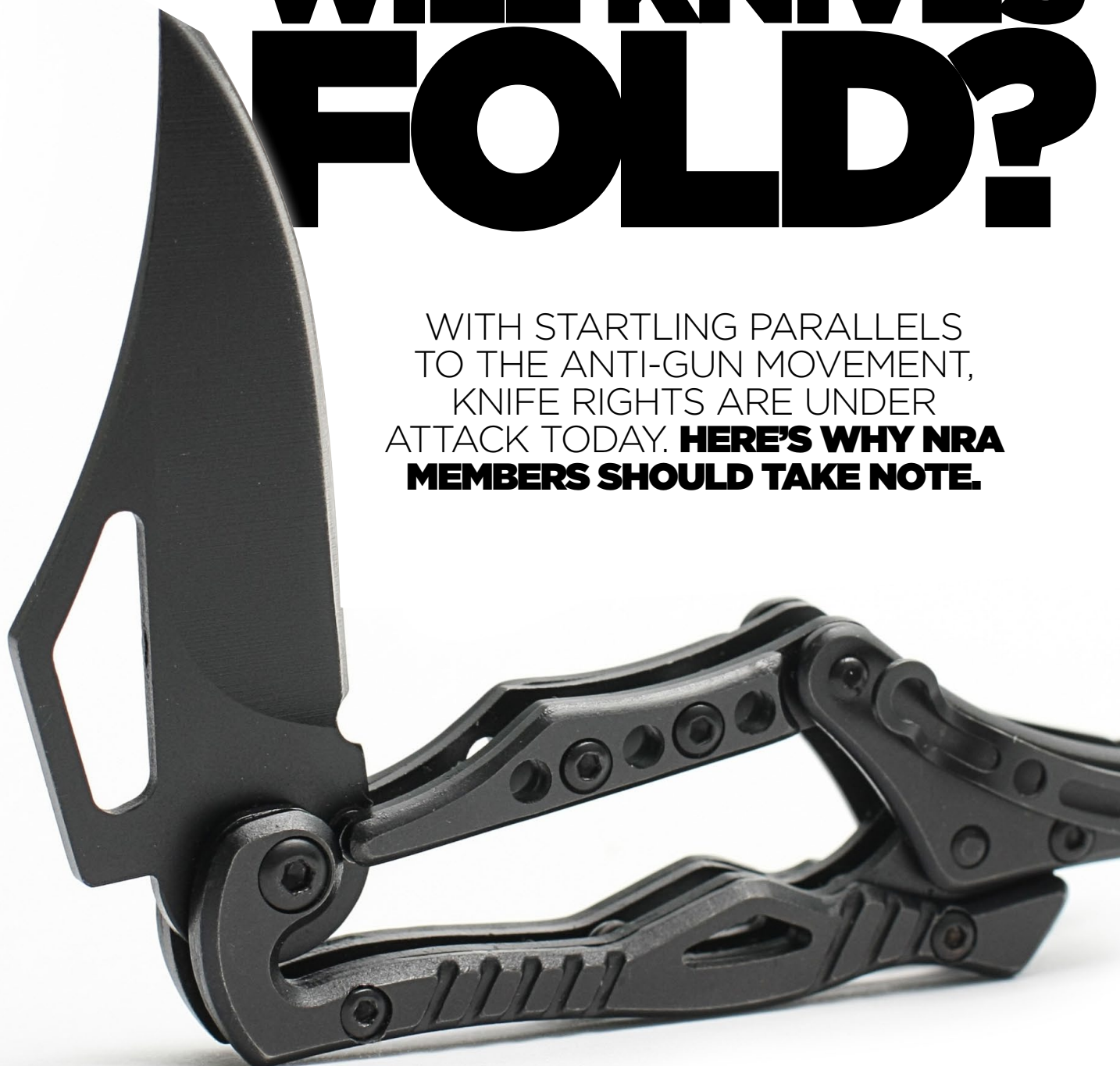


KNIFE RIGHTS

WILL KNIVES FOLD?

WITH STARTLING PARALLELS
TO THE ANTI-GUN MOVEMENT,
KNIFE RIGHTS ARE UNDER
ATTACK TODAY. **HERE'S WHY NRA
MEMBERS SHOULD TAKE NOTE.**



by BLAINE SMITH, *Associate Editor*

If you're like me, you never considered that the Second Amendment protects anything other than an individual right to keep and bear firearms.

Marksmanship was the impetus for the founding of the NRA—the nation's preeminent protector of the Second Amendment—in the late 1800s, while more recent years have seen a sustained effort by the NRA to protect the rights of the American people to possess guns for defense, hunting, hobby and sport.

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But consider this: The fight for knife rights is just as heated as any being waged on the firearm front.

As an NRA member, your efforts have already contributed to knife victories won.

In fact, nearly 27 years ago, the NRA recognized that the word “arms” is not restricted to firearms. The Oregon Supreme Court held, in *State v. Delgado* (1984), that a ban on carrying switchblade knives violated the defendant's state constitutional right to keep and bear arms. Robert Dowlut, then NRA Deputy General Counsel, filed a “friend of the court” brief on behalf of the NRA supporting the defendant.

So let us take a moment to learn how knife rights are important to Second Amendment freedom; how the NRA has already played an important role in furthering the goals of the knife-rights movement; and how a knife-rights organization based in Arizona has become a leading protector of knife rights in the U.S. while joining the NRA in ensuring protection of the Right to Keep and Bear *all* Arms.



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In The Beginning

MUCH LIKE LAWS banning firearms, which in their earliest incarnation were rooted in a slavery-era fear of blacks having the capacity to bear arms, knife restrictions in the U.S., too, were rooted in similar fears of armed blacks.

According to Doug Ritter, chairman of Knife Rights—a growing organization dedicated to protecting the rights of knife owners—the earliest restrictions on knives in the U.S. were laws against blacks possessing Bowie knives, which at the time were becoming popular and were perceived as a dangerous weapon.

The next great wave of knife restrictions came in the 1950s, Ritter said, as a result of Hollywood stirring fears of gang violence in the larger American cities. The symbols of out-of-control youths that were projected on the screen—such as switchblades—were subsequently outlawed by city councils and state legislatures as a misguided reaction to fears of rampant youth violence.

“That’s when the Federal Switchblade Act was passed,” Ritter said. This act, passed in 1958 and banning importation and interstate commerce in knives that opened automatically by pushing a button or by operation of gravity, “was opposed by the Eisenhower administration, but passed anyway because it was a feel-good, highly emotional, irrational reaction to some of the movies coming out of Hollywood at the time.”

“Hollywood essentially made the switchblade a sign of gang warfare; the political reaction as always was to irrationally ban switchblades,” he said. “It had little basis in reality—you only have to look at many of the laws that, for example, have a ban on switchblades except for hunting or fishing. So it really was entirely political. But unfortunately out of all that came the Federal Switchblade Act, which really put a damper on things because it made it so difficult—it made it impossible to import, and it made it very difficult to ship knives between states.”

This was in spite of the fact that restrictions on such knives were never proven to deter violence. Despite the fact that the violence seen in the movies of the time wasn’t as rampant as Hollywood would have the public believe. Despite the fact that a knife can easily be fashioned from

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just about any metallic or ductile material. Restrictions on knives only hindered the majority of knife owners who used them daily in work or part of their normal routine. Criminals, of course, remained armed.

“Over the years,” Ritter said, “you might say that knife owners have been experiencing a death by a thousand cuts.”

If this sounds much like the battles that gun owners have fought for the last decades, that’s true. In fact, gun and knife regulations—and the battles surrounding the passage of each—share many common

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motivations and actors. And as the battle for one goes, so goes the other.

“As the country has become more urbanized,” Ritter said, “and as politicians have been frustrated by the success of the Second Amendment forces in regard to firearms,

they’ve often turned to knives.

“There’s very little rationality in these knife restrictions any more than there is in firearms. It’s the same fight. It’s why we say we’re like the NRA for knife owners, because we’re really fighting the same fights, and we’re fighting them with much the same strategies.”

The Battle Begins

IT WAS AN article that appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2006 that would prove the turning point for today’s knife rights movement.

Ritter happened upon an article on the front page of the *Journal B*

section entitled “Deadly pocketknives become a \$1 billion business.”

“This was not an opinion piece, this was supposedly a journalistic endeavor. It was all about these terrible tactical knives,” Ritter said. “And it was like every bad article you’ve read about assault rifles, but you could substitute ‘tactical knife’ for ‘assault rifle,’ it was horrible. And nobody responded in a timely manner.”

The *Journal* article was quick to demonize tactical knives due to their appearance—bemoaning their “menacing-looking” blades and ergonomic grips—and went to great lengths to compare them to the boogeyman of the knife world, the switchblade, due to the fact that most can be opened quickly with a single hand.



“The one knife used to illustrate the original article, Buck Knives’ diminutive Metro, is essentially a bottle opener with a tiny 1 1/8-inch blade,” Ritter said. “What made it ‘tactical’ and such a deadly weapon that it should be regulated in the opinion of these fanatics is the safety feature of a locking blade, the safety and convenience feature of one hand opening and an ‘ergonomic’ handle.”

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**“THEY THINK MOST OF US
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— FORMER NRA PRESIDENT
SANDY FROMAN



The article also accused manufacturers of “weaponizing” the pocketknife, and looked askance at the marketing tactics of companies that produce such products. They even raised the specter of the 9/11 attacks, pointing to the conclusion of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks in 2004 that the hijackers used small knives, and not box cutters, to hijack the four airliners.

Yet the only support the *Journal* could muster for its thesis that tactical knives are “deadly” was the story of a Bakersfield man who used a knife to murder a woman, and the case of an Atlanta Marine who used a tactical knife to kill one mugger and wound another when he was accosted by five men armed with a shotgun and a handgun.

By way of statistical evidence, the *Journal* trotted out a monthly bulletin by the FBI released in March of that year that warned law enforcement to keep watch for “emerging threats” posed by knives. Flimsier still, the article noted that between 2000 and 2004, knife-related crime rose a mere half of a percentage point (note that no statistics on crime related specifically to tactical-style knives are available).

“If it weren’t such a decidedly serious matter, it would be hilarious. But, there’s nothing funny about this agenda,” Ritter said. “And I had an epiphany, which was ‘There’s no NRA for knife owners; we need an NRA for knife owners.’”



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“Because I had been traveling overseas, I’d been to Europe and England, I’d seen what had happened to knife owners there and the absurd restrictions and the way people looked at you when you pulled out a pocketknife, and I didn’t want the United States to end up like England,” he said. “And I could see that we were headed that way,



and that was what precipitated the founding of Knife Rights.”

So in 2006, Knife Rights was formed, and none too soon. In 2009, Knife Rights faced its first big fight, which was also its first big victory—a victory won by a coalition of sportsman’s and industry groups, including the American Knife & Tool Institute, Knife Rights and the NRA.

“U.S. Customs tried to essentially redefine what a switchblade was back in 2009,” he said, “and that resulted in, eventually, the passage by Congress of a fifth exception to the Federal Switchblade Act to specifically exempt one-hand-opening and assisted-opening folding knives from the definition of what a switchblade is. That served as a catalyst for a lot of what has followed.

“That was Knife Rights’ first big fight, and really accelerated our growth and our plans to become the second front in defense of the Second Amendment,” Ritter said.

NOT ONLY IS KNIFE RIGHTS BATTLING IN THE LEGISLATIVE ARENA, THE GROUP IS ALSO ACTIVE IN THE COURTS ...

Since that time, Knife Rights has continued to build on this success. Last year, the nation’s first knife preemption law was passed in Arizona, blocking local governments from passing knife ordinances more restrictive than state law. This year, state knife

preemption laws were passed in Utah and New Hampshire. Also in New Hampshire, Ritter said, Knife Rights was able to get rid of the ban on switchblades, dirks, daggers and stiletos.

And in the coming year, Knife Rights plans to continue its effort to pass preemption laws in various states, a tactic that has proven successful for the NRA.

“After 12-some years on the NRA Board and some years before that,” said Todd Rathner, NRA Board member and director of legislative affairs for Knife Rights, “I’ve seen the NRA be unbelievably successful in passing firearms preemption laws, and it seemed like the exact solution we needed to protect knives. And so we’re pursuing a very aggressive knife law preemption agenda.

“We’re essentially following the model that the NRA has already shown is a success by passing knife preemption model legislation in Arizona

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first, then in Utah and New Hampshire, and now taking it to as many as 10 other states this next session.”

Not only is Knife Rights battling in the legislative arena, the group is also active in the courts—this summer, Knife Rights filed a federal civil rights lawsuit to stop New York City District Attorney Cyrus Vance from interpreting New York state’s vague knife law as outlawing common pocketknives as gravity knives and switchblades.

Under Vance’s leadership, many knife retailers in the city—including Home Depot and Ace Hardware—have been forced to pay millions to the District Attorney’s office to avoid prosecution and forfeit their

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inventory of many common pocketknives, Ritter said, while hundreds of New Yorkers have been arrested for carrying simple pocketknives for work and utility.

The frightening aspect here, both Ritter and Rathner noted, is that

when a person is arrested for a minor weapons charge—simply for carrying a pocketknife—their gun rights are, in turn, placed in peril.

“What DA Vance is doing in New York is essentially following in Bloomberg’s footsteps,” Rathner said. “Since Bloomberg has attacked guns, Vance has decided to attack knives, and we’ve got to be there to fight this before it gets out of hand and spreads.”

A Second Amendment Army

IN THE END, as NRA Board member, former NRA president and Knife Rights Board of Advisors member Sandy Froman points out, knife rights and gun rights in America are inextricably linked because in the end, they're both about freedom.

"The leftist faction in our country rejects individual rights," Froman said. "They want us to be docile subjects of government, taken care of

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by a nanny state run by elitist intellectuals who tell us what is safe for us to do. They think most of us are too stupid or too dangerous to own guns and knives."

And just as knife owners who may not own guns are eager to support protection of the Second

Amendment when they learn it applies to bearing knives, the knife rights movement seeks the support of gun owners and NRA members to continue its fight.

"The only reason we still have our guns is because the NRA stood guard over our Second Amendment rights for the past 140 years. Knife Rights is the NRA for knife owners, representing grassroots knife owners like you and me. It's dedicated to protecting our rights to own, use and collect the world's oldest tools," Froman said. "In addition to being useful tools, knives are also 'arms,' and fall squarely within the meaning of the Second Amendment.

"From our household kitchen knives to our constant companions—our pocketknives—to hunting blades to the combat knives our soldiers carry into battle, millions of Americans use knives every day for lawful purposes," she said. "Let's keep it that way." 🇺🇸

For more on the Knife Rights organization, visit www.kniferights.org.