's
Only Full-Color
Guide to Case[®]
Knives

Foreword by John Sullivan, Director of Marketing, W.R. Case & Sons

Steve Pfeiffer

COLLECTING
Case[®] Knives
IDENTIFICATION AND PRICE GUIDE

Steve Pfeiffer

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my late father, Russell J. Pfeiffer, the sharpest knife trader I ever knew.

And to the late George Goring Sr. of Michigan, my mentor and friend who introduced me to the wonders of Case pocket knife collecting in 1973.

And finally to the late author Dewey P. Ferguson, who blazed this trail before me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the good folks at W.R Case & Sons Cutlery Company for graciously providing me with access to the archives at the Case factory, for the fine plant tour, for providing much useful material, and for generally being such gracious hosts. Shirley Boser, Case historian, was a valuable guide for this effort, as were Lisa Miller, coordinator of the Case Collector's Club, and John Sullivan, Case's director of marketing. And thanks to Andy Norcross of the Case Art Department and to Katie Shonts, the new Case historian. And, finally, thanks to Tom Arrowsmith, president of WR. Case & Sons, for supporting this effort.

I would also like to extend a warm thank you to each and every associate of W.R Case & Sons Cutlery Company for the talent and enthusiasm they display in every step of the manufacture of Case pocket knives.

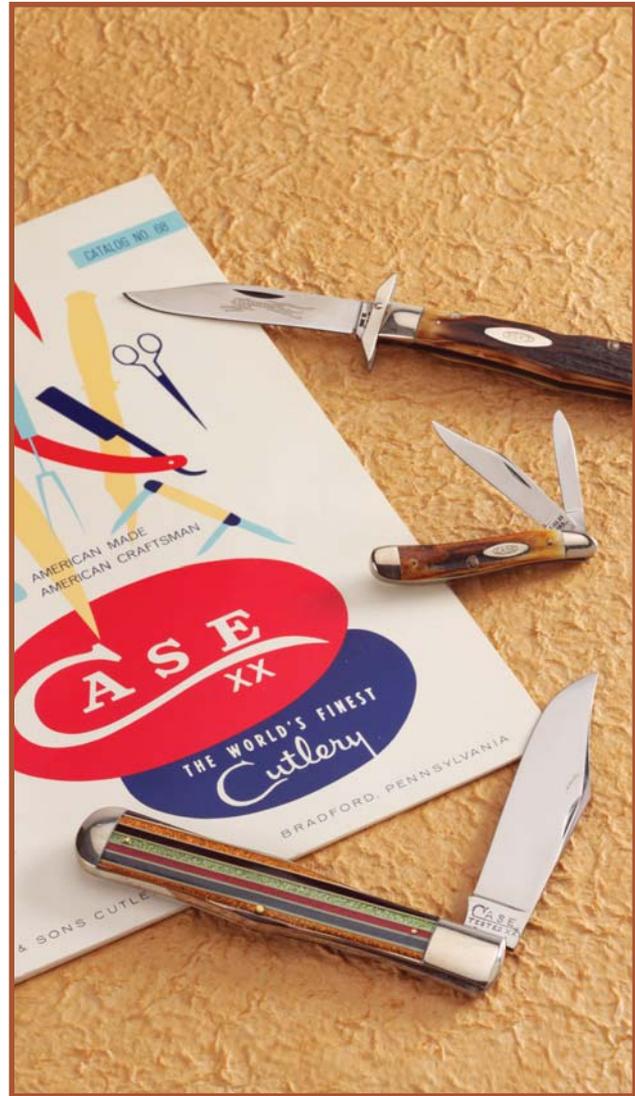
I would like to thank a number of fellow knife collectors who provided support and encouragement for this book, including "Uncle Jim" Prather, Ed Olson, Theron Eckard, Bob Picklesheimer, and Gary Moore.

And many thanks to my dear friend Sheila for transcribing much of the material I copied from the Case factory archives.

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FOREWORD



There's a story behind every Case knife. That may sound like the usual marketing blather, but turn the pages of this book, and you'll see what I mean. Handle materials, blade steels, pattern by pattern, the story of the Case knife comes to light.

For those of us who work for W.R. Case & Sons, there's more to the story. It is not just about the knives, it's about the people. My career with the company began in 1994, a few months after Case Wall of Fame member Mary Petro retired with seventy years of service. Mary started on Bank Street, the first Case factory in Bradford. I had the privilege of actually working with another Case Legend, model maker Tom Hart, the designer of the Texas Lockhorn (page 257). Our marketing team developed the CopperLock®, the RussLock®, and the concept that led to the Pocket Worn® knives. Tom, by the way, had fifty years of service. I mention Mary and Tom, but there have been so many. Generation after generation, skilled Case artisans continue the knife-making traditions started by the Case Brothers more than a century ago.

W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Company has a rich legacy – something we work very hard to preserve. There have been many changes in the knife industry in recent years. Old-line knife factories like Imperial Schrade and Camillus have closed. More knives are being imported from China and other countries. These economic times are challenging for any American manufacturing company. But the real reward comes because we are lucky enough to

make a product – a pocket knife - that people care about. That brings me to the other “people” story at Case – our customers, enthusiasts and collectors.

There's just something about a Case knife – it brings the stories to life. If I'm traveling and mention that I work for Case, invariably I'll learn about a favorite pocket knife or the hunting knife that was a gift from their Dad or Granddad. Our repair department gets so many wonderful letters. Stories of knives used on the farm or carried to war in Vietnam. At the factory, hardly a day goes by without Case Collectors touring the facility. I can't begin to tell you how much that means to all of the Case Associates. Families travel together on their summer vacations, building memories with their children and grandchildren. That probably doesn't happen at many other factories.

It was certainly an honor to be asked by Steve Pfeiffer and the folks at Krause to write the foreword for this book. I offer my congratulations on the tremendous effort and research he put into this book. Whether you are a new or veteran Case collector, it will be a great reference. Case collecting is a great hobby – one to last for a lifetime. Just remember rule number one: Collect what you like – and enjoy.

John Sullivan
Director of Marketing
W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Co.
Bradford PA

INTRODUCTION



It is with great pleasure and pride that I present this book to the Case pocket knife collecting community.

When I initially conceived this project, I set out to write a book about Case pocket knives that would be significantly different than other books on the market that cover the Case brand.

There are a number of fine books available that thoroughly cover the history of W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Company, including rare information and photos that trace the history of Case and related firms and the lineages of the families involved.

Likewise, there are many stories that have been documented regarding the often colorful personalities involved in the cutlery industry in and around Bradford, Pennsylvania during the early years of operation of W.R. Case & Sons and their rivals including the Case Brothers Cutlery Company and the Cattaraugus Cutlery Company.

Rather than “reinventing the wheel” and covering this information again, I chose a different focus for this book. This is a book about the knives themselves. It is a book about staghorn and steel, about pocket knife construction details, handle materials, and the “DNA” of the historic pocket knife patterns that have been in and out

of the Case pocket knife line over the course of many years. Given the vast number of pocket knife patterns and variations produced by Case during the World War I era, the pre-World War II years, the post WWII years, and up to the present day, naturally not everything can be covered.

I have endeavored to include information on various topics related to the Case brand that will be of maximum interest to Case pocket knife collectors, and (I hope) to the collectors of other brands and types of knives as well.

The history of the W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Company mirrors the history of the modern cutlery industry itself, and American industry in general.

It is my sincere hope that in writing this book I have accomplished the task I set out to do, and that knife collectors of all experience levels in the United States and around the world will gain much valuable information from the study of what is contained herein.

Steve Pfeiffer
AKA “Knifeaholic”
February 2009

THE CASE COLLECTORS CLUB

Listening to collectors is ever so present at Case with one of the best suggestions offered almost 30 years ago. An avid knife collector wrote to a past Case president about forming a knife collectors association. This resulted with the introduction of the Case Collectors Club in 1981.

Since that time, the Case Collectors Club (CCC) has pledged to be the premier association for knife collectors and enthusiasts worldwide. The CCC helps beginning collectors and serious aficionados learn more about the history and rich heritage of Case knives. Collectors are rewarded with unparalleled customer service and quality, handcrafted knives worthy to be labeled “Made in the USA.” Case continues to raise the value of membership by offering a quarterly magazine that shares information on new products soon to hit the market, Case history, featured collector stories, annual consumer events, and much more.

Additional membership benefits include free tours of the Case knife factory, special Club events, an exclusive member forum, and options to buy limited edition knives.

The CCC strives to keep the family tradition of Case collecting alive from generation to generation. When an established collector has the opportunity to pass down their collection to a family member, they both share the satisfaction of learning about and acquiring a true masterpiece of American craftsmanship. Sponsoring a junior member in the CCC is a great way to keep the tradition alive by introducing a child or grandchild to the fun of knife collecting.

Club members are a part of the world’s largest knife collecting association! For additional information or to join the club, call (800) 523-6350, write to W.R. Case & Sons Cutlery Company, Owens Way, Bradford, PA 16701, or visit www.wrcase.com.

MAXIMS FOR THE CASE POCKET KNIFE COLLECTOR

If it's *your* knife:

It has "regular" bone handles or bone handles with a "red tint."
The stag handles have a "crack."
And it has a steel blade pin in a nickel silver bolster, then it was "crudely repinned with a nail."
It has "visible rust spots."
It has "significant rust and tarnish."
It has "50 percent blade wear" and has been heavily "buffed and polished."
It has "significant blade wobble."
And it has weak backsprings, it has "lazy blades."

And it has a blade that has been reshaped, it is a "broken blade."
It is a phony.
It is a modern counterfeit.

Yep, if you have followed the "knife business" for any length of time, you must know that over in Solingen, Germany (or as I heard one "ole timer" once call it, "Sloe Gin Germany"), there are any number of old cutlery warehouses packed with "new old stock" knives, or "old parts," just waiting to be discovered. And many of these knives and blades will have the tang stampings of older American knife companies. Imagine that! I am going to have to go over to Solingen one of these days. I wonder if there are any "old stock" Case pocket knives over there. And don't get me started on "sandbar stag." Please, don't. And how many times have you heard the expression that "that knife came out of the factory" when referring to an old knife. Um...yeah...I think that they ALL came "out of the factory" at some point.

OK gang, here is a little secret to make your "knife collector" lives easier. We have no doubt all been in a situation where we were at a knife or gun show and we want to alert one of our buddies to the fact that we think a knife on a dealer's table is a "phony" or a "counterfeit." Oftentimes this becomes an awkward situation as we want to point this out to our friend, yet it may be considered "bad

If it's *my* knife:

It has "cherry red bone" handles.
The stag handles have a "natural stress line."
And it has a steel blade pin in a nickel silver bolster, it was a "special factory order" made that way for "extra strength."
It has "specks."
It has "developed a nice patina."
It has "been lightly used and cleaned to near mint."

It has a "hint of blade play."
And it has weak backsprings, they are "easy on the thumbnail."
And it has a blade that has been reshaped, it is a "special tool blade" that "came from the factory" that way.
It is an "authorized reproduction."
It is "new old stock" from a "warehouse find."

form" to publicly use the terms "phony" or "counterfeit" out loud in front of the dealer. In addition to this being "bad form," the dealer usually has larger and sharper knives available within easy reach, if you get my drift.

So, in order to remain "incognito," use one of the following statements:

"Why, that knife looks to me like an *artificial leg joint*."
Or "That knife looks like a *cabinetmaker's success* to me.

OK, so what does this gibberish mean? Well, I prefer to think of it as "secret code," but here is the explanation:

Artificial = Faux

Leg Joint = Knee

Artificial Leg Joint = *Faux Knee*

"The cabinetmaker was successful in my kitchen; he made the counter fit."

Cabinetmaker's Success = *Counter Fit*

Get those? If not, ask your wife (if you are a man) or your children (if you are a woman). I know your next question. What, pray tell, is the difference between a "phony" knife and a "counterfeit" knife. Well, here is the difference as I see it: A "phony" is so bad that it won't fool anyone. A "counterfeit" at least attempts to look like the real thing.

CASE XX CUTLERY

is nationally known for its high standard of quality, and its original and practical designs

The essential requisites in the manufacturing of High Grade Cutlery are:

KNOWLEDGE of what is necessary to produce it.

EXPERIENCE gained by the old methods, coupled with many of the scientific developments of the present era.

We now offer you a line that surpasses anything that we have been able to furnish you in the past.

Our entire line of Hunting Knives, Butcher, Slicing and Paring Knives, Pocket Knives and Razors are manufactured from our High Grade CHROME Vanadium steel in our own factories.

Our blades are all “double tested”—first after hardening and again after tempering—to insure uniform quality. This is why CASE CUTLERY is marked, “Tested XX”.

The above text is an excerpt from the introduction to a 1930s-era product catalog published by W.R Case & Sons Cutlery Company. Today, as then, Case continues to research and improve the methods of cutlery manufacture so that Case pocket knife collectors and users can continue to have the finest available pocket knives made in the proud CASE tradition.

CASE POCKET KNIVES

THE MOST POPULAR BRAND AMONG KNIFE COLLECTORS

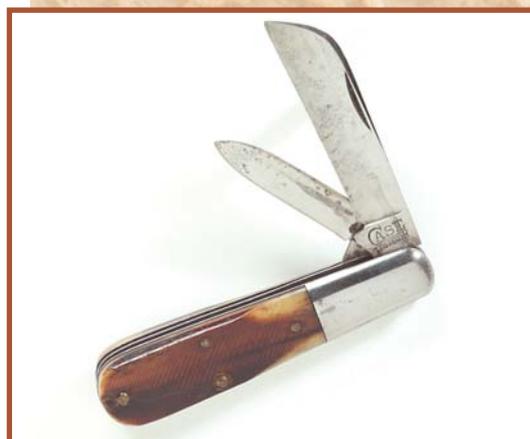
While pocket knives were manufactured in the United States as early as the mid-1800s, the idea of pocket knives as a collectible began in the post-WWII era of the 1950s. It was probable that the increase in personal wealth and leisure time in the more industrialized years after the war led to a rise in nostalgia for items associated with the Depression years and earlier.

Pocket knives are in many ways a “natural” collectible. The knife is said to be man's earliest and most basic tool. The pocket knife, particularly in the years prior to WWII, was a universal item treasured by men and women, boys and girls. In those days, virtually everyone either carried a pocket knife or had one or more readily available in a tool box or desk drawer. Pocket knives knew no social boundaries. Farmers, laborers, clerks, office workers, dock workers, fishermen, and outdoorsmen all carried and prized pocket knives as the most basic of working tools.

For a young person, the acquisition of the first pocket knife was an important rite of passage. A young boy's or girl's first knife might be an inexpensive new one or a hand me down. Pocket knives in those days were often kept and used until the blades were sharpened down to thin narrow spikes and the handles were worn smooth.

These well used but still serviceable pocket knives were often handed down to the next generation to be used again, and then often retired and put away as valued keepsakes—remembrances of a father or grandfather who may have carried and used the knife for 40 years or more. Cigar boxes or drawers filled with the well used and cared for pocket knives of previous generations were in essence the first knife collections.

The 1890s through the early 1940s can be viewed as the first “golden age” of pocket knife manufacturing in the United States. During that era, literally hundreds of cutlery companies produced pocket knives. Many of these companies were in existence for short periods before either failing or being purchased by new owners or absorbed by other cutlery manufacturers. Other cutlery firms prospered and produced millions of pocket knives that were distributed to every state of the union. The American cutlery industry battled imports, lived through good times and through periods of economic distress, and ultimately retooled to



The Case 62009 “Barlow” pattern was popular as an inexpensive working knife, especially during the pre-WWII years. These three 62009 patterns with the Case Tested stamping exhibit nice sawcut green bone handles. Closed length is 3-3/8”. From top: 62009 with spear master blade, 62009 1/2 with clip master blade, and 62009 Sh with sheepfoot master blade. All have pen secondary blades and iron bolsters and liners.

provide millions more knives of all types for the United States government during World War II.

During these years, the American cutlery industry produced some of the finest pocket knives that have ever been manufactured. All cutlery factories of that time relied a great deal on highly skilled cutlers to perform many operations by hand in the manufacture of fine pocket knives, a tradition that continues today in the best knife factories.

Pocket knives manufactured in the early years of the cutlery industry in the United States in the mid- to late 1800s were often relatively simple in design, construction, and materials. Ebony wood and simple undyed cattle bone were often the handle materials of choice on the simple, sturdy, unadorned jack knife patterns of the day. There were few manufacturers of pocket knives in the United States in those days, as most pocket knives and other cutlery items were imported, usually from Sheffield, England.

American pocket knife manufacturers were fully capable of making elegant well-adorned pocket knives that would rival the best knives made in Sheffield. Indeed, the early American manufacturers often made up special displays of pocket knives with handles of tortoise and pearl and with elegant file work, for display at the industrial exhibitions of that era. But by and large, the majority of pocket knives that were widely sold by American manufacturers were simple sturdy one- and two-blade jack knives of various sizes. The "Russell Barlow," manufactured in great quantities by the John Russell Company of Turners Falls Massachusetts, is a classic example of the relatively simple American-made jack knives of the era.

The imposition of tariffs on imported cutlery in the late 1800s provided a significant boost to the then-fledgling domestic cutlery industry in the United States. Domestic production capacity for pocket knives increased with additional firms entering the business and setting up new factories or buying out existing cutleries. From the 1890s through World War I, American cutlery manufacturers expanded the range of pocket knife patterns produced. Pocket knife designs during this era expanded beyond the simple jack, pen, and cattle knife patterns to include more elegant and distinctive designs including the now classic "premium stockman" pattern that has since been widely produced in a variety of sizes and styles by virtually all American cutlery firms.

If the tariffs of the 1890s set the stage for the first "golden age" of American cutlery manufacturing, the end of WWI seemed to provide further impetus to the then-growing domestic cutlery industry. Giant industrial concerns like Remington and Winchester, both experienced in manufacturing and each facing the loss of military contracts, each decided to jump into the manufacture of cutlery for the civilian market, including pocket knives, in a big way.

Large hardware wholesalers grew in the post-WWI era, and typically these firms contracted with existing American cutlery factories to produce private branded lines of pocket knives and other cutlery. One large hardware wholesale house, E.C. Simmons, actually bought a large established cutlery company outright for the supply of its in-house KEEN KUTTER brand of pocket knives.

The era between the two world wars saw the blossoming of the domestic cutlery industry in the United States. Intense competition and a strong domestic market led to broad expansion of the pocket knife lines of each of the major American cutlery firms. Cutlery companies produced a dazzling array of pocket knife patterns, with a seemingly infinite number of variations in sizes, shapes, and blade combinations.

Handle material choices were also expanded during these years. In addition to the more traditional materials such as ebony and cocobolo woods, jigged and dyed bone, and mother of pearl, celluloid handle materials were introduced in a rainbow of colors and in a plethora of patterns. I have long believed that the sheer variety of pocket knife patterns, handle materials and companies/brand names in the business during these years laid the groundwork for the future collectibility of pocket knives.

This first golden age of pocket-knife manufacturing in America continued through the Depression years of the 1930s and early 1940s. While the Depression did claim a number of cutlery firms, others expanded and modernized production to remain competitive. World War II was the catalyst for further change and consolidation in the American cutlery industry, in particular for the cutlery manufacturers whose lines included pocket knives.

Whereas in the period between WWI and WWII there were over 30 major American cutlery firms (in addition to many smaller ones) that were active in the manufacture of pocket knives, by the end of WWII there were only ten ma-

for firms that produced quality pocket knives in the United States. When these ten firms retooled and geared up for production for the civilian market after the war, they faced both increased foreign competition and a vastly changed marketplace for cutlery; pocket knives in particular.

Gone were the days of a single cutlery manufacturer producing 600 or more different pocket knife patterns, as a number of the larger firms had done in the earlier years. Gone, too, were some of the traditional pocket knife handle materials that had been routinely used by these companies.

While most pocket knife manufacturers continued to use genuine bone as a handle material after the war, synthetic imitation bone handle materials were increasingly in use. The use of synthetic replacements for bone as a handle material began prior to and during WWII, due to material shortages and the difficulties involved in obtaining bone from overseas during these years. By about 1960, almost every pocket knife manufacturer in the United States had phased out genuine bone handles in favor of synthetics.

Likewise, other traditional handle materials including mother of pearl, colorful celluloid and wood were replaced with modern plastics by many cutlery manufacturers as they trimmed their product lines and cut costs in the face of changing market conditions. As compared to natural handle materials, the more modern plastics were less expensive to process since they could be molded to shape, and they required fewer steps in the manufacturing process. The synthetic materials were also more resistant to cracking and warping, with the result that pocket knives could be manufactured by more automated methods with less skilled hand labor involved.

Despite these changes in the cutlery industry, there was still a significant market for traditional pocket knives during the 1950s and 1960s. The market for pocket knives was largely intact in the rural areas of the South and West in particular, and in other areas where farming, hunting, fishing, and outdoor pursuits continued as part of the local culture.

During the mid- to late 1960s, the introduction and popularity of single-blade lockback folding knives with stainless steel blades began to diminish the market nationally for traditional pocket knives. However, in certain parts of the country, in particular the rural South and Midwest, pocket knives made in traditional patterns with carbon steel blades were still highly regarded among knife users.

It was in these areas of the United States in the late 1960s that organized pocket knife collecting as we know it today began. Guns and pocket knives had always been closely associated with each other and in those days, guns were sold not only in gun and sport shops, but in rural hardware stores and pawn shops. These businesses generally always had large displays of pocket and hunting knives as well, and gun shows and trade days were fertile ground for the trading and selling of pocket knives. Increasingly restrictive gun control laws enacted in the late 1960s caused many gun traders to focus their efforts more on pocket knives rather than guns. As a result of the increased interest in pocket knives, the first guide books and price guides devoted to collectible pocket knives were published in the late 1960s.

As pocket knife collecting took root in the South, Midwest, and other parts of the country, the pocket knives that garnered the most interest were made by one particular company, W.R. Case and Sons Cutlery Company



This Case XX 6380 whittler, front and back views, has blood red bone handles that are nicely pocket worn. Pocket wear seems to bring out the deep color of the bone handles.

of Bradford, Pennsylvania. Collectors typically shorten the name of the company to simply “Case.” From the inception of pocket knife collecting in the post-WWII years through the present day, Case has been by far the most collected brand. The reasons for this are manifold, and the following represents my personal view as to why Case pocket knives are and have been *Number One* with knife collectors.

1. CASE POCKET KNIVES ARE, AND ALWAYS HAVE BEEN, QUALITY WORKING TOOLS

While Case has always produced well-finished pocket knives, beautiful to look at and with stunning natural handle materials, every one is first and foremost a practical working tool. Whether a Case pocket knife is the tool of choice for a hunter, fisherman, stockman, factory worker, or office worker, every pattern is designed and manufactured first and foremost to be used, and to be used hard. Case pocket knives have been well respected by generations of knife users, and are often handed down from one generation to the next. The quality and popularity of Case knives with users over many years helped lay the foundation for the company being known as the “king” of collectible pocket knives.

As this excerpt from the back cover of a 1974 Case factory catalog says:

The cost of cutlery is relative...relative to what the blade is expected to do; the amount of craftsmanship derived, quality desired in the end product and the time to accomplish it, but most of all the safety in performing the task. Any use of cutlery that ends with the user injured can be the most expensive knife ever purchased.

Our cutlery will not guarantee you against injury but because of its design, balance, quality, of material, and workmanship, it is a much safer tool whether one is using a CASE Pocket Knife, Hunting Knife, Household Knife, Scissor, or Shear.

2. CASE AS A COMPANY WAS, AND IS, AN ANACHRONISM

After World War II, while other cutlery companies tended to abandon the “old ways” of manufacturing cutlery, Case stuck with many of the traditional methods. While many companies went to synthetics, Case continued to use natural handle materials like genuine bone, genuine

stag, mother of pearl, and real wood. Some of the more complex pocket knife patterns were abandoned by other companies in an effort to simplify and cut costs, while Case continued to manufacture them. The continued use of natural handle materials, and the production of a broad product line with many patterns offered, meant that Case had to rely more on skilled hand labor than on automated machinery. The emphasis on skilled hand labor continues to this day in the Case factory.

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, the increase in demand for Case pocket knives by the knife collecting fraternity combined with the already significant demand among knife users to outstrip Case's production capacity. By the early 1970s, the word was that Case was only able to fill about half of its orders. Due to the many hand operations involved in production, it was very difficult for Case to ramp up production. Case explained this directly to its dealers in this note from President J. Russell Osborne excerpted from the 1968 Case factory catalog:

TO OUR CUSTOMERS:

In the face of greatly increased demand for our knives, CASE simply refuses to compromise its quality. We will continue to insist on the many hand operations required to produce quality knives. Perhaps we are a hundred years behind the times, but any other means of manufacture would not be CASE.

We do appreciate your indulgence and understanding if we cannot fill your order complete. You may rest assured that we are doing everything possible to speed up production without jeopardizing CASE quality. Thank you!

3. CASE HAS ALWAYS PROVIDED TOPNOTCH CUSTOMER SERVICE

During the years prior to WWII and the decades after the war, most cutlery manufacturers relied on jobbers or on wholesale hardware companies to distribute their products to individual retailers, usually small-town hardware stores, pawn shops, and gun shops. Many of the larger pocket knife manufacturers routinely sold a high percentage of their annual production through regional hardware wholesale companies.

During this era, Case relied on a factory-trained sales force of people who had a detailed knowledge of the Case product line. These sales people would call on individual retailers personally, assisting the dealers in maintain-