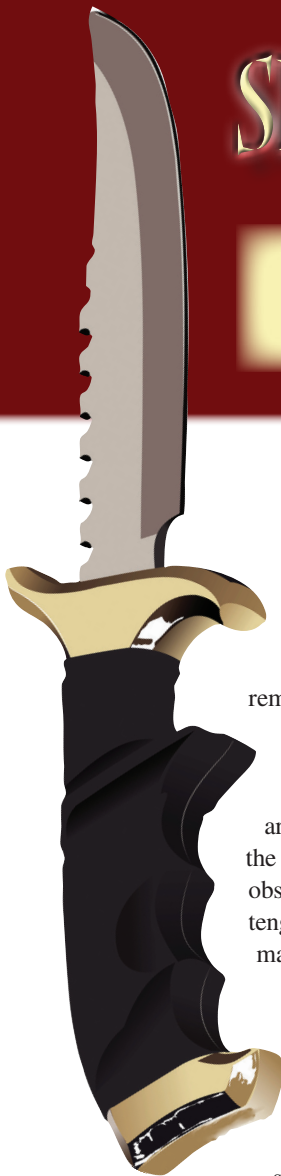


SPORTING CUTLERY & MULTI-TOOLS

The Cutlery Category Still Cuts a Wide Swath Through The Army/Navy Market



Knives are essential army/navy store items. Customers seeking to buy a knife often head for the nearest army/navy store, and knife sales remain relatively strong in a negative economic climate.

“Despite the economy, the major knife companies are putting out new models like the recession never happened,” observes Keith Shelton of Moteng, whose company wholesales many of the major brands.

While folding knives continue to outsell fixed blades, fixed blades are making a comeback. However, Shelton notes that the largest area of increased sales is in economy priced lines by the major manufacturers.

Knives are a particularly attractive product for gun shops, he said, noting that the percent-

age of margin for knives is higher than for firearms. For the army/navy store, as well, knives frequently offer higher margins than apparel.

In January, an unusual collaboration between the Buck Knife Company and Tops Knives, both Idaho-based companies, produced the Combat Search and Rescue Knife. Shelton notes that this is the first time these two highly regarded manufacturers have collaborated on a product. The CSR-T knife features a heavy duty thick blade and has a suggested retail price of \$150.

Bucks in swashbuckling?

Swords comprise a lesser category for Moteng but Shelton has enjoyed good sales of functional swords from Cold Steel. He notes that these swords are not intended for decorating a wall. “They are designed for martial arts aficionados who want their swords razor sharp right out of the box,” he said.

Böker Knives traces its history to 19th century Germany. The company manufactures a variety of cutting tools, but for the army/navy retailer, the Böker Plus line holds the most

BY HOWARD PROSNITZ

interest. Designed for law enforcement and the military, the line includes reproductions of historical military knives such as the Mark One Navy Knife from the 1940s. “It is made to the same specs as the original with the same leather wrap handle, leather sheath and SK-5 high carbon steel blade,” said company president Dan Weidner.

Although functional, the knife is geared more toward collectors, Weidner said.

New from Böker is the Credit Card Knife, a custom made, fully functional folding knife the size of a credit card. Retailing for \$29.95, the knife features a 1/8 inch blade and a pocket clip, so it can easily be carried in a wallet.

“It is functional and easily concealed.

People say they have never seen a knife like it,” Weidner said.

In the fixed blade category, Böker has developed the Cop Tool, a knife designed for law enforcement and the military with a partially serrated blade that is strong enough to use as a prying tool.


Moderately priced knives are selling well, as are law enforcement and military knives in general, Weidner said.

A world market

Although many customers seek American made knives, Valor Company’s Ray Santos notes that some of the best known knife companies manufacture their knives in China under a closely supervised production process. “It is more acceptable today for knives to be made in the Orient as long as there is good oversight. These companies are able to bring out value line knives and that are of good quality,” Santos said.

Knife sales remain strong for Valor. Although the company discontinued its line of fishing knives a few years ago when high oil prices were affecting the fishing industry, it has made up for the loss by increased sales of tactical and pocket knives.

Valor wholesales knives by many major manufacturers and has recently done espe-

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cially well with Cold Steel, Smith & Wesson and Benchmade.

The Fury knife line from Joy Enterprises has long been a value oriented product sold almost exclusively by independent retailers. Joy president Andrew Kroll observes that big box stores do not carry the Fury brand.

“Nor is it our intention to market our products in these stores. We give the family owned army/navy store the opportunity of selling a brand that you won’t find in the Wal-Marts and Targets,” Kroll said.

He notes that Joy’s highest growth products are multi-functional tools that include a knife. Kroll emphasizes that these tools are not modeled on the iconic Leatherman multi-tool, but rather are knives designed for specific purposes. The line was originally made for the roping and riding market but has also become popular as nautical tools.

One example is the Fury Spike, a tool that features a Marlinspike, a fully serrated blade, and a shackle for attaching the knife to a chain or rope. The spike is useful for opening tight knots, especially in nylon rope. When closed, the spike becomes a pair of pliers, useful for undoing knots.

Function and affordability the key

Fury offers both beginner’s and advanced survival knives. The Survival Mate, retailing for \$9.99, is typically bought by a parent taking a son or daughter camping for the first time. The

multi-functional handle includes a sharpening stone and a survival kit consisting of matches, a fish hook, fishing line, wire cutter and saw. A compass is mounted at the end of the handle.

The Recon Survival Knife is a more practical and more expensive tool. Its handle includes a backsaw, small first aid kit, matches, fishing line and hook and space for four rounds of ammo.

Sales of swords, more than those of knives, have been hurt by the economic downturn.

“Our business is suffering from the economy as many other businesses are,” said Barry Ross, president of CAS Hanwei. “Swords are a luxury item. When people have less disposable income, our revenues go down.”

CAS Hanwei makes no decorative swords. All of the company’s products feature a live steel blade, although some blades, mainly on swords designed for the re-enactor market, are not edged.

The edged swords are retailed primarily to practitioners of Oriental and European martial arts, which involve cutting exercises. European martial arts include broad sword sparring and rapier dueling. Ross notes that martial arts enthusiasts study the teachings of old swords masters from books dating back to the 15th century.

“Swords appeal to a broad market,” said Ross. “The Japanese swords, in particular, have a military connection and some army/navy stores will carry a selection.”

To supplement its sword line, CAS Hanwei

has recently introduced its Rock Creek brand of hunting and folding knives. All feature forged steel blades and exotic wood or leather handles. Ross noted that a selection of stag handles knives will soon be introduced.

The line is manufactured in China by the same company that produces CAS Hanwei’s swords.

Sako Rouchanian of Recon I in Tarzana, California claims that his store is the third largest retail store specializing in knives in the country. Approximately 80 percent of his inventory is cutlery. Rouchanian has observed that more customers today are seeking knives for utilitarian purposes rather than as collectibles.

“Collectibles have slowed down. People are buying knives for necessity,” he said.

He noted that knives are one category of merchandise where many customers seek American-made products.

Rouchanian continues to strongly enjoy sales of knives by major companies, including Benchmade, Spyderco and Buck, and has done particularly well with folding knives having a partially serrated blades. Swiss Army knives remain a strong seller, but Rouchanian notes that customers today prefer folding knives with locking blades.

He continues to carry multi tools by a variety of manufacturers, but finds it is difficult to compete with big box store prices on these items. ★