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ILLUSTRATED

## SOLDIER ON

» THE MILITARY ISSUE

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**COLD STEEL**  
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**FIXED TO FIGHT**  
WHY FOLDERS DON'T  
BELONG IN BATTLE

**BEYOND BASIC**  
SOG UPGRADES  
THE TERMINUS XR

**DAGGER**  
**SELF-DEFENSE**  
WITH MICHAEL JANICH

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JULY/AUGUST 2020 • VOL. 34, NO. 4 • U.S. \$5.99 • DISPLAY UNTIL: 08/11/20



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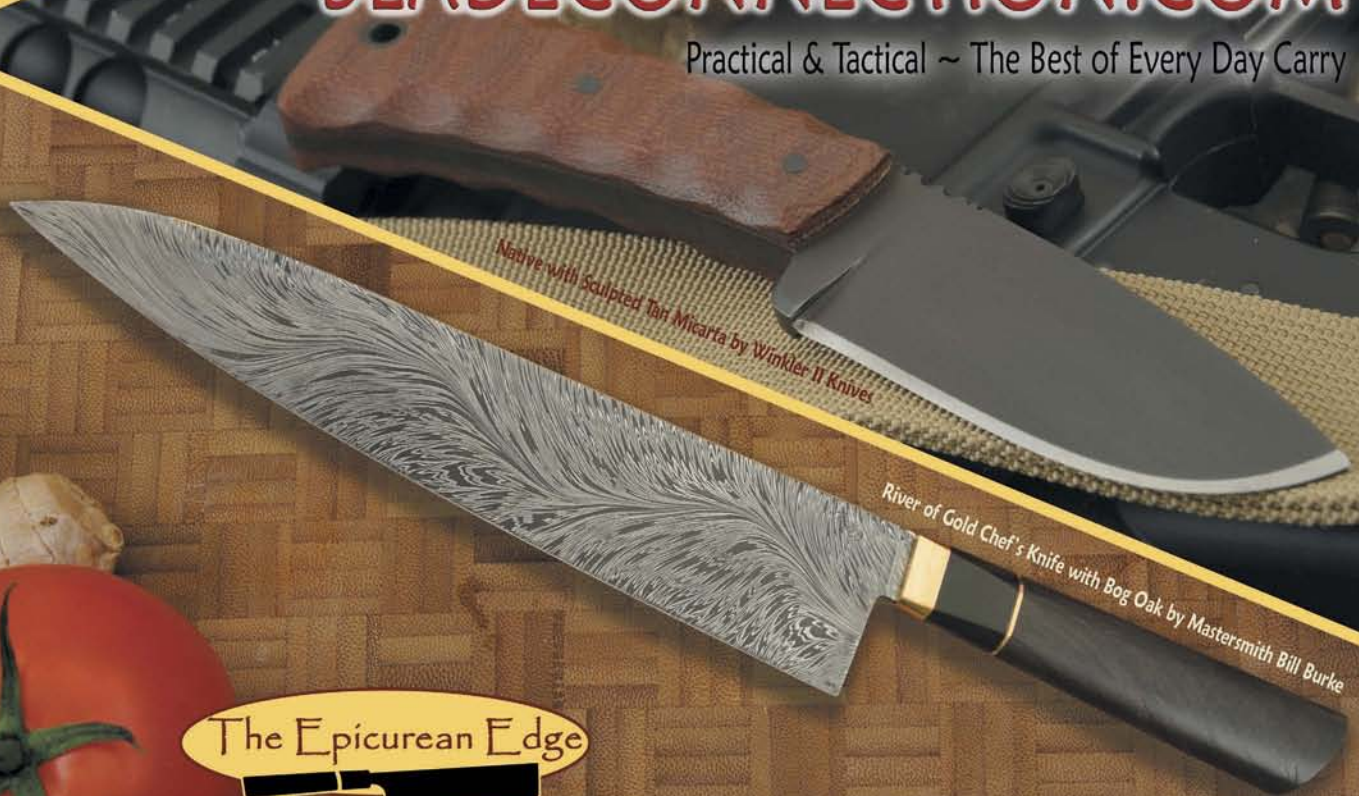


Great Stag - a collaboration by André Thorburn and Garri Dadyan



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Native with Sculpted Tan Micarta by Winkler II Knives

River of Gold Chef's Knife with Bog Oak by Mastersmith Bill Burke

The Epicurean Edge

The Knife that Makes the Meal ~ Cutlery for the Discerning Chef

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## COVER STORY

### 14 SPECIAL FORCES

Using military philosophies, two retired green berets have masterfully guided Spartan Blades for 12 years.

BY DOUG JEFFREY

## FEATURES

### 24 COLD STEEL

A look at Cold Steel's XL folding knives—are they insanely useful or just insane?

BY BOB DEMARCO

### 30 SOLDIER ON

Tim Stetzer tests the KA-BAR I266 Modified Tanto

BY TIM STETZER

### 36 BEYOND BOUNDARIES

An inside look at three veteran-owned, veteran-friendly makers: Wheelis Knives, Amtac Blades and Archangel Blades

BY DOUG JEFFREY & DWAYNE UNGER

### 46 BEST VALUE BENCHMADE?

Is the new Black Class Presidio II CF Elite—intended for tactical users and first responders—worth the premium price?

BY BRYAN J. BALL

### 50 AUSPICIOUS BLADES

An insider's look at the life and blades of close-combat legend Colonel Rex Applegate.

BY MICHAEL JANICH



36



50

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## 58 KNIVES 101

Protect and organize your pocket knife collection with these three storage solutions.  
BY BRYAN J. BALL

## 64 FINELY FIXED

A tactical fixed blade doesn't have to have a bland or utilitarian appearance. It can also be a hand-crafted, beautiful object of pure art.  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHARPBYCOOP (JIM COOPER)

## 72 FIXED TO FIGHT

A look at why a fixed blade is in every way superior to a folder for the tasks that a soldier needs a knife to perform in battle.  
BY STEVE WHIPPLE

## 76 BEYOND BASIC

Previously budget-minded SOG ventures into the higher-end folders market with the Terminus XR.  
BY BRYAN J. BALL

## COLUMNS

06 LOCKED ON

08 GEAR UP

12 POINTS OF INTEREST

22 PERSONAL DEFENSE

80 EDGE OF SURVIVAL

# Knives

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# THE BIG HANDOFF

**I** find it odd to be talking about big changes in the middle of summer—that’s usually a topic for spring or fall. Of course, this year has been anything but typical, as every single one of us knows. I’ll spare you from another “uncertain times” discussion or “new normal” essay because that’s not what I’m getting at.

## The More Things Change

I’ve worked on *Knives Illustrated* for many years now, as managing editor and for the last year as print and digital editor. I’ve helped steer it through some difficult times and some wonderful changes as the economy has made running a magazine much more than putting words on a printed page.

And now, I’m ready to say “Welcome!” to a new editor who will take the reins and embrace *Knives Illustrated* and its community. I’m moving on to another passion of mine (crochet—don’t judge) and will miss the friends I’ve made here. But I’m looking forward to my future.

## Slicing and Dicing

Please enjoy stepping into your future with my very good friend, Bryan J. Ball, who you may recognize from YouTube as Slicey Dicey. I’ll let him take it from here...

It’s been knife knowing you all,

Margaret Kavanagh

## Honored

Bryan here! I want to start off by wishing Margaret all the best in her new endeavor. She’s been a friend for years and her talent is only exceeded by her personality. She did some great work here at *Knives Illustrated*, and I can’t thank her enough for giving me a great launching pad to start with. I’ve literally become obsessed with the knife world and community over the last several years. Being the Editor of *Knives Illustrated* is truly a dream job for me and I can’t wait to get going.

## Who’s This Guy?

Many of you in the knife world may know me as the owner and rambler-in-chief of the Slicey Dicey YouTube channel. But I assure you, I’m not just a YouTuber. My primary job for the last 22 years has been as a product reviewer and writer, and I have more than a bit of print and digital editorial experience with many publications around the world.

## Changes

*Knives Illustrated* has a long and illustrious history and a very loyal fanbase and readership that I truly appreciate and respect.

In that vein, I won’t be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. I will include some more modern folder content as that’s my wheelhouse, but I’ll be relying heavily on our past contributors (and some new ones) for the fixed blade, custom, and tactical content that we’ve become known for. We also really want to step up our social media presence, and I’ll be active there on Instagram and Facebook.

We also have a new podcast (cleverly named the *Knives Illustrated* Podcast) that you can find on our YouTube channel and wherever you like to consume your audio podcasts.

I very much look forward to interacting with all of you and to watching *Knives Illustrated* grow far beyond the already fine little magazine it is today.

Bryan J. Ball, Editor







### JANTZ CHEF BLADE



Perfect for the home or professional chef. Overall 12 1/4", blade 7 1/2", 1 5/8" wide. 3/32" thick with 3/16" handle holes. Blade stays extremely sharp. Knife shown with giraffe bone and decorative torx screws.

CAT.#	STEEL	FINISH	HRC	PRICE
J1208	440C	Satin	58-60	36.95

### PATTERN 22 BLADE



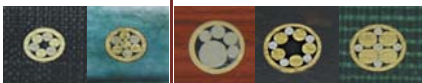
Flat ground hunter blade. Makes a good general purpose hunting and skinning knife. Overall 8 1/4", Blade 3 1/2", Width 1", Thickness 5/32". Bolster holes 1/8", Handle and Thong Holes 1/4". Cryogenically treated and razor sharp.

CAT.#	STEEL	FINISH	HRC	PRICE
J2208	440C	Satin	57-58	33.95
J2228	D2	Satin	59-61	33.95

### MOSAIC PINS

1/8" x 12"

3/16" x 12"



#MP810 #MP820 #MP380 #MP300 #MP310

1/4" x 12"



#MP485 #MP480 #MP405 #MP400 #MP440

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
MP810	1/8" Black Eyed Sully	\$14.95
MP820	1/8" Morning Glory	\$18.95
MP380	3/16" Doberman	\$22.95
MP300	3/16" Morning Star	\$22.95
MP310	3/16" Lucky Clover	\$22.95
MP440	1/4" Silver Star	\$44.95
MP480	1/4" Lab	\$44.95
MP405	1/4" Circle Of Light	\$44.95
MP400	1/4" Pandora's Box	\$39.95
MP440	1/4" Meteorite	\$44.95

### MOSAIC DESIGN PINS



\$19.95 each  
Size 1/4" x 2"  
Made in the USA  
at Jantz

Meticulously crafted with the knifemaker in mind to create a singular style for your knife. Each are available in four combinations of quality brass and nickel silver.

### KNIFEMAKERS CENTER SCRIBE



Shown marking center in steel

Use this handy tool to scribe the center lines as a guide for grinding knife blades. Designed for accuracy, this scribe can be adjusted from 0-1/2" with 1/32" per revolution using the fine adjustment screw. Uses a Carbide tip. Replacement carbide tips available.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS305	Center Scribe	\$39.95
JS307	Replacement Carbide Tip	\$9.95

### HARDENED FILE GUIDE



This versatile tool can be used for holding your knife blades to do complex file work and filing slots for guards. Precision machined and ground from A-2 tool steel and hardened to 62RHC. Overall length 3.250", maximum blade width 2", each jaw is 3/8" x 3/4". Made in USA.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
FG101	File Guide	\$49.95

### KNIFE SHARPENING WHEELS



Used by professionals, this two wheel system allows the user to grind a fine edge then clean & polish to a sharp edge.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
WKS750	Knife Sharpening Wheels	\$34.95

### KYDEX MOLDING PRESS



Made in the USA. Featuring single hand closure, lock, and release. Allows you to walk away while the thermal molding foam sets your heated Kydex. Made with 3/16" steel plate. Included, two 8" x 12" x 1" thick high quality foam. 9 lbs/cf density, 225°F heat rating.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS900	Molding Press	\$89.95
JS901	Replacement Foam (2 pcs)	\$12.95

### KENNEDY SLIP JOINT FIXTURE



Perfectly adjust the rise and fall of all three positions of your slip joint folder blade to make it "walk and talk". When properly used, the spring will be in perfect height of liners with blade across all three positions. The ingenious spring retracting device allows you to quickly, easily, and safely remove the blade to make adjustments. Dial indicator allows you to set perfect spring tension and amount of material to remove on each axis of the blade for perfect fitting. Simplifies blade fitting to a higher degree of accuracy than rise and fall fixtures. No more guess work. Learn more about it online at knifemaking.com. Made in USA.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS500	Slip Joint Fixture	\$795.00

### Jantz HOLLOW GRINDING FIXTURE



Allows you to grind straight or recurved blades quickly and accurately with your 2" wide belt grinder (some adjustments may be necessary to fit your machinery). To use simply replace your work rest with the angle bracket, set your initial grinding increment and move your blade through the fixed part by hand. The elevator raises or lowers the grinding center line for greater versatility. All sales final. No returns.

Choose the adapter arm to fit your grinder to complete your fixture.

CAT.#	DESCRIPTION	PRICE
JS260	Hollow Grinding Fixture	\$489.95
JS205	Wilton Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	Bader Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	Burr King Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	KMG-1 Adapter Arm	\$89.95
JS205	Grizzly Adapter Arm	\$89.95



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1-800-351-8900





# VETTED

## EDC GEAR FROM VETERANS, FOR THE TROOPS

TEXT BY TIM STETZER, PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE MANUFACTURERS

### 1. Black Rifle Coffee Company Complete Mission Fuel Kit

The military's vehicles may run on diesel, but its troops run on coffee. While chow hall coffee may do the job, let's just say it isn't always the most palatable substance out there.

Enter Black Rifle Coffee Company, a company founded by veterans who make gourmet, small batch roasted blends. You'll want to drink their coffee because it tastes great, not just because you need it to survive that oh-dark-30 wakeup.

If you're new to Black Rifle, then the Complete Mission Fuel Kit is a great place to start because it gives you four blends to sample (see right). Personally, I go straight to Beyond Black because that's how I roll. You can get the Kit ground or as whole beans.

When you buy Black Rifle Coffee, you're not just getting great coffee. You're helping Black Rifle Coffee to support veterans, law enforcement, and first responders.



### 2. Camelbak Sparta 1000Z MIL-SPEC Crux

I can still vividly remember those hot Alabama summers at Ft. McClellan. My drill sergeant would yell at my platoon to down multiple canteens of funky tasting water to ensure we stayed hydrated. So I'd fill up my old 1-quart canteens from a canvas Lyster

bag. Times change, but the need for hydration doesn't.

Camelbak is a little more sophisticated than my old GI canteen and canvas water bag though, and it gives you a BPA-free system that holds more water, without the funky taste, as well as a number of carrying systems like the new Sparta 1000Z MIL-SPEC Crux Pack.

The Crux gives you a 3-liter (100-ounce) water bladder along with a 33-liter gear capacity so you can carry water, food, and equipment on the go. The Crux is made from 500D double-rip Cordura fabric and comes in black, coyote, or multi-cam colors. It's fitted with laser cut MOLLE for adding additional gear or pouches, and has an adjustable harness and waist belt for optimal user adjustability.

#### SPECIFICATIONS:

- **Collection:** Hydration Plus Cargo
- **Hydration Capacity:** 3 liters/100 ounces
- **Hydration Type:** MIL-SPEC lumbar CRUX reservoir with Quicklink system
- **BPA/BPS/BPF Free:** Yes
- **Quick Link Disconnect:** Yes
- **Gear Capacity:** 33 liters/ 2,013 cubic inches
- **Pack Weight:** 3.6 pounds
- **Dimensions:** 19.7 x 12.2 x 11 inches
- Laser-cut Mountain MOLLE panels on front and sides for secure attachment of accessory pouches
- Low Rider reservoir shifts weight down on the back
- Four-zipper, full clamshell opening on main compartment
- Webbing waist belt with lumbar adjustment stows when not in use
- Multiple drink tube exit ports, for routing tube over the shoulder or under an arm
- Side-release buckles for quick release from shoulder harness, compression straps, and waist belt
- Zippered back panel access makes loading a full reservoir into hydration compartment easy
- Dual antenna ports on top of pack
- D-rings and webbing loops for tube management
- Adjustable sternum strap
- Hook-and-loop strap management
- MOLLE attachment system integrated to bottom of boot
- 500D double-rip Cordura fabric

**MSRP:** \$246.70

[www.camelbak.com](http://www.camelbak.com)





**SPECS:**

- One-piece 80CRV2 carbon steel construction
- Skeletonized/tapered tang
- Black canvas laminate grips with paracord
- Sharp edge head/blunt hammer end
- 15 inches overall length
- 26 ounces in weight
- Limited lifetime warranty
- Made in USA

**MSRP:** \$499.99

[www.caseknives.com](http://www.caseknives.com)



### 3. Case Winkler Pack Axe

Sometimes you have jobs in the field that require a little more brute force than you can dish out with your combat knife. At times like that, an axe has been the go-to tool for soldiers for centuries.

Case's new Winkler Pack Axe is a great choice for breaking open crates, clearing fields of fire, or cutting stakes for camo netting or tarps. Part of Case's American Hero's Knife Series, the Pack Axe is a collaboration between Case and Winkler Knives. Its co-designer is Kevin Holland, a Navy SEAL survival expert with more 2,000 combat missions. The Pack Axe is a handy 15 inches long and is made from a single piece of 3/8-inch thick 80CRV2 carbon steel. It features both axe head and hammer poll, and is fitted with a set of canvas micarta grips. It has a paracord wrap for extra utility.



### 5. Combat Flip Flops Floperator

Your mom may wear combat boots, but that's probably only because she doesn't have anything else to change into, like the Combat Flip Flops Floperator sandals. Sandals are great to change into after a long day in hiking boots, and they're also great for flopping around the house.

Combat Flip Flops makes a number of quality styles in both men's and women's sizes. But the basic Floperator is what I turned to when I wanted a good pair of sandals for my boy, who would otherwise go barefoot and feral if I let him. The Floperator is ruggedly constructed with a rubber outsole, EVA mid layers, and a molded arch support, mated to military-grade tubular nylon uppers, so these aren't your two-buck disposable sandals that you see at your local chain stores. They're available in coyote and shadow gray in Men's and basic black in Women's. They even have Velcro sections on the straps for attaching morale patches, like the Combat Flip Flops American flags, available for \$7 in both full color and subdued options, or any other strip style patch of your choice.

When you buy a pair of Floperators, you aren't just getting a great pair of sandals; you're also supporting a business that gives back to war torn nations around the world. When you buy a pair of sandals, you help send an Afghan girl to school through donations to Aid Afghanistan for Education, a charity that helps women and children who would otherwise be denied an education. Do your feet, and a kid in Afghanistan, a favor and check out the Floperator the next time your travel-sore feet need a break from their stinky boots.

### 4. Cold Steel Spetsnaz Trench Shovel

Everybody knows that the military loves digging. Whether it's trenches or latrines, or maybe even filling sandbags, there's no shortage of things to keep an idle troop busy if you have a shovel. While the US military has used the trifold entrenching tool for decades, there's still a lot to be said for the old school fixed shovels like the Russian "Spetsnaz" e-tools.

Cold Steel has made its version of this shovel for ages, and one has ridden in the back of every car or Jeep I've had since they came out. They're solid and durable, work great for digging, and do a more than decent job at hacking and chopping as well. They even throw and stick amazingly well.

For 2020, Cold Steel has supersized things with its Special Forces Spetsnaz Trench Shovel. The new model features a 50% longer handle and a slightly larger shovel head. That extra length gives you more leverage for digging and will let you get a two-handed grip in the haft for hacking. It's still light enough for one-handed hacking and throwing.

The Trench Shovel has a rugged hardwood handle and a medium carbon steel blade with three moderately sharp edges. You can tune up those edges with



a file to whatever level of sharpness you desire. If you considered the original Spetsnaz shovel a good tomahawk alternative, consider the Trench Shovel an ersatz battle axe. The bigger size makes it a perfect Jeep or truck tool, and well suited for camping or canoeing. In fact, Cold Steel even mentions it can be used as an impromptu boat paddle as well! At under \$40 this one is a no-brainer addition to your vehicle or kit.

**<SPECS:**

- **Weight:** 36.3 ounces
- **Thickness:** 2mm (shovel head)
- **Handle:** Hickory
- **Steel/Material:** Medium carbon steel
- **Overall Length:** 30 inches

**Price:** \$39.99

[www.coldsteel.com](http://www.coldsteel.com)

**SPECS:>**

- Men's sizes 7-15, Women's sizes 5-11; half sizes available
- Proprietary rubber outsole & EVA mid-layers
- Injection molded arch support
- Military-grade tubular nylon upper
- 2 5/8 x 5/8 inch morale patch
- Funds one day of school for an Afghan girl
- Lifetime warranty

**Price:** \$39.99

[combatflipflops.com](http://combatflipflops.com)



## 6. KA-BAR Krunch Spoon/Straw



Every year KA-BAR comes up with a new gadget that's quirky but usually surprisingly handy. The item always has the iconic KA-BAR-style ribbed handle mated to whatever the tool of the year is. In the past there have been ice scrapers, bottle openers (I get a lot of use out of that one), and even a Spork complete with a hidden knife inside the handle for cutting up that tough hunk of meat that the Army calls a steak.

This year's entry is going to be one that you either get, or you don't: it's the Krunch, an adult cereal spoon. When I first heard about this one last year at Blade, my eyes lit up. I am the target audience. Cereal is a mainstay for me, and it fills the food void not just at breakfast but any time I need a quick, trouble-free meal. Cereal for lunch? You bet. Dinner? Yeah, that happens. Late night snack after getting home late from work? Oh yeah. The Krunch is a big, bad, man-sized black spoon capable of tackling the whole grain fodder of your choice. But that's not all! It also has a straw built into the handle so that you can drink your cereal milk, soup broth, or any other liquid as well. The KA-BAR Krunch is made in the USA of food and water safe Creamid (whatever that is) and is dishwasher safe. Even if you aren't a crazed adult lover of cereal, it's a cool spoon and will work great in your lunchbox or camping gear. At under \$9, it'd make a neat gift too.

### SPECS:

- **Weight:** 0.1 pound
- **Overall Length:** 7.25 inches
- **Tang Stamp:** KA-BAR
- **Handle Material:** Creamid
- **Country of Origin:** United States
- **Width:** 1.75 inches
- MSRP:** \$8.57
- www.kabar.com**



## 7. Tactical Medical Solutions TacMed Pocket Medical Kit

It never hurts to be prepared for a serious injury. Tactical Medical Solutions can cover that eventuality with its TacMed Pocket Medical Kit. The PMK gives you the tools to cover a traumatic injury on the spot. The compact kit is designed to fit in the trauma plate carrier on a Kevlar vest, in a uniform shirt pocket, or even in the back pocket of your jeans. It contains an SOF tourniquet, an Esmark bandage, a Beacon chest seal, and a pair of surgical gloves along with your choice of either regular compressed gauze or Combat Gauze.

### CONTENTS

- 1 SOF tourniquet Gen 4 (Rescue Orange)
- 1 Esmark bandage
- 1 compressed gauze or Combat Gauze
- 1 Beacon chest seal
- 1 pair black gloves

### MSRP:

\$53.09 - \$92.90 (depending on gauze option)

[www.tacmedsolutions.com](http://www.tacmedsolutions.com)



## 8. TOPS Hammer Hawk Axe

Being able to break in and out of places, or into things, can be critical in an emergency scenario. So having a durable entry tool is a good idea. The Hammer Hawk axe from TOPS Knives definitely fits that bill, and it's also one of the more stylish tools in its class. Designed by none other than TOPS President Leo Espinoza, the Hammer Hawk is as serious a tool as you get.

### SPECS

- **Blade Length:** 4.5 inches
- **Overall Length:** 14.5 inches
- **Blade Thickness:** 0.38 inches
- **Blade Material:** 1075 RC 56-58
- **Blade Finish:** Acid Rain
- **Handle Material:** Green canvas Micarta
- **Weight:** 36.3 ounces
- **Weight w/Sheath:** 42.3 ounces
- **Sheath Material:** Brown leather
- **Made in USA**
- MSRP:** \$350.00
- www.topsknives.com**

Constructed of a single piece of 3/8-inch-thick 1075 steel and fitted with green canvas Micarta scales, there is nothing delicate or subtle about this piece. The 4.5-inch cutting edge is backed by a hammerhead poll. That, along with its more-than-2-pound weight, means it will smash or hack through whatever it needs to. Despite the brutal functionality of the piece, there's also an aesthetic to it that you don't generally expect on entry tools: a detailed arrow design set into the recessed area of the head. The Hammer Hawk comes with a two-piece leather sheath that allows you to carry it on your belt or pack, and it's made in the USA at TOPS' Ucon, Idaho, facility. **KI**

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about our  
production process  
or Knife Making



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as they discuss  
everything from  
current events to  
their favorite hobbies



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# INDEPENDENCE DAYS



## FREEDOM RINGS FOR KNIFE ENTHUSIASTS

BY KNIVES ILLUSTRATED STAFF

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**While some legislators and/or governors of some states continue to oppose repealing their irrational knife restrictions, even our most restrictive states are better (in most regards) than much of the rest of the Western world.**

Knife Rights Founder and Chairman Doug Ritter explained, “I keep an eye on what’s happening in other countries with their knife restrictions, if for no other reason than to use them as object lessons when we go talk to legislators. The fact is, while Knife Rights is moving us towards an ever sharper future here in the U.S., in many countries, the last decade has seen them moving backwards, and nowhere else are they getting rid of restrictions.”

Ritter noted that he’s often approached by knife enthusiasts and manufacturers elsewhere in the world, hoping he’ll come do something to roll back their often severe restrictions on knives. Ritter first tells them his plate is full with Knife Rights’ efforts here in the U.S. However, he commented, “The second point I make is the real

### KNIFE RIGHTS ONLINE

The best way to keep up to date on Knife Rights’ legislative and litigation efforts is with their free email News Slice™ newsletter at [KnifeRights.org/NewsSlice](http://KnifeRights.org/NewsSlice) or via social media at [Instagram.com/KnifeRights](https://www.instagram.com/KnifeRights), [Facebook.com/KnifeRights](https://www.facebook.com/KnifeRights) or [Twitter.com/KnifeRights](https://twitter.com/KnifeRights).

kicker. Even if I had the time, and they had the funds, they lack the extraordinary culture of freedom and self-determination that we have here. Without that culture of freedom, without the Second Amendment as well, they have no place from which to start.”

While many in other nations in the Western world look askance at the U.S. and our so-called “cowboy culture,” the reality is for the most part, they simply cannot grasp the concept of individual freedom that underpins our nation and its culture.

“When we threw off the colonial yoke and told the King of England to take a hike, it established a culture of self-determination that instilled a much more pure form of ‘freedom’ than exists anywhere else in the world,” Ritter noted. “The Declaration of Independence was extremely radical in its day, and that was followed up by the even more radical U.S. Constitution.”

Knife Rights’ success at rolling back knife bans—31 bills in 22 states since 2010, as of this writing—is directly connected to those events.

“No other system of government on Earth makes it easier for its citizens to get rid of archaic laws and to stop bad laws, either legislatively or through litigation. And, by ‘easier’ I don’t mean ‘easy,’” explained Ritter. It also makes it easier to pass restrictive knife laws, but Ritter notes that the corollary is that it’s easier to defeat them. But, no system works 100% in any advocate’s favor and it takes a tremendous amount of work and funding to get the job done, as well as tenacity and persistence, which Knife Rights has shown they have in spades. **KI**

### YOU CAN HELP.

Knife Rights’ **Ultimate Steel Spectacular** fundraiser is going on now, ending July 31. Make a donation to support Knife Rights’ efforts to forge a sharper future for all Americans, to keep the torch of liberty and freedom shining bright for the knife community, and you could win prizes valued upwards of \$7,000! Get all the details and view all the extraordinary custom knives and other prizes at [UltimateSteel.org](http://UltimateSteel.org).





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# SPECIAL





USING MILITARY  
PHILOSOPHIES,  
TWO RETIRED  
GREEN BERETS  
HAVE MASTERFULLY  
GUIDED SPARTAN  
BLADES FOR 12  
YEARS

TEXT BY DOUG JEFFREY,  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF  
SPARTAN BLADES USA

**T**hey are American heroes. Combined, these two retired members of the Special Forces have more than four decades of military service and dedication to the United States of America. To be sure, their skills, military education and experience are among the elite. In the following story, you will find out how Curtis V. Iovito and Mark Carey combined forces and used the philosophies they mastered in the military to build one of the knife industry's strongest brands—Spartan Blades.

In the interview, Mark made it abundantly clear that they are patriotic and driven toward perfection. Whether serving our country or their customers, these two men are also humble, talented, focused, dedicated and committed. That's why they are American heroes, and that's why Spartan Blades has been in business for 12 years.

Along with their team, they are most definitely "special forces."

# FORCES



**Knives Illustrated: What prompted you to enlist in the Marines and then the Army?**

**Curtis Iovito:** As a young man, I grew up in a small town that valued patriotism and service. Combined with a sense of adventure and a desire to see more of the world, I was compelled to join the Marines.

As for the Army, two of my squad leaders talked me into getting out of the Marines. This was not intended as a permanent thing; instead, it was a way of avoiding leave. They explained that it was common to get out, take a short break, which was basically free leave, and then I'd reenlist.

This turned out to be pretty bad advice, as the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings [Balanced Budget Act] budget cuts had just been put into effect, and the Department of Defense decided not to let former Marines reenlist. As a guy who loved the Marines, I decided that being a paratrooper would be the next best thing, so I enlisted in the Army and eventually ended up in the 2nd Ranger Bn.

**KI: I understand you developed an interest in knife making while in the Special Forces. What created that interest?**

**Below:** The Spartan-Harsey folder or "SHF" is the company's first folder collaboration with William Harsey, Jr. This blade can be used for everyday carry or as a sturdy field knife.

**Curtis:** As a Special Forces weapons sergeant, I wanted to develop my knowledge of weapons and started working weekends at a gun/machine shop near Ft. Lewis (Tacoma, WA.). While working there, I made a knife for myself and then for a friend. You can probably guess how it grew from there.

**KI: During your 20-year career in the military, what are some of the most important lessons you learned?**

**Curtis:** I can honestly say the biggest one is, "Know your operational environment." This is true whether you are in an insurgent neighborhood or at a dinner party. It is such an important factor when conducting business and interfacing with others. It allows you to plan and develop courses of action.

**KI: The company was founded in 2008. What prompted you to take this direction for your next career?**

**Mark Carey:** Curtis and I retired about the same time and went to work for a corporation that felt it was best to spend company profits (in the millions) rather than pay out hard-earned bonuses. We had seen operations that were perennially successful and

others that had crashed simply due to planning and lack of attention to detail. We were fairly confident that we could run a successful operation.

**KI: How much time elapsed from the time you came up with the idea to the time in which the company was up and running?**

**Mark:** It was about 60 days. We developed two business plans: one for building sniper rifles and the other for making knives. We decided on knives based on the state of the industry, the start-up cost, and how nice and receptive people in the industry were.

At the time, Jeff Freeman, who was in charge of product development and innovation at Gerber, offered to let us visit their factory and hang out for a few days. Chris of Chris Reeve Knives offered to let us stay with him, so he could teach us about the industry. At the time, the firearms industry was busy undercutting each other and stealing employees. In the end, knives were an easy choice.

**KI: To build a successful knife company, what did you see as the biggest challenge?**

**Curtis:** Honestly, we never let the fear of failure enter our thought process.



Understanding the risk after weighing it was a different story. We knew that we wouldn't be able to take a paycheck for at least a year ... and that was hard. We lived off savings and contract work for the first few years so that we could reinvest into the company. We knew that most startups fail because of early over spending, but we avoided that.

**KI:** When you guys first opened the doors, you were working in a pre-Civil War mule barn. Tell us what that was like.

**Curtis:** Well, we often are asked, "Why the name Spartan Blades?" It developed out of the spartan way we had to do things to get started. We each pitched in a few thousand dollars and moved into a pre-Civil War mule barn on Mark's property. There was no heating, air-conditioning or internet, but there were plenty of spiders and snakes. We remodeled the upstairs as an office and the downstairs as a grinding and blasting area. Honestly, it was not that bad. Mark, in essence, was always at work and would often walk over to the shop in his robe and take care of banking, purchasing and sourcing of materials. It was small, but it definitely taught us how to put systems in place on a small scale.

**Below:** Another collaboration with William Harsey, this Special Edition is covered with a series of Runes and Staves to bring luck, good health, and healing to the owner.

# The Truths

CURTIS IOVITO AND MARK CAREY DEVOTED DECADES OF SERVICE TO AMERICA. THIS TAUGHT THEM "SOF TRUTHS" THAT THEY USE AS GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THEIR COMPANY.

**01** Humans are more important than hardware.

**02** Quality is better than quantity.

**03** Special Operations Forces cannot be mass produced.

**04** Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.

**05** Most Special Operations require non-SOF assistance.

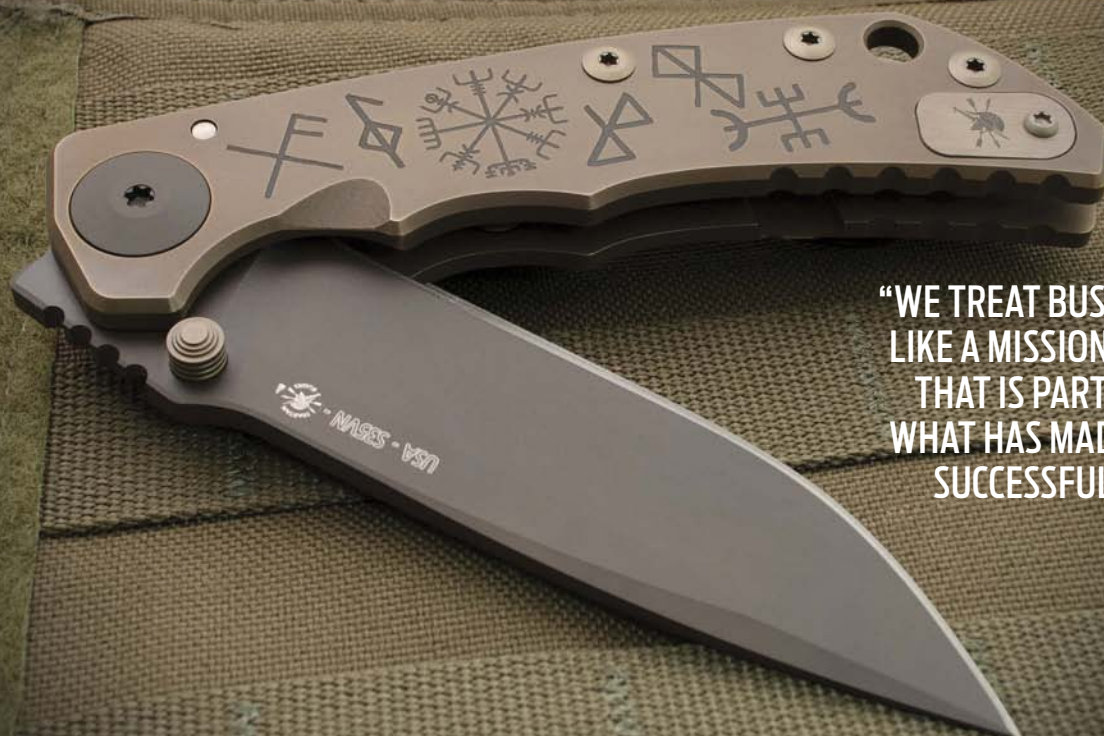
**KI:** How long were you there before you moved? Once you were in a new building with more elbow room, describe the feeling.

**Curtis:** We were in the barn from 2008 to 2014. I will never forget the time a dealer called us and asked to speak to the "American division of the company." I said, "Satu tick tick saja," which is Indonesian for just a moment. I put him on hold then answered the phone, "Curtis speaking, American division." I will never forget Mark looking at me and saying, "What the hell?" I will also never forget blasting knives in the winter and telling Jake

Nelson, one of our employees, "Some day we might be able to do this in a heated building." Of course, when that day came, it was pretty damn nice.

**KI:** When you guys selected the team, what traits were you looking for in your employees?

**Mark:** The biggest one was finding team players. We just don't subscribe to the usual boss/employee way of conducting business. We like to take a team approach, much like we did in the Special Forces. Everyone in our shop has specific duties, but we also cross-train everyone. For example, our guys



**"WE TREAT BUSINESS LIKE A MISSION AND THAT IS PART OF WHAT HAS MADE US SUCCESSFUL."**





## “HONESTLY, WE NEVER LET THE FEAR OF FAILURE ENTER OUR THOUGHT PROCESS.”

—Curtis Iovito, on opening Spartan Blades

in the assembly area can answer the phone, take orders, work trade shows and run a laser. All our employees are either veterans or locals whose families have been in town for years.

### **KI:** Describe your creative process when coming up with new ideas.

**Curtis:** Mark and I tend to be very system and process-oriented. We find that it is easier to implement, teach, and follow systems and processes. Developing ideas is very much the same. While the creative process is based on preparation, incubation, illumination, evaluation and implementation, we often will use the military decision-making process, which is mission, mission analysis, course of action (COA) development, COA analysis, COA comparison, COA approval and orders production. This is just the way we are used to doing things.

### **KI:** Both you and Mark have extensive military experience. When creating new product, do you rely solely on that, or do you work with others?

**Curtis:** Early in the process of starting Spartan Blades, we were sitting around with Chris Reeve and Bill Harsey. They asked us a few questions to which they

**Top Left:** This shot shows the Shintos in the blaster.

**Top Right:** Although there was no heating or air conditioning, Spartan Blades initially spent several successful years in their original home.

already knew the answer. The first was, “Did you get knife making classes in the Special Forces?” The answer was “No.” The next was, “How many hours of knife designing did you receive at Ft. Bragg?” The answer was, “Well ... none.”

Bill then said something that always stuck with us. He said, “So being in the Special Forces has nothing to do with being a good knifemaker or designer. So, do what good SF guys do: develop relationships and learn.” His point was know yourself and be honest about what you’re good at and what you aren’t. If you aren’t good at something, find someone who is.

To answer your question, we rely on others all the time.

### **KI:** In a given year, do you strive to release a certain number of knives?

**Mark:** No, we don’t. Quality is always better than quantity. Knives tend to have a lifespan, and we do track sales and performance of knives. If we feel a knife is coming to the end of its run, we kill it and develop a new one.

Now that we have joined forces with KA-BAR Knives, we are doing more long-range planning in an effort to create more choices for our customers. We plan to make three distinct lines of knives: Gold or Elite Grade, Silver or Pro Grade and Bronze or Field Grade. Expect to see far more offerings from us in the next few years.

### **KI:** What makes Spartan Blades’ knives different from the knives other companies produce?

**Curtis:** In most cases, it is how we develop the knives as a product. When we started making knives, we decided that we would go a little overboard on the processes it takes to make a knife. For example, the price of CPM steels is far more expensive than, say 1095, but we knew it performed better so we used it. We double-deep, cryogenically heat-treat our blades. When we asked Bob Skitbinski, the metallurgist at Crucible Steel Company, if it was necessary to do it twice, he said, “No, but it is the only way to get the very best performance from the steel.” So, we did it, doubling the cost of the treatment.

During the temper process, all our knives are brought to tempered while fitted in a hydraulic press to ensure straightness. This is called pressure tempering, which adds additional cost. We even decided on PVD coating that is far more expensive than other methods, but we did that as well.

Why use these expensive processes? Because we decided to make the best knives that we could. Simple as that. Remember, we didn’t want to be the Special Forces guys who make crap, and we knew that the bigger guys most likely wouldn’t spend the extra money to pull the best performance out of their knives ... giving us an edge.



**Left:** Spartan Blades get more than their share of real-world use.



**Bottom:** Lannie Harper is a retired Army master sergeant and an Apache helicopter mechanic. Here he is shown bending clips.

## THE FIRST DECADE: A Timeline

**2008:** Curtis Iovito and Mark Carey found Spartan Blades. They set up shop in a pre-Civil War mule barn.

**2010:** At the BLADE Show, Spartan won the “Knife Collaboration of the Year” award with William W. Harsey.

**2014:** Spartan scored two victories at the BLADE Show. First, Spartan won the “Most Innovative American Design” award. For the V-14 Dagger with Les George, Spartan also won the “Knife Collaboration of the Year.”

**2016:** For the Spartan Harsey folder, the BLADE Show recognized Spartan with the “American-Made Knife of the Year.”

**2017:** For the Kranos folder, Spartan won the “American-made Knife of the Year” at the BLADE Show.

### Personal Info

**Name:** Curtis V. Iovito

**Age:** 55

**Born:** Bolingbrook, IL

**Title:** Co-owner;  
President, Product  
Development/Marketing

**Name:** Mark Carey

**Age:** 53

**Born:** La Mesa, CA

**Title:** Co-owner;  
President, Plans and  
Operations

**KI:** Your company has enjoyed tremendous success through the years. Which of the accomplishments stand out the most?

**Curtis:** Professionally, it would be winning American Made Knife of the Year two years running at the International BLADE Show. Personally, it would be the relationships we have developed with our friends in the industry. The list includes Chris and Anne Reeve, Bill Harsey, Rick Hinderer, Greg Medford and many more. In any other industry, the people we listed would be considered rivals. In ours, they are considered friends. That is a very rare and special thing.

**KI:** What are the keys that have enabled your company to be so successful?

**Mark:** We attribute that to a few things. First, we decided early on that we would always pay our bills early or on time. Second, a knife would never leave our shop until it is paid for. Third, we would never take any money until we delivered our knives. Finally, we would treat every dealer and customer as if they were our business partner because, in essence, they are.

**KI:** Discuss the company's mission statement, and explain your goal to reinvigorate the populace through your knives.

**Curtis:** What we mean by this is that we are rapidly becoming a country used to disposable products. Many of us remember what it was like to pick up tools or household items that belonged to our grandparents or from a local craftsman. We want to give products like that back to people.

**KI:** Describe how the philosophy “knives with intent” works in conjunction with your company's success.

**Curtis:** While I know this can sound a little menacing to some, it has a deeper meaning. We try to think about the intent of the user and what the knife will be used for. If you do that, it can translate into success.

**KI:** You've described your company as “relentlessly patriotic. Describe how this trait became so meaningful for you.

**Mark:** We spent the majority of our adult lives serving in the U.S. military,

## Mission Overview

### The Military Careers of Iovito and Carey

Curtis Iovito's and Mark Carey's bios are so long that we can only present a few highlights. For more information, jump on the company's website.

#### Curtis Iovito

##### Assignments

- D/2/1st SWTG, Special Operations Target Interdiction Course (SOTIC), Ft Bragg, NC
- C/7/1 SFG (A), 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Okinawa, Japan
- B/3/1 SFG (A), 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Ft. Lewis, WA

##### Military Education

- DDS-DSS High Threat Protective Security Operations Course (Knoll Crucible)
- O'Garra SSI High Risk Drivers Training Course
- Special Forces Advanced Reconnaissance and Target Exploitation Training Course (SFARTETC)
- Special Operations Target Interdiction Course Level I (SOTIC)
- Special Operations Training Course (SOT)
- Military Freefall Parachutist Course (HALO School)
- U.S. Army Special Warfare Training Center Instructor Training Course (ITC)
- Special Forces Weapons Sergeant Course
- Ranger Indoctrination Course
- Airborne School

#### Mark Carey

##### Assignments

- D/2/1st SWTG, Special Operations Target Interdiction Course (SOTIC), Ft Bragg, NC
- C/7/1 SFG (A), 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Okinawa, Japan
- B/7/1 SFG (A), 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), Okinawa, Japan

##### Military Education

- USMC Urban Sniper Course
- Special Operations Target Interdiction Course Level I (SOTIC)
- U.S. Army Special Warfare Training Center Instructor Training Course (ITC)
- Advanced Non-Commissioned Officers/Operation and Intelligence Course (ANOC/O&I)
- Paramedic (UTSAHSC)
- USMC Maritime Over the Horizon/Coastguard Courses
- U.S. Army Mountain School
- Special Forces Medical Sergeant Course
- Airborne School
- U.S. Army Basic Training/Advance Individual Training - Infantry Course



as well as other activities after that service. During that time, we lived and worked in dozens of countries and were always happy to come back home. You see the lack of freedoms and movement in other countries and really appreciate what a special existence we have here in the U.S. I know some people equate patriotism to the flag, business, race, politics, or a particular party, but it is so much more than that. It's our shared history, our families and core American values that make us [USA] special.

We know America isn't perfect, but no country or man is. We are proud to be an American company. We truly love our country and wouldn't hesitate to die for it. And trust me when I say that has almost happened a few times. As Spartan Blades grows, we find ourselves working and selling knives worldwide and take great pride in telling people that we are an American company and even more so retired soldiers.

**KI:** Discuss the changes that recently occurred.

**Curtis:** We are Pineland Cutlery, Inc. doing business as Spartan Blades.

I know this was a bit of a surprise to people. We started Pineland Cutlery, Inc. this year with KA-BAR Knives as our partner. As a small company, we just didn't have the assets to see Spartan continue to expand into other larger markets. While there is no doubt that we could have in time, time is something that Mark and I had to look at. We decided that we would like Spartan Blades to live beyond us, and we aren't getting any younger.

Our desire was to team with an American company that cared about history and had the same ethics and core values as we do. As a company that has close ties to the military, KA-BAR was a natural choice for us. We already had a friendly and collaborative relationship with them, and we knew they are trustworthy and honest.

If you had told me 12 years ago that we would be partnering with the most storied American knife company in U.S. history, I wouldn't have believed you.

**Mark:** Now that we have teamed with KA-BAR, our plan is to make Spartan Blades available to a wider customer

## Contact Us

Website  
SpartanBladesUSA.com

Email  
contact@spartanbladesusa.com

Phone  
(910) 757-0035

base. By creating three distinct lines of knives (Gold, Silver and Bronze), we will also be opening our knives up to distribution. Gold or Elite grade knives will be the same knives we have always made right here in North Carolina by the same craftsman. Silver or Pro Grade will be made by KA-BAR in New York and will be a more affordable option. Finally, we are developing a Bronze or Field Grade that will be manufactured with overseas partners..

**KI:** If you could go back in time, would you change anything?

**Curtis:** No, I've always said that is no way to think; you can only change the future, and the best way to do that is by doing good things and treating people right. **KI**

## Meet the Team

- **Curtis V. Iovito & Mark Carey:** Co-owners of Spartan Blades
- **Kimberly Harper:** She is the customer service representative, an Army veteran and the personal interface between our customers and our company.
- **Lannie Harper:** He is a knife maker and craftsman, retired Army master sergeant, and an Apache helicopter mechanic who has a degree in gunsmithing and business. Let's just say his attention to detail is pretty damn good.
- **Jake Nelson:** A knife maker and craftsman, Jake grew up in the neighborhood we had our original shop in and used to ride his bike to our shop to blast knives for extra money. He is now been with us for almost 10 years and literally can do any job required in our shop. He has a very bright future for such a young man.



**Left:** As a member of the Special Forces, Mark Carey specialized in all aspects of medicine, as well as unconventional warfare with an emphasis on counterterrorism and sniping.



**Lower Left:** Curtis Iovito and Mark Carey call the Spartan Harsey Dagger "the epitome of what a combat dagger should be." The overall length is 10 3/4 inches, and the blade length is 6 inches. It weighs in at 6.72 ounces, it is made of CPM S35V steel and has a hardness of 58-60.

**Right:** Here, most of the staff is shown at the 2018 SHOT Show. Left to right, the team members are Jake Nelson, Mark Carey, Lannie Harper and Curtis Iovito.



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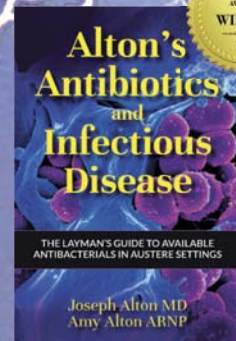
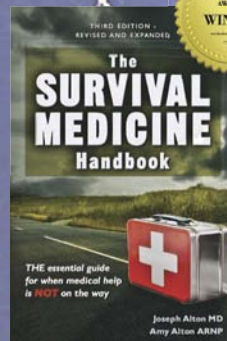
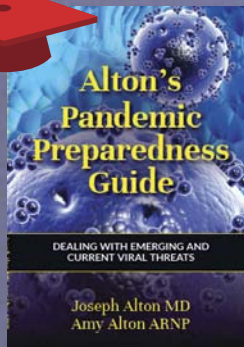


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# DAGGERS DRAWN

## Modern Self-Defense Tactics

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL JANICH

**W**hen it comes to fighting knives, the dagger enjoys an elite status that few other blade styles can match. Historically, daggers have always been revered as incredibly potent weapons, whether they really deserved that reputation or not. For modern self-defense, however, historical reputation isn't good enough.

For self-defense, we need real performance. To that end, let's take a look at what really constitutes a good dagger and how to take advantage of those attributes with proper skills and tactics.

For the purposes of this article, I'm defining a dagger as a true double-edged knife capable of serious cutting performance with either edge. Based on that definition, single-edged knives with false

**Above:** Not all daggers are created equal. Before you trust one for self-defense, understand what attributes it needs to have and adjust your tactics accordingly.

edges—sharpened partial edges on the spine of the blade—also technically qualify. Single-edged knives with swedges (unsharpened back bevels), spikes, or any other designs that fall short of truly functional edges “don't make the cut”—both literally and figuratively.

### Legality

Double-edged knives are illegal to carry in many jurisdictions, so structuring your edged-weapon-based self-defense tactics around one may box you into a legal corner. As always, it's your responsibility to do the homework on the laws where you live and areas where you travel. In addition to the term “dagger,” also beware of “dirk” and any verbiage that specifically addresses the number of sharpened edges permissible by law.

Some laws also prohibit the carry of knives that are purpose-designed

#### ON THE WEB

**Martial Blade Concepts**  
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**SEQUENCE (A)-(H):**

Against an overhead attack with a hammer (A), the dagger-armed defender first executes a two-step *Hubud* parry from the Filipino martial arts to deflect the strike (B, C). Stabilizing the back of the arm with his left palm, he performs a pulling cut with the near edge of the blade to sever the flexor tendons and muscles to destroy the attacker's grip (D). He then quickly follows with a forehand cut with the blade's other edge, severing the bicep, underlying nerves, and potentially the brachial artery (E-H).

as weapons. Daggers make poor utility tools and are typically recognized more as weapons than general-purpose knives. When in doubt, err on the side of caution and carry something single edged.

**Design Considerations**

With very rare exceptions, folding knives do not lend themselves well to double edges. The reason is that the spine of the blade usually stands proud of the handle when the knife is closed. If it were sharpened, you'd have a sharp edge exposed—even when the knife is closed—so carrying and deploying it would be dangerous. The only way to safely carry a double-edged folder is to have a design that allows the blade to fold completely within the handle. Balisongs do this best. The early custom versions of the Applegate-Fairbairn Folder were also double edged, but most folder designs don't allow it.

The other issue with double-edged folders is that cutting with the back edge of the blade places a lot of stress on the lock mechanism. If it's not up to the task and the folder "lives up to its name" at the wrong time, you could suffer serious injury.

If a folder isn't an option, obviously the remaining choice is a fixed blade. While fixed blades are simpler,

stronger, and quicker to get into action than folding knives, from both a comfort and legal perspective, they can also be challenging.

Regardless of which option you choose, pay close attention to the knife's edge geometry. In order to cut effectively, its cutting edges must be reasonably thin and acute. This is a challenge with daggers because their double edges mean that the primary bevels for each edge must be shorter than if the same blade were single edged. The shorter the bevel, the more obtuse the edge angle and the poorer its cutting ability. Many iconic daggers—like the famed Fairbairn-Sykes commando knife—suffered from this shortcoming.

A high-performance dagger blade is almost like laying two single-edged knives spine to spine. Both cutting edges should have long bevels and acute terminal-edge geometry. Broad blades, thinner blade stock, and hollow-ground bevels all help achieve this.

**Tactics**

The primary advantage of a double-edged blade is that it cuts in both directions. This quality allows it to be used with both conventional "edge-out" skills and "reverse-edge" tactics without having to adjust your grip. That means you can integrate

the skills of these two different approaches to knife tactics to create a "hybrid" system that allows you to take advantage of targets that face toward you and those facing away from you with equal ease.

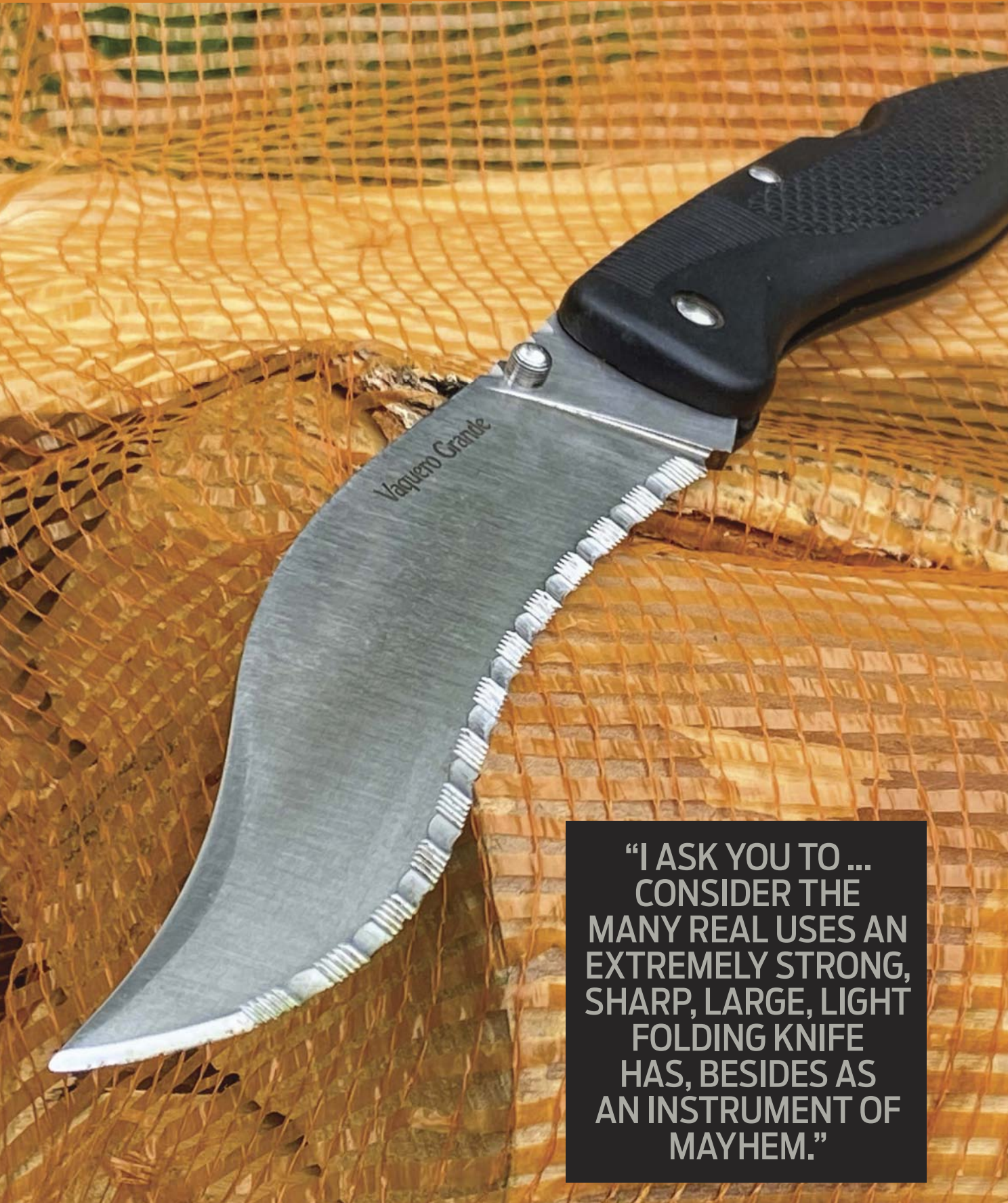
For example, if an attacker swings a weapon at you with a high, forehand motion, the inside of his arm—and all the high-value targets it offers—is exposed. Outward cutting strokes with either standard or reverse grip could target the flexor tendons, muscles, and arteries of the inner forearm, or the bicep muscle and the key nerves and the brachial artery just below it. Once you've followed through on your cut and your knife is past his arm, aim for the triceps muscle, drawing the near edge of the blade back toward you through the target. This powerful pulling movement takes advantage of the strength of your back muscles and severs the muscle that your attacker needs to extend his arm and swing at you again.

Two cutting edges can be better than one, but only if you wield them with smart tactics. **KI**

**Below:** Broader blades and hollow-ground bevels, like on the Laci Szabo-designed "Szabo Express" (left), cut far better than narrow, flat-ground daggers, like this old-school Gerber Mark I with blued blade (right).







**“I ASK YOU TO ...  
CONSIDER THE  
MANY REAL USES AN  
EXTREMELY STRONG,  
SHARP, LARGE, LIGHT  
FOLDING KNIFE  
HAS, BESIDES AS  
AN INSTRUMENT OF  
MAYHEM.”**





**Left:** The Cold Steel Vaquero was one of the company's original XL knives.

# INSANELY USEFUL OR JUST INSANE?

## COLD STEEL XL FOLDERS

TEXT & PHOTOS BY BOB DEMARCO

**Y**ou've seen Cold Steel's marketing approach. And if you're like most, you probably take exception to the company's unapologetic manufacturing and marketing of knives as weapon—but I'm not like most guys. Some bristle at seeing a pig carcass run through by an Italian broad sword. Not me. Some cringe at the site of Lynn Thompson hacking at a side of beef with a Bowie. Not this guy. Now you know who you're dealing with. I'm a Cold Steel fan and proud of it.





Cold Steel got its hooks in me as an impressionable teen in the mid-1980s, when tales of its legendary Master Tanto made their way from Ventura, California, to the suburbs of Cleveland. My best friend Mike told me of a belt knife that looked like a samurai sword, could cut anything, and was used by the CIA. "It can even punch through a car door," he exclaimed, which is naturally a prerequisite for knives carried by CIA agents.

Fast forward 35 years later, and I'm awash in Cold Steel knives—fixed blades, machetes, swords, haft weapons, a swordcane, and even those plastic knives (that I have great difficulty defending). But by far the pride and joy of my sprawling Cold Steel collection is my sub-collection of XL Folders. Cold Steel XL folders are characterized by their thin ground blades of 5.5-7.5 inches, large

**Top:** Huge Cold Steels tend to accumulate in one's collection.

**Right:** The 4 Max Scout and Voyager Kris are two excellent large folder options from Cold Steel.



versatile handles, and ethnographic designs. Most XL models sport the company's ultra-strong Tri-Ad lock and have smaller companion models in the same line.

I have 15 XL Cold Steel folders. You may say, with a bit of sarcasm in your voice, "That's money well spent." But I ask you to suspend your judgement

and disbelief for just a moment, put aside the imagery from the Cold Steel marketing videos, and consider the many real uses an extremely strong, sharp, large, light folding knife has, besides as an instrument of mayhem. I submit that CSXLs are not only weapons, but great working tools and even excellent collectibles.





“FIGHTING AGGRESSIVE, VINEY VEGETATION AROUND HERE IS LIKE DOING BATTLE WITH THE GREAT HYDRA.”

## Why are Cold Steel XL Folders such Great Performers?

Before we get into those very real reasons for including CSXLs in your collection, let's take a closer look at what makes them such stellar performers.

**Blade Shape:** These knives take their design cues from the world's most infamous and proven bladed weapons and translate them into a contemporary format, using modern materials and manufacturing. So, if the blade

shape worked for warriors of old, it'll do just fine for you. Each blade is ground to a stunningly sharp edge and most are thinly ground for the entire breadth of the blade. Adding full serrations to these large blades (an option on most) amplifies the cutting power and adds to the longevity of the edge, which is important if re-sharpening is not an option.

**Handle:** The handle designs of these massive folders are carefully considered to maximize grip options and optimize the physics of the users swing. Choils, grooves,

**Above, Top:** The Espada XL is one of Cold Steel's largest and most iconic knives.

**Above, Bottom:** The Cold Steel Espada XL has many different hand positions.

and textures shape these Grivory or G10 handles, offering a strong and comfortable grip whether choked-up close to the blade, in a natural mid-handle grip, or hanging onto the end for maximum leverage.

**Reach:** The best illustration of reach can be seen in the gargantuan Espada XL (16.75 inches overall!). Two-thirds of the way down the grip is a protruding sub-hilt. Gripping the final third of the handle with your trigger finger around the sub-hilt gives you an extremely sure grip for swinging, turning the Espada XL into a small





machete, while giving the user an effective reach of 11 inches or so. Not too shabby for a “pocketknife.”

**Lock:** So that you don’t accidentally guillotine your fingers, Cold Steel proudly and loudly adds its proprietary super-backlock, the Tri-Ad lock, to most of its XL folders. By adding a stop pin between the blade tang and the back spring, the Tri-Ad lock can withstand incredible opposing force and self-adjusts over time, ideal for a large hard-use folder.

**Relative Portability:** Yes, these are very large for folding knives and are a challenge to carry daily, but if you reframe the portability question to one of capability for the stored (folded) size, these knives nearly compare to fixed blades. Of course, there are many abuses you wouldn’t want to put even the strongest folder through, but barring those, the light weight, blade length, and lock strength of the Cold Steel XLs offer amazing bang for the folded size.

## As a Weapon...

When I first saw the Vaquero Grande 6 inch in the late 1990s, I couldn’t believe my eyes. That serrated blade deeply recurved like something from the Philippines, and that long horn-shaped handle so reminiscent of Spanish knives... it looked like a Talibong and a Navaja had a passionate night together and out came Vaquero Grande. To me, it was beautiful, and all weapon. God forbid, I actually had to draw a knife in self-defense, it should be the biggest, gnarliest knife I can manage.

## As a Tool...

Twelve years later, with a backyard and an excuse to use the larger knives I’d collected over the years, fighting aggressive, viney vegetation around here is like doing battle with the great Hydra. Cut one, and seven pop up in its place. This backyard battle taught me that the same attributes that make the Vaquero Grande a devastating weapon also make it an outstanding tool for keeping the English ivy and Virginia creeper at bay.

Now seeing the value of the CSXLs on two dimensions, as weapons and essential agricultural tools, I began to consider a third justification for acquiring ever more XL folders... collectability.

## As a Collectable...

I have many historical ethnographic weapons in my collection and recognize the

**Above:** Ample grip is never a cause for concern in any Cold Steel knife.

**Left:** Cold Steel’s newest model with their Kris blade is the Voyager.

### CONTACT INFO

**Cold Steel Knives**

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**Phone:** 800-255-4716

**Website:**  
[www.ColdSteel.com](http://www.ColdSteel.com)

“THE CUTTING POWER, VERSATILITY, PACKABILITY, LIGHT WEIGHT, AND LOCK STRENGTH OF THE XL FOLDERS CANNOT BE ARGUED AND SHOULD PIQUE THE INTEREST OF EVEN THE MOST SEASONED COLD STEEL SCEPTIC.”

**Below:** Cold Steel's Kris blade is inspired by the Filipino sword of the same name.

ingenuity and utility of many exotic blade shapes. If you believe, as I do, that the average knife enthusiast can benefit greatly from exposure to blades from other cultures, then consider this: Cold Steel XL folders are all derived from knives found throughout history. In addition to American Bowies and Tantos, you can have a modern, folding Nepalese Kukri, Italian Stiletto, Spanish Navaja, and even the Indonesian Kris in Voyager dress.

Plus, if you're compelled by the blade shapes and utility of the Cold Steel XL folders but cannot bring yourself to buy a 6-inch pocketknife, Lynn Thompson has you covered with a 4-inch or smaller companion knife for most every model.

## In Conclusion

Anyone who collects anything is halfway to understanding my affinity for Cold Steel's XL folding knives as well as my justifications for owning so many of them, but for knife collectors it should be a no-brainer. The cutting power, versatility, packability, light weight, and lock strength of the XL folders cannot be argued and should pique the interest of even the most seasoned Cold Steel sceptic. With some models starting as low as \$50, it seems a moral imperative for the modern knife enthusiast to give Cold Steel XL folders a second look. **KI**











The KA-BAR 1266 Modified Tanto is a combat knife for the 21st century, blending traditional functionality with modern materials.

# SOLDIER ON

## THE KA-BAR 1266 MODIFIED TANTO

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY TIM STETZER





**“THE EXTRA LENGTH AND FINE POINT OF THE MODIFIED TANTO ... MAKE IT A FINE COMBAT KNIFE ... SUITABLE TO SERVE ON FOR DECADES TO COME.”**

**I**f someone says, “fighting knife,” at least in the US, there’s a good chance that the classic KA-BAR Marine combat knife pops into your head. That doesn’t mean there isn’t room to innovate a trusty classic. The KA-BAR has ridden on the hips of countless servicemen for nearly 80 years. It still soldiers on to this day. Olean, New York-based KA-BAR Knives continues to update its designs and materials, giving end users at the tip of the spear even more options to use what suits them best. The latest example of that is the KA-BAR 1266 Modified Tanto.

## ‘Modified Tanto’

So what is the 1266, and what makes it different from other KA-BARs? The 1266 is actually based upon KA-BAR’s other tanto design: the 1245. Unlike the classic clip point KA-BAR, the 1245 uses an 8-inch blade (as opposed to 7 inches) and an angled “American tanto” style point. KA-BAR calls the 1266 a “Modified Tanto” for two reasons. First, it’s built off the same blade blanks as the 1245. Second, its blade profile is like a historical Japanese tanto, which is much less

**Top, Left:** At more than a foot long of American made steel, the KA-BAR Modified Tanto is a formidable piece of combat gear.

**Top, Right:** The KA-BAR Modified Tanto’s 8-inch blade follows the smooth, sweeping curve of a traditional Japanese tanto.

**Bottom, Left:** The Modified Tanto uses the same shape and style grip that has worked so well on KA-BARs for nearly eight decades but upgrades it with a modern, weather resistant Kraton material. The oval cross section with palm swell and five-grooved grip makes for a sure and comfortable handle.

**Middle, Right:** The Modified Tanto is made in New York at KA-BAR’s Olean, New York, plant.

**Bottom, Right:** The Modified Tanto is simply marked with its proudly made in the USA stamp and 1266 model number.

abrupt and angular than the 1245’s Americanized style.

The 1266’s blade is 0.165 inch-thick 1095 Cro-Van steel, a classic and proven carbon steel (also used in KA-BAR’s other military grade knives). The steel is treated to a 56-58 Rockwell and has a flat grind with a long, false swedge that tapers to a keen point. KA-BAR fits the 1266 with a synthetic Kraton G handle that mimics the style and handling of its stacked leather handles, but is much more resistant to the elements. It has a through tang design, a pinned steel pommel, and a straight, steel double cross guard.

The Modified Tanto comes with a glass-filled nylon sheath that has a triple retention system as well as lashing points for attaching the sheath to your gear. There is a strap that goes over the guard, as well as one that snaps around the handle. Additionally, a pair of plastic tabs snaps over the guard when you seat the knife in the sheath. So, even without the straps in place, the knife isn’t going anywhere. You can shake the knife upside with just the tabs engaged and the knife doesn’t come out. Despite the extra security, it’s still easy to draw the knife by simply

applying some pressure with your thumb to the tab as you draw. If you want to attach the sheath to MOLLE gear without just tying or taping it in place, KA-BAR offers an optional KA-BAR Attachment System that comes with two sets of attachable loops and eight mounting screws.

The 1266 itself is proudly made in the USA in Olean, New York, and its sheath is made in Taiwan. The MSRP on the Modified Tanto is \$198.28. The optional Attachment System will set you back another \$13.90.

## Field Trials

The 1266 is first and foremost a combat knife. With that in mind, I looked for combat-related tasks for my field testing. Despite my best efforts, I was unable to locate any roving Taliban units in the hills of Western Pennsylvania for hand-to-hand combat tests. It must be the lack of caves in my area. As a backup plan, I decided to see what kind of utility chores I could do with it instead.

The traditional KA-BAR handle has been much copied, and with good reason. The oval cross section, with its five-groove handle and palm swell, works extremely well for a variety of hand sizes and grip

### CONTACT INFO

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Olean, NY 14760

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styles. While I love the look and feel of traditional stacked leather, the 1266's composite rubber handle is very functional. The material's light texture, along with the grooves, ensures a solid grip even when the handle is wet or covered in fluids. There's not so much texture, though, that you get hot spots. And, the modern materials ensure that the handle isn't susceptible to rot like the leather ones could be in certain conditions.

The balance point on the 1266 is right around the first handle ring, below the guard, giving it a butt-heavy feel. That, combined with the tapered blade, made me suspect that the 1266 would not be a great chopper for field work. A little bit of backyard work quickly proved me wrong. Despite not being a mass-forward piece, I found the 1266 actually worked great. If I wanted a little extra leverage I choked back on the handle, gripping it by the back three rings and using a snap cut technique. I made quick work out of 1- to 2-inch branches and cut up some wooden stakes.

The tanto's plain edge proved quite capable for whittling points on the stakes and for notching, too. The knife had a slightly toothy edge when I got it. It would scrape hair, but not cleanly

**Top, Left:** The Modified Tanto ships with a rugged glass-filled nylon sheath with multiple retention and mounting options. The sheath uses double retention straps that lock down both the guard and the pommel of the knife to ensure retention.

**Bottom, Far Left:** The 1266 Modified Tanto compared to the author's old traditional KA-BAR that he bought while in the Army.

**Bottom, Middle:** While the traditional leather sheath of the author's original KA-BAR was nice, the modern glass filled nylon version that comes with the Modified Tanto is much more durable.

**Top, Right:** The Modified Tanto's grip is quite comfortable in a variety of positions, including the basic ice pick grip.

**Bottom, Right:** The toothy 1095 steel worked extremely well for carving quick stakes for use on tarps or camo netting.

shave it, but that didn't seem to affect its performance on wood in the least, let alone more mundane tasks like cutting open boxes and cutting through some cordage and old rope I keep lying about for test purposes.

The point of the 1266 is a long, gradual sweep to a fine point, as opposed to the blunt, angular tip common to the American-style tanto like KA-BAR's model 1245. I did some test stabs into my stacked cardboard test targets and found that the 1266 penetrated deeply and seemed undeterred by denim or leather coverings on the target. The handle works well in an ice pick grip, and the combination of handle design and double guard keep your hand safely away from the blade, even on full force stabs.

Does the Modified Tanto perform any better than an American tanto like the 1245? Hard to say without a side-by-side comparison, but it does penetrate quite well. I suspect you'd get a bit better penetration with the 1266, but that the blunter tip of the

+ SPECS

**Blade Length:** 8.00 inches

**Cutting Edge:** 7.32 inches

**Handle Length:** 4.87 inches

**Overall Length:** 12.75 inches

**Blade Material:** 1095 Cro-Van Carbon Steel

**Blade Thickness:** 0.165 inch

**Blade Hardness:** 56-58 HRC

**Blade Style:** Modified Tanto

**Blade Grind:** Flat

**Blade Finish:** Black

**Handle Material:** Black Kraton G

**Sheath Material:** Black Glass Filled Nylon

**Weight:** 11.6 ounces

**Made in the USA**

**MSRP:** \$108.28





For users looking for a compact, quirky, indestructible blade, KA-BAR's American made one piece forged Wrench Knife is just the ticket.

1245 might be a little bit tougher. Regardless, that penetrating ability, along with the extra inch of blade over a classic KA-BAR, should serve it well for defensive use. That slightly longer blade would come in handy when punching through soft armor, heavy winter clothing or a utility vest as well.

The long continuous curve of the 1266's edge made it a great slashing weapon as well and I found that I could make long, deep cuts in my test target. Underhand stabs also penetrated quite well.

## A KA-BAR for the 21st Century

When I went into the Army back in 1988 as a 17-year-old private, one of my first purchases was a stacked leather handle KA-BAR from the PX at Ft. McClellan, Alabama. I used that knife a lot over the years in the field, as well as on personal hunting and camping trips. It was a do-all blade that performed well at everything I made it do, even some of the things it probably wasn't best suited to. While a traditional KA-BAR will still serve quite well today, I do think the more modern ones like the 1266 give some nice options to today's troops. The extra length and fine point of the Modified Tanto in particular make it a fine combat knife, and the combination of proven 1095 Cro-Van steel with durable, weather resistant Kraton handle and modern sheath make it suitable to serve on for decades to come. If you're serving now, or have a son or daughter in the ranks, and need a great field knife, then you may want to give a hard look at the American made KA-BAR with a little bit of Japanese inspiration. **KI**



**Top, Left:** Snap cuts proved quite effective for hacking through modest sized pieces of dried wood.

**Top, Right:** The author was pleased to quickly whip up stakes suitable for securing tarps or netting with the KA-BAR Modified Tanto.

**Bottom, Right:** The author was pleased with how well the Modified Tanto chopped, despite its sleek blade and handle biased balance.

## +

**Blade Length:** 3.0 inches  
**Overall Length:** 7.125 inches  
**Blade Material:** 425 High Carbon Stainless Steel  
**Blade Thickness:** 0.188 inch  
**Blade Hardness:** 56-58 Rockwell  
**Blade Style:** Drop Point  
**Blade Grind:** Flat  
**Handle Material:** Stainless Steel  
**Sheath Material:** Hard Plastic  
**Weight:** 3.2 ounces  
**Made in the USA**  
**MSRP:** \$54.74

# THE KA-BAR FORGED WRENCH KNIFE

If you don't need an actual combat knife, but need an ultra-sturdy utility knife, then the new Forged Wrench Knife might be just the thing for you. Inspired by the rugged tools found in garages and mechanic bays worldwide, the drop-forged, 425 high carbon stainless steel Wrench Knife is a functional homage to folks who work with their hands. With a 3-inch blade and at 7.125 inches overall, the Wrench Knife is compact enough to be carried on your belt, strapped to your vest or pack, or tossed in your toolbox. It's plenty of blade for utility tasks though, and being a solid piece of drop-forged steel, is about as durable as it gets. The handle harkens back to the wrenches in your dad's toolbox and works as well when you grip it for cutting tasks as it does for cranking down on the nuts of recalcitrant motors. The Wrench Knife comes with a hard-plastic sheath and both it and the knife are made right here in the USA, just like the tools that inspired them.







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# BEYOND BOUNDARIES

## TOP VETERAN-OWNED, VETERAN-FRIENDLY KNIFE MAKERS WHO CONSTANTLY PUSH FOR PERFECTION

TEXT BY DOUG JEFFREY & DWAYNE UNGER, PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOE WHEELIS, BILL RAPIER AND ANTHONY PAUL FEWKES

**H**eroes. For years, mine were the professional athletes who ran faster, threw harder, and jumped higher. They scored more touchdowns, hit more home runs, and scored more baskets than anyone else. And they did this inning after inning, game after game, season after season. Pretending to be them, I played sports outside until it was so dark I could not see my hands in front of my face. I absolutely idolized them.

But that was then.

My new heroes also wear uniforms. They are also athletic, driven, mentally tough, and consistent. Regardless of the “game,” they also bring it every time. But their rules are different. In their “games,” there are no standings and no real personal statistics. Instead, they play a game of life-and-death ... for you and me. Who are these new heroes? The brave men and women of the U.S. military. I have always admired them, as I grew up wanting to be a U.S.

Marine. But it was in the aftermath of 9/11 when my classification of heroes officially changed.

In the following story, you’re going to meet some of them who now make knives for a living, as well as one who has a good relationship with them. The first is Joe Wheelis, who spent four years with the U.S.M.C. The second, Anthony Paul Fewkes, works closely with the military. Bill Rapier, the third, spent 20 years in the Navy, including several years as a member of SEAL Team 3.



Above: Wheelis is a one-man band now that his wife started her own business.

Below: Joe Wheelis received his first knife when he was about 7. That love shows clearly in the beautiful work he now does.

Like you, their world revolves around blades. You’ll find out what started this love affair and much more. These up-and-coming knife makers are doing their absolute best to bring you the best product they can make. They are dedicated. They are focused. They are heroes. Forever.

### ONE: Joe Wheelis/ Wheelis Knives Marine, Paramedic, Knife Maker

Joe Wheelis is a hero in more ways than one. After his tour (2002-2006) in the Marines, his service to his Americans continued, as he worked as a paramedic. In the following story, the 38-year-old Pennsylvania resident explains how knives became his life.

#### MOTIVATED BY 9/11

I was struggling to pay my way through college when the events of 9/11 happened. I had talked to a Marine recruiter in high school two years before but decided not to go then. After the terrorist attacks, I was motivated to go back and sign up.

#### ROLE CALL

After boot camp and infantry school on the East Coast, I was stationed at Camp Pendleton [CA], where I was an infantry assaultman. I am a little biased, but it was the greatest job in the Marine Corps. Rocket launchers, explosives, and breaching made it a super fun job ... most of the time.

#### TEAMMATES

I think camaraderie is what I remember most about the service. The

“I WANT PEOPLE TO GRAB ONE OF MY KNIVES AND KNOW THAT THEY CAN RELY ON IT WHEN IT IS NEEDED MOST.”

— Joe Wheelis of Wheelis Knives



members of my unit went through some really tough times together, and we became family. We fought amongst ourselves all the time, but we always had each other's backs.

### TWO IS COOL

What was the most gratifying aspect of my service? The sense of accomplishment and the honor of doing so. I guess that's two things, huh?

### FIRST LOVE

I have always loved knives ever since I got my first Swiss Army knife for Christmas when I was 7 or 8. The Marine Corps gave me a greater appreciation for tough knives. We can break anything!

### FIRST RESPONDER

After getting out of the Marines, I was quite bored and couldn't find anything that had the excitement of being an assaultman. I had been introduced to the medical side of things by our awesome Navy Corpsmen and developed an interest.

I initially planned on joining the fire department. However, after graduating from paramedic school, I faced the long prospect of going through the fire department hiring process or starting to work almost immediately with the county EMS service with which I had trained. I chose the second option.

In my career, I worked with two services across four counties in northwest Georgia. I received my EMT certification in 2007 and my paramedic in 2010. After getting my paramedic, I worked full-time in the field until 2017.

### THE BEST

The most gratifying aspect of this position (paramedic) was making a difference. Everyone thinks that EMS and firefighters are rushing all over the places saving lives. It is just not like that. Most calls are mundane and not a life-or-death situation. So, on that rare occasion that your skills and knowledge combine to save a life, it really makes you feel great.

### YOU'D NEVER GUESS

In general, public service (fire, EMS, law enforcement) is just overly



**Above:** In addition to his military service, Joe Wheelis also worked as a paramedic, serving up first-rate service to the public. Now, his knives do an excellent job of serving up items from the kitchen.

abused nowadays. The things people called 911 for never failed to surprise me. I had a habit of getting grumpy when woken up at 2 a.m. for a toe pain call. The 24-hour shifts really bothered me, as well.

### THE ROLE OF KNIVES

Multitools really shine in EMS. Oxygen bottles always had to be turned on and off and required a special wrench or the pliers of a multitool. And there was always packaging you needed to cut open or seat belt you needed to cut during extrications.

### THE CHANGE

My transition to the knife world occurred when my wife and I moved to her family farm in Pennsylvania. We were in search of a slower and less stressful area than the quickly growing area of Georgia where we lived. Although I had a national license, it can still be tricky to get certified as a paramedic when moving to a different state. There were a bunch of hoops to jump through, and I realized that I didn't really want to go back to that job. I had been making knives part-time for several years, so I decided to dive in head first and give it a shot.

### ANY HESITATION?

When I first made this move, I knew it was going to be tough. I had almost no following at the time,

and I knew how many knives I had to make and sell each week to come close to my paramedic salary. Let's just say I learned how to live more frugally (LOL).

As it turns out, knife making is everything and more of what I expected. The knife making side is a blast! The real work is in the marketing and financial side of things.

### THE CHALLENGES

The problem in knife making right now is that the field is saturated with knife makers. Some TV shows have seemed to really inspire people to try to make knives themselves. That's great for buyers, but it makes for a lot of competition for the makers.

Knife making is also extremely time-consuming. I often spend more than eight hours each day in the shop. Then I come home, clean up, and sit in front of the computer for two more hours for marketing, managing my website, and fulfilling orders. It can be a lot of work.

### INSIDE WHEELIS

Wheelis Knives uses research, skill, thoughtful design, and the latest techniques to bring extremely high-quality knives to the serious user who can't afford failures and expects the very best from their tools.

As for my specialty, I am starting to do a lot more big knives. Combat

## MAKE CONTACT

Company Name:  
**Wheelis Knives**

Web:  
**WheelisKnives.com**

Instagram:  
**@wheelis\_knives**

Facebook:  
**facebook.com/wheelisknives**

## PERSONAL 411

Name: **Joe Wheelis**

Age: **38**

Residence & Business Location:  
**Newburg, PA**

Family: **Wife (Alaina)**

Previous Occupations:  
**Marine, Paramedic**





survival type stuff. I really enjoy making super tough tools that will take a beating.

On the flip side of that, I also do a lot of culinary knives. With culinary knives, it's all about pushing the geometry, hardness, and edge thickness so it is a different challenge.

I really enjoy working on both, as it gives me a break from each style and keeps things from becoming monotonous.

### THE UNIQUE FACTOR

The details are what make my knives different. I think what really sets any custom knife apart from machine-produced knives are the little quality details that are sometimes easy to miss. For example, taking the extra time to smooth the sharp lines, round over the corners, and add those extra little touches that make a knife more comfortable to use and pleasant to look at.

Most importantly, I want my knives to be reliable. I want people to grab one of my knives and know that they can rely on it when it is needed most. With that in mind, I tend toward thicker steels than the norm. I have big hands and had issues before with

**Above Left:** While Wheelis has yet to showcase his product at trade shows like Blade or the SHOT Show, he has exhibited at gun shows.

**Above Right, Top and Bottom:** What makes Wheelis knives unique? He says it is the quality details.

**Opposite page:** Ask Joe Wheelis what the most gratifying aspect of making knives is and hesitate he does not. He says it's watching a piece of steel be transformed into a "beautiful, functional tool."

some knives, so I always try to make sure there is plenty of room to grab hold. In general, I build my stuff to just be a bit sturdier.

### STEEL PREFERENCES

I mostly use high-carbon steels and tool steels. I do use AEB-L and Nitro-V stainless, but they are mostly for culinary knives. The ones I use the most are 1095, 80CRV2 and A2 for outdoor knives, and 52100, 26C3 and AEB-L for kitchen knives. I found that I can make just about any style knife with those. I have been messing around with some S7 tool steel lately as an ultra-tough alternative to CPM 3v.

### CUSTOM ORDERS

Right now, I am taking limited full custom orders, so wait times are about five to six months.

### HANDLE MATERIALS

I use a variety of materials, but I use the following options for my semi-custom knives.

- Micarta is extremely durable. It provides a good grip even when wet, and it is a great all-around material. However, some say that looks a little boring.

- G10 is a layered polymer that is durable but slick unless textured. It is waterproof and chemical-resistant, but it does not have grain, so it does not have a lot of character.

- An acrylic-molded material, kirinite offers multiple colors and design options and is chemical-resistant and waterproof. It is most attractive, as many colors are metal flake. When wet, it does not offer a lot of grip.

- Wood offers endless patterns and colors, and it adds a beautiful and unique touch to each knife. I use tough woods, but there is still the slight possibility they may split over time.

### ONE-MAN TEAM

I do all the knife making and heat treating. My wife used to help with sheath stitching. But she has started her own handmade jewelry business, and I have been left to do it all myself (LOL).

### WHAT'S TYPICAL?

I am currently in school, so it has screwed up my schedule, but I will





**“WHEELIS KNIVES USES RESEARCH, SKILL, THOUGHTFUL DESIGN, AND THE LATEST TECHNIQUES TO BRING EXTREMELY HIGH-QUALITY KNIVES TO THE SERIOUS USER ...”**

**— Joe Wheelis of Wheelis Knives**

describe my normal day from before and what I plan after school.

On a typical day, I wake up with the sun and do not have to hear an alarm. I make coffee and eat breakfast before heading to the shop. I tend to make knives in batches of five to 10, so that I only have to fire up the heat treat oven and get dry ice occasionally.

So, Monday mornings I set the designs I am going to work on for the next week or two. It usually consists of a couple custom-order designs, a couple smaller outdoor knives, some big ones, and a couple kitchen-style. I like having a variety of knives to work on.

I spend the morning laying them out on the steel, cutting a rough profile on the bandsaw, and then shaping the profile on the grinder. After that, I mark the holes for the handle scales and drill and countersink all of those. After lunch, I roughly bevel the knives and get them ready for heat treat.

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The next day is almost entirely spent on getting the knives through heat treat, sub-zero treatment, and tempering. During times while I am waiting on the oven to heat up, I work on other knives or clean up the shop.

On Wednesdays, I clean off all of the forge scale, finish the bevels, and prep the scales for attaching. Then I epoxy and bolt the scales before letting them rest overnight.

Thursdays are for shaping and finishing the scales. The final day is spent on making the sheaths for the knives and sharpening.

#### **THINGS HAPPEN**

This past fall I made the stupid mistake of rushing when working with sharp objects. I was behind on a machete and scheduled to leave the next day to go to a show and then vacation. The machete was a little tight in the Kydex sheath, so I thought I would just pop the butt of it with my palm. Unfortunately, I smacked it too hard, and my hand

slid down the handle and right down the edge. I got lucky though. After a half dozen stitches, I was back home in time to finish the machete and get on the road.

#### **THE REWARD**

The most gratifying aspect of making knives is seeing something start out as just a bar of steel and some other materials that are then turned into a beautiful functional tool that will last for decades.

#### **TRADE SHOWS**

I have never exhibited at any big knife shows like [the] Blade [Show], although I have gone several times since I grew up in the area.

I have exhibited at a bunch of gun shows, and they are definitely a unique experience. While there, I have been fortunate enough to meet quite a few great customers. In general, however, they are a tough crowd for custom knife sales.





## TWO: Bill Rapier/ Amtac Blades Destined for Greatness

Bill Rapier, the owner of Amtac Blades and American Tactical Shooting Instruction (Amtac Shooting), recently retired after 20 years in the Navy. During his service, Rapier was a member of SEAL Team 3. You're about to walk his path.

### THE MILITARY JOURNEY

I enlisted because that is what God wanted me to do. Since I was 5, I wanted to be in the service. What was the appeal? I think God just puts us in different things and gives us our own passions and desires. As long as I can remember, I dressed up and played Army. Think about it. Why do some kids pick up trucks? It's just the way we are made or wired.

When I was in high school, I started to think about how I would serve ... fighter pilot, service academy, or any of the other options. Eventually, I looked for the hardest organization to get into, and the SEAL teams looked like the best choice. Here we are 25 years later.

### NAVAL DUTY

My duty assignments included several years at SEAL Team 3 and more than 14 years at Naval Special Warfare Development Group. The positions I held include assaulter, breacher, sniper, team leader, troop chief, and military working dog department senior enlisted adviser.

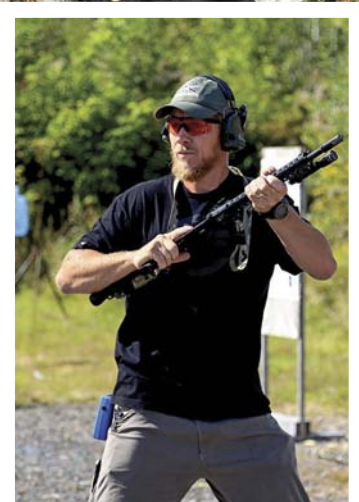
### BEST MILITARY MEMORY

The caliber of guys with which I served. That is my best memory. From across the nation, how many young men are fit enough for the military? That number probably cuts out a huge percentage of the population. For those that enlist, then they have to go through boot camp and a trade school, etc. Then there's more training. By that point, the military has downselected through a lot of people.

For those that remain, they are solid guys. That leaves some high-caliber guys with good reputations for SEAL teams, but then they go through another selection process in which half do not make it. At every level the selection process keeps happening.

**Above:** The Northman lineup is an impressive team.

**Right:** Bill Rapier, 43, spent 20 years in the Navy and was a member of SEAL Team 3.



## WHAT'S AWESOME?

"The most gratifying aspect of making knives is teaching a [combatives] class in which guys are carrying my knife. That is awesome. Plus, there are a couple guys still doing the deed [carrying the blade downrange] that are carrying them."  
—Bill Rapier

On SEAL Team 3, I served with really amazing guys. Unfortunately, there are quite a few who are not around anymore. Our weakest guy would have been the star performer anywhere else.

### 9/11

The most gratifying aspect of my service was our ability to take the fight to the enemy. When I first checked in at SEAL Team 3, I discovered that there were some current guys who had been in 20 years but had missed things like Vietnam. I was terrified that 20 years may pass and that I would never do anything for real. Then 9/11 happened.

Fortunately, we had the political leadership that had the "stones" to take the fight to the enemies. It was gratifying to do that, as well as it was to learn and get better. And we got way better.





**Above:** Meet the Magnus (top) and the Northman (bottom). The Magnus has a 5-inch blade while the Northman features a 1 1/2-inch blade.

## FIRST STEPS

My interest in knives began when I was young. I was a missionary kid and lived in Germany from the ages of 5-12. During that time, I'd go to the local stores and buy old German bayonets and Swiss Army knives. I also received knives from a grandfather. My dad helped me make a box to keep my collection in, and I still have that. It is cool. I will eventually divvy it out to my kids. From that time, I always liked knives. In the mid-2000s, I joined the Sayoc Kali (knife fighting) organization, and that really opened my eyes to understanding the use of knives. I can look at a knife and see its purpose. As a combative guy, I know what to look for in a blade. That has shaped the way I design blades and the way I carry them.

## THE KNIFE JOURNEY

Amtac Blades started as a conversation with my friend, the "Northman," whom I met through my training business. Making new friends through training, by the way, is a cool dynamic that I had not expected when I started the business. I told him I wanted a fixed blade knife that would fit in my front pocket to replace the folding knife that I was using for my cutting tool.

From a combative perspective, I was looking for a number of things. For example, I thought it would be cool if the knife sat deep in my pocket inside a Kydex sheath. After that conversation, I didn't think much more about it, but three weeks later I received a package in the mail that contained

**"AT AMTAC BLADES, WE MAKE A COMBATIVE FOCUSED-KNIFE THAT HAS DUAL USE FOR THE BACK COUNTRY."**

— Bill Rapier of Amtac Blades

a knife prototype. We kept refining it in a number of ways, including messing with the pocket sheath and different clip variations, and I got a new knife each month. Over the next year and a half, we continued to test, modify, and refine it until we had something that met my initial vision: the Amtac Blades Northman.

Eventually, I asked my buddy who built the prototype and others if they were OK if I started a business doing this. I got the thumbs up from the guys to give it a roll. Two years later, we're 500 knives into it. It has been a cool road.

I want to make clear that I was not alone in designing this knife. I provided an overall vision as to what I wanted to see and then guys that are much better than me provided input and technical know-how to make it happen. So, I want to give a special thanks to "Northman," Tuhon Tom Kier, and Jake Hoback for providing guidance and technical knowledge. Also, thanks to all my students that provided feedback and to all the warriors and soldiers that came before us and collectively passed on their combative knowledge to make us better.

## RUNNING BOTH

I think the key to running two businesses is to treat people right. I think it's also important to be passionate and stubborn and believe that the business is going to

work. Good counsel is also critical. I am blessed with good friends in the blade industry, as well as in combatives and shooting. I can bounce ideas off guys.

Along those lines, in my warranty section, I remind customers that we make knives, not crowbars or screwdrivers. I advise them to carry those items if they need them because that will increase the life expectancy of the blade. Still, I have fixed the problems some customers have had. I take care of my customers. It makes people happy, and it is the right thing to do. It creates loyalty.

## ANY YELLOW LIGHTS?

I retired from the military in June 2014, and I was ready for a change of pace. I had 10-plus combat deployments, and some of my friends had been killed. I felt like it was a good run, and I was blessed to be part of cool stuff. Now the focus is on family. The top three things I do now are serve the Lord and focus on being a good husband and a good father.

## INSIDE AMTAC BLADES

At Amtac Blades, we make a combative-focused knife that has dual use for the backcountry. It is something you actually carry. After that, we are a vet-owned small business. We're also an extension of Amtac Shooting, which teaches Americans how to do their jobs

## UP CLOSE

Name: **Bill Rapier**

Age: **43**

Residence: **Idaho**

Business Location: **North Idaho**

Family:

**Married with six kids**

Other Business:

**American Tactical Shooting Instruction (Amtac Shooting)**

Previous Occupation:

**U.S. Navy SEAL**

## MAKE CONTACT

Company Name:

**Amtac Blades**

Web:

**AmtacBlades.com**

Instagram:

**@amtacblades**

Facebook:

**facebook.com/Amtac-Blades-336543800505384**

Email: **bill@**

**amtacblades.com**





better, part of which is to protect themselves and their families.

### THE FLAGSHIP

The Northman, a fixed blade pocketknife, is our flagship product. You can also carry it in a belt sheath. It features M390 steel, the blade thickness is 5/32, the blade length is 3 1/2 inches, overall it is 6 7/8 inches and the blade weighs 4.3 ounces. The fire sheath weighs in at 1.6 ounces. It is quickly deployable, and the blade, fire sheath, trainer, and storage are included.

There have been some recent upgrades, too. The blade spine is more square and sharper, which allows you to use the spine to strike the ferro rod. The punyo has been opened up slightly, which creates a more positive draw stroke. You'll also notice jimping on the top and the bottom toward the handle's rear. The handle is now slightly lighter, too. The blade is available serrated and non-serrated.

### THE MAGNUS

The Magnus, which is our scaled-up version, features a 5-inch blade and CPM20 steel. For versatility, the blade spine is sharp, so you can strike the ferro rod. Currently going for \$550, the Magnus comes with a fire sheath, trainer and storage sheath.

### STEEL CHOICES

The Northman features M390; the Magnus is CPM20. When a blade is used for flesh, it does not matter what steel is used. For a tool, having better steel is good. Our goal is to put out a premium product, so we will use the best steel we can source.

### AND FINALLY

I want to reiterate my gratitude to all my mentors who have helped me. None of this would have happened without those guys. They are my Tribe.

**Above, Left:** The Magnus and the Trainer blades from Armtac Blades.

**Right:** Fewkes' ties to the military and law enforcement are strong. He says they have been a "constant thread" in his business, and he appreciates their trust



## THREE: Anthony Paul Fewkes / Archangel Blades

### Connected to Law Enforcement & Military

It all began in the wilderness adjacent to Lake Metonga. Like most knife enthusiasts, Anthony Paul Fewkes was just a boy exploring the Illinois wilderness when he fell in love with knives. More than 30 years later, the love affair is still raging for the 43-year-old father of two young girls.

### WHERE IT STARTED

Like all young boys, I had an automatic draw to knives. My older brothers both loved them, and we played survival in the backwoods by Lake Metonga. At that time, I carried a daily pocketknife. The martial arts were also a thread in my life. Those two hobbies always kept knives close.

When I became a 597 union pipefitter welder, I became really interested in metallurgy and the entire process. YouTube was the final step to the beginning of my knife making journey. Watching videos

from LMK Knives and Dirty Room Knives launched my passion for making knives. Eight months after my first knife, someone discovered me on Instagram and asked me to make him a knife. Matt [Lawson] was my first customer and that created the realization that this was something I truly loved.

### KNIFE JOURNEY

After I was laid off as welding program director at ETI, I started knife making full-time and had tons of requests. It was at this time that someone from the Tactical Elite Training Academy contacted me and asked me if I'd make a knife for close-quarters combat for Special Forces and SEALs, etc. The Lone Operator was born.

I sold hundreds of knives over the next year, and that is my largest selling knife to date. It was a great honor to make knives for those who defended my very freedom.

After that first batch, I started taking direct orders from SEAL Teams and Special Forces. Usually they would order one-on-one or through their battalion command. They absolutely

## MEET ANTHONY

Name: **Anthony Paul Fewkes**

Age: **43**

Residence & Business Location: **Plainfield, IL**

Family: **Wife, Andrea; and two daughters, Hannah and Madilyn**

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## “IT WAS A GREAT HONOR TO MAKE KNIVES FOR THOSE WHO DEFENDED MY VERY FREEDOM”

—Anthony Paul Fewkes of Archangel Blades

loved the fact that the knife was small and concealable.

I had a lot of repeat customers after that and incredible stories, one of which happened last year. I received a picture of one of my very first knives for the Team guys and a message from a military contractor overseas on a job. When he was in a low-lying area with a sandbag wall, he found my knife stuck in one of the bags. I assume it was left under a high-stress situation. The contractor recovered it and wanted to return it. That was just a neat story. I can't imagine what that knife had seen or how it helped the original user, but it made me feel like I did something good.

In 2016, I took a job in engineering for Vines VA Hospital. Now I do knives on request, as I have time. This is something I truly love, and I will continue to do as long as God allows.

### STEEL CONNECTION

Yes, knife making is everything I expected ... and more. It allows me a chance to create and connect with a community unlike any other, and it is an honor to be a tiny part of it. I have been drawing since I was old enough to hold a pencil, and this gives me the ability to create artistically in another way.

### CHALLENGES

The day-to-day challenges are time management and delivery. These are definitely a challenge because of the

quality I wish to give my customer, and that sometimes interferes with delivery deadlines. It is definitely a balance that I am always trying to master.

### INSIDE ARCHANGEL

In the beginning, if you asked me to describe Archangel Blades, I would have said tactical. Now I'm happy to say that I welcome any challenge.

Learning the various grinds and styles of knives is and will be forever a process of growing. I love to challenge myself in what compound grind I can pull off and how exact I can make it. As long as it's made with my hands, I will be happy with it in the end. In short, Archangel Blades is a shop in which I strive for quality and incredible designs as original as humanly possible.

### BEHIND THE NAME

Being a Christian, I think it just made sense to call my company Archangel Blades. It's a strong name and represents good versus evil. Plus, military and law enforcement personnel have always been a constant thread in my business, and I welcome that trust any day.

### THE UNIQUE FACTOR

I think my knives are unmistakably mine. They are artistic, but there is a definite thread of purpose-built blades. They have to be

**Above:** Anthony Fewkes has a primary full-time job that keeps him close to vets, but he works on knives a couple hours each day and longer on the weekends. He fell in love with knives as a boy exploring the nearby wilderness. Now he has his own knife business, and here are a few of his beauties.

ergonomically correct, efficient and aesthetically pleasing to the eye.

### PLAIN & SIMPLE

Two words to describe my designs? Bold and unmistakable.

### STEEL PREFERENCES

Actually, I will use any and all. In the beginning, it was carbon, of course, but now it's CPM S35VN to M390 and on. I love steel. Everything is heat-treated and tested in-house.

### TYPICAL DAY

Currently, I work two hours per day. On the weekends, I work six hours one day and maybe two the other day. Family is most important, so some weekends I won't work at all.

### FAVORITE ASPECT

The most gratifying aspect of making knives is the journey. When I hand over a knife to clients, it's great to see them light up. Sometimes they will later call or text to tell me they love it. I absolutely love my clients. In fact, one of my best friends is a past client.

### HUMBLED

Although always changing, the community is one of a kind. I've had the privilege of making some incredible friends and mentors, too. I hope to be doing this in my old age. I hope I get lucky. Thank you for the chance to tell my little story. I am truly humbled. **KI**

## QUICK HITS

### Custom Orders:

First, I discuss these with a customer while on the phone or through text or email. Next, I sketch a design and send it to the customer, who approves it. Changes have and do happen in the process, but it's a liquid thing, so I go with the flow.

### Handle Material:

Carbon fiber is my favorite, but I use anything. A lot of laminations with various materials are very popular today.

### Kydex & Leather:

Yes, I use Kydex and form my own sheaths. I recently started the leather journey.

### Military Discount:

Absolutely



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# BEST VALUE BENCHMADE?



**Main Image:** You'd need some pretty huge mitts to overwhelm the Presidio II CF Elite's 5-inch handle length.

**Below:** The Presidio II CF looks and feels much pricier than it is.

# BENCHMADE PRESIDIO II CF ELITE

TEXT & PHOTOS BY BRYAN J. BALL

**I**s Benchmade's Black Class worth the price? To answer this question, this "Blue Class" guy is going to take a close look at the new release from the company's Black Class, which is intended for tactical users and first responders: the Benchmade Presidio II CF Elite. To say Benchmade is a staple of the folding pocketknife market is an understatement among understatements. Everyone—from general users to enthusiasts to collectors to law enforcement and military—knows what a Benchmade is.







## Three Classes

Benchmade has split its catalog into three “classes.” The Blue Class features the knives that we’ve all grown to know and love such as the 940, the Griptilian and, more recently, the Bugout. The Gold Class is made up of upscale versions of other models.

The Black Class is tactical. One standout from this class over the last few years has been the Presidio II. It comes in several different versions, including coated or uncoated blades, a large standard size, a mini, and even automatic variants. One constant of all of them has been the heavily milled aluminum handles. They were very grippy and definitely looked pretty cool, but they made the knife heavy and a bit pricey. The Presidio II in all of its forms retailed for well north of \$200 and a large manual version weighed in at a pretty hefty 6.1 ounces for its 3.7 inches of blade length.

## Black Class Lightens Up for 2020

For 2020, Benchmade introduced the new “CF Elite” handle material for its extremely popular Bugout model. CF Elite is a carbon-reinforced nylon polymer that claims to be 17% lighter and 50% stronger than the “Grivory” nylon handles that have been a constant presence on Benchmade’s knives for many, many years. Given that Grivory was already lighter than aluminum and CF Elite is much less expensive to work with, putting on a new lighter and cheaper Presidio II was a natural fit.

**Top, Left:** The CF Elite scales have a look that is much closer to carbon fiber than it is to FRN or GFN.

**Top, Right:** The Presidio II CF Elite’s blade stock is a bit on the thin side for a hard use/tactical knife.

**Opposite Page, Top:** For such a large knife, the Presidio II CF Elite carries very well.

The new Presidio II CF Elite (570-1) comes in the usual combinations of a satin or coated blade, with or without serrations, and in large (3.72-inch blade) or mini (3.2-inch) sizes. In the large full-size form, it weighs well over an ounce, less than its predecessor, and MSRPs for just \$155. With street prices being more in the \$130 range, it’s truly a great value. The automatic versions of the Presidio II are soldiering on with the aluminum handles and old pricing for the time being. At the time of writing, the mini Presidio II was not yet available so this review will solely be of the larger 550-1 version with a satin, plain edge blade.

The looks have also changed a bit from the older version. The signature diagonal milling is still somewhat replicated but in a less extreme way. You can see the design cues. And if you’ve ever seen one before, you’ll know immediately that you’re looking at a Presidio. The general handle and blade shape are also identical to the previous Presidio.

If you were worried that largely nylon-based handles were going to look cheap, don’t. While it’s ostensibly the same handle material as what you get on the Bugout CF Elite, it looks much more premium on the Presidio II. It doesn’t look like carbon fiber exactly, but it doesn’t look like “fancy plastic” either. In my mountain bike racing days of the late ‘90s, the whole industry was going wild over thermoplastic frames and frame parts. The look of the Presidio II CF Elite actually reminds me a lot of that material.

The Presidio II’s well-loved grippy feel hasn’t been reduced either. The reduced depth of the angular grooves is more than made up for by a series of small dots. There is also ample jimping on both the upper and lower spine of the blade, up near the faux hilt. With gloves or without, wet or dry... this knife isn’t going anywhere in your hands.

And it’s comfortable, too! I never found the aluminum Presidio to be horribly uncomfortable, but it was far from my favorite. The 550-1 is a much more comfortable knife in the hand. It fills the hand very nicely, there are zero hot spots, and you can’t feel the standard deep carry pocket clip in your hand at all. The aluminum handles felt more optimized for gloves than was probably necessary, whereas the CF Elite scales feel good with or without gloves.

## In & Out of the Pocket

Another complaint that some people (myself included) had about the aluminum Presidio II: getting it in and out of the pocket. Both the new version and the original have a smooth landing spot for the pocket clip, so neither are exactly pocket destroyers. However, the older one did occasionally catch a bit, especially when removing the knife. The CF Elite isn’t as easy as a knife with totally smooth scales, but it is far from objectionable and a more than worthwhile sacrifice for the grip it provides when actually using the knife.

Once it’s in the pocket, the Presidio II CF Elite carries shockingly well. It’s a big knife, but that reduction

## ⊕ SPECS

**Blade Material:** S30V

**Blade Length:** 3.72”

**Overall Length:** 8.72”

**Blade Width:** 1.16”

**Blade Thickness:** 0.12”

**Blade Finish:**  
Black DLC or Satin

**Handle Material:**  
CF Elite

**Frame Material:**  
Stainless Steel Liners

**Weight:**  
6.6, 2.8 and 2.5 ounces

**MSRP:** \$155 in Large Size





#### CONTACT INFO

**Benchmade**

**Address:**  
300 Beavercreek Road  
Oregon City, OR

**Phone:** 833-557-2526

**Website:**  
www.Benchmade.com

in weight is very noticeable in comparison to its predecessor. It's also still pretty easy to get your hand past once it's in your pocket to reach other items you may have in there. In daily carry, it doesn't feel dramatically larger than something like a full-size Griptilian.

For a tactical or hard use blade, the Presidio has always had some rather thin blade stock. At 0.12 inch, it's much thinner than what you often see on something like a Hinderer or a Zero Tolerance. For people like me who will use this more for EDC, that's a welcome change. It's fairly thin behind the edge (about 20 thousandths of an inch), and the very high, flat grind makes it an excellent slicer. However, I can see how people may appreciate a thicker blade stock and the more robust tip that would provide in harder use situations.

### Fidget Factor

The action on the Presidio II CF Elite is just what you'd expect from Benchmade. That means...it's a blast. If there's one thing the Axis lock gets right, it's the "fidget factor." There's a reason that omega spring style locks have become so prevalent now that Benchmade's patent has expired. They're just fun. You can open the Presidio with the thumbstuds, you can middle-finger flick it, or just activate the lock and wrist flick it out. And when it comes time to close it, the Presidio II drops like the proverbial guillotine if you want it to. That said, the Axis lock also allows you to slow that drop if you want to by simply adjusting how far you pull the lock back.

Also of note: Benchmade's lifetime warranty. I've had to use the warranty on a couple of occasions, and the company has been quick to take care of any problem I've had, no questions asked. I've also taken advantage of its Eversharp lifetime sharpening service once, just to see how it worked. I prefer to service my own knives, but for those who don't, knowing that you can get a free sharpening, cleaning, and lubrication for free whenever you need it is pretty confidence-inspiring.

Being more of a "Blue Class" guy than a "Black Class" guy, I have to say that overall, I'm very impressed with the Presidio II CF Elite. First of all, it's a great value. Also, I honestly thought that I'd spend a bit of time with the full-size version, then pass it along for something smaller like I did with the original. (I sold my aluminum Presidio II in favor of a Griptilian.) I kind of planned on selling this one and getting a mini Presidio II. But after having it in my pocket for the last couple of weeks... I think it's a keeper as it is. **KI**



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**Right:** Col. Rex Applegate's World War II sidearm—a rare "Fitz Special" revolver—along with prototypes of two of his knife designs, a signed photo, and a patch of the elite OSS.

# Auspicious BLADES

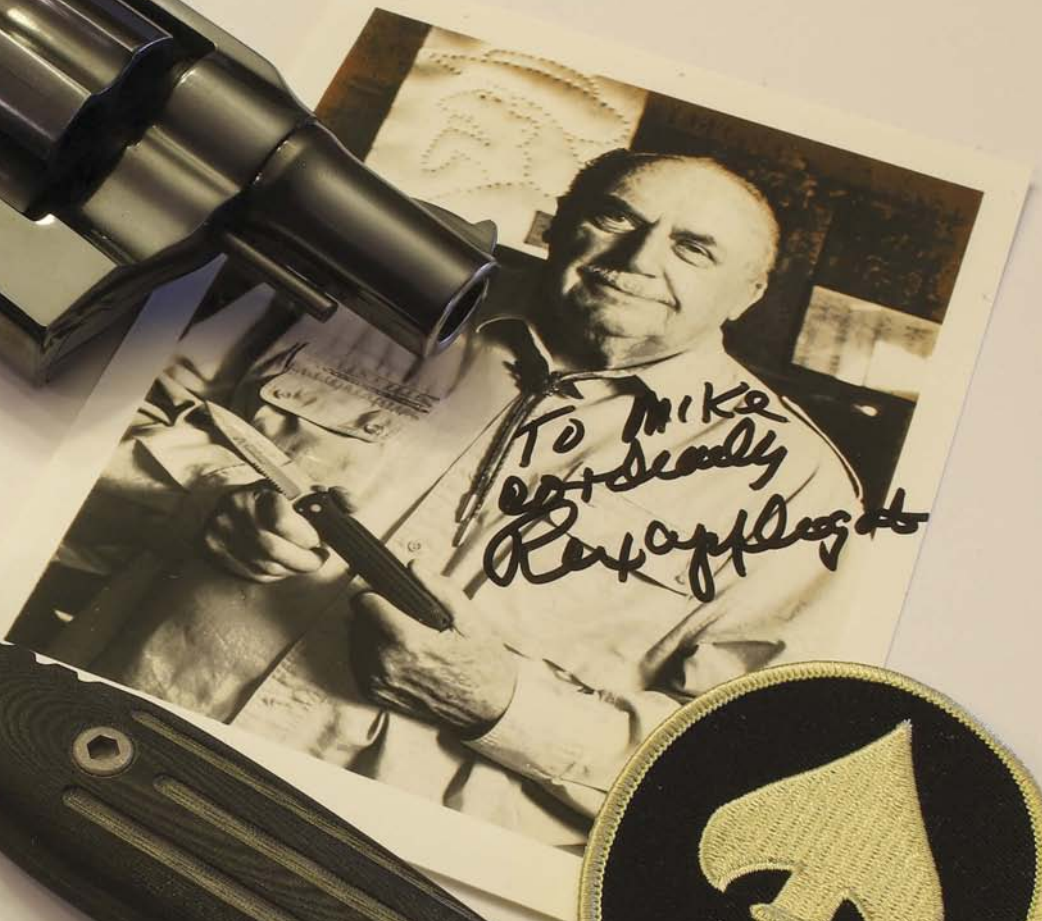
## KNIVES OF A CLOSE-COMBAT LEGEND, COLONEL REX APPLGATE

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL JANICH

**C**olonel Rex Applegate is a name that should be familiar to any serious student of close combat and military history. Born in Oregon on June 21, 1914, his family roots extend all the way back to the American Revolution and the early pioneers of the Oregon Trail. At an early age, he learned to shoot and hunt from his uncle, Gus Peret, a renowned professional hunter and exhibition shooter for Remington-Peters.



“COLONEL REX APPLGATE WAS A LEGENDARY AMERICAN AND PATRIOT WHO LITERALLY LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR MODERN MILITARY AND TACTICAL CLOSE-COMBAT TRAINING.”







## Applegate's Military History

In 1940, Applegate graduated from the University of Oregon, where he participated in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program, and entered the Army as a reserve officer in the Military Police. He later competed with 10,000 other reserve officers for 100 regular Army commissions. He finished 11th, clearly distinguishing himself above his peers and prompting a transfer to the Army's Counterintelligence Corps. He was then personally recruited by Colonel William "Wild Bill" Donovan for an assignment in the Coordinator of Information (COI), which later became the Office of Strategic Services (OSS)—the nation's super-secret wartime intelligence organization and the predecessor of the CIA.

Applegate personally coordinated the establishment of the OSS' training center, Area B, at what is now the presidential retreat at Camp David. He cross-trained with the British Commandos and Special Operations Executive (SOE—the British counterpart of the OSS) and worked closely with W.E. Fairbairn and E.A. Sykes, veterans of the Shanghai Municipal Police and designers of the iconic Fairbairn-Sykes Commando Dagger.

**Above:** The author's collection of Applegate-designed knives includes some of the rarest examples in existence.

**Right:** The Applegate-Fairbairn design was developed to solve problems inherent in the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger being issued at the time. The F-S shown here is a presentation model made for the 22nd SAS.



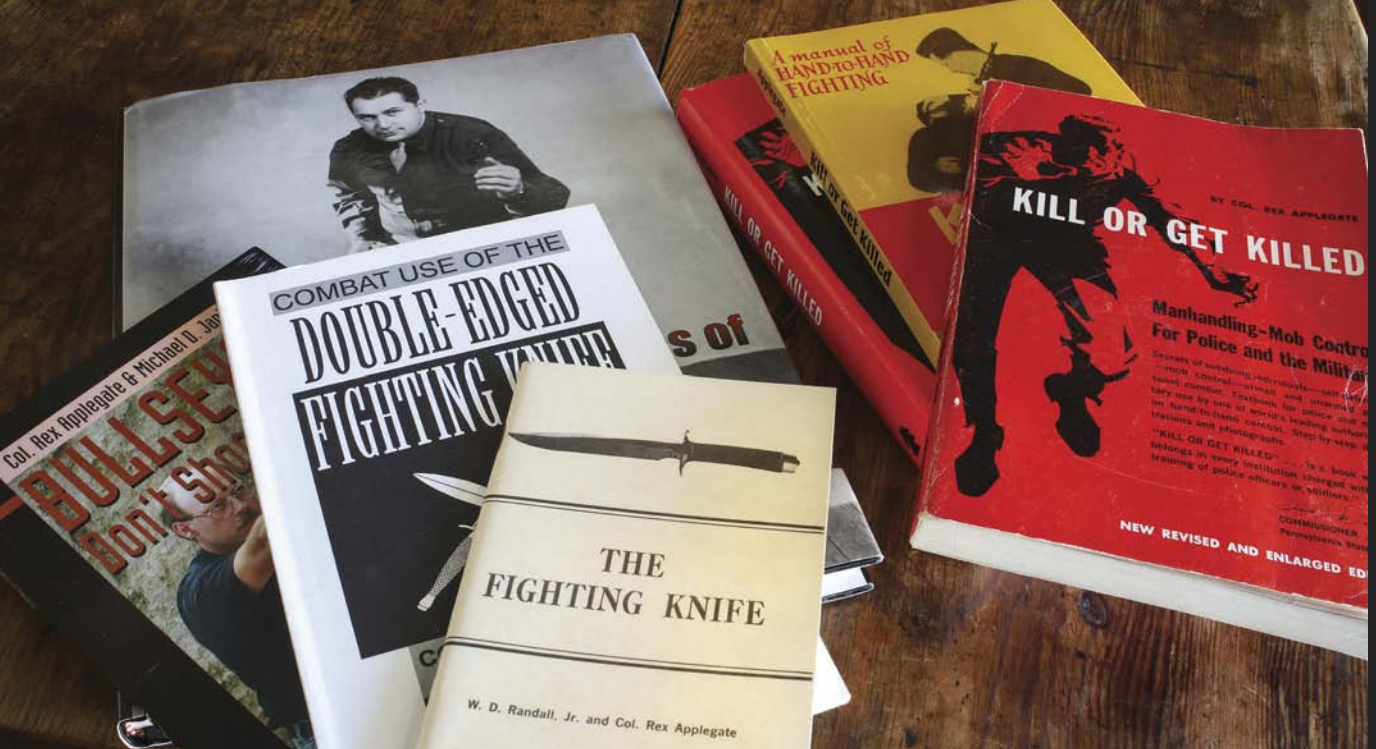
In 1942, Applegate was transferred to the Military Intelligence Training Center (MITC) at Camp Ritchie, Maryland, where he trained American intelligence operatives in all aspects of close combat before sending them off to war. After World War II, "the Colonel" lived in Mexico, where he imported arms and served as an advisor on riot control to the Mexican army, before ultimately settling back in his home state of Oregon. Applegate remained extremely active until his death, authoring numerous books on close combat, riot control, and patrolling. He designed combat knives, and was the foremost proponent of handgun point shooting for tactical applications.

Colonel Rex Applegate was a legendary American and patriot who literally laid the groundwork for modern military and tactical close-combat training.

## Meeting "The Colonel"

I first heard of Col. Applegate when I was about 13. I was interested in learning about knife fighting and one of my martial arts training partners lent me "Kill or Get Killed"—the Colonel's classic book on close combat that he wrote during World War II and revised several times thereafter. I read that book cover to cover several times and extracted everything I could from it, including





**Above:** The collective works of Colonel Rex Applegate.

teaching myself how to point shoot Applegate style with an air pistol.

About 20 years later, I was working for the U.S. government trying to resolve the fates of American POW/MIA from the Vietnam War. I had grown frustrated with the politics of that issue and wanted to make a career change, so I approached Paladin Press, “the most dangerous publisher in the world,” to see if they had any openings. I had been a Paladin customer since I was a teenager and, by that time, had written two books for them. Paladin’s owner, Peder Lund, was intrigued by my resumé and flew me out for an interview. He wanted to establish a video production department within the company specifically to work with Col. Applegate and asked if I was interested. For me, it was a dream come true. I met the Colonel at the 1994 *Soldier of Fortune* magazine convention and helped him with his booth while he decided if he could work with me. Thankfully, I passed muster and got the job.

I established Paladin’s video production department in late 1994 and ran it for 10 years. During the first few years, I had the privilege of working very closely with Col. Applegate on several video projects. The Colonel was impressed with my genuine interest in close combat and

## THE WRITINGS OF COL. REX APPLGATE

Col. Rex Applegate’s initial efforts during World War II focused on developing a course of instruction in close-combat for OSS recruits and the intelligence operatives trained at the Military Intelligence Training Center (MITC). Later in the war, he took many of these lessons and consolidated them into a book geared more toward the needs of the average soldier. That book, “Kill or Get Killed: A Manual of Hand-to-Hand Fighting,” was originally published in July 1943 by the Military Service Publishing Company and had its second printing in November 1943.

When the Colonel moved to Mexico after the war, he served as an advisor to the Mexican government on mob and riot control. He also began incorporating aspects of this discipline into “Kill or Get Killed,” yielding an expanded second edition in 1951, a third edition in 1956, and a fourth edition in 1961. In 1976, Col. Applegate contracted with Paladin Press to publish another expanded edition, which continued as a bestseller until Paladin’s closing at the end of 2017. A version of the book was also officially adopted as a training manual for the U.S. Marine Corps.

“Kill or Get Killed” is an undisputed classic in the field of close-quarters combat and belongs in the library of every serious student of the subject. However, it was by no means the Colonel’s only book. He also shared his vast knowledge in other titles, including “Scouting and Patrolling,” “Combat Use of the Double-Edged Fighting Knife,” “The Fighting Knife,” which he co-authored with W.D. “Bo” Randall, Jr., and “Bullseyes Don’t Shoot Back,” which I had the honor of co-authoring with him. He was also deeply involved in Chuck Melson’s incredible book “The Close Combat Files of Col. Rex Applegate,” which was published after his death, and the production of the videos “Point Shooting” and “Shooting for Keeps,” which I shot and edited during my time as Paladin Press’ video production manager.

Col. Applegate’s published works provide a wealth of battle-proven information and an incredible insight into the evolution of modern close-combat tactics. Although some of his works, like “Bullseyes Don’t Shoot Back,” have been brought back into print, many of his older books and videos can now only be found on the used-book market. If you can find them, buy them. You won’t be sorry.





**Top, Left:** The first Applegate knife in the author's collection was this Blackjack version, presented by the Colonel himself. The brochure that accompanies it is also autographed.

**Top, Right:** The evolution of the Applegate-Fairbairn Folder began with the first prototype (top) made by Bill Harsey and Butch Vallotton. The second prototype version (middle) was made by Harsey and had more handle grooves and a longer thumb ramp. The Gerber factory-made version (bottom) is from the first production run and was autographed by the Colonel.

**Bottom, Left:** The evolution of the A-F Folder also shows the switch from a steel backspacer, to a Micarta one, to the injection-molded handle of the Gerber production version. The two custom versions also have fully sharpened false edges.

**Bottom, Right:** Peder Lund, founder of the now-defunct publisher Paladin Press, had a standing order with Bill Harsey. If Col. Applegate ordered a prototype, make a second, serial numbered 002, for him. Note the 002 markings on these three knives.

took me under his wing, giving me personal training in point shooting and other topics. Ultimately, we became good friends and co-authored the book "Bullseyes Don't Shoot Back." Needless to say, working with him was an incredible honor and one of the highlights of my life.

## My Applegate Knife Collection

When Col. Applegate worked with W.E. Fairbairn during the war, they realized that the Fairbairn-Sykes dagger had some serious shortcomings. In 1943, they collaborated together on an improved design, as well as an enhanced version of the OSS Smatchet. Although the war ended before these designs could be brought into production, the Colonel knew they had merit and was determined to make them a reality.

The improved dagger design, dubbed the Applegate-Fairbairn (A-F) Fighting Knife, was first made on a small scale by knifemaker

T. J. Yancey in the 1980s. When Yancey retired, custom maker Bill Harsey took over, making custom versions of the A-F and working with Applegate to refine the design. To make the knife more affordable to soldiers, the Colonel licensed the design to Al Mar, Blackjack, and Boker, all of whom produced them commercially.

During my first visit to the Colonel's home, he took me out to the range at his family homestead—now a state historical landmark—in Yoncalla, Oregon. I told the Colonel I'd taught myself how to point shoot from his book when I was a teenager, so he was curious as to how well I had learned. After running me through several hundred rounds with a variety of different guns, he was pleased with my performance. When we got back to his house that afternoon, he pointed to a pile of Blackjack A-F knives and told me, "Take one; you earned it." That was an auspicious start to my Applegate knife collection.

In the mid-1990s, Col. Applegate was also working with Gerber

Legendary Blades on a folding version of the Applegate-Fairbairn. He approached renowned custom knife makers and fellow Oregonians Bill Harsey and Butch Vallotton to help develop the folder, and they co-authored the first prototype. Later, the Colonel refined the design and Harsey assumed primary responsibility for translating his knife concepts into prototypes. Harsey marked the Colonel's handmade prototypes "001" to identify their status. Paladin's Peder Lund, who was also friends with Harsey and had commissioned several knives from him, put in a standing order with Harsey. With Applegate's permission, every time Harsey crafted a 001 prototype for the Colonel, he was to make a second copy, numbered 002, for Lund. More on these later ...

When Gerber's production version of the A-F Combat Folder was released, I purchased one from the Colonel. It was laser-engraved "First Production Run" and came in a nylon





belt pouch that was different than Gerber's thumb-break version. Years later, I added a second example of this knife to my collection through a trade with Bob Taylor, founder of Round Eye Knife and Tool (REKAT). The blade of Taylor's A-F was autographed by the Colonel in Sharpie marker.

## After the Colonel's Passing

When Col. Applegate passed away in 1998, Peder Lund helped his widow auction off his incredible gun and knife collection. Lund also had first dibs on anything he wanted to buy. Since he knew I was also close to the Colonel, Lund extended that courtesy to me. I was fortunate enough to purchase several guns from the Colonel's collection—including one of his personal carry guns—and one knife: the very first Harsey-Vallotton A-F Combat Folder prototype, hand signed by both makers.

Lund took the pick of the litter—the “Fitz Special” revolver that Col. Applegate carried as a sidearm in World War II, and the .38 Smith & Wesson “Lemon Squeezer” he carried in Mexico after the war. Both guns had “notches in their pedigree,” and the latter ultimately inspired S&W's Centennial model. Years later, Lund gave me the opportunity to purchase both guns. I told him that I was very interested, but I wasn't sure I could afford them. One day, he walked into my office and handed me a plastic bag containing both guns. When I tried to hand it back, he told me, “I can't think of anyone else on Earth the Colonel would rather have these guns go to. You did more than anyone to secure his legacy. If you keep them, they're yours.” They remain two of my most prized possessions today.

About a year later, Lund told me he was planning to sell his collection of Bill Harsey-made 002 prototypes of the Colonel's designs. Again, he asked me if I was interested. Grateful and humbled by his gift of the guns, I was not only interested, but saw it as an opportunity to balance my karma by paying



**Top:** Two prototype 002 A-F boot knives, one with a standard diamond-cross-section dagger grind and one with a large, single hollow grind on one side and two flats on the other.

**Center:** Prototype 002 versions of three smaller Applegate fixed blades: a boot knife, a boot knife with a single hollow grind on one side and two flats on the other, and a mini Smatchet.

**Bottom:** Prototypes of the Covert, a smaller version of the A-F Combat Folder. The manual version was made by Bill Harsey and Butch Vallotton, and the double-action automatic by Butch Vallotton.

“AFTER RUNNING ME THROUGH SEVERAL HUNDRED ROUNDS WITH A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT GUNS, HE WAS PLEASED WITH MY PERFORMANCE.”







**“I PAID LUND’S ASKING PRICE WITHOUT HESITATION, AND ADDED SIX INCREDIBLY RARE APPLEGATE-DESIGNED KNIVES TO MY COLLECTION.”**

whatever he wanted for them. I paid Lund’s asking price without hesitation, and added six incredibly rare Applegate-designed knives to my collection, including: the second prototype of the A-F Combat Folder (on which the Gerber production

version was based), a prototype of the smaller A-F “Covert” folder, a Butch Vallotton-made double-action automatic “Covert” folder, an A-F boot knife prototype, an A-F Mini Smatchet prototype, and a unique A-F boot knife prototype

with a single, deep hollow grind on one side and two flats on the other.

All these knives featured Harsey’s (or Vallotton’s) painstaking craftsmanship and the same construction theme and finish. The blades were beautifully ground from 154CM stainless steel and bead blasted to eliminate reflection. Their handles were crafted from Micarta and the fixed blades featured bead-blasted brass guards and custom-molded pancake-style Kydex sheaths with belt slots.

## The Final Piece

Over the years, I have had the good fortune to assemble an impressive collection of Applegate-designed knives and other artifacts. My only regret was that it did not include a full-sized version of the Applegate-Fairbairn Smatchet. When I first met the Colonel, he was still selling limited-edition versions of this imposing fixed blade that he had made by Buck Knives in 1989-1990. Marked with his business name—Wells Creek Knife and Gun Works—only 750 of this version were produced. Although I wanted to buy one back then, I didn’t, and I have regretted that ever since.

In early 2020, I saw one of these rare knives pop up on a custom knife purveyor site and I couldn’t resist. I immediately bought it, and now it sits proudly beside the other Applegate items in my collection.

Working with, and being mentored by, Col. Applegate will always remain one of the highlights of my life. He was an extraordinary man and a true hero, and I’m honored to do my part to preserve his teachings and his legacy. **KI**

**Above, Top:** Prototypes of the Covert, a smaller version of the A-F Combat Folder. The manual version was made by Bill Harsey and Butch Vallotton, and the double-action automatic by Butch Vallotton. They are shown with Colonel Applegate’s legendary Fitz Special, which he carried in World War II.

**Above, Bottom:** This Applegate-Fairbairn Smatchet was one of 750 made by Buck Knives for Col. Applegate’s Wells Creek Knife and Gun Works. It’s seen here with a prototype of its boot-knife-sized “son,” the Mini Smatchet.



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# POCKET KNIFE STORAGE SOLUTIONS

PROTECT YOUR COLLECTION

TEXT BY BRYAN J. BALL, PHOTOS BY BRYAN J. BALL & KEVIN FITZGERALD







“PERHAPS YOU’RE WORRIED ABOUT THEFT—OR, VERY POSSIBLY, YOU DON’T WANT YOUR SPOUSE TO SEE THEM.”

**W**e’ve all been there ... You spread out all of your knives to take a look at them and realize, “This has gotten out of hand.” Just having them lay around on your desk, workbench, or toolbox isn’t going to cut it anymore. Maybe you’ve moved up into some more expensive folders and want them stored in a safer way. Perhaps you’re worried about theft. Or, very possibly, you don’t want your spouse to see them. Here are some options to keep your folding knife collection more protected, more secure, and out of the sight of prying eyes.

**Above:** You have several ways to stow your prized collection, including these convenient storage options.



## Spyderco Spyderpac

You can find several knife roll/soft cases on the market, but my personal favorite is the Spyderpac.

The small size Spyderpac holds 18 knives and the large holds 32. The pockets are spacious enough for most folders (even my Cold Steel 4 Max fits easily), and they have a solidly sewn nylon edge with thick transparent plastic pockets so that you can easily see which knife you're looking for.

The outer construction is made of very durable Cordura and has a metal bar sewn in to keep it semi-rigid when closed. There's also a shoulder strap mounted on two D-rings for carrying. It's not the most comfortable strap in the world but, outside of an Expendables movie, going on a hike with 18 of your favorite knives isn't exactly a common occurrence.

**Right:** The Spyderpac opens to a surprisingly large size.

### CONTACT INFO

**Spyderco**

**Address:**  
820 Spyderco Way  
Golden, CO

**Phone:** 800-525-7770

**Website:**  
[www.Spyderco.com](http://www.Spyderco.com)

**>Opposite Page, Top:** The transparent pockets on the Spyderpac allow you to easily identify and admire your knives.

**>Opposite Page, Bottom:** The Vault case's modular interior allows you configure it in a number of ways.

**Below:** The small size Spyderpac closes into an easy-to-carry package.







Spyderpacs close tri-fold style and seal up with a very strong Velcro enclosure. The small size goes for about \$39 and the large costs \$46.

I wouldn't mind seeing a Velcro section on the outside of the case for patches and whatnot, for organizational purposes if nothing else.



---

**“[THE VAULT CASE] FITS 11 LARGE FOLDERS VERY WELL WITH MORE ROOM LEFT OVER FOR SOME PENS AND SOME SMALLER FLASHLIGHTS.”**

---

### **Vault Case**

Vault is a fairly new player on the scene, but the company's modular semi-hard-shell cases are quickly gaining a big following in the EDC community.

They are currently available in one size (large) and come in either matte black or a faux carbon fiber finish. The shell itself is made of rigid plastic and is closed with a very secure zipper with a wide border to give some room for expansion.





**“A SMALL AND CHILDISH BUT UNDENIABLE UPSIDE TO THE VAULT CASE IS THAT IT MAKES A GREAT PLACE TO PUT YOUR KNIFE STICKERS.”**

Inside, you'll find the “modular” part of the modular design. It has numerous slots with elastic straps in a few different sizes. Internal panels can be moved and configured to carry all sorts of EDC gear, from watches to flashlights to pens. But because we're focusing on knives here, I've found that it fits 11 large folders very well with more room left over for some pens and some smaller flashlights.

The Vault Case is also easy to store away in a locker, drawer, or cupboard if you don't want it sitting out. Although, it does look very nice, especially in the faux carbon.

A small and childish but undeniable upside to the Vault Case is that it makes a great place to put your knife stickers.

The Vault Case retails for \$37.99.

**Above:** The Vault case looks great “naked” or adorned with your favorite knife stickers.

#### CONTACT INFO

**Vault Case Company**

**Website:**  
[www.VaultCase.co](http://www.VaultCase.co)

## Pelican Case

If you're looking for the ultimate protection for your collection this side of a steel safe, the Pelican Protector line of cases has been a longtime go-to for knife enthusiasts.

The durable hard-shell plastic cases are crushproof, waterproof, and dustproof. They also include provisions for installing a padlock—or even two if you want to be extra sure.

The Protector comes in several sizes and just about any color you can think of. Prices start at about \$32 for the smallest size up to over \$200 for one that will most likely

handle your entire collection. The Protector series comes with “peel and pick” foam inserts to customize the case to nestle whatever you want to store in it.

And the upside to the Protector is that, despite the cost, you have a product that you can reconfigure to another item at a later date. If you lose your passion for knives, you can order new foam and reconfigure it for cameras or firearms or whatever other precious cargo you want to protect.

If you want even more protection, Pelican has options with even sturdier cases and integrated locks.





**CONTACT INFO**  
**Pelican Products, Inc.**  
 Address: 23215 Early Avenue, Torrance, CA  
 Phone: 800-473-5472  
 Website: [www.Pelican.com](http://www.Pelican.com)

**Left:**  
 The Pelican Protector 1300.

**Above:**  
 The Pelican Protector can be configured to fit just about anything you need.

## Protected, Secured, and Safe

These are not the only three options out there by any stretch of the imagination, but they offer three levels of protection dependent on your needs and wants. **KI**



# FINELY FIXED

BEAUTIFUL TACTICAL BLADES FROM CUSTOM MAKERS

BY KNIVES ILLUSTRATED STAFF, PHOTOS BY SHARPBYCOOP



## + SPECS

### TYLER L. TURNER

**Model:** Turner Knife & Tool Freedom Fighter

**Blade Length:** 5 inches

**Blade Material:** PSF Z7 w/ NG2400 Flat Black Coating

**Handle Material:** OD Green Canvas Micarta

**Made in:** Hopkins, Missouri

**Contact:** On Facebook at Turner Knife & Tool or Instagram @turnerknifetool

**A** tactical fixed blade doesn't need to have a bland or utilitarian appearance. It can also be a hand-crafted, beautiful object of pure art. Jim Cooper of SharpByCoop curated this collection of stunning photos for us to illustrate that fact. Information on how to contact the makers is included in the specs box on each page.





**+** **SPECS**

**TIMOTHY STEINGASS**

**Model:** Steingass Custom Knives Silver Bear

**Blade Length:** 8.5 inches

**Overall Length:** 13.5 inches

**Blade Material:** CPM-154

**Bolster Material:** 416 SS

**Made in:** Bucksport, Maine

**Email:** [timothy.steingass@gmail.com](mailto:timothy.steingass@gmail.com)





**+** SPECS

**DAVID SHARP**

**Model:** Sharpwerks H&G Special

**Blade Length:** 9 inches

**Blade Material:** CPM 154

**Handle Material:** Loose Weave Carbon Fiber

**Bolster Material:** Copper

**Made in:** Hesperia, California

**Facebook:** Sharpwerks Usable Art





 **SPECS**

**NICK WHEELER**

**Model:** Wheeler Paraneer Fighter

**Blade Length:** 10.25 inches

**Overall Length:** 15.625 inches

**Blade Material:** 52100

**Made in:** Castle Rock, Washington

**Contact:** NickWheelerJs@hotmail.com or @nick\_wheeler\_knives on Instagram





## MICHAEL ZIEBA

**Model:** Zieba Knives Cleaver

**Blade Material:** 52100

**Made in:** Brooklyn, New York

**Email:** ziebametal@gmail.com







**+** **SPECS**

**PIERRE MEFFLIN**

**Model:** Mefflin Knives WZ Dagger

**Blade Length:** 6.5 inches

**Overall Length:** 11.75 inches

**Blade Material:** WZ

**Handle Material:** G10 With Carbon Fiber Pins

**Made in:** Tumbi Umbi, Australia

**Web:** [www.mefflinknives.com](http://www.mefflinknives.com)





 **SPECS**

**AIDAN GARRITY**

**Model:** Iron Lion Knives Fixed Bowie

**Blade Length:** 10.8 inches

**Overall Length:** 15.85 inches

**Blade Material:** 1084

**Handle Material:** Black Linen Micarta

**Bolster Material:** 1095/15N20 Damascus

**Made in:** Madison, Connecticut

**Contact:** [ironlionblades@gmail.com](mailto:ironlionblades@gmail.com)  
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ADVERTISER	PAGE	ADVERTISER	PAGE	ADVERTISER	PAGE
A.G. RUSSELL KNIVES	45	GTUL	49	NIAGARA SPECIALTY METALS	71
BLADE GALLERY.COM	3	HALF FACE BLADES	35	RANDALL MADE KNIVES	57
BLUE RIDGE KNIVES	57	HAVALON	83	SMITHSEEDGE	43
BRADFORD USA KNIVES	35	HOGUE GRIPS	43	SPYDERCO INC.	57
CHRIS REEVE KNIVES	57	JANTZ SUPPLY	7	TOPS KNIVES	13
DOOM AND BLOOM, LLC	21	KAYNE & SON	71	W.R. CASE & SONS CUTLERY CO.	2
FÄLLKNIVEN	45	KRUDO KNIVES	49		
GRIPKNIFE LLC	84	LT WRIGHT HANDCRAFTED KNIFE COMPANY	11		





# FIXED TO FIGHT

IF YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT, CHOOSE  
A FIXED BLADE OVER A FOLDER

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY STEVE WHIPPLE





**Left:** When it comes to blade length, most folding knives just can't compete with fixed blades. Even larger folders tend to peak where small fixed blades start. Pictured: Hogue's Sig Sauer EX-A05, Emerson's PUK WE's 601J, Cold Steel's Tokyo Spike, Cold Steel's Immortal, and Maxpedition's Small Long Clip Point.

**Below:** Four of the strongest locks on the market: Benchmade's Axis, Cold Steel's Tri-Ad, Spyderco's Compression, and SOG's Arc-Lock.



**Right:** But no matter how ingenious and well-constructed its lock, by design a folder will always be a broken knife.

**Is a folder all a soldier really needs? Yes, some may say. But despite folder advancements, this perspective is short-sighted. A fixed blade is in every way superior to a folder for the tasks that a soldier needs a knife to perform.**

Historically, fighting men throughout the ages have relied upon fixed blades (swords, bayonets, daggers, and dirks) as primary and secondary weapons of war. While folding knives have existed for centuries, they were seldom seen as suitable for the battlefield. They were relegated to agricultural and plebeian uses.

More recently, military leaders and troops alike have wrongly believed that a folder is all a soldier really needs. Folder proponents point to steady improvements in the reliability of firearms and ammunition, as well as major advancements in folding knife materials, construction methods, and locking mechanisms. And for those who will actually occupy the battlefield, this perspective can have dangerous consequences.

So what does a soldier's knife need to do? Answer: The same tasks knives have been performing since the beginning of time: cutting, stabbing, hacking, and occasionally prying and digging. Many folders can meet several of these needs. A few manage to struggle through most of them. But no folder will perform all of these requirements well. A fixed blade, on the other hand, can accomplish all of them with the reliability and consistency that the vagaries of combat demand.







“WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN AND YOUR KNIFE MUST SURVIVE THE TASK TO WHICH YOU ARE APPLYING IT, THE FIXED BLADE IS THE ONLY CHOICE.”

Beyond the ability to outperform folders in the functions of a knife, fixed blades possess several other attributes that make them invaluable to any soldier who may find themselves in harm's way. These attributes are strength, length, and accessibility/reliability.

## Strength

I can't overstate the strength advantages of a fixed blade over a folder. The strides that knife manufacturers have made in developing secure locking systems for folders are amazing. And there can be no doubt that folders will perform tasks today that no sane user would have expected of them 40 or 50 years ago.

Yet a folder, by definition, is a broken knife—that is, it consists of at least

two (and usually more) separate pieces. Trying to mate those pieces into a reliable, durable whole, while a worthwhile pursuit for knife makers and the casual owner, is not the purview of the soldier. When the chips are down and your knife must survive the task to which you are applying it, the fixed blade is the only choice. Let someone whose life might not hang in the balance be the guinea pig for the latest, greatest locking folder.

## Length

Most folders possess blades in the 3- to 4-inch range. Occasionally, you'll see the 5-inch blade. And Cold Steel and Darrel Ralph have models ranging from 5 ½ to 7 ½ inches, but these are the exceptions.

Fixed blade knives, on the other hand, tend to start with 3 ½ inches

**Top:** Lightweight, strong, easy to mount, and easy to access, with none of a folder's drawbacks. Some of the author's personal recommendations: the CRKT Yukanto, the Spyderco Aqua Salt, the Gryphon M-10, and the Cold Steel Kobun.

**Bottom, Left:** Just because it's a fixed blade, it doesn't have to be obtrusive. You'll find Cold Steel's Mini-Tac Bowie, Boker's Yurco Pocket Knife, Gerber's Guardian Back-Up, and Cold Steel's Safe Maker extremely convenient to carry and to conceal.

of blade, and most run in the 4- to 6-inch range. Those made specifically for combat generally have blades between 7 and 12 inches.

So why is the fixed blade's longer length important? Because heftier cuts, deeper stabs, and broader slashes are called for on the battlefield. And they can best be performed by blades of sufficient length. Whether cutting through parachute rigging, stabbing through clothing and load-bearing gear, or slashing through vegetation, you need more blade length than your average folder offers. Plus, if circumstances dictate that you violate the cardinal rule of knife use and pry or dig with your blade, the lessons of Archimedes will show you why a longer knife makes for a better lever.





“IN CONFIGURING THE KNIFE’S SETUP ... ENSURE SECURE SHEATH RETENTION OF THE BLADE, AMBIDEXTROUS ACCESSIBILITY ... AND LIMITED POTENTIAL FOR A KNIFE GRAB BY THE ENEMY.”

**Top, Left:** Three excellent, medium-sized knives that you can stake your life on: the Cold Steel AK-47 Field Knife, the Microtech Crosshair, and the Winkler Knives Knight Pathfinder.

## Accessibility/Reliability

While accessibility and reliability may seem like separate considerations, I feel that they are two sides of the same coin when it comes to combat knife effectiveness. If your knife isn’t instantly accessible and ready to perform once it’s in your hand, it is of little use and you might as well save yourself the burden of carrying its weight. Likewise, no matter how accessible your knife might be, if you have to take the time to open it or fumble with repositioning it in order to establish a proper grip, you run an unnecessary risk of dropping and losing it, failing to put it to use in time, and/or cutting yourself.

Accessibility options for soldiers carrying fixed blades are myriad, as concealment typically is not an issue and makers/manufacturers often tailor their sheaths to a variety of attachment methods. While most troops find it convenient to affix knives to load-bearing gear, plate carriers, and thigh rigs, placement is really only limited by one’s imagination.

In configuring the knife’s setup, however, ensure secure sheath retention of the blade, ambidextrous accessibility whether seated or standing, and limited potential for a knife grab by the enemy.

## Even Your Odds

While modern folders have earned their place in civilian carry, in garrison use, and in the pockets of soldiers enjoying R&R, they just don’t belong on the battlefield. They’re too small, too fragile, too cumbersome, and frequently too unreachable. If you think there’s even the remotest chance that you might have to stake your life on a knife, even the odds and carry a fixed blade. **KI**



**Center, Left:** A stout fixed blade (such as Cold Steel’s Medium Warcraft Tanto) is convenient and readily accessible when mounted to a vest or plate carrier. Just make sure you can reach it with either hand.

**Below:** If you have the authorization, the room, and the wherewithal, then by all means go big! They don’t get much bigger or tougher than Cold Steel’s Trail Master and Ontario’s Spec-Plus Raider Bowie.







# BEYOND BASIC

SOG VENTURES INTO HIGHER-END  
FOLDERS WITH THE TERMINUS XR

TEXT & PHOTOS BY BRYAN J. BALL





**Above:** The Terminus XR S35VN borrows much of its styling from the Terminus slipjoint.



**Below:** The Terminus XR S35VN is a very attractive package.





**U**ntil now, SOG Specialty Knives Inc. has focused on the more budget-oriented segment of the market, and that's what's made SOG a staple in sporting goods and outdoor stores all over the world. It's been quite some time since the company has ventured into the world of higher-end folders. That's all changing now.

SOG's very first focus was fixed blades. In 1986, founder Spencer Frazer launched his own line of tactically oriented fixed blades. His inspiration? The knives Special Forces used in Vietnam. Since then, the company has evolved into one of the country's largest knife companies. It makes everything from fixed blades and folders to multitools, keychain knives, and everything in between.

SOG's most recent foray into the world of more enthusiast-oriented knives that would take on the likes of Spyderco, Benchmade, and Zero Tolerance was the SOG Terminus XR, released in 2019. That knife featured a BDZ-1 blade, attractive styling, and a new locking system for the company. Benchmade's patent on the lock had expired and SOG was one of many companies to produce its own slightly different version. SOG's is called the XR Lock, and it seems poised to be a staple of the company's folding efforts going forward.

For 2020, SOG has upgraded the Terminus XR with a new S35VN version. It's a slightly less-expensive

**Above, Left:** The big upgrade for the 2020 Terminus XR is the S35VN blade.

**Above, Center:** The Terminus XR S35VN's pocket clip may be a bit polarizing to some.

**Above, Right:** The blade on the Terminus XR arrived a bit off center and with an uneven grind near the tip.

**“FOR 2020, SOG HAS UPGRADED TERMINUS XR WITH A NEW S35VN VERSION THAT IS INTENDED TO BE A SLIGHTLY LESS-EXPENSIVE ALTERNATIVE TO SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR AND WELL-REGARDED EDC KNIVES.”**

alternative to some of the most popular and well-regarded EDC (everyday carry) knives in the world. With the price increase that comes with the upgrade in blade steel, SOG has also introduced a less-expensive version with D2 blade steel and G10 handles to fill that gap. The Terminus XR S35VN has an MSRP of \$89.95 and the D2 variant goes for \$54.95. The latter comes in a few different colors, but for this review we'll focus on the pricier S35VN version, which only comes in the color shown.

true through-and-through carbon fiber, it is very attractive, especially at this price point.

The Terminus XR's blade is a very classic-looking near clip point with a very nice multi-angle satin grind that would look right at home on a much more expensive knife. The look is rounded out with a fairly minimal amount of billboarding on the blade and a clip with SOG logo milled right into it. (That may be a turnoff for some.)

The blade shape remains the same from the previous Terminus XR, but the upgrade from BDZ-1 to S35VN is a pretty big one. S35VN is one of my favorite EDC steels, so I was very happy to see it. It has very good edge retention, better-than-average corrosion resistance, and is fairly easy to sharpen. The Terminus XR also has an excellent sharpening coil that should assist in that task. SOG is pretty new to using this steel, so I can't comment much on its Cryo heat treat, but it seemed to perform as one would expect it to.

The Terminus XR did come very sharp out of the box and slices pretty well with its thin 0.11-inch blade stock. There's also a pretty decently robust tip for such a thin

## **+** SPECS

**Blade Material:** S35VN

**Blade Length:** 3.00"

**Overall Length:** 7.00"

**Blade Width:** 0.98"

**Blade Thickness:** 0.11"

**Blade Finish:** Satin

**Handle Material:** Carbon Fiber over G10

**Frame Material:** Stainless Steel Liners

**Lock:** XR Lock

**Weight:** 3.3 ounces

**MSRP:** \$89.95

## **New Take on the 'Tactical Slipjoint'**

The Terminus XR is based on a knife that was a unique SOG offering in its own right. The original Terminus is what the company has called a "tactical slipjoint." It doesn't have a locking blade, but everything else about it definitely reminds you of a small tactical knife. When placed side-by-side, the familial resemblance is undeniable, but the XR is a much different knife for sure.

The first big difference you'll notice is the scale material. The Terminus XR S35VN uses carbon fiber over G10 scales with a significant amount of milling to increase grip. While not





blade. The only disappointments I had with the blade were that it was a bit thick behind the edge (27 thousandths) and it did come with an uneven grind up near the tip.

With a blade length of 3 inches and an overall length of 7 inches, the Terminus XR is by no means a big bruiser, but it did fit my large-size hands pretty well. It's also quite comfortable in the hand. There are no unwanted sharp edges, and the jimping on top of the blade is right where you'd want it and effective while not overly aggressive.

At 3.3 ounces, the Terminus XR just misses that magical "ounce per inch of blade" ratio that a lot of EDC fans often look for. However, the deep carry reversible clip works very well and the thin 0.45-inch handle makes it carry very well. The only downside I had carrying the SOG was that the jimping on the flipper tab sometimes rubs uncomfortably against your pinky finger when you try to reach past it in your pocket.

**Top, Left:** The Terminus XR isn't a very large knife.

**Above:** While it isn't a big knife, the Terminus XR still fits my large-size hands pretty well.

**Above, Right:** The Terminus XR S35VN carries quite well.

#### CONTACT INFO

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sognives.com

Deployment on the Terminus XR is mostly good, but somewhat of a mixed bag. The XR Lock is solid. It works as you'd expect an omega spring-based lock to work. Flipping the knife open by just releasing tension on the lock works great and closing it the same way gives you 80% of the joy you'd get from a more expensive Benchmade. However, the SOG runs on bearings rather than Benchmade's bushings and you can feel those bearings running over the liners. It's not a grinding or anything, but you can feel it.

The knife does fire out very reliable on the thumbstuds, but they do feel a little sharp for my tastes. The flipper tab deployment is also just a bit lazy. It works well enough, but I wish they'd have just left it off and gone with just the thumbstuds. But you do get three deployment methods that all work relatively well, so that ain't all bad.

I did have a couple of QC issues with my particular Terminus XR S35VN

that I'd be remiss not to mention. First, there was the aforementioned uneven grind. I didn't really consider this to be a deal breaker. The second is that the blade is just a bit off-center. I also kind of forgave this. SOG is new to this lock and there is sure to be some sort of learning curve. The last is a bit weird... this is actually my second Terminus XR. I ordered the S35VN from a very reputable dealer and it arrived sealed in the box. The box said S35VN on it, but when I opened it, it was the older BDZ-1 version inside. To SOG's credit, I called them and sent it back and they sent me the correct one in about a week's time. So, no harm, no foul on that one, but do check that blade steel marking!

The original BDZ-1 Terminus XR made my top ten budget knife of the year list, so obviously I'm a fan of it overall. I'm also excited about what it means for SOG. The company introduced a wide range of more enthusiast-oriented knives at Shot Show 2020 (many using the XR Lock) and I'm very eager to try out several of them. Being a knife reviewer, I admit to being a bit of snob. I just get to try too many and get spoiled. It's been awhile since I was really excited about SOG as a brand, but I truly am now. **KI**



# BATTLING BOARS IN THE BALKANS

SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM  
EJ SNYDER'S ADVENTURES IN  
THE BULGARIAN WILDERNESS

TEXT BY ERIN MASERCOLA

PHOTO © ELSAD IBRAHIMOV  
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**I**n the early days of the pandemic, EJ Snyder sat down with Amber Hargrove of *American Survival Guide Television*. You can watch the full interview at [www.asgmag.com/features/how-ej-snyder-survived-wild-boars-in-the-balkans](http://www.asgmag.com/features/how-ej-snyder-survived-wild-boars-in-the-balkans) (use the QR code below for a direct link).

Meanwhile, just in case you missed it, here are some of our favorite moments. EJ will be back with his regular *Edge of Survival* column in our next issue of *Knives Illustrated*.

## ‘Lonely Like the Wolf’

Up first? A behind-the-scenes look at EJ’s latest *Naked and Afraid: Alone* adventure. Unlike other seasons of *Naked and Afraid*, where survivalists tackle hostile wilderness environments in groups, *Alone* features sole survivors. He did his survival stint in the Balkan Mountains in Bulgaria, and he appears in S11: E6 of the series.

The rugged area is home to lots of wild animals, including the rare Eurasian wolf. (Hence the episode’s title.)

## How ‘bout Them Hogs?

Also roaming around the Balkan wilderness along with the wolves and EJ? Some 450-pound wild hogs. Before EJ went to Bulgaria, he thought they’d be a great animal protein source for him. So he brought his bow along.

When he got to Bulgaria, EJ soon learned that Bulgarian wild hogs “only come out when it’s pitch black.” Their nocturnal habits rendered his bow useless.

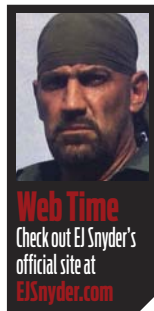
EJ always has a hack or two up his sleeve, even when he’s without actual sleeves. His backup plan was to build a weighted spike trap from logs and snare wire. When a team of hogs wandered into the trap, he theorized, it would ensnare at least one of them.



PHOTO © ZIZAR / DEPOSITPHOTOS.COM

*“My number one survival item on every challenge is my survival knife, the TOPS SXB, one I specifically designed to be a one tool option for a survival situation. With it ALONE, I can survive any situation. Everything I had out in Bulgaria was a direct result from that knife. From weapons, traps, shelter, fire, shoes, equipment, tools, and alot of other tasks. It saved my keister out there and got me out of there alive. Especially on Night 20 when i needed fire most. I never leave home without it.”*

**“BULGARIA ITSELF, I DON’T THINK, WANTED ME THERE,” EJ TELLS AMBER. “IT TRIED TO SPIT ME OUT EVERY DAY.”**



But snare wire is illegal in the Balkans, so he was going to have to use 550 paracord instead—something wild hogs chew through easily. Therefore, the hogs were off the table.

## EJ’s Balkan Cleanse

Smaller mammals in Bulgaria’s Balkan Mountains region are also protected from being hunted. “So I was left to be a vegetarian, which I’m not a big fan of because I am a large guy,” he says. He was a smaller guy when he left the wilderness, having lost 52 pounds. **KI**

## SURVIVAL DIET

### EJ’s Bulgarian Menu:

- walnuts
- large carpenter ants
- stinging nettles
- wild plums
- wild apples
- minnows
- crawfish
- one tasty trout

*“I felt pretty good when I came out,” he observes. “Eating that way cleanses you.”*





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