

Look sharp!

A practical guide to tactical knives

By Keith W. Strandberg

A knife is one of the primary tools that a law enforcement officer carries. Not only can it be used as a weapon in close quarters or crowded areas, where discharging a firearm is impossible, a knife can also be indispensable for those little tasks that you just can't do with your hands. "There have been many studies done

that show that within 21 feet, an assailant can cover that amount of ground before an officer can unholster his firearm and make the shot," says Nick Morgan, product specialist at KnifeCenter.com. "So for close quarters combat, a knife is a very good tool, as long as it can quickly be deployed. If an officer is unsure of the backdrop behind his target, he will not

take the shot; so that really leaves a lot of times when a knife may be the primary weapon over a gun. Knives can also be used in a non-lethal fashion by keeping a folding knife closed and using it as an impact weapon, hitting bone or pressure points to disable an assailant.

A number of companies today are in the business of making knives, either in general or specifically for law enforcement applications. *Law Enforcement Technology* has talked to the experts to find out what the trends are in knives, and then prepared a guide of some of the best products on the market today.

Trends

Police officers are busy people often doing several things at the same time, so one-hand opening is a big issue for knives. "A general request from armies and law enforcement is one-hand opening for the large knife blade and a locking device for the same," says Paul

Camenzind, International Sales Manager, Victorinox AG. "Here at Victorinox, we produce multipurpose pocket tools, and the reason a police officer or soldier carries is to have a multitude of useful instruments reduced down to a size which enables carry... in a pocket or belt pouch. Although we do have a variety of pocket knives which we consider to be most appropriate for the use in armies, police or any other official entity, in reality even the smallest little knife of our Classic Series, a 58mm mini pocket knife, which very often is used as a key hanger, found its way even to the U.S. Marine Corps."

A trend towards increased usability has been going on for years now, with manufacturers looking at what police officers do every day and meeting those needs. "It's always good for an officer to have a backup to their gun on the off-chance their gun fails, or they have to engage in hand to hand combat," says Lindsey Phelps, Sales Manager,

Columbia River Knife and Tool (CRKT). "Also, a knife is handy for daily tasks. We are continuing to look at and offer innovative knives and tools that an officer would carry for their function, durability and quality at an affordable price."

Folding knives small enough to carry all day every day are becoming more and more popular. "Right now, the trend is tactical folders that can also be used as 'every day carry' (EDC) knives," says KnifeCenter.com's Morgan. "This means that they're not overly huge, not overly heavy, nor do they have unnecessary bells or whistles. Their main features include a strong blade design, durable lock, ergonomic handle, and the safety of knowing your fingers won't run onto the blade during use."

"Another trend currently going on in our industry, not necessarily the law enforcement community, is new steels," he continues. "It seems like over the past two years, manufacturers have come out



Purchase guides

CRKT M16 SF PR, specified by the military for tactical use. **\$110 crkt.com**

CKRT Otanashi noh Ken PR, developed by martial arts trainer and knife designer James Williams, is designed to be unobtrusive as an EDC knife. **\$150 crkt.com**

Boker Plus CFR (Combat First Responder): Designated for troop members serving as paramedics and emergency personnel, designed to master any task, providing an uncompromising rescue knife. In an emergency, it can be used near the body without risk, and also

acts as a standard knife due to the full cutting edge and blade tip. **\$132.95 boker.de.us**

Boker Plus Cop Tool: Developed and field tested by Roy Huntington, a police officer with more than 20 years of experience, the Cop Tool can be used as a lever, chisel, belt cutter, scraping tool, or as a multifunctional knife. The bead blasted blade is made of high performance 440C stainless steel. For grip with gloves or wet hands, Boker uses textured G-10 for the handle, which eliminates any danger of slipping. **\$85.95 boker.de.us**

KnifeCenter.com's Nick Morgan offers his candid thoughts on the best available knives:

Microtech Halo V comes with a Kydex carry sheath, intimidating with a super-fast AUTO mechanism. **\$585 microtechknives.com**

Microtech Combat Troodon an all-around top notch knife. Also available in a smaller, non "Combat" version for \$331. **\$438 microtechknives.com**

Microtech Socom A lightweight, large, capable manual folder built to Microtech quality. **\$330/340**

Chris Reeve Sebenza for most large models with inlays or

graphics, \$410 for a regular Large model and \$350 for a regular small. The famous Chris Reeve Sebenza by which all other folding knives are judged. **\$485 chrisreeve.com**

Benchmade Infidel Another famous knife for its overall quality and ease of use. Comes with a nice double edge blade and nylon sheath. **\$412.25 benchmade.com**

Benchmade 710 A great McHenry & Williams design with reach, speed, and a very nice slender profile that carries well because it's so lightweight. **\$165.75 benchmade.com**

Benchmade Adamas A robust tactical folder with a nice thin blade. Comes with the same nylon sheath as the Infidel. Also available as an AUTO (\$216.75) or fixed blade (\$140.25). **\$170 benchmade.com**

Benchmade AFO Variety of prices and variations on this model, which is military issue to some lucky troops. **\$221 benchmade.com**

Benchmade Griptilian a great knife, been around for a while. It's a durable, functional design that many people feel is one of Benchmade's best designs and won't break the bank. **\$110.50 benchmade.com**

Guardian Tactical Patron Guardian Tactical knives are built solid. They have great ergonomics and top quality materials as well. **\$395 guardiantacticalusa.com**

Emerson CQC-8 Variety of prices based on variation. You can really choose any Emerson knife since they're just simple tactical designs built strong as hell. I like the Patriot in particular. **\$258.95 emersonknives.com**

AI Mar SERE 2000 This is the small mini model but it's also available in an AUTO and large version with a 3.6-inch blade. Great handle on this knife to prevent your fingers slipping

forward and a very useful blade shape. **\$234.95 almarknives.com**

Fox NERO Nighthawk Not many people know about this but it's a very cool looking blade and a very nice tactical design. A small finger guard but a nice thumb ramp. **\$213.95 foxknivesusa.com**

Pohl Force Bravo One Survival Both the folders and fixed blades are built for military use, but I like this model as it's a very similar design to most of their folders but at half the price. **\$195 pohlforceusa.com**

DPx HEST/F A lot of nice design elements and features. It's solid feeling, lightweight, and buries

deep in the pocket with the deep carry pocket clip. Tons of variations in the series. **\$200 dpxgear.com**

Spyderco Police3 Long, slender with reach and a nicely textured handle with a strong lockback design. Great ratio of length to weight. **\$159.95 spyderco.com**

Spyderco ParaMilitary 2 The most popular production knife on the market right now. It's the second iteration of the design with a near perfect handle and blade shape. Very lightweight, strong, and uses great materials. Made in the USA for a good price, nothing not to like here. **\$121.95/\$134.95 spyderco.com**



Gerber 06 AUTO I think this might be a duty issue piece for some as well but it's not cheap; USA-made Gerber quality with great steel that reminds you of how Gerber got to be so big in the beginning, making quality tools for our armed forces.

\$151.95 gerbergear.com

Gerber Propel Assisted Opener (\$114.95/\$119.95) or the AUTO (\$134.95/\$149.95) same thing as the 06 model with nice quality and steel, just in a

slightly slimmer design.
gerbergear.com

Cold Steel Recon 1 Strongest tested lock on the market, with an ultra grippy handle, makes this a great tactical folder. AUS-8 steel isn't the best but it can easily be resharpened in the field by most users.

\$73.95 coldsteel.com

Kershaw Blur A very fast assisted-opening knife with a thin handle and very nice recurve blade

shape. It's highly collectible and highly functional.

\$76.95 kershawknives.com

And finally Zero Tolerance, "built like a tank" and "overbuilt" are terms that describe their knives well. It's the USA-made, tactical knife division of KAI, which includes Kershaw Knives and Shun Cutlery. Everything is heavy duty and tactically designed, most come with a nicer Carbon Fiber version of the knives for collectors but also for end users. Carbon fiber not only looks great but its ultra-durable, making it a great handle material.

ZT0562 My new favorite knife, with a Rick Hinderer design, has the best available materials at a price that won't break your bank. I think it's just a dam great knife at a great deal and it's great to be made in the USA. The blade opens so smoothly and the ergonomics are spectacular. In my mind as close to a perfect knife as you can get. **\$240 ztknives.com**

ZT0566 The 566 is a smaller, assisted opening version of the 560 model. The 566 is just a little more comfortable in the hand and I think the size is right for most people. **\$168 ztknives.com**

ZT0350 The 350 is a smaller version of the 300 series folders, which were Zero Tolerance's first ever knives. It's got a wide, beefy blade you can pry with and is a great knife for use with gloves. For those with larger

with more new steels than we ever had before and that's going to continue. Blade steel is always a balance between hardness (ability to hold an edge without becoming brittle) and corrosion resistance. They're trying to find the perfect balance between the two, but each cutting task or law enforcement officer is different. So there's no wonder steel yet, just a lot of high end steels that are making knives more expensive."

Choosing a knife

Here are some important things to consider when choosing a knife:

Blade thickness

You don't want the knife to break when you need it most. Also, a thicker blade allows for some minor prying, but this is never recommended.

Ergonomics

Your knife has to fit your hand well so it cannot be removed from it during a fight. You'll want to use a comfortable knife a lot more than one that has hot spots (creates pain in spots of your hand) or is too big and bulky.

Durability

Here material is everything. You pay directly for the quality of the materials more so than in other industries so you really "get what you pay for".

Tolerance

The knife must be made well. It's easy to tell the difference between a \$40 knife and a \$200 knife—the blade will be better centered between the handle, the grind on the edge will be better, the amount of play (when the blade of a folder wiggles side to side or up and down when it's locked open) is less.

Folder or fixed blade?

KnifeCenter.com's Morgan thinks that folding knives are more appropriate for law enforcement use. "A fixed blade knife has the strength going for it and no matter

what kind of lock or who makes it, a folder is not as strong as a fixed blade," he says. "Also, when you pull out a fixed blade, it's ready to go. You don't have to worry about folding it open and making sure it's locked up tight, you unsheathe and go.

"The reason I think a folder is the way to go is just sheer convenience," he says. "Officers' utility belts are pretty full already so carrying a fixed blade on the belt is generally a no-go, and carrying one around the neck might be too difficult to get to in a pinch since most duty officers wear bullet-resistant vests. You can carry a folder almost anywhere on your person and nobody will know you have it. They're generally lighter as well since you don't have to factor a sheath into that weight."

Sheath or no sheath?

For fixed blades, a good sheath is of the utmost importance. More than 95 percent of the time the knife is sheathed, so having something that doesn't rattle, is comfortable, and durable is the biggest thing for me when picking a fixed blade.

Final advice

Some departments supply knives to their officers, but the bottom line is that if you want the perfect knife for you, you're better

off buying it yourself. This way, you can get a knife that fits your hand and fits your daily life, on and off duty.

"My advice would be to not buy the cheapest thing you can find but to splurge a little," says KnifeCenter.com's Morgan. "This might be a tool you have to count on for your life so you don't do yourself any favors saving \$20 to ultimately have a knife that will fail you when needed. I always recommend doing a little research and finding a knife that has good reviews. We have reviews available on most items and we don't alter them in any way—they're customer's honest opinions, good or bad.

"I also think it's very important that the knife be lightweight and comfortable in your hand," he says. "People make the case a lot for concealed carry handguns that if you go too big or if you just can't shoot it as good as you want to, you'll just leave it at home. I feel it's the same way with knives. If it's a big, bulky or isn't comfortable to use, you're just not going to carry it." ■

Keith W. Strandberg is an American freelance writer and award-winning screenwriter/producer of feature films living in Switzerland. He was a former contributing editor for LET more than a decade ago and is happy to be back writing for the magazine.

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TACTICAL TECH & GEAR



Gerber 06 Auto

Gerber Propel Assisted Opener

Zero Tolerance 0350

hands though, a 300/301/302 ZeroTolerance's folder is best. [\\$148 ztknives.com](http://$148 ztknives.com)

And finally, in the budget category. A knife that is built super well and is about as cheap as you want to go on a folder. Coming in at **around \$30 is the Ontario Rat Model 1**. It's also available in an assisted opening version with G10 handles for a better grip with faster opening. ontarioknife.com ■

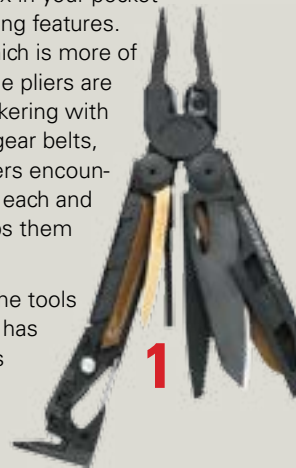
Editor's Note: All prices MSRP.

Keith W. Strandberg is an American freelance writer and award-winning screenwriter/producer living in Switzerland.

A word on multitools

"A multi-tool is really an invaluable tool once you carry and use one," says KnifeCenter.com's Morgan. "It's like having a small tool box in your pocket—[and] really has a lot of life-saving features. Most, if not all, have a saw which is more of an outdoor survival tool, but the pliers are great for untying knots and tinkering with other tools (guns, flashlights, gear belts, batons, handcuffs, etc.). Officers encounter all different kinds of issues each and every day and a multi-tool helps them be as prepared as possible."

Look for a multi-tool that has the tools you're looking for. No one tool has everything—weigh the options against your needs.



Here are five worth looking into:

1. Leatherman MUT—\$159.85-\$169.85
2. Victorinox SwissTool—\$77.95-\$129.99
3. Victorinox Swiss Army Rescue Tool—\$102.00
4. SOG PowerAssist—\$79.95-\$85.95
5. Gerber Bullrush Multi Tool—\$49.95

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