



THE COLLECTION

The First Long March

A Civil War Bowie knife, and what the men who carried them learned about looking tough.

CHRIS VALLETTA

Bowie knife in its original leather scabbard
Civil War

THIS ONE CAME FROM A CIVIL WAR AUCTION, and it is enormous. The blade runs close to thirteen inches. The handle is thick, plain wood, pinned to the blade, with a hole worn through the end for a cord. It rides in its original leather scabbard with two brass rings. You feel the weight the second you pick it up.

It was sold as a Civil War Bowie knife. I can't find a maker's mark or a name, so I can't tell you who carried it. Big knives from that war are some of the most faked relics on the market, and I hold this one's story with an open hand.

What I can tell you is what knives like this one meant in 1861.

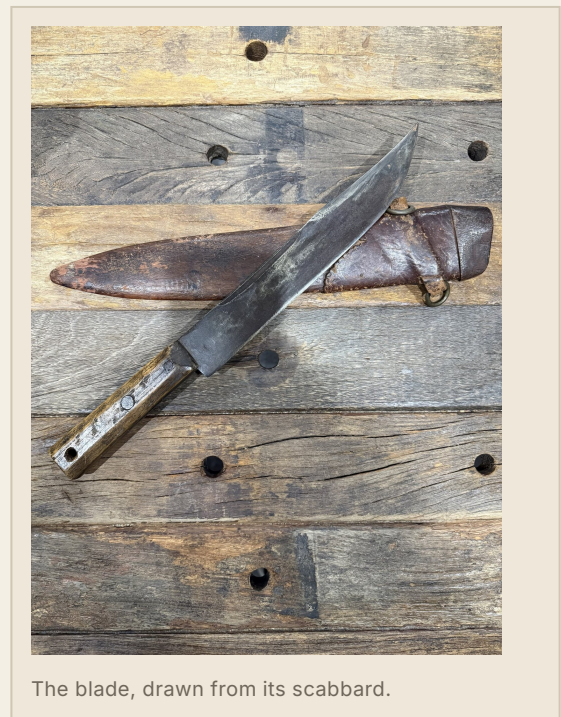
When the war started, a lot of young men in the South went off with a big knife on their belt. Families and towns had them made. Blacksmiths hammered them out of wagon springs and farm tools. Men sat for photographs holding them. A big knife said you were ready.

Then they started marching.

Within a year, many of those knives were gone. Men left them by the road or mailed them home. A heavy knife slapping your leg mile after mile stops looking like courage. And it rarely did the job the photographs promised. Wounds from blades were rare in that war. Rifles and artillery did the killing.

The knives that stayed in the ranks did a different job. They cut firewood. They cut the beef for supper. They became tools.

Look at this blade. It looks like it was sharpened over and over, for years. Somebody kept this knife because it was useful, not because it looked dangerous.



The blade, drawn from its scabbard.

I think about that when I watch new leaders take over. Most of us show up with a big knife. A title. A need to look tough. It looks good in the picture.

Then the first long march comes. A bad quarter. A crew that walks. And you find out what is worth carrying.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.”

HEBREWS 12:1 (NLT)

Here is the question I keep asking myself: what am I carrying just to look strong? The people following me feel that weight too. Whatever ego a leader hauls around, his team ends up carrying with him.

Leadership is service. Put down what only makes you look dangerous. Keep what helps the people beside you, and keep it sharp.

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