

Podcast #194 Transcript: How To Choose The Best Fighting Knife

Jeff Anderson: When it comes to personal protection weapons, your first instinct is most likely to go to a firearm of some kind, and no doubt, a gun is the ultimate equalizer for everyday carrying. Mostly, because it's really hard to conceal a bazooka in the waistband of your shorts.

But, one other everyday carry tool that most people use as a backup weapon to a firearm, or in many cases it could be the only weapon that you carry, is a knife of some kind. And certainly, a knife is a formidable weapon, if it's the right knife, and if you know how to use it. So let's start with that first "if".

With a vast assortment of knives on the market, what features should you be looking for and which ones you should be looking to avoid when it comes to choosing an edged weapon for every carry, backup protection. Well, that's what we're here to find out.

Hello everyone, this is Jeff Anderson, editor for Modern Combat and Survival Magazine and executive director of the New World Patriot Alliance, with another podcast to help you better prepare for any threat you may face in your role as a protector and a patriot. With us today to talk about personal protection knives is famed martial artist and knife designer, Bram Frank.

Bram, welcome to the program.

Bram Frank: Thank you, Jeff. It's my honor to be here.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah, it's only taken about seven years I think, since I've been trying to get you into our network. You were introduced to us by a mutual friend of ours, but I'm really excited to finally get ... To tap into your knowledge in this, because you're ...

You've got such a foothold in this industry, in this area that we're going to be talking about, that I'm ... This was the area that I wanted to get you on and really start introducing you to our audience. So, really excited to have you here.

Listen everybody, if you haven't seen Bram before, most likely you have even whether you know it or not. But Bram is the founder of Common Sense Self Defense Street Combat. He's spent nearly 50 years training in the martial arts and holds an 8th Dan in Modern Arnis.

Over the course of his career he has done a variety of self defense instruction videos through companies like Paladin Press and Video Quest. But, he's also been featured in a lot of publications that I'm sure many of you have read.

Ranging from SWAT Magazine, to Guns & Ammo, Police Journal, and Tactical Knives, just to name a few.

Now, you can learn more about Bram, his products, and his training over at www.CSSDSC.com.

Okay, Bram, let's go ahead and get started in this. I've really been looking forward to this interview because ... We just got done talking with somebody else in this industry and it's really about how the blade isn't necessarily ... Like, the knife is not the weapon, it's really the tactics and everything you put behind it. But, having the right tool for the right job is a huge part of the self protection formula here.

So, when it comes to choosing the best weapon for having as a backup knife most people are going into two camps, either fixed blade or something like a combat folder. So, what I wanted to really do was, kind of really help educate people on the difference between those when they're choosing something.

I wanted to start off with fixed blade knives first. Before we get into what to look for in a fixed blade knife, when somebody is considering a self protection knife, when it comes to fixed blades, what are the pros and cons that people need to know about using that as a backup weapon? Or for any sort of a self protection tool?

Bram Frank:

Well, you know, a fixed blade can never fold on your fingers. That's its biggest advantage. You can't accidentally cut your fingers off unless you put your hand in front of the blade. I'm sure you're a firearms guy, so you'll understand, don't put anything in front of the muzzle you don't to shoot. The same thing goes true with a knife. Don't put your hand in front of the blade because you'd be an unhappy camper.

Now, with that said, the advantage of a fixed blade is it's always ready to deploy. Meaning that as long as I can access it, I can use it. I don't have to open it, I don't have to worry about did I engage it? Did the lock lock in? It's ready to be used.

One of the biggest problems with a fixed blade, believe it or not, when you said ... For me it's ... Again, I agree, the blade's not it, it's the handle. Because people go, "I'll just pick it up and go." Well, depending upon the handle material and the shape of the handle, you may go for it with sweat, with blood, with gloves, it may not come up in your hand. Then, if it's only partially out and you go to re-grab it, you could be an unhappy camper.

So, for me, one of the first things I would tell someone is if you're going to buy a knife, pick it up. Put it in your hand. Does it fit in your hand? Does it not slide out? Do you have a great grip on it? Because if you can't hold it, you can't use it.

I don't care how cool the blade is, how sharp, how dull, how pointy, how many spikes on it. If it won't fit in your hand, it's useless.

The other side of how it fits in your hand is, how does it fit in your clothing? So, when I try to pick out fixed blade, I need something that I can carry comfortably and won't get in the way. Because a lot of knives have really bad carry systems, so they get in the way of your groin, or when you sit down, you can't get it.

Because people always do, "Look, I'm standing up. I can carry this knife." Well, that's really nice, but most of us sit down, we move, we do stuff. So, part of it is, how does it fit on your person while you're actually moving?

So a lot of people, they go try the knife in their hands. You've seen lots of knife handles they're round, or they're oval. All of that will come out of your hand. I actually like some of the rubbery grips that I can squeeze. I like things that give me a little bite.

Things that are very smooth, under duress we lose fine motor skill, so we can't feel the differences in the handle. So if the handle won't tell you where your edge is, you could also have a problem. I like tools that tell me where is my edge, where's my backside.

So I want the knife handle, the fixed blade, to talk to me. Because under duress, I don't have time to think. If I'm just using it for chores, for what I call regular tactics. I'm cutting food, I'm cutting wood, I'm cutting leather, I'm doing a project, I have time to look at the blade and orient myself.

If we're talking about a self defense tool ... I refer to it more as a tool than a weapon, because I use ... A weapon technically something I only kill a person with. I don't actually do projects with. A scythe, spear, or dagger truly is a weapon. It has no practical purpose, so I always thought of an edged tool.

So I need my tool to tell me how to use it. Anybody who's picked up a screwdriver, that's why they have grooves in the handle that tells you what direction to grab. It's why hammers are oval and not round, so you can orient the head to what you're gonna hit. Saws have people ... and firearms. They only fit in your hand one way.

So, I like knives that do the same kind of thing. If you're going to buy a fixed blade, my first thing is check the handle. Second thing, if I have enough time to babble about it, would be the size of the blade. People want, you'll just [inaudible 00:07:25]. You don't need a military size knife for everyday carry. I mean, it'll work. But I don't need to be, this is the knife.

It should be no bigger than your folder. It should fit in your hand. Your fixed blade should not have too long an extension, so I don't get in the way because I'm doing self defense. I'm not dueling, I'm not having a war. I want something

that I can use. You want, again, if you know what a fixed blade size is, that's about it.

I would say no more than four to five inches of blade. You don't need any more than that in a daily carry because it's easy to put somewhere. Again, same kind of thing with a holster. You want something simple that holds it close to your body. You can put it on your gear, in your pockets, on your belt, switch it around. So that goes with some of the simple things I look for on fixed blade.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah. So you talked about some of the pros to it. As far as, you don't have to ... I think one of the biggest pros is you don't have to open it up. If you're locked up and grappling with somebody, a fixed blade, the blade is there. If you can get to the knife, if you can get it out, you can employ it. You don't have to try and raise it up at the same time.

Bram Frank: Right.

Jeff Anderson: What are some of the cons, maybe, of carrying a fixed blade as a backup tool?

Bram Frank: Well, the exact opposite was said, that I can't deploy it. It gets hung up. I have no place comfortably to put a holster, so I can't get to it. I don't trap this going to my holster. A lot of people in America, "Well, I own a gun, therefore I know how to use it." A lot of people carry knives and go, "Therefore I know how to use it."

A lot of them will practice cutting in the air, which is better than nothing. But they don't practice deploying. So when they go to get it, a lot of us who carry concealed with firearms, we learn to pull our clothing away, access our tool. Well, most people don't practice that with their edge tools. So under duress, trying to grab it out from wherever they put it, doesn't work.

Sometimes they grab, there's too much blade length to get into what I'm doing. Fixed blades, overall, have very few cons except for those kind of things. Because to use it, once I got it out, even if I don't use the sharp edge it's a hunk of steel, I can move you out of the way.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah.

Bram Frank: If it's in my hand and there's no question it's gonna fold. Some of the cons, again, are what's the structure of the blade? [inaudible 00:10:05] nobody's used kitchen knives, unlike my son-in-law, who he can't tell one knife from another. So my daughter won't let him anywhere near the knives.

So he calls and he goes, "Dad, she won't let me get there." I said, "Do you know what the knives are for?" "No." "That's why Rachael won't let you anywhere near the knives and won't let you anywhere near the tactical knives." Because

blade shapes affect how you use them, that's why all kitchen knives have different shapes. They're better for some things.

So in a fixed blade, you want to pick the best blade for quick cutting, easy access, maybe a little point. The con maybe being, you didn't pick the right blade for an application. Con could be, again, weight. Sometimes fixed blades, because of the amount of steel if they're production ones, they're too heavy in your hand. You get tired, your wrist gets tired, you can't access quickly.

Sometimes on fixed blades, again we're getting ready to talk about handles, the handles may be too small, too short for you to get a great grip under duress. So, it's not a lot of cons, but there are some ... and guards. A lot of fixed blades, believe it or not, don't come with guards.

I know people say don't have a guard on your knife because it'll catch in your clothing. I tell people, obviously, you've never used it against a human being under duress. You want a guard to make sure you don't slide up onto the blade. So a lot of fixed blades that are made, have no guards. They have no way to keep you from slipping. That's a con into itself. Because I guarantee under duress, people think about it coming out of your hand, it's also going up the blade.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah, especially if you have like blood and sweat and things like that, that can make it even more slippery and make it-

Bram Frank: Right.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah, yeah.

Bram Frank: Right, yeah.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah and I think the other thing, going back to how you differentiate a ... You call it a tool, because a weapon is like a murder weapon. That has like even the psychological framework behind it. So maybe even for legal reasons, a fixed blade put in front of a jury can look like it's a true weapon. As opposed to a folder, which look less ominous and might be maybe more of a legal standing. Maybe give you a little bit more legal boost behind it as well.

Bram Frank: Yeah, absolutely. I tell people, battle one is surviving. Battle two is the courtroom where if you have the Predator 5 knife in your hand, they're gonna go, "Who were you thinking you were gonna kill?" I don't know if you know Michael [inaudible 00:12:35], he always jokes about making me a pink knife.

We just started making some pink knives because I'd rather walk into court with a little itty bitty pink folder. Everybody laugh at me and go, "That's what you used?" That's what I also do, I tell people carry the smallest blade you can,

which is why my fixed blades are only four inches. Because four inches or less, people go, "That's all you carry with you?" Well, yeah.

Because if you carry, like I said a military style, they're gonna go, "Oh my god, who were you trying to kill? Godzilla?" No one believes you were the good guy. So yeah, how people look at things and names effect things.

Jeff Anderson:

Yeah, yeah. Good point. Okay, we're talking with Bram Frank of cssdsc.com about choosing the right personal protection knife for everyday carry. We started with fixed blades, which leaves us with the more common combat folder coming up next. But first, check out this special message.

Okay, we're back with Bram Frank of cssdsc.com. It's Charlie, Sierra, Sierra, Delta, Sierra, Charlie dot com. Which stands for, by the way, Common Sense Self Defense Street Combat. In other words, what really works in the street. We've been talking about choosing the best self-protection knife for a back up for self-protection and the pros and cons.

We already went over the fixed blade, so now we're coming up on the combat folders. Now, Bram, the combat folder is I think more of a staple. Especially, as a back up tool for concealed carry and things like that. A lot of guys now, and women, are carrying combat folders. Even if it's for utility purposes, but also for back up for self-protection.

So, just like we did with fixed blades, I want to know what do you see as the pros and cons of carrying a combat folder for self-protection?

Bram Frank:

I find a folder to be the optimal thing. I grew up, I've had a knife, a folder in my hand since I was four. My grandfather gave me the first one at four years old, so I'm bonded to folders. I think they're really convenient.

One of the cons of folders, not directly, is people don't understand tip up, tip down. Lots of people end up with what they call deep pocket clips. It puts the knife directly way down in your pocket and you have to recall, index by thumb. So if I have to stick way into my pocket, find the tool, pull out, flip it over, open it up, and go I'm already four beats off.

Tip up also means it can open in lots and lots of [inaudible 00:15:25]. Many people go, "Oh, but I can access." Under duress, I guarantee, you cannot get your hand into your pocket, stick your thumb in, find it, and get this thing out. If it accidentally opens, you're sticking your hand into the blade.

When I talk about tip up, it's a disaster to me. I'm amazed at lots of knives are made that way and people like to hide them. So that's one of the cons of a folder, how does it fit in your pocket. I have no other con. People go, it's too small.

As we were talking about fixed blade, I don't think too small is any issue, blade size. Because of where I cut you.

Jeff Anderson: Can you explain that because there might be people who don't understand tip up or tip down. It's important because of the way that the knife is gonna be carried and how it's going to. Realize that not everybody ... somebody might be listening to this and not watching the video of it. So if you could explain just what that means-

Bram Frank: Tip up means the butt of the knife is up out of your pocket. The hinge part, the pivot, is down in your pocket. If you opened it, the tip of the blade would actually be sticking up into your pocket, all right?

Tip down literally means the head of the knife is at the top of your pocket. If you open it, the blade is pointing down into your pocket. The clip on tip up is at the far end, at the butt end of the knife holding it in, so that one has to reach your hand into the pocket and gauge the tool, pull it out, and turn it over. Whereas, if it's tip down, the head of the knife is sticking up. You just pull up out of your pocket and it's in your hands.

I don't like tip up, as I said, for various reasons. I don't like it in case it accidentally opens. I don't like having to try to find it. Again, this goes for gross motor skills. I have to teach guys ... I don't teach lots of civilians. I have to teach guys who have uniforms on. Be they Law Enforcement, Security Law Enforcement, all the way up to Military.

Under duress, I have to be able to deploy the tool. Not miss the tool, not search for the tool. So it's a sign of gross motor skill and that's one of the, again, a pro and con for it. I need a tip down so I can pull this up out of my pocket without thinking. I don't want to have to reach into my pocket.

People go, it's better if it's deep in your pocket. You're getting it with the clip. It's not. It may look cool, it may look sexy to hide it in your pocket. It's a pain in the ass when you really have to access it under duress.

Some of the cons of, again, of folders, is the same handle issue. The handle doesn't stay in your hands, it's too small, it's not convenient. Again, when you pick out a folder ... I said how do we pick out a fixed blade. Make sure it's open, put it in your hand. How does it fit in your hand, does it feel right in forward and reverse grip. Does it make you say, I don't want to put it down. Because if it says that, you'll use it.

Otherwise, if it doesn't fit in your hand, you're gonna pull it under duress and just like the same way I said a fixed blade will come out or slip, so will a folder. It's even less [inaudible 00:18:56] for you up your hands. They're thinner, they're smaller, they're lighter, so it better fit your hands.

I know I'm sort of mixing pros and cons into the same thing here, but I want people to understand ergonomics, how it fits in your hand is more important than the blade shape. Again, accessibility, [inaudible 00:19:14] a holster and fixed blade. How does this sit in your pocket is very important under duress, not in perfect conditions.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah. You have your own line of knives and you've really put a lot thought into real world application of how your knives function for survivability. Because like you said, you're dealing with Law Enforcement, you're dealing with Military, people that are gonna have to depend on this to save their lives.

So what are some of the design functions that you think, especially when somebody is looking for a folder knife. Some of the design functions that you put in there to take into account accessibility, and under duress, and things like that?

Bram Frank: Well, I'm a shooter, so I believe in ... [inaudible 00:19:59] Glock used to laugh at me and said my guns are color coded for safety. Red guns don't shoot, blue guns are ... Like Glock Sim guns are tools for practice [inaudible 00:20:08]. Any other color is live.

Well, I've been trying to get firearm safety, so red is a safe [inaudible 00:20:15]. Or talk about what do I need, well I need to make sure I have a trainer to practice. You can practice, don't carry a knife.

My tools all sit in your pocket tip down and of course they come up and their hammers. I don't have to open them. I come up and I beat on you, because that's real. I panic, it comes up in my hand, and I go for it. I don't try to open it. I beat the snot out of you with it. That's why I own the [inaudible 00:20:41].

Well, the Ramp, which gives me trapping and hitting, also is kinetic opening. If I can touch it, it opens. My guys have to be able to just go for it, they touch it, they go, it's open. It closes in the same flow of combat.

The clip, I own the patent on fly clip, why? I don't know if you ever carried a pocket knife but you catch that bottom and the thing springs out. Well, I have a broad flat clip so that it presses everything against your pocket. It kills your pockets, you won't lose it. [inaudible 00:21:11].

I was having an interpersonal relationship with someone in a public restroom. Before this time, many years ago, I would never slide or put my face anywhere near a public restroom floor. Because it came out of my pocket and hit the floor, the two of us were sliding across a urinal stained floor to get to said knife before the other one did.

I learned that I never want it to pop out of my pocket again, which is why I have the world's first patented clip with a function in it [inaudible 00:21:41] on there.

But it's totally flat, it's very broad, it allows for accessing. It allows for reverse, the forward grip without taking your hand off of it. Also, indexing, I own the patent on indexing.

My tool, as you can see, has an odd shape. Again, it's firearms grip so that when it's in there, it can't come out of your hand. Through this side, you can see I only need three fingers. Just like you hold a firearm. My lock is on the back because it's never out of battery for you. You can always see where it is and as long as your fingers in the trigger, it can't close on your hand. That's important.

The other knives that comes out of it. You gotta turn it to unlock it. You have to do something. I like it where it's right there. My tool, trying to think of how to do it, cannot come out of your hands. It locks into my hands. That's important. I tell people, can you slide on it. The ramp also stops you going in.

Blade shape is not as important. I make this in different blade shapes. But my tools are knives with impact. They really are tools. I can hammer with them, I can PAC-MAN cut with them, because of the ramp. I want tools that you can use when you're stupid. Not knives you can use when you're smart. You don't get smart under duress.

Jeff Anderson: That's such a great thing.

Bram Frank: My guys use [inaudible 00:23:08]. Also, it's gotta be ... If you've ever worked in a kitchen, Chef cutting. People do big slashing motions. That works when I'm in Florida. I wear short sleeve shirts [inaudible 00:23:21].

But if I'm back home like in Vermont, I've got on long underwear, a shirt, a sweater, or sweatshirt and my jacket. It's slashing moves might only cut my jacket and my sweatshirt, didn't stop me. Whereas, when I do Chef cutting and I apply it and draw it through in small motions, I cut through my jacket, my sweatshirt, my sweater, and I cut through me.

I teach people the advantage of a pocket knife is, I can get in small and carry it where I want. Except for a few countries. Idiot places like Germany, and UK, and OZ of course where they deem that these are evil creatures. Especially, with locks. You can't carry them.

Oh, that's another thing. Locks, besides ergonomics of the handle, a lock is the most important feature because all you've got to lose is your fingers. So when you buy a folder, check the lock. Liner locks will not protect your fingers. I have a Marine Corps approved lock here. It's a dovetailed joint that goes into the back of the blade, so that you can put pressure against it and your okay. All right, so that's the important part.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah, it makes sense. The knife isn't going to help you as a blade if the blade is actually open. If it's closing in on your fingers, because it has a bad lock. That's a good point, yeah. Awesome.

Bram Frank: Yeah.

Jeff Anderson: So, Bram, thank you so much. [crosstalk 00:24:51]-

Bram Frank: I made it look-

Jeff Anderson: Oh, go ahead.

Bram Frank: No, no. I was just gonna say, that's one of the things. You just want to make sure to check everything out. You don't have to listen to me. You pick out what's best for you.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah.

Bram Frank: That's obviously what you [inaudible 00:25:02]. Find something they make that you want to carry.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah, awesome. Well, that definitely gives people some really good information to go out there when they're thinking about whether ... Either they're evaluating their own knife that they're using as a backup, or if they're looking to go out there and finally get a backup.

For whether you're firearm, or if you're gonna carry something. At least have something on you for self-protection. These are really great tips for people to go out and choose the right one. So, thank you very much for that.

Listen everybody, definitely go check out ... Bram has been well known for the design of his knives. As you can tell, it really is based upon real street combat and being able to save your life under duress. To be able to get to the knife, to be able to employ the knife, and to be able to use it to be able to save your life.

So go check it out over at www.cssdsc.com. Until our next Modern Combat and Survival broadcast, this is Jeff Anderson saying prepare, train, and survive.