

## PROMISE MEETS HARD LUCK

### THE KCB-70 BAYONET; THE EICKHORN BRAND'S EVOLUTION AND PARTICIPATION IN U.S. BAYONET TRIALS; AND THE ELUSIVE PURSUIT OF COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

by Ralph E. Cobb



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Recent history of the Eickhorn brand and the famous squirrel trademark is very much tied to the story of the KCB-70 (Knife-Cutter-Bayonet 1970). At first blush, pairing Carl Eickhorn's legendary reputation and the innovative KCB-70 design would seem to guarantee commercial success. However, the breakthrough needed to "go big" has proven elusive. Despite all of the KCB-70's promise, hard luck finally doomed *Carl Eickhorn Waffenfabrik AG* and has followed its successors into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. However, the Eickhorn brand and squirrel trademark keep coming back to have another go in hopes of achieving commercial success.

#### *The KCB-70*

The KCB-70 was designed and manufactured by *Carl Eickhorn Waffenfabrik AG*, in a joint-venture with the Dutch firm, *Nederlandse Wapen en Munitiefabriek 'De Kruithoorn' N.V.* (NWM) [Dutch Weapons and Ammunition Factory 'The Powderhorn' L.L.C.]. In 1967, NWM was licensed to produce the Stoner 63A weapons system. The Stoner 63A was unique, and way ahead of its time. A complete modular weapons system which could easily be re-configured as a carbine; a rifle; and either a magazine or belt-fed light or medium machine gun. As the name suggests, it was developed by Eugene Stoner, whose revolutionary AR-10 rifle had been produced

1958-1962 by the Dutch firm *Staatsbedrijf Artillerie Inrichtingen* [State Artillery Systems Corporation] and led to development of the AR-15/M-16.

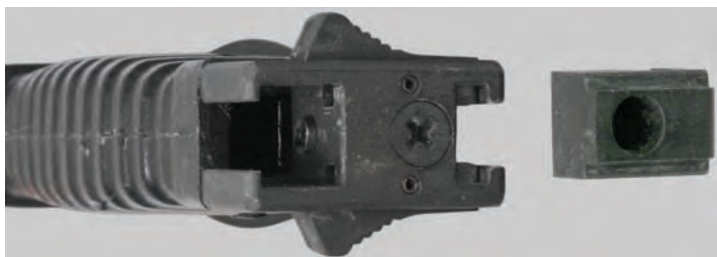
The intent was to produce a multipurpose bayonet-knife, with a wire-cutter similar to the Soviet AKM bayonet. The KCB-70 blade is patterned after the Soviet AKM bayonet, featuring a clip-point with saw back and wire-cutter features. Unlike the AKM bayonet, with its bright plated steel blade, the KCB-70 bayonet had a non-reflective dark phosphate (parkerized) finish. The grip and scabbard body were made of shiny black plastic, similar to the Stoner rifle's hand guard. The scabbard came with a green web belt hanger and a green leather restraining lace. The scabbard's Eickhorn-patent wire cutter system incorporated a screwdriver blade into the point.



KCB-70 M1 bayonet and scabbard from the Carl Eickhorn/NWM joint-venture.

The pommel is secured to the tang with a screw, allowing replacement of the plastic grip. A spring plunger in the mortise opens a hidden

compartment inside the hilt intended to house a sight adjustment tool for the Stoner rifle.



Compartment in the pommel intended to house the Stoner 63A sight adjustment tool.

The Stoner 63A bayonet mount was derived from the Stoner-inspired AR-15/M-16 and AR-18/AR-180 assault rifles, allowing the KCB-70 to be used with any of these leading-edge small arms. Being a joint venture between NWM and Eickhorn, the KCB-70 intended for the Stoner 63A carried both firms' trademarks (as had the G3 bayonet that Eickhorn developed in partnership with *Rheinmettal AG* during the late 1950s).

Eickhorn envisioned producing variants of the KCB-70 for use with other weapons, such as the FN-FAL and G3. These first three KCB-70 subtypes were designated M1 (Stoner/M-16), M2 (FN-FAL), and M3 (G3). An example of the KCB-70 for use with the U.S. M1 Carbine also exists, so it appears that Eickhorn at least toyed with a M1 Carbine variant as well (it would later become subtype M4 of the KCB-77 family). The KCB-70 M1 with the hilt compartment and dual trademarks is the only bayonet which can rightfully be called a "Stoner bayonet."



Dual NWM/Carl Eickhorn trademark on KCB-70 M1 bayonet.

NWM failed to secure any Stoner 63A export contracts. Approximately 3,600 Stoner 63A weapon systems were produced in the USA by the Cadillac-Gage Company, with production ending in 1971. 2,500 were the light machine gun, purchased by the U.S. Navy for use by Special Forces and SEAL Units.<sup>1</sup>

However, this did not help Eickhorn's or the KCB-70's fortunes, since the U.S. did not equip its machine guns with bayonets.

The polycarbonate plastic used for the KCB-70 proved too brittle, leaving the grip and scabbard prone to cracking. Although it offered many technological advances over its contemporaries, the KCB-70 failed to woo customers away from the cheaper M4, M7, G3, and FAL Type C bayonets.



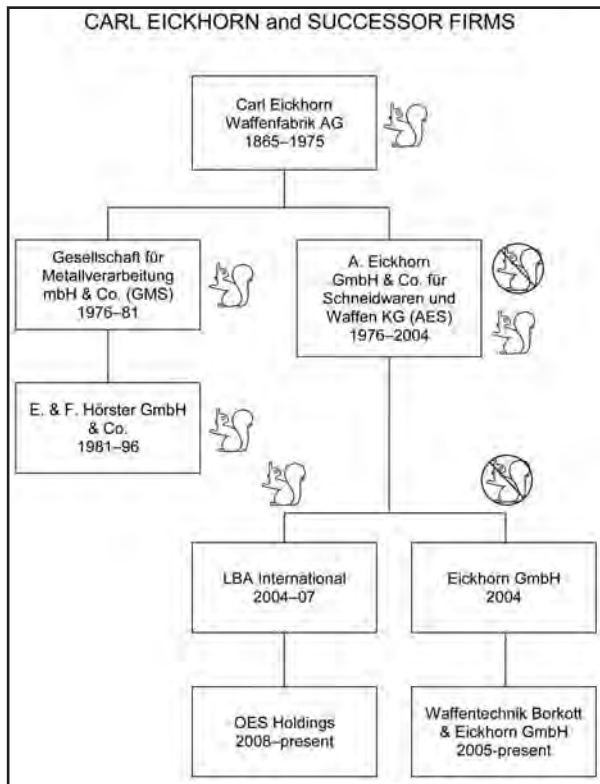
KCB-70 Scabbard with cracking at the stress point where the restraining lace attaches.

### ***The Demise of Carl Eickhorn Waffenfabrik AG and Development of the KCB-77***

Poor sales and post-Vietnam economic stagnation took its toll on *Carl Eickhorn Waffenfabrik AG*, which went bankrupt in 1975. This effectively ended the old "Carl Eickhorn" firm, but not use of the Eickhorn name and squirrel trademark. As investors purchased the Eickhorn factory and squirrel trademark, the Eickhorn family established a competing firm. This led to a confusing situation where some

bayonets legitimately bearing the squirrel trademark were not made by Eickhorn at all, while other bayonets legitimately produced by Eickhorn family successor firms do not carry the squirrel trademark.

shallow grooves.



Evolution of the Eickhorn brand and use of the squirrel trademark 1975-present.

The *Carl Eickhorn Waffenfabrik AG* factory and the squirrel trademark were purchased by investors, doing business as *Gesellschaft für Metallverarbeitung mbH & Co. (GMS)* [Society for Metalworking L.L.C.]. GMS products carry the squirrel trademark, so are often mistakenly assumed to be Eickhorn production. As a result, GMS remains virtually unknown today.

GMS changed the plastic formula and made the grip more robust. GMS grips have a rough, matte appearance, with deep grooves vs. the KCB-70's shiny, smooth plastic, with



Comparison of the Carl Eickhorn and GMS grip designs.

GMS had to develop its own wire-cutter system, since the Eickhorn family still held the KCB-70 wire-cutter system patent. The improved bayonet became known as the KCB-77. GMS KCB-77 production appears to have focused primarily on the KCB-77 M1 and M3 subtypes (for the M-16 and G3, respectively).



Comparison of the Carl Eickhorn and GMS wire-cutter systems.

At the same time GMS acquired the Eickhorn factory, two members of the Eickhorn family formed a competing firm, *A. Eickhorn GmbH & Co. für Schneidwaren und Waffen KG* (AES) [A. Eickhorn Company for Cutlery and Weapons L.L.C.].

AES produced G3 bayonets for the Bundeswehr and for export; copies of the FAL Type C bayonet; and copies of the U.S. M7 bayonet that featured a one-piece grip. AES also produced many variants of the KCB-77 with an improved plastic formulation and the Eickhorn-patent wire cutter system.

AES expanded the number of KCB-77 subtypes to enable the bayonet's use with a broad range of rifles worldwide.

The ultimate KCB-77 bayonet "family" subtypes were as follows:

- M1 was for the M-16
- M2 was for the FN-FAL
- M3 was for the G3
- M4 was for the U.S. M1 Carbine
- M5 was for the S.I.G. Stgw. 57 & 90
- M6 was for the Mauser Kar 98k
- M7 was for the AKM

AES was named after its founder, Annette Eickhorn and was managed by Jörg Eickhorn. Because GMS owned the squirrel trademark, AES developed a generic trademark: three

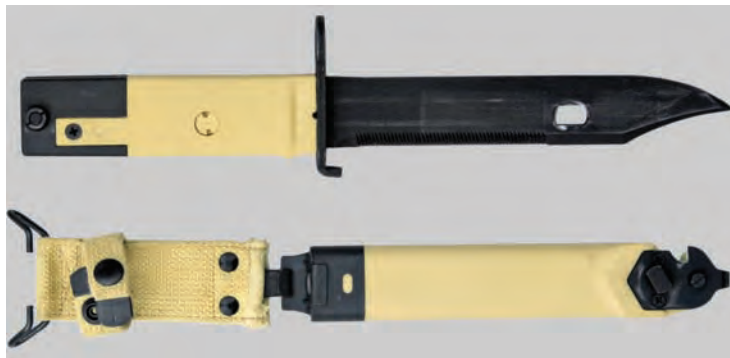


Generic "AES-Hexagons" trademark on a KCB-77 M1 bayonet.

hexagons containing the letters "A," "E," and "S." AES products often had a distinctive plum-colored phosphate finish.

After a five-year run, GMS went bankrupt in 1981. The squirrel trademark and other GMS stock were acquired by *E. & F. Hörster GmbH & Co.* AES obtained a license to use the squirrel trademark from Hörster ca. 1982-83. The license was not exclusive, so both AES and Hörster used the squirrel trademark concurrently (AES only on bayonets and combat knives; Hörster on swords and sabers). Although having licensed the squirrel trademark, AES continued use of the AES-hexagons trademark as well.

Some AES KCB-77 bayonets have a small projection on the lower crosspiece that serves as a bottle opener.<sup>2</sup> Several belt hanger designs were offered, some of which allowed the scabbard body to be removed for wire-cutting, while the belt hanger remained fastened to the wearer's belt. The plastic grip and scabbard body, as well as the webbing, could be made in various colors.



AES KCB-77 M6 bayonet as made for Saudi Arabia, with bottle opener and detachable scabbard body in desert yellow color. Made in 1989 for use with the 8mm. Kar 98k, the KCB-77 M6 was the last bayonet designed for a Mauser rifle.

Following Hörster's 1996 bankruptcy, AES purchased the squirrel trademark, for a time returning exclusive ownership to the Eickhorn

family.

AES entered a variant of the KCB-77 in the 1986 U.S. Army XM9 bayonet competition, but lost out to the Phrobis III Ltd. design. As previously discussed by Homer Brett in the *SABC Journal*, the AES KCB-77 entry was the only submission that actually met the Army's desire for an "off-the-shelf" item already in commercial or military production. Although several firms filed lawsuits in protest of the Army's awarding the contract to Phrobis, AES did not.<sup>3</sup>

Although AES felt their product superior, the KCB design was no longer so revolutionary. Examples sold commercially were designated the AES M9 and the packaging referred to the AES product as "the genuine and better M9."

### *21<sup>st</sup> Century Bayonets and the Demise of AES*

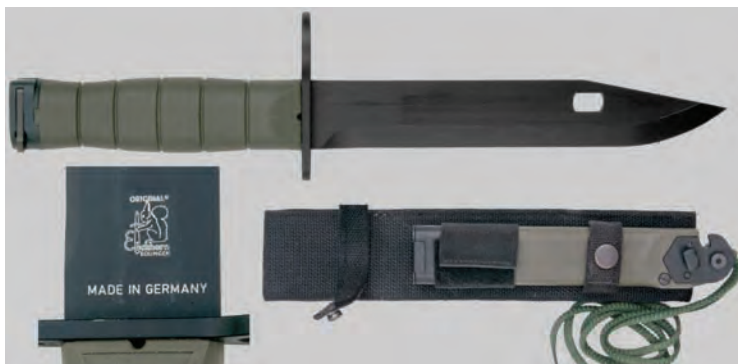
Based on a NATO Standardization Agreement, AES developed the Bayonet System 2000, using the latest in metallurgy and polymer technology. Although thinner and lighter than the U.S. M9 blade, the Bayonet System 2000 blade was very resilient. It could be deflected a full 30 degrees without deformation or breakage. When used as a wire-cutter, the Bayonet System 2000 was claimed to be safe for cutting electrified wire up to 1000 volts. Unlike the KCB-77, where multiple bayonet subtypes were produced, a series of inexpensive adapters enabled the same bayonet to be used with virtually any assault rifle.

After field-testing 5,000 M9 bayonets beginning in 1991, the U.S. Marine Corps determined that the AES Bayonet System 2000 was the only off-the-shelf bayonet that met their needs. In 2001, they awarded AES a no-bid, sole source contract to supply a version of the

Bayonet System 2000 manufactured in the USA (the only Eickhorn bayonets ever manufactured outside of Germany). However, protests and political maneuvering by domestic manufacturers resulted in rejection of the AES contract. A subsequent competitive bidding procurement resulted in substitution of a design developed by a domestic firm, the Ontario Knife Co. of Franklinville, New York (the OKC-3S bayonet).

This was a severe blow to AES, which went bankrupt in 2004. The AES bankruptcy resulted in a replay of 1975, where the AES factory and the squirrel trademark were purchased by investors and Eickhorn family members immediately formed a competing company.

A British firm, Lightweight Body Armour Ltd. (LBA), bought the AES factory in Solingen and the squirrel trademark, rebranding the parent firm as LBA International and its edged weapons manufacturing subsidiary as Eickhorn Solingen Limited. In 2004, Canada adopted the Bayonet System 2000, as the CAN Bayonet 2000, with Canadian manufacturer Diemaco producing them domestically under license from LBA International. LBA subsequently rebranded the product as the Bayonet System 2005.



Bayonet System 2005 produced by Eickhorn Solingen Ltd., under LBA International ownership. The squirrel trademark is accompanied by the words, "Original Eickhorn Solingen."

In 2007, the corporate name was changed to The Original Eickhorn-Solingen Company Limited. In 2008, LBA International ceased being a shareholder and the company was spun off to investors, who restructured the company as a Scottish limited partnership named OES Holdings. The current business uses two trade names: Eickhorn-Solingen Limited and Original Eickhorn Solingen, somewhat interchangeably. Under ownership of OES Holdings, the company continues to produce the Bayonet System 2005, the KCB-77, and a modernized U.S. M7 copy. While their military products are still top quality, the company recently introduced the “Eickhorn Pacific” line of low-cost consumer products made in China.

In 2004, as AES entered bankruptcy, Jörg Eickhorn established *Eickhorn GmbH*. *Eickhorn GmbH* produced the B2K [a rebranded Bayonet System 2000], the Universal Bayonet System (UBS) [a rebranded KCB-77] and a modernized copy of the U.S. M7. *Eickhorn GmbH* did not have rights to the squirrel trademark, so used a generic trademark.



Eickhorn GbmH trademark.

In the late 1990s, the Netherlands adopted the Canadian C7A2 (M-16) rifle to replace its aging FN-FAL rifles. They contracted with Canadian manufacturer Diemaco to produce the C7A2. In a replay of the U.S. Marine Corps experience, the Netherlands initially adopted the

U.S. M9 bayonet, then in 2004 changed to the B2K bayonet.

In 2005, *Eickhorn GmbH* merged with the metals and plastics technology firm, *Borkott GmbH*, to become *Waffentechnik Borkott & Eickhorn GmbH*. Military clients of *Waffentechnik Borkott & Eickhorn*, include: the Bundeswehr, Ireland, Malaysia, Slovenia, and Vietnam.



Waffentechnik Borkott & Eickhorn GmbH trademark.

### Conclusion

Today’s steels, polymers, and coatings are state-of-the-art, making the Bayonet System 2005 and B2K two of the most advanced bayonets ever produced (which may come as a surprise to a certain U.S. President). The KCB-70, KCB-77, and Bayonet System 2000 were innovative designs that held much promise. Despite so much promise, including the Bayonet System 2000’s adoption by the U.S. Marine Corps, hard luck repeatedly plagued the Eickhorn brand during the Post-Vietnam Era. The Eickhorn brand’s repeated division into competing firms, one family-owned and one investor-owned, was also problematic.

The Eickhorn brand and squirrel trademark soldier on in a schizophrenic way, currently appearing on both state-of-the-art military products and on cheap Chinese-made consumer goods. The move into cheap consumer goods is a significant departure from Eickhorn’s legacy and may prove a race to the

bottom for a brand that built its reputation on quality and innovation. While the most recognized rodent in the cutlery business refuses to give up the ghost, the long sought-after breakthrough and commercial success remain elusive.

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#### ENDNOTES:

1. To its credit, the Stoner light machine gun enjoyed a surprisingly long service life with the U.S. Navy. Designated Mark 23 Mod 0 light machine gun, the Stoner 63A was first used in combat by U.S. Marines during the Vietnam War and continued in service with Navy Special Forces until replaced by the M249 SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon) in the late 1980s.
2. Bottled water is the only safe drinking water available in most of the world. In the 1980s, much of it still came in glass bottles that required a bottle-opener, so the addition of a bottle opener was a practical matter.
3. Phrobis & The M9 Bayonet-Part Four: The Army M9 and the Phrobis-Buck Commercial M9, Volume No. 21, Fall 1997.

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