

---

# Swiss Army Knife

## *Genuine and Original*

Karl Elsener (1860-1918) was born into a family of hat-makers. As the fourth son, he could enter a different profession, so he trained as a cutler. He apprenticed in Paris and Germany. Then he established his own business in Switzerland in 1884. His mother, Victoria, helped sell his knives in the family hat shop.

Elsener learned that the Swiss Army was buying its multi-tool folding knives from a German company. He decided to compete. By 1891 he had developed the Soldier's Knife for standard Army use. It had a cutting blade, reamer, screwdriver, and can-opener.

Despite a large initial Army contract, Elsener nearly went bankrupt. German companies in the steel-producing German town of Solingen could produce fine knives at a better price.

So Elsener kept innovating: a Schoolboy's Knife, a Cadet Knife, a Farmer's Knife. Finally he produced his ingenious Officer's and Sports Knife, patented on June 12, 1897. This weighed less than the Soldier's Knife but did more, because it used only two springs for six tools (adding a second blade and a corkscrew). Swiss Army officers liked it so much that eventually the Army gave him a contract.

The Officer's Knife firmly established Elsener's company and fortune. In 1909, his mother died, and Elsener began using her name as his knives' brand name: VICTORIA. In the same year, the Swiss government also granted him permission to use the Swiss emblem, a white cross on a red background. This helped distinguish his knives from German imitations. After the invention of stainless steel in 1921, Elsener added INOX (a French abbreviation, signifying "rust-proof" metal) to his brand's name. It has been VICTORINOX ever since.

In 2005, Victorinox acquired Wenger, a long-time Swiss rival. Wenger had offered a "genuine Swiss Army Knife" competing with Victorinox's "original Swiss Army Knife." For many years they had split the Swiss Army contract between them.

Now Victorinox produces millions of knives a year, as well as other products. There are many versions of the Swiss Army Knife. The giant Swiss Champ