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# RIPOSTE

By Lynn C. Thompson

(ri-post') n 1. A quick thrust delivered after parrying a lunge in fencing.  
2. A quick, clever reply : retort.

## AMERICAN HANDGUNNER MISSES THE MARK ON FIGHTING KNIVES

In its May/June 1997 issue, American Handgunner magazine fires a full clip of informational blanks. An article authored by Patrick Covert and titled "Fighters" (page 60) illustrates just how limited the knowledge of the writer and the magazine's editorial staff are when it comes to the subject of fighting knives.

The subtitle of this particularly annoying article states, "Double Edged, Single Edged, Dagger and Dirks. . . . We Show You the Cutting Edge of Combat Knives." From the outset, it is apparent that the content of the story is well wide of its target. Now is the time to separate the Bulls-eye from the Bull@#%\*. Our first glimpse of what American Handgunner really knows about fighting knives is a huge four-color photo of Buster Warenski's 32-ounce solid gold Egyptian dagger. This was, no doubt, just the ticket for stabbing the surly eunuch in the back a thousand years ago, but it hardly qualifies as the state-of-the-art fighter today!

Four more pages of "fighters" await the eager reader. A total of 10 custom art knives are portrayed as "up to the minute" fighters. Art knives are created for the sake of art. Fighting knives exist for an entirely different purpose. The article makes no mention of the featured knives' cutting power, point strength, penetration, or edge-holding ability. Instead, the reader is treated to descriptive terms involving nebulous qualities such as feel, legendary, understated, dynamic, Viking-inspired, ultra modern and Mach speed

profile - empty adjectives when it comes to describing a true fighting knife and just what anyone wants on his side in a life or death struggle!

If these artsy, fartsy photos don't shed enough light on American Handgunner's lack of knowledge on the subject of fighting knives, the ultimate proof is in the copy. Here are a few of our favorite tidbits.

On page 104, Mr. Covert states, "A typical fighting knife today will average 8 to 11 inches in overall length, small enough to fit on the blade of a Bowie." This sounds like the description of a boot knife, not a fighter. Furthermore, the statement is unsupported by any photos. Eight of the 10 knives pictured have overall length in excess of 11 inches, and two are folders. If you ever are unfortunate enough to find yourself in a blade to blade encounter, pray that your opponent is armed with Mr. Covert's "typical fighter", stay at long range and cut his knife hand off with a flick of your Cold Steel® Trail Master® Bowie.

On page 105, the author continues, "Stainless steel is by far the preferred blade material for modern fighting knives. Its ability to resist rust and corrosion makes it the top choice for field use, and stainless steel's edge holding ability adds awesome cutting power to the equation. The two varieties of stainless steel considered the best by custom knife makers and manufacturers alike are ATS-34 and 440C." Obviously, Mr. Covert has not been reading about Carbon V® or watched our video "PROOF." We challenge Mr. Covert or anyone else to produce a stainless steel blade made of 440C or ATS-34 which is capable of making in excess of 20 consecutive cuts through a one-inch manila rope without losing its edge. Contrasting the puny edge retention of stainless steel with the proven cutting ability of Carbon V®, which delivered 250 consecutive cuts with a Trail Master® on video tape, proves our point in no uncertain terms.

"There is no right or wrong blade style for the fighter — it's all a matter of what works for you. And if you are in a situation where you need, it

best work," continues Covert on page 106. When it comes to double talk, this statement takes the cake. Of course, there are right and wrong blade styles for fighting knives. This is equivalent to saying that there is no single handgun more suited to self defense than another - it's all a matter of personal preference. Would anyone believe that a 25ACP Raven is just as effective, reliable and versatile as a 9MM Beretta 92F in a self defense situation?

For such a statement to appear in print, one of two situations must have occurred. Either the author does not practice knife fighting regularly with a variety of blades or he has done little or no testing. We have done plenty of testing. Believe it when we say that most fighting knives are totally unsuited to the task when their point strength, penetration, blade strength, resistance to shock, sharpness, edge retention and cutting power are put to the test.

Finally, Mr. Covert states, "If you need a knife for personal protection, a combat folder fills the bill nicely. Compact and lightweight, these folders are comfortable to carry, easy to conceal and big on performance." We do agree that combat folders are easy to carry and conceal, but that's where our meeting of the minds stops. Claiming they are big on performance is really stretching it. Other than those of Cold Steel®, how many folding knives have ever been tested? How many magazine articles have been written on folding knife performance where sharpness, cutting power, edge retention, penetration, lock strength and overall strength have actually been tested? Granted, any folding knife is better than fingernails alone when it comes time to fight. But no folding knife, with the possible exception of a Balisong, can begin to compare to the strength and reliability of even the smallest boot knife.

We feel compelled to set the record straight. Make an informed decision when buying a fighting knife. Your money, and maybe more, are on the line.

# RIPOSTE

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## RIPPED OFF AT BLADE SHOW

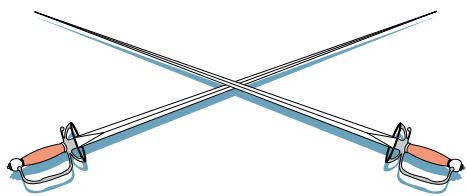
Our Cold Steel® display captured a lot of attention at the recent Blade Show in Atlanta. A huge hit with attendees, Cold Steel® drew big crowds during the weekend event. We played our video, “PROOF”, non-stop, mesmerizing audiences with its incredible action. Visitors were amazed by the feats of strength and cutting power Cold Steel® knives displayed on videotape.

We received hundreds of compliments on our knives. Our customers validated our claims time and again. Cold Steel® products are proven to be the best in the world—as advertised. During the show, we gave away more than 2,000 catalogs and 1,000 copies of “PROOF”.

The knife-throwing exhibition by Billy Branton and the Master of the Blade, Bob Karp was another highlight of the show. These two experts can really throw, and we were delighted to see them demonstrating our Bad Axe, Special Forces Shovel, True Flight Thrower and Torpedo. Both men had nothing but praise for Cold Steel® throwing implements, and Bob Karp threw a Torpedo so deep into the wooden target, it could hardly be pulled out.

We are, however, sorry to report that Cold Steel® had over \$4,000 worth of knives stolen from our booth on Thursday, the exhibitor setup day. This was the single largest loss due to theft in Cold Steel® corporate history and it was a particularly bitter “pill” to swallow after having to continually beg and plead with the Blade staff, just to be allowed to exhibit at the show.

We suggest that in the future, Blade place greater emphasis on the security needs at exhibitor’s booths. These exhibitors are displaying millions of dollars worth of knives, and a good start would be security guards armed with something other than just a radio!



## HOW OTHER KNIFE MANUFACTURERS RIP YOU OFF

Over the years, we have grown increasingly disgusted with the shortcuts, shoddy materials and poor manufacturing methods used by our competitors, here and abroad. Not only do these practices give the knife industry itself a “black eye”, they also may result in the consumer’s loss

of hard-earned money, serious injury and even death.

We are particularly sick and tired of the “knock off” companies based in Tennessee, New York, Taiwan, Japan and Pakistan, passing off their copycat products as “just as good as the originals.” Nothing could be further from the truth. These U.S. and foreign companies get away with these deceptions because they make knife-like objects that ape a popular look but can’t perform! These companies are counting on consumers looking more closely at their low prices, than at performance of the products themselves. Their biggest fear is that someone will actually put these knives to use.

These companies have tried to cover their exposed behinds by conveniently leaving their names and addresses off the boxes their knives come in. Thus, the hordes of disgruntled consumers will have nowhere to turn, and no way to get their money back. The companies are then free to prey on the next sucker! As long as they can continue to fool people with smoke and mirrors and provide incredibly low prices, they will be successful. That is why we have decided, once and for all, to expose all of their dirty tricks, so that the buyer may more easily recognize and avoid their inferior goods.

## STEEL

The heart of any knife is the steel that goes into the blade and tang. One of the best ways for a manufacturer to cut his cost is to “cheap out” on the steel. In the end it may wind up costing the consumer most of all. One of the easiest ways to “cheap out” is to use stainless steel that isn’t even heat-treatable. Because of its high chrome content, 300 series stainless is widely used in table cutlery and for diving knives where rust is a big concern. In cutting anything tougher than a stick of butter, it is absolutely useless.

The next cheapest stainless is probably the widely-used 420J2 from Japan. This steel grinds like butter, and domestic and foreign companies out to rip off the consumer love it. It has very little carbon content, so the Rockwell hardness of 420J2 will not exceed 53. But Rockwell hardness is of no concern to these companies. They want a cheap steel that is easy for them to stamp out, grind, finish and sharpen. It is of no concern or consequence to them if a razor-sharp edge is impossible to achieve, or if its mediocre to non-existent edge lasts for only a minute. They don’t worry about the fact that the blade will bend in a circle like a piece of spaghetti if locked in a vise and pulled using just a hand for leverage. The most significant feature of 420J2 is that ten blades of the cheap stuff can be ground and finished in the same amount of time it takes to grind one blade of AUS8A!

Even more shocking, who believes they actually heat-treat those 420J2 blades? We at Cold Steel® have tested knives made with 420J2 steel from Taiwan which only had a Rockwell hardness of 45! Another way to tell that the buyer is being “taken for a ride” is a manufacturer’s reference to his steel as “surgical stainless.” When you see this, you can bet the farm that knife is a piece of crap! (Crap isn’t swearing. My grandmother used the term, and she was just about a saint.)

The favorite “cheapo” stainless in the United States is 425 modified. This junk is their darling because it is so soft and malleable that even small parts can be fine-blanked very close to the desired shape, thereby eliminating costly precision milling operations and hand-fitting by skilled craftsmen. Let the buyer beware. Don’t be taken in by manufacturers using fine-blanked parts, (especially in folding knives) as a shortcut to help boost their bottom line. You see no matter how good a fine-blanked part is, it will never equal the near perfect part that can be obtained only through precision milling and hand-fitting.

## TANG

Perhaps, one of the most often told lies in the cutlery industry is that various models of knives come with a full tang. Undoubtedly, many a mail order con artist will go to hell for lying. But somehow, they feel particularly comfortable telling this “big stretcher.” Obviously, one of the best ways to save money in the knife business is to cut down on the amount of steel used in each piece, by making the finished product with a very short or stub tang. In this way, the manufacturer can easily cut 1/3 off his steel bill with no one the wiser.

Another variation, is the rat tail tang, which uses a bit more steel, but really saves big bucks through easy assembly. Both the stub and the rat tail tang construction methods have found great favor with the Tennessee knife Mafia, and other knock-off companies in Japan and Taiwan. Be suspect of any cast aluminum, zinc alloy, wire-wrapped or hard-plastic handled knives, as they are often hiding a serious lack of steel!

## HEAT TREATMENT

As we previously mentioned, one of the best ways for a manufacturer to reduce his cost is simply not to bother heat-treating his blade at all! So, for this reason, so many of the Pakistani and Taiwanese knock-offs go dull so quickly. If they do decide to heat-treat a blade, they purposely leave it soft (anything under 53RC), so that it can be easily ground, minimizing the wear and tear on their tooling, grinding machines, belts, stones, etc.

Another dirty, cost-cutting trick of the trade is allowing a wide tolerance in hardness levels. This means that the manufacturer really doesn’t know how hard his blade is. That’s bad news for the buyer. Even a variation of one (1) point in RC hardness can make a terrific difference in a blade’s strength and toughness, and the optimal hardness for each steel does not allow for such broad deviations. (If you don’t think we know what we are talking about, just watch our video “PROOF”.) A good clue that this trick is being employed is seeing advertisements for knives quoting RC 54-57 or 58-62.

## GRINDING

Has anyone ever heard much praise for the terrific grinding accuracy of a knife made in Pakistan, Taiwan, or for that matter, most of the United States? One of the biggest challenges a high quality manufacturer like Cold Steel® regularly faces is producing blade after blade

with a near perfect hollow or flat ground blade bevel. Super hard steel is difficult to cut, and quickly wears wheels, belts, etc., making consistent, high tolerance grind lines difficult to obtain. Knock off companies and most of our domestic manufacturers do not labor under these same constraints. At Cold Steel®, however, our daily routine is committed to the maintenance of quality throughout the grinding process.

While we are on the subject of grinding, another cost-cutting trick being widely popularized by U.S. custom knife makers and some knife magazines is the single side chisel grind. Take a look at these allegedly “hot shot” knives and close inspection will reveal how short the height of the single bevel is when compared with the width of the blade. Slipshod knife-makers love this grinding method because it is so downright cheap. A single pass, removing a small amount of material from the blade, is all that is required to achieve the desired “high fashion” look which is also being erroneously touted as high-tech (when it is actually low-tech.) What is more, the chisel grind requires no particular accuracy from blade to blade, since there is no corresponding bevel on the other side to match up. No wonder all the “short cut specialists” have jumped on this “chisel grind” bonanza at the consumer’s expense.

### **FINISHING SHORTCUT**

Many people do not realize that a beautiful satin or mirror-polished blade requires a tremendous amount of skilled hand labor to produce. The process is not only expensive, but the blade itself is very vulnerable to damage during construction and assembly. For instance, on the immensely popular Cold Steel® ATC Kukri, which we built several years ago, it was not uncommon for us to have to refinish a blade two or even three times before it left the factory. Just a moment’s inattention can result in a scratch on a fine satin finish and send a knife back to the polishing department.

It is easy to understand why the knife buyer will never see a high satin or mirror polish on a knock off blade. Many U.S. manufacturers are also abandoning the beautiful, yet costly, finishes, in favor of cheaper ones. Certainly, we at Cold Steel®, would have no objection to this practice, if these manufacturers lowered their retail prices to reflect their vastly cheaper finished blades. Alas, this is not the case. Instead, we can only shake our heads and alert the consumer that these companies have attempted to pass off their mass-produced, machine-made bead blast look as if its high-tech and state-of-the-art. While it may not reflect much light, the look is ugly and cheap. In a simple, unsophisticated process, all these knife manufacturers have to do to obtain their unsightly, grey blades is to dump a tray of unfinished knives into the top of a huge vibrating tumbler filled with fine abrasives, and let gravity do its work. Slowly, bit by bit, the blades will work their way down through the abrasive compound to fall out the bottom in their new dirty grey coat!

### **GUARDS AND POMMELS**

Three major methods are now in use to cut corners when producing a guard, bolster or

pommel for a knife. Avoid them like the plague.

The first method is to do away with solid brass or stainless steel for those parts in favor of a cheap zinc alloy. Most of the science fiction style knives coming out of Taiwan utilize zinc alloy parts that are easily broken.

The second method is to eliminate costly, time-consuming hand-fitting of those parts. Take a close look at the next Taiwan wonder you come across and check out the blade-to-guard fit. Chances are there is a gap large enough to drive a bull dozer through. Another assembly shortcut is simply pressing the rat’s tail tang through the guard and handle and then turning the pommel on. While this may pass muster in the looks department, the first time that zinc alloy skull crusher is used, the owner will find that the pommel breaks or bends and the entire knife will have loosened up.

The third method involves some sophisticated dazzle and deception. Some manufacturers heavily chrome or otherwise plate the exterior of cast zinc alloy guards bolsters or pommels. This creates the illusion of a very expensive, high quality part but there is no substance. Don’t be fooled into handing over your hard-earned dollars for some worthless zinc and microscopically thin chrome plate.

### **HANDLES**

One of the all time favorite handles for both domestic “corner cutters” and Taiwan “knock off” companies, is the one piece handle cast out of both aluminum or zinc alloy, or injection molded out of cheap ABS plastic. One reason they just love these ugly handles is they almost always incorporate an integral guard and pommel so they can eliminate the separate manufacture and fitting of those two parts. Another reason is these handles hide the tang of the knife from view so the manufacturer can save money on steel by using an inferior stub tang with no one the wiser.

Lately, the bandwagon effect has taken hold with domestic and foreign “cheapo” makers as they attempt to copy the “drive on” Kraton® handle, first pioneered by Cold Steel®. What they want the consumer to believe is that their “copy cat” rubber handles are Kraton®, when they are actually made of far cheaper and inferior TPR rubber. Remember, knock off companies get rich by deceiving their customers with the “in” look - never the performance of the original.

### **LOCK STRENGTH**

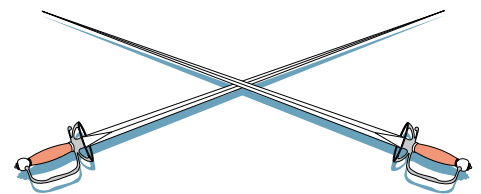
If safety is first with a conscientious knife manufacturer like Cold Steel®, it is dead last with a “knock off” company. We have always been amazed that people will blindly trust their irreplaceable fingers to cheap, imported “knock off’s” of our folding knives, or to domestic brands that refuse to comment on the strength of their locking mechanisms. The risk of personal injury alone should be enough to discourage the purchase of inferior products just to save a few bucks. What are the “knock off” companies hiding? Perhaps, it is the fact that the locks on most of their knives cannot even hold 40 lbs.! Maybe they don’t want their buyers to know that their locks are assembled by slave labor in China,

or by a housewife sitting at the kitchen table in a Taiwan tenement. Perhaps, they don’t want the buyer to realize that they have taken a short cut by dispensing with precision milling and hand filing in favor of snap-together, fine-blanked parts that are so sloppy that a truck could be driven through the gap between the blade and locking bar. There is certainly one thing they don’t want the consumer to know. The truth.

Not only have the manufacturers remained silent on this issue of lock strength but the gun and knife magazines as well. Currently, these so called “experts” seem content to discuss how sleek and sexy the latest tactical folder is, but there is no substance behind their words. When was the last time a magazine actually tested a lock-back it was touting as tough and strong? Has a gun or knife magazine ever put a tactical folder’s allegedly superior liner lock through a shock resistance test, by rapping the back of its blade smartly on the edge of a table or bench to see if it will fail? Has anyone ever heard of a magazine willing to lock a tactical folder’s blade in a vise and suspend weight from the end of its handle to determine what its lock will hold? We all know the answer - NEVER! Simply stated, the only thing the magazines are interested in right now is the “in look” and performance is a non-issue. Talking about performance would cut advertising revenue!

In contrast, performance is the only issue we are concerned about at Cold Steel® and form will always follow function in the design of our knives. This is the reason our President, Lynn C. Thompson is such a fanatic about lock strength. Unlike our competition, and the magazines, he recognizes only too well that there are only two things between your fingers and the edge of your folding knife... your brain and the strength of your locking mechanism!

Of course, any knife is vulnerable to misuse, poor judgment, neglect, and abuse. Any blade or locking mechanism can be broken. However, it is important to remember that because they fold, lockbacks are inherently weaker and more vulnerable to human error or abuse than fixed blades. Therefore, Cold Steel® is constantly striving to improve the strength of its locking mechanisms to provide the greatest margin of safety possible!



### **LAST THRUST**

If the content of this article has disturbed you, the reader, or at the very least provoked some thought, it has accomplished its goal. We at Cold Steel® feel an obligation to bring these facts to the attention of the consumer. Our concern is quality which lasts long after the buyer leaves the shop. Ultimately, it is the consumer who controls knife quality. Every dollar spent on a Cold Steel® knife is a vote for value and performance.