

# The Society of American Bayonet Collectors

NEWSLETTER No. 10

SUMMER 1992

## In Memoriam

Member Michael Bird passed away April 26. He was 36 years old, and a specialist in bayonet reference books. He will be missed by his many friends the world over.

## Phrobis and the M9 Bayonet: Part One

by Homer Brett

In May of 1985 the *Armed Forces Journal* (AFJ) magazine published an article on (the) "U.S. Army Bayonet: Outclassed and Outdated . . .", an article that was outlined, assembled and laid out by myself for AFJ. Accompanying the article, on its first page, was an AFJ editorial taking to task the extreme amount of time it was taking the U.S. Army to develop an idea or design and then get it to the field. In many cases it was a five to ten year effort.

In the June issue of AFJ the Army, speaking through Major General John Voss (Chief of Infantry), replied that it could and should adopt new equipment faster and without gold plating. He added that, by chance, the Army had briefed the Army Under Secretary on the need for a new bayonet on the same day as the May AFJ article was published. The gauntlet having been thrown down, the Army began drawing up a Letter of Requirement (LR) listing specifications they wanted for the new bayonet/fighting knife. These specifications went through three revisions with the final version stating that the new weapons must perform in the following priority: 1) bayonet, 2) combat knife, 3) field craft knife, and 4) wire cutter.

Once the specifications were established the Army sent them out to approximately 50 companies and manufacturers along with a questionnaire on their existing or potential designs. The Army's aim was to purchase an "off-the-shelf" product which would require no design or development delay, in other words a design that was ready to go into almost immediate production or which was already being produced.

The Army received about 30 replies to its solicitation and a final group of six competitors was selected to compete. Each company was required to submit 55 bayonets of their design for the Army's "shoot-out" in late 1986. Three designs came from American firms and three designs came from European firms (more in a later article). The troop trials took place at the home of the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. The design submitted by the firm of Phrobis III of Oceanside, California, won the competition. It was a hands-down win with Phrobis having a zero failure rate while the worst design had a failure rate of 74% (AFJ). The contract was awarded in October of 1986 and the first production M9s were delivered to the Rangers in February of 1987.



The winning bayonet was designed by Mickey Finn and his team of design and engineering people, at Phrobis. Although this was their first bayonet design competition, Mr. Finn and Phrobis had already successfully produced the Buckmaster knife, the Skeleton knife and the Folding Titanium knife. All these knives were designed with the Naval Special Warfare community and other special operation units in mind, as well as the potential commercial market. Phrobis was a research and development firm rather than a mass production manufacturer and so it licensed all three of their knife designs to the Buck Knife Company for manufacture and commercial marketing. Phrobis however retained all rights and patents to its designs.

The Phrobis XM9 bayonet was a triad design with two separate scabbard systems and a single bayonet. In this article we will cover only two of the legs of the bayonets that won the Army's trials. The XM9 system is unique in American bayonet design as it is a modular system similar in concept to the Stoner Weapons system tested by the Marine Corps in the 1960s. The idea was that all the component parts of the system are completely interchangeable and thus any combination of parts can be assembled to build whatever particular edged weapon a military service would need. Thus, in theory, a Buckmaster blade would fit an XM9 bayonet or a new type of bayonet could be assembled with a smaller or shorter blade, different crossguard or special knife-style pommel cap. The Army was neither interested nor appreciative of this concept - they only wanted a new bayonet. However, by understanding the conceptual idea, the specific features of the XM9 will become more logical. Every XM9 bayonet could be properly assembled and disassembled with a torque wrench, a set of Allen wrenches and a screwdriver; thus, any part that became damaged could be replaced quickly and easily. The bayonet's main sub-systems are: A) the scabbard with its cutter plate, webbing and sharpening stone, and B) the bayonet, which has a blade, tang rod, grip and latch plate and latch plate screw.

Because the Army had wanted an off-the-shelf design, which virtually no one actually had, all but one of the XM9 designs submitted to the trials were modifications of existing knife or bayonet designs. The Phrobis team took the Buckmaster knife and some of

their earlier prototype bayonet designs and developed from them the Phrobis XM9.

The mold for the Buckmaster knife was used to produce a green-colored scabbard which had the Buck logo masked off its face. A cut-out was then milled at the scabbard's tip and a stainless steel cutter plate with a T-lug was mounted with two screws coming through the backside. The back of the scabbard had a sharpening stone glued into a recess and a webbing system and front pouch finished off the scabbard assembly.

The webbing assembly included a FASTEX quick release clip mounted just above the scabbard throat, and above this was a metal Bianchi belt clip to hold the entire bayonet to the soldier's belt.

The bayonet blade was made from an original Buckmaster blade blank with a short threaded tang. Over this was placed a crossguard machined from flat stock with two bottle opener slots in its face. Then the circular tang rod was threaded onto the end of the blade tang with a torque wrench and the green Zytel grip was slid down over the tang rod and held in-place by the latch plate. The latch plate screw was then threaded through the latch plate and into the threaded end of the tang rod. This completed the Phrobis XM9 bayonet, that won the Army's bayonet trial.

Due to the Army's off-the-shelf concept and the short time between the final LR and the trials the Phrobis XM9, like most of its competitors, was virtually handmade (in the Phrobis machine shop). In practical fact the XM9 is a prototype bayonet and a number of changes were made to it before it was ready for mass production.

In my next article I will cover more on the production M9 bayonet, but suffice it to say that the XM9 is quite distinct in all its parts from the issue M9 bayonet that the Army carried into Operations Just Cause, Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Using Mr. Cole's XM9 drawing for reference the XM9 latch plates were made from modified M7 bayonet pommels. The tang rods were made from normal steel rather than the stainless steel of the production M9 and XM9 and the grip was molded in a round form and then had its vertical and horizontal grip grooves machined



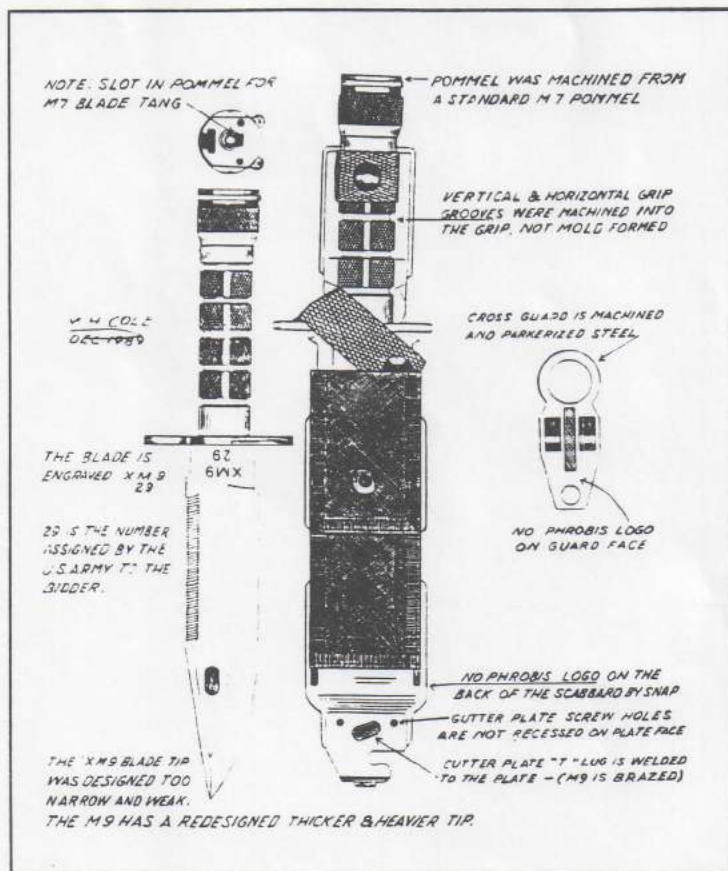
into it. The crossguard was machined rather than stamped from steel and there was no Phrobis logo on its face.

The blade was made from an unfinished Buckmaster blade blank with the fuller teeth and the oval T-lug hole machined into it. The blade was marked only with "XM9" and below it the number "29" which had been assigned to Phrobis by the Army. During the trials it was discovered that the XM9 blade tip was prone to bending as it was too thin and narrow. This was quickly improved and the production M9s had a thicker and stronger tip.

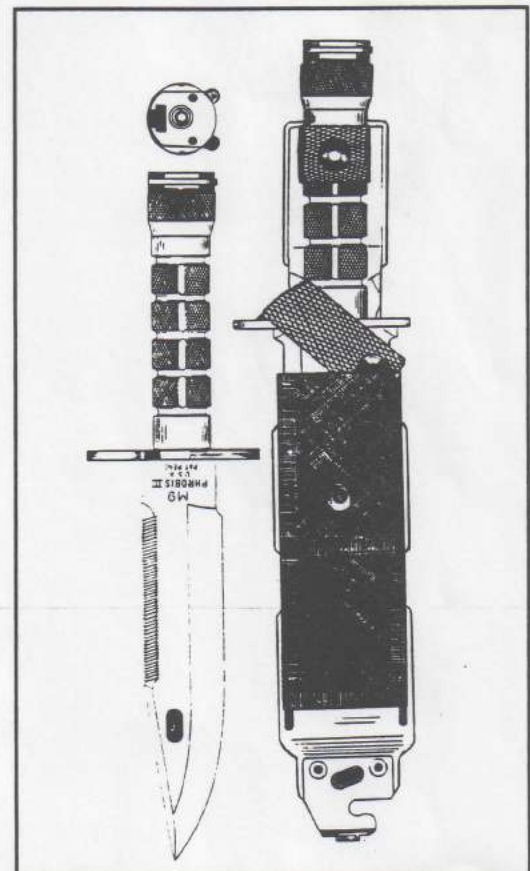
The XM9 scabbard had to have its toe machined for the cutter plate which had the T-lug welded in-place and a rectangular protrusion on its back that locked it into the scabbard. Notice that the face of the plate is totally flat with no recessed screw holes. Additionally there is no Phrobis logo molded into the scabbard below the sharpening stone and there are minor variations in the snaps, screws and rivets of the webbing and Bianchi clip.

Although the parts of the Phrobis XM9 and the Army issue M9 are interchangeable, they are not the same bayonet and the XM9 is a benchmark in American bayonet design. The issue M9 is at this writing issued only to the U.S. Army and then only to the Ranger, Airborne and combat infantry units. The M7 is still issued to the remainder of the Army and all of the Navy, Marines and Air Force. The M9 is the United States' first issue wire cutting bayonet and our first modular bayonet. It will probably have some evolutionary changes and improvements over time, but it is a piece quite unique in the history of bayonet design. As with all bayonets it was influenced by the eons old hunting knife and its immediate parents were the XM9 and the Buckmaster knife.

I would like to thank Phrobis, Mickey Finn and John Holm for their assistance, as well as all the personnel at Fort Bragg who have helped me with my research. My thanks also to Howard Cole who allowed me to use his excellent drawings from *Volume IV* of his book *U.S. Military Knives, Bayonets and Machetes*.



PHROBIS XM9 BAYONET



U.S. BAYONET M9





# The Society of American Bayonet Collectors

NEWSLETTER NO. 14

FALL 1993

## PHROBIS AND THE M9 BAYONET – PART TWO

### The “CHEVRON” Bayonet

By Homer M. Brett

This article is the second in the continuing series on the development of the U.S. Army M9 bayonet that was designed by the Phrobis III Corporation.

In 1986 Phrobis III won the U.S. Army's XM9 trials for a new wire cutting bayonet/combat knife, vanquishing five other competitors. In October 1986 the contract was officially awarded and the newly adopted bayonet was designated the “M9.” This was the first new U.S. bayonet since the M7 of Vietnam fame.

It should be recalled at this point that the 55 XM9 bayonets that Phrobis delivered to the Army trials at Fort Benning were virtually handmade on machine tools not manufactured on a production line. The U.S. government requires a formal inspection of a contractor's facilities, including the production line, testing equipment and required record keeping systems before formal production can begin on a contracted item. The contractor must also demonstrate capability to complete the contract on time and to specifications.

Along with the facilities inspections, Phrobis was required to produce a handful of First Article Test (FAT) bayonets for the Army's inspection and to prove that it was able to begin the production-line manufacture of the bayonet. These FAT bayonets (to be discussed in a later article) passed with flying colors, and the go-ahead was given to begin formal M9 production. However, like all contracts, the gremlins of imperfection were at work, which resulted in the rare U.S. Army M9 bayonet variation that Phrobis designated the “CHEVRON” model.

Only 1,200 “CHEVRON” marked U.S. Army M9 bayonets were ever produced, and its very existence was due to a combination of events at the Buck Knife Company, a subcontractor to Phrobis.

Buck was contracted by Phrobis to make a variety of metal parts for the Army's new bayonet, and this included blades. The Army's Technical Data Package (TDP) spelled out exactly how the blades were to be marked (this was done before they were hardened). Each M9 blade was stamped on its *left side* at the ricasso, leaving the *right side* ricasso completely unmarked.

Phrobis and the Army carefully spelled out the M9s specifications in the TDP and it was Phrobis' responsibility as the prime contractor to ensure that the bayonets delivered to the Army met the TDP. However, just as the Army's bayonet was going into production, Buck Knife Company began instituting a company-wide blade coding system. Every blade made at Buck would have a year code stamped on it, which would also show that it was a forged blade, rather than a fine blanked one (the Phrobis XM9 blades were fine blankings).

As the Army's M9 blades went into production, Buck automatically applied this new marking, but did so without consulting or notifying Phrobis of the additional “CHEVRON” stamp being added to the ricasso. Thus, the small “CHEVRON” stamp, with its point facing to the right of the U.S.A. marking, was placed on the very first production-line made M9 bayonets.

The complete blade marking is as follows:



M9  
PHROBIS III  
U.S.A. >

Regardless of the seeming innocence of this small "CHEVRON," it was in direct violation of the TDP. However, the discrepancy was not initially caught by the inspectors at Phrobis, and the "CHEVRON" bayonets were almost all in the first shipment of bayonets that had been tested and quickly delivered to the Army for immediate issue to combat units.

At Phrobis, with the first delivery of bayonets to the Army completed and the chaos of getting the shipment out now calmed, the inspectors quickly noticed the blade marking error. On January 16, 1987 a Material Review Report, #002 was issued notifying Buck Knife Company of the production discrepancy—"Unauthorized 'marking on the blade.'" The report also noted that the "Marking does not affect form, fit or function." Buck was immediately ordered to cease marking the Army contract blades with the "CHEVRON." Buck then acknowledged this discrepancy in its Interoffice Memo of January 20 under a subject heading of "Non-conforming Material Report."

At this point it should be made clear that Buck was allowed to keep this year code marking on all of its COMMERCIAL production M9 bayonets that were manufactured under a licensing agreement granted by Phrobis. On the Buck commercial bayonets the markings and the year stamp were placed on the *right side* of the ricasso with the *left side* of the blade retaining the original Phrobis markings, but without the "CHEVRON." This system of marking both sides of the blades of the commercial Phrobis/Buck M9 bayonets continued until Buck bought out Phrobis in 1992.

Some other differences should be noted between the CHEVRON M9s and the later production bayonets. These are:

- 1) Note the distinctive flats on top of each shoulder of the letter "M" on the "M9" stamping on the ricasso.

- 2) The sawteeth on the CHEVRON were machined, whereas later production bayonets had the teeth broached.

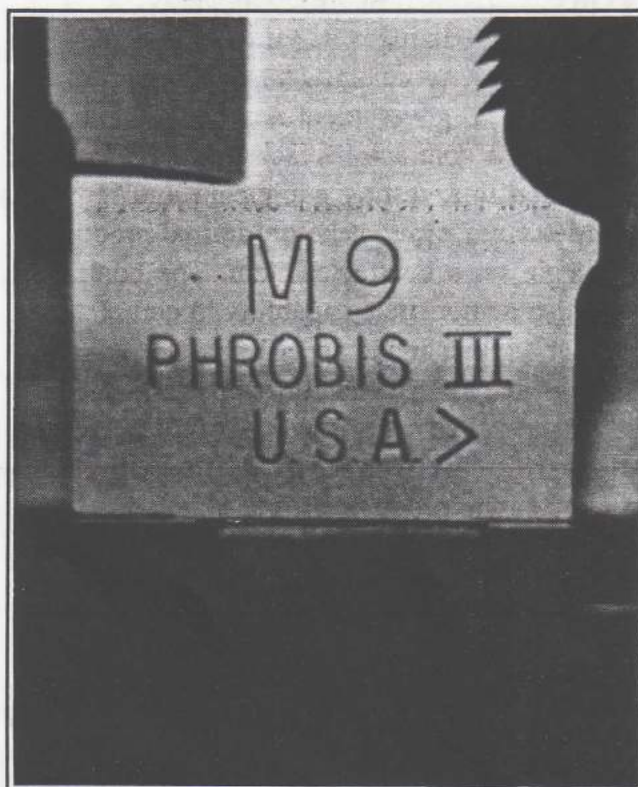
- 3) The CHEVRON latch plate lacks the

two parallel sides of the later production latch plates. Instead, the two sides curve down into the radius of the bottom of the plate.

The fact that the CHEVRON M9 bayonets were the first and rarest models of the M9s delivered under the Army contract was not lost on Phrobis. The remaining 166 bayonets that had been held back were then numbered from 001 to 166 on the blank right side of the ricasso. Phrobis and Buck then divided them with Phrobis keeping the even numbers and Buck receiving the odd ones.

Phrobis then produced a high quality wooden presentation plaque, with the bayonet mounted on to a Colt-made, military issue, M16A1 rifle barrel. Only sixty of these plaques were produced and #001 was presented to President Ronald Reagan, while other low numbers went to important civilian and military officials for their offices. The remaining bayonets were advertised commercially and the CHEVRON M9, mounted on a plaque, was the first Phrobis commemorative presentation bayonet, as well as the rarest variation of the U.S. Army issue M9.

*I wish to thank the staff of Phrobis and the Army Ranger and Airborne personnel who assisted me. The Phrobis advertisement is reproduced with the permission of Mickey Finn.*







**"A CUT ABOVE THE BEST"**

The official U.S. Army M9™ Multipurpose Bayonet System (MPBS™) now in use by U.S. Army Rangers. Chosen by overwhelming user preference in official U.S. Army tests. Developed exclusively by Phrobis III, Ltd.

**Functions:**

- Perfectly balanced combat knife
- Wire cutter easily cuts 10 ga. double strand barbed wire
- Saw blade slices through light metal (including aircraft skin)
- Bottle opener

**Scabbard provides:**

- Sharpening stone
- Screwdriver
- Pouch for M9™ pistol magazine



Phrobis III, Ltd., Carlsbad, California USA

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This color print was produced by Phrobis III as part of the publicity for the Army's newly adopted bayonet. Both full size wall posters and 8 1/2" x 11" posters were produced and distributed through U.S. Army channels, as well as foreign military missions.



## **Phrobis and the M9 Bayonet -- Part Three**

### **Colonel Lewis L. Millett, Congressional Medal of Honor Winner**

*by Homer M. Brett*

At this point in the historical narrative of Phrobis and the M9 bayonet, Phrobis has won the XM9 trials, completed the First Article Tests (FAT) and begun formal production and delivery of the M9 bayonet to the U.S. Army. The first bayonets delivered were the rare CHEVRON M9's of which only 1,200 were produced. Phrobis was also working on the Army for a potential follow-up contract as it was the Army's intention to arm all the Ranger, Airborne and combat infantry units with the quantity purchased in the original (1st) contract was insufficient to reach this goal.

With its bayonet deliveries to the Army on schedule, Phrobis was also making a great effort to get both public and military publicity for its revolutionary bayonet design. Dozens of articles were written in military publications, knife and gun magazines, newspapers and even in such popular magazines as PEOPLE and TIME. It was hoped that this increased flow of information and data would assist in boosting sales to U.S. allies who had already adopted the M16 rifle, as well as influencing the three remaining U.S. military services to purchase and issue the M9 bayonet.

As part of the publicity effort, Phrobis engaged Colonel Lewis L. Millett, U.S. Army, retired, as its point man to the Army's infantry units. This is the same Colonel Millett who had won the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Korean War by leading his troops in a historical bayonet charge.

The Colonel was tasked with making a number of goodwill trips to various U.S. Army combat units to introduce the new bayonet and to explain its features and capabilities. These trips included one to Korea where Colonel Millett instructed members of the 2nd Infantry Division on the M9, assisted in boosting support for a joint U.S. -Korean War memorial (now in the planning stage) and visited hill 180.

It is on this hill that there stands a bronze plaque in both Korean and English that names this Korean hill "Bayonet Hill" and also explains the significance of this honor.

Colonel Millett was quite pleased to have been asked to be Phrobis' ambassador to the Army for the M9 bayonet. However, before accepting this assignment he chose to conduct his own private tests on one of the bayonets. These quite strenuous tests were conducted without support or compensation from Phrobis, and the results and the Colonel's comments are as follows.

The first test involved 2,500 thrusts, made by three individuals taking turns into "tough, dried, hard, white oak timber." The results were that "at thrust 886 the point of the bayonet was broken. Less than 1/16 of an inch was broken off with no appreciable change on subsequent penetrations." He went on to say, "Due to the continuous nature of the testing procedure and the thrust or stab, twist and withdrawal, the blade became noticeably warm from the point to 2 inches from the point." (My research shows that the Colonel had been given an XM9 bayonet to test and this weak point problem had already come out during the Army's trials. It was then eliminated by making the point thicker.)

The second test Colonel Millett administered was the "slash or cutting stroke delivered from different angles for a total of 2,500 strokes." His final test was the cutting of commercial and heavy duty link fence as well as cutting of concrete nails, with thirty cuttings for each of the different materials. Incidentally, it was this ability to cut through chain-link fencing that allowed an Army Ranger unit, which had been pinned down under fire in Panama, to successfully capture its objective during Operation Just Cause in December of 1989.



This accurately covers Colonel Millett's work for Phrobis, but leaves us with the even more interesting story of how he won his Medal of Honor using his bayonet, a weapon some technowarfare people consider obsolete.

Colonel Lewis L. Millett's military career is that of a classic soldier as well as a gung-ho, hell-bent-for-leather individual, who has fought in WWII, Korea and Vietnam. Even now retirement has only slowed his pace modestly.

Lewis Millett graduated from high school in 1940 and immediately enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. However, shortly after this, President Roosevelt announced that the U.S. would not become involved in the World War, leaving hard-charging Lewis with little choice but to go AWOL to Canada and enlist in a Canadian unit headed to England.

Still in England at the time of Pearl Harbor, Millett requested and was granted a transfer to the U.S. forces (this was normal policy for U.S. citizens serving in Allied units after the U.S. joined the war). Just before transferring, our errant youth chose to complete an experimental course in Commando training to see if the "average" soldier could survive it.

Assigned to an artillery unit in North Africa, Millett won a silver star for climbing into burning ammunition half-tracks and moving them before they could explode in the midst of his unit. Later on he also shot down a German ME-109 with a pair of .50 caliber Browning machine guns that his unit armorer had rigged together. For this act he received a stiff chewing out as his CO was upset that he had exposed their concealed artillery position, but he was advanced to private first class anyway. During WWII, PFC Millett earned a field commission to 2nd Lieutenant and developed himself into a first rate artillery forward observer (FO), a group of elite artillerymen who live among the front grunts.

After WWII, Millett left the service for college and then rejoined the Army just in time for the Korean War. As part of the 25th Division, Millett's 8th Field Artillery supported the 27th

Infantry (the Wolfhounds), and our intrepid Captain rapidly expanded his reputation.

On one occasion as a unit forward observer, Captain Millett had a battalion of North Korean troops move through his company-sized unit during the night. Despite his numerical inferiority the Captain was able to keep his unit calm until the enemy had finally passed through. He then commanded the company while the Koreans were "cut to pieces."

On a second occasion, while flying as an artillery spotter, Captain Millett and his aircraft pilot landed behind enemy lines to assist a downed fighter pilot. As there was insufficient room for three people in the aircraft, Millett immediately gave up his seat. He followed this courageous act by proceeding to hold off a large communist patrol with only his M1 carbine until his pilot could return and pick him up.

With this developing reputation, our Captain requested a transfer to the command of an infantry unit and was given E Company of the 27th Regiment. From the beginning he insisted that his troops drill strenuously with bayonets and carry them at all times (something many units ignored in Korea). This emphasis on using the bayonet with skill as well as the aggressiveness and confidence it instilled into his company was later to pay off in saved lives and an accomplished mission.

Moving northwards during Operation Punch Easy Company had to contend with entrenched North Korean and Chinese troops and the soul and bone wearying bitter cold and snow of the Korean winter. They were also angered by a Chinese combat bulletin the Captain had found, which stated that American troops were afraid of close combat and especially the bayonet -- preferring to rely on artillery and air power to do their work for them (actually a very sensible tactic, but only when appropriate).

The aggressive leadership provided by Captain Millett and the weapons discipline and training he had instilled in his men came to fruition on 7 February 1951. Approaching a hill on the map



that was simply labeled #180, they came under fire from well-entrenched Chinese troops. The hill (actually a series of three knobs) overlooked the march route of the entire I Corps, and had to be taken. Using his third platoon for fire support and suppression, Captain Millett ordered his supporting tanks to shell the hill and the entrenched enemy. However, the gutsy and stubborn Chinese laid down an accurate fire from their protected positions and the two platoons were required to advance under fire across the open ground to the base of the hill.

Upon reaching the base of the hill Captain Millett led his troops up the steep incline through a hail of grenades and bullets. The Captain personally charged an entrenched "buffalo gun" (an antitank gun turned on his troops) and leaped into position bayoneting all three of its crewmen, while his troops followed behind emulating his tactics and clearing the Chinese out of their foxholes with bullets and cold steel. It was not until the fighting had died down that the Captain suddenly realized he had been wounded by grenade fragments in his back and legs, and that this had even occurred before he had jumped into the gun pit. The Chinese, to their credit, had stubbornly resisted his overwhelming assault with more than 50% of their 200 plus troops being killed or wounded before retreating.

It was for this action that Captain Millett was awarded the Medal of Honor. His citation states "...and with fixed bayonet, (he) led the assault up the fire-swept hill...his dauntless leadership and personal courage so inspired his men that they stormed into the hostile position and used their bayonets with such lethal effect that the enemy fled..." Incidentally the citation also reads, "while urging his men forward shouting encouragement." What the Captain actually shouted was "Come on you sons-of-bitches and fight," an expression his troops distinctly remembered with some shock during the after-action interviews, as this was not Captain Millett's normal way of addressing them.

Captain Millett's bayonet charge was at the time called by historian, and later General, S.L.A. Marshall, the "greatest bayonet attack by U.S. soldiers since Cold Harbor in the Civil War." It should be noted that General Marshall's prose should not be taken as in any way detracting from the heroism of any other U.S. units that would challenge his use of the words "the greatest." The designation of the last and greatest bayonet charge has still not been settled, even among veterans of Vietnam, and certainly the future may yet hold surprise.

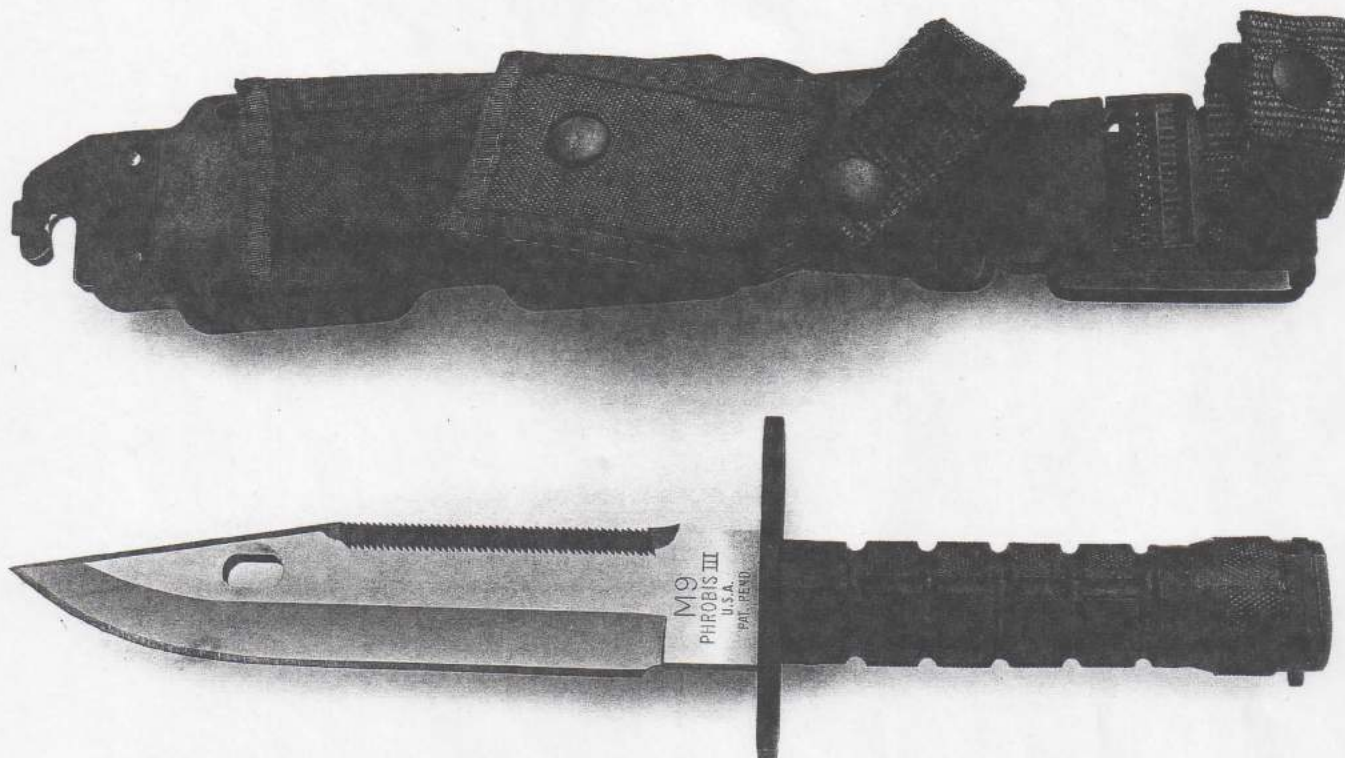
Colonel Millett continued to serve through the Vietnam War, trained Vietnamese Rangers, served during the '68 Tet crisis and generally avoided anything that looked like a desk or chair. As with many such officers, he was heartbroken when we withdrew from Vietnam, deserting our allies and the many Vietnamese who had risked their lives by siding with us. The Colonel finally retired from the Army in 1973.

As an aside, it should be noted that the M1 Garand bayonet, seen in the illustrated photos of Colonel Millett, is the one with which he earned his Medal of Honor. Like many junior officers in the Korean War, he had taken to carrying the more powerful M1 rifle, rather than depending on his 1911A1 pistol or the M1 carbine, with its much less powerful cartridge.

I should like to credit the staff of the former Phrobis III Corporation, General Mike Michaelis and the old Collier's Magazine for their assistance. I should wish to thank Colonel Lewis L. Millett for his time, assistance and patience during my research for this article.



## Phrobis & The M9 Bayonet---Part Four



### The Army M9 and the Phrobis-Buck Commercial M9

by Homer M. Brett

In my last article on Phrobis and the M9 bayonet (*S.A.B.C. Journal* No. 7), Phrobis III had won the U.S. Army XM9 Bayonet Trials and been awarded the M9 bayonet contract. The company then produced the required First Article Test M9s, which the Army approved, allowing Phrobis to begin production of the M9 bayonet. The first production bayonets made were the 1,200 "Chevron" marked models; and after these, there followed the balance of the contract's bayonets, finally reaching a total of 315,600 Phrobis-made M9s.

At the same time the production bayonets were beginning to come off the manufacturing line, Phrobis was also planning its corporate expansion based on the Army's expected future delivery of an additional "100% add-on" contract option. Phrobis was also developing a number of new knife designs for the U.S. Navy SEALs, and for future commercial production. Also in its early design stage was

an improved M9 bayonet, the future M9-A1.

This fourth article in the continuing series, *Phrobis & the M9 Bayonet*, will cover the bayonets of the Phrobis U.S. Army M9 contract, as well as the commercial M9 bayonets produced under license from the Phrobis III by the Buck Knives Corporation.

Illustrated in this article are the blade markings of the Army's XM9, the "Chevron" M9, the non "Patent Pending" marked M9, and the "Patent Pending" marked M9. Also shown are the markings of the Phrobis-Buck commercial bayonets.

What is often not understood is that the Phrobis M9 contract was **not** a U.S. Army "developmental" contract. The Army's publicly stated aim, and its plan from the very beginning, was to conduct a competitive bayonet trial for all the submitted designs, from which it would select the **best** bayonet based on the trials results. The Army also specifically stated



that while price would be a consideration in the bayonet's selection, it would not be the major selection factor. The U.S. Army wanted the best bayonet that it could afford in an "off-the-shelf purchase".

Once purchased, this new bayonet design would be rapidly deployed to all Army front-line combat units. The challenge put to the service was to provide its combat soldiers with a modern multi-use bayonet, and to do so in less than the normal ten year developmental cycle. In fact, the first Phrobis M9 bayonets were delivered to the 1st Battalion, 58th Rangers at Fort Benning, less than fifteen months after the 10 December 1985 date which formally established the Army's official bayonet requirement.

The phrase, "off-the-shelf" was the most important description applied to the soon-to-be-purchased M9s, and its use haunted and influenced the M9's lack of changes and improvements throughout the entire Phrobis contract. In fact, of the six competitors who submitted bayonet designs for the XM9 trials (and a seventh company which was unable to submit its bayonets in time), only one bayonet design was actually in military-commercial production at the time the Army sent out its manufacturer's questionnaire in 1985.

Only the German firm of A. Eickhorn, successor to Carl Eickhorn of Solingen, actually had their KCB-77 (Knife, Cutter, Bayonet-1977) in commercial-military production. All of the other five designs (Phrobis, Imperial, S-Tron, Marto, and Royal Ordnance) were in their developmental stages even as the 1986 Trials date was officially announced.

The submission of their various designs and competitive bids by the six companies were held in the shadow of the Army's on-going and extremely acrimonious competitive trials for its new pistol, the Beretta 92 (finally adopted as the M9 pistol). Beretta had won the official Army shoot-out in 1984, but problems in the testing, and a tremendous amount of Washington politics had intervened to push for a retrial of all the pistols involved. Some of this pressure and influence was from important officials from the New England state involved, and the Army was ultimately forced to repeat the pistol trials at a great expense in time and money in 1987-88.

The Beretta 92 again won, but the Army's procurement system kept finding its fingers constantly in the fire.

This on-going political firefight made the Army extremely reluctant to allow Phrobis to change any major feature on the M9 bayonet throughout the entire contract. In fact, the physical changes that were approved by the Army involved only such features as blade markings, the reduction in length of the web leg tie-down loop by 60% (its original length interfered with the wire cutting function), replacement of the brass rivets that held the Bianchi clip to the webbing with (magnetic) stainless steel rivets, and some additional very minor changes.

During the length of the contract, Phrobis offered the Army a number of serious design improvements at no additional cost to the Army. This even included an integral blade stop for the bayonet. Despite this, the Army procurement bureaucracy, worried about potential lawsuits from the other trials competitors, continued to reject any major alterations to the M9.

Even without any of the suggested alterations, the Army had already dealt with a number of lawsuits filed to protest the awarding of the M9 contract to Phrobis III. The Imperial Schrade Corporation of Rhode Island filed a protest, but the Federal court threw its suit out because it had been filed after the legal filing deadline. The Ontario knife Corporation of New York also protested, but the court ruled that its XM9 bayonets were submitted too late for the Trials; and as clearly stated in the Army's Trials paperwork, this was proper grounds for Ontario's rejection. Even the German firm of A. Eickhorn seriously considered filing a lawsuit, but the company that represented it in the U.S. felt that this was not a cost-effective action, so the potential suit was never submitted.

Both Imperial and Ontario were from states with a great deal of political clout in Congress, and this made the Army very skittish about making any changes to its "off-the-self" purchase. These political problems also ultimately resulted (unofficially) in Phrobis III not receiving the originally promised 100% add-on M9 contract, and the loss of that contract was one of the major causes of the financial demise of the corporation.

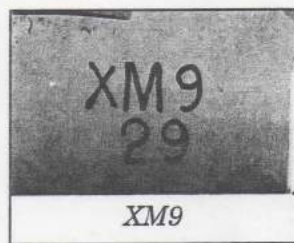


Phrobis delivered on its M9 bayonet contract, as specified, and ahead of its required delivery schedule, completing the contract in September of 1989. The company was also presented with a U.S. Government achievement award for its exemplary performance in completing its contract. Despite this, Phrobis was unable to overcome the Army's caution about the possible political repercussions of the contract. This was not dissimilar to Beretta's problems in having to reshoot the Army's pistols trials.

Sadly, before the next U.S. Army M9 contract was offered out for public bidding, the firm of Phrobis III had ceased to exist.

Please note that all Phrobis-made U.S. Army XM9 through M9 bayonets have their blade markings stamped on their left ricassos. No Phrobis-made U.S. Army bayonets were ever stamped on their right ricassos.

The Phrobis Trials XM9 bayonet was en-



graved (not stamped) with a 2-line marking on the blade's left ricasso. The "XM9" was the Bayonet Trial designation, and the number "29" was the individual Trials number assigned to Phrobis.

The "Chevron" M9 bayonet had a 3-line stamp on the blade's left ricasso, and included the illustrated Chevron marking immediately after the "U.S.A."

The first of the post-Chevron M9 bayonets were stamped on the left side of the blade's ricasso with a similar 3-line marking. This second 3-line marking is not often seen, as it was only used until the fall of 1987, when Phrobis requested, and received from the Army, authorization (on 16 September 1987) to mark the bayonets with a 4-line marking:

M9  
PHROBIS III  
U.S.A.  
Pat. Pend.

The 4-line marking was the final Phrobis blade marking of the U.S. Army M9 contract, and was used on the majority of the bayonets made during the contract.

A careful look at the early Phrobis ricasso markings reveals some variation in the actual style of the letters used on the die stamps. Some of the early 3-line stamps had letters with their tops a bit more squared, rather than intersecting at sharp angles. This was probably not a purposeful design, but simply the way the stamps were made by the die stamp manufacturer. Since the variation is fairly minor, it may not even have been noticed on the production line.

Of special note is that the Army 3-line stamped bayonets will always have a long web leg tie-down loop, and brass rivets retaining the Bianchi clip. Some of the earliest of the 3-line stamped bayonets will also have the early production M9 latch plate, which has sides that gently curve down (i.e. more rounded) to the

bottom of the plate, as you look at the rear of the bayonet.

The 4-line bayonets can be found with both lengths of web leg tie-down loops, and even occasionally with brass webbing rivets. However, neither of these early features lasted very long on the 4-line bayonets. The 4-line bayonet also has a latch plate whose sides are mathematically parallel, and a circumference that is less rounded than is the early latch plate.

#### The Phrobis-Buck Commercial M9 Bayonet

As part of their contractual agreement with Buck Knives, which served as a sub-contractor to Phrobis on the Army M9 bayonet contract, Phrobis agreed to license Buck to produce a commercial version of the M9 bayonet. This bayonet would then be sold under Buck's name, with Buck alone paying to market and advertise it. The agreement also stipulated that the bayonet would be marked with Phrobis' name, exactly as stamped on the U.S. Army



M9s.

*Commercial Marking*

This commercial bayonet was to be of the same pattern and design as the Army M9, but it was not required to be totally milspec. Additionally, after an extremely heated argument between the two companies, Buck was finally permitted to equip the commercial M9s with a circular pin-style blade stop on the cutter plate. This was done at Buck's request in order to lessen the company's risk of liability if anyone was injured while using the bayonet's wire cutter function.

Because of this modification, it also became necessary to modify the axis of the commercial bayonet's cutter plate T-lug; otherwise, the added blade stop would have prevented the use of the bayonet in its wire cutter function. For this reason alone, the T-lug on the Phrobis-Buck commercial M9 has its horizontal axis parallel to the top edge of the cutter plate. On the Army issue bayonet, the T-lug runs from an 8 o'clock, to a 2 o'clock angle on the cutter plate.

*Commercial (left) and Military Cutter Plates*

On the left side of the commercial bayonet's ricasso, the 3-line Phrobis military blade stamp was first used, and later the 4-line Phrobis military stamp. In addition to the Army blade stamp on the left ricasso, the Phrobis-Buck commercial bayonets also had an added Buck Knives commercial stamp on their right ricassos:

Buck  
188  
U.S.A.>

The #188 was Buck's model designation for the commercial M9, and to the right of the "U.S.A." there was also a small, year-of-manufacture symbol. Buck Knives had adopted this

dating system on all its products in 1986. The first commercial-year symbol used on the Phrobis-Buck commercial M9 bayonet was a "chevron" with its apex pointing to the right (1987), with the following year's chevron (1988) pointing upwards, and the 1989 chevron pointing downwards. The last Phrobis-Buck commercial bayonet had the year marking "x" for 1990. Buck had already generated the symbols for the production years of 1986 to 2006, and after 1990 all Buck marked M9 bayonets were of post-Phrobis production.

By checking the year date stamp on any Buck M9 bayonet blade, the collector can ascertain the exact year of manufacture (but not necessarily the year of assembly), starting in 1987.

It should also be noted that all of the data collected to date indicates that the Phrobis 3-line military blade stamp was used only on Buck commercial M9 bayonets that are also marked with Buck's 1987 year symbol (>). All subsequent years' production have the Phrobis 4-line blade stamp on them. The Phrobis-Buck commercial M9 was produced both with the Army's light gray, bead blasted, stainless steel blade, and also in much smaller numbers with a commercial-only black oxidized blade. Both versions of the Phrobis-Buck bayonet were delivered to the commercial market in an attractive two-piece box, with a medium green colored top embellished with white lettering on all of its five sides. The bottom half of the box was made of white cardboard.

Of additional note is that, like the Army bayonets, the Phrobis-Buck bayonets had the Phrobis dolphin logo stamped on the face of their crossguards, and also molded into the scabbard body, just below the sharpening stone.

Although collectors will occasionally encounter commercially marked Phrobis-Buck M9s in U.S. Army units, it needs to be clearly stated that no U.S. Army Phrobis contract M9 bayonets ever had "Buck" blade markings, or markings on the blade's right ricasso (excepting the engraved serial numbers of the presentation "Chevrons").

Also former U.S. soldiers (and occasionally Marines) are sometimes encountered who swear that they brought back what is obviously a commercially marked M9 from the Desert Shield-Desert Storm campaign. While it



is often difficult to guarantee the provenance of bayonets such as these, it should not be automatically presumed that the bayonet's owner is mistaken, or is exaggerating the bayonet's history. Many of the Army's combat units did not receive the M9 bayonet in time for their deployments to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, so our ever-resourceful soldiers (and some Marines) cleaned out their local knife and surplus stores that were anywhere near a military base. This also happened to the M9 stocks of the major mail order military equipment companies such as U.S. Cavalry, Brigade Quartermaster, and Ranger Joe's.

Commercial Phrobis-Buck M9s have also leaked into the U.S. supply system from soldiers who purchased a commercial bayonet to replace a lost, broken, or stolen issue M9; this in order prevent their being fined or otherwise disciplined.

In some of the Army's airborne units, when the "loss" of bayonets during parachute jumps began to dramatically increase (a great excuse to "glom" on to your bayonet), the individual paratrooper was required not only to replace the bayonet, but he would also be demoted one rank as well. This quickly reduced the loss of M9s during parachuting, as it made the loss of a bayonet so expensive that it was much cheaper to buy one on the commercial market.

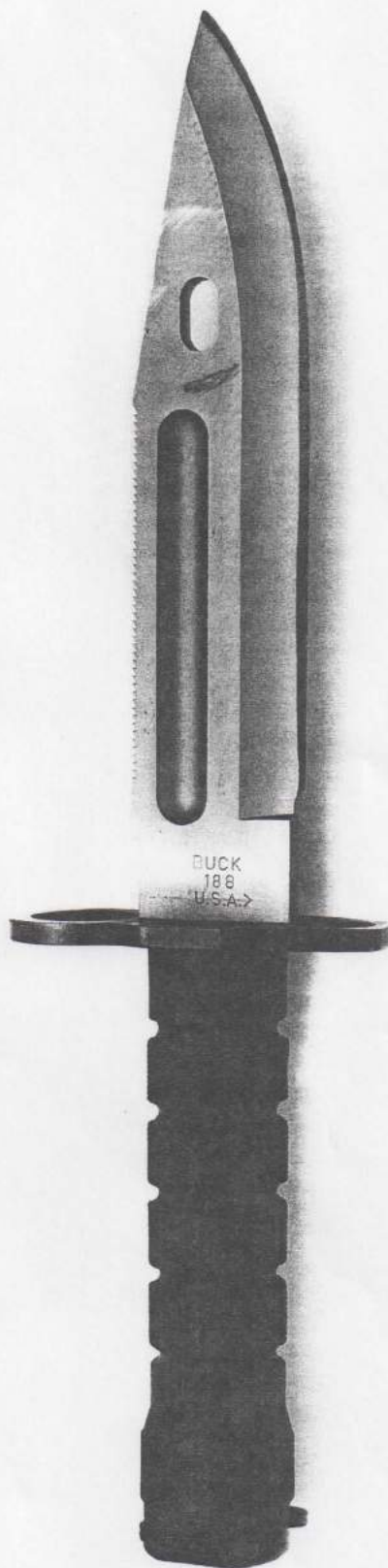
Commercially marked Phrobis-Buck bayonets were never purposely included in any U.S. Army bayonet delivery from Phrobis; and given their separate production cycles, it is highly unlikely that any slipped into the supply system in this manner.

The Phrobis Army M9 contract was successfully completed in September 1989, just in time for December's "Operation Just Cause" in Panama. It was there that the Phrobis M9 received its first baptism of fire, an experience that it came out of with a number of publicly printed military kudos.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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H.M.B., Phrobis Corporate Historian



*Illustrating the single blade fuller on the right side of Phrobis and Phrobis-Buck commercial bayonets. The Buck Knives reicasso marking shows that this is unquestionably a Phrobis-Buck commercial bayonet.*