

A Basic Manual on Knife Throwing

By J. B. Wood

Illustrated by Roy Pelz

The author of this manual, Mr. J. B. "The Old Man of the Hills" Wood (Kentucky) is a well known writer on firearms and the outdoors. His articles appear in "Gun Digest", "Guns", "Gun World", "Guns and Ammo", "Shooting Times", "Better Camping" and many other sportsman magazines.

Mr. Roy Pelz (Indiana) is an artifact collector as well as a fine artist. As Mr. Pelz is not a member of our association, we owe him a deep and sincere vote of thanks for donating his time and effort toward this manual.

A Basic Manual on Knife Throwing is one of a series published by The AMERICAN MOUNTAIN MEN for the education of our members or others who are interested in the basic skills needed by the early Mountain Men.

KNIFE-THROWING

First of all, if your only knife is an original, authentic Bowie type, or a big "Arkansas Toothpick" which you have carefully made for yourself, don't risk throwing it. Riveted staghorn or bone handles and slim brass guards do not fare well under repeated impact into wood. If your knife was not specifically made for throwing, get or make one which has the right features.

The blade should be at least 1/4 inch thick at the base and should be twice as long as the handle. The blade tang should pass all the way through the handle and if possible should also be of one piece with the hilt cross-piece. Whether part of the blade or separate, the cross-piece should project less than the usual type. The less it sticks out, the less chance of it becoming bent or broken. Most true throwing knives have no cross piece at all. Bone or staghorn is fairly tough for handles, but rivets tend to loosen

and even these sturdy materials may split after much throwing. If bone or staghorn is used, the best method of attachment is a hole drilled lengthwise for a narrowed tang, the tang threaded at the pommel for a nut which can be tightened as necessary when it loosens. Nylon and fiberglass are ideal handle materials and are almost indestructible. Their modern appearance can be somewhat masked by staining a darker color.

The blade may be any shape, but for a forceful throw must not be double-edged, a fact which will be obvious when we get to the proper throwing grip.

Right now, let's lay to rest an old myth. You have no doubt seen some self-styled "expert" balance a knife across his finger at the hilt and pronounce it "perfect" for throwing. This, to put it mildly, is a lot of bull! A knife which will balance in this way is actually more difficult to control. The best throwing knife has a blade which is heavier than the handle, or vice versa. It doesn't really matter which as long as one end is heavier.

The proper throwing grip is with the blunt edge toward the palm, the point lying near the base of the thumb, the thumb lying flat on the blade, pointing toward the hilt. The fingertips grip in a row on the opposite flat of the blade. If this sounds confusing, consult illustrations # 1 and 2.

Holding the knife by its point with thumb and forefinger, a grip that is necessary with double-edged blades for obvious reasons (See illustration #3), results in a total lack of power for all but the heaviest knives. In a serious situation a light knife thrown like this might make an opponent mad enough to really hurt you!

We have all seen fantastic long-distance throws in scenes from films and on television. These, of course, are another myth. Around fifteen feet would be the maximum range for good control. Beyond this, point first impact is a matter of luck. Also, because of air resistance and the necessary adjustment in throwing force for control, much power is lost at the longer ranges.

Between you and the target, a knife should make exactly one half turn. This half-turn is controlled by two factors: Angle of release and force of throw. Balancing these two elements is the thing that will require the most practice. At maximum range the release angle should actually be no angle at all, the knife horizontal, handle pointed straight at the target. As the distance decreases, the angle should increase. At very close range, the handle at release point might be vertical or perhaps actually pointing toward the rear. See illustrations #4,5,& 6.

You might think that the horizontal release would give a quicker turn-over, since the elevated angle requires 1/4 to 1/2 more turn, but it doesn't work out that way for one good reason: Air resistance. With the horizontal release there is very little of it and the knife travels handle-first for a longer distance before starting to turn. With the angled release both the air resistance and the wrist action help to start the turn earlier.

Force of throw also has a direct effect on the turn-over, in an obvious manner. The shorter time a knife is in the air, the less time to turn. Therefore a powerful throw at very close range is difficult to achieve. I prefer to always throw with as much force as possible and to adjust the release angle to the distance.

Quite a bit of body action is necessary for a powerful throw. Assuming that you are right-handed, start with your weight on the right foot, arm drawn-back past the right ear, the knife vertical, handle pointed downward. While snapping the arm forward to a straight, extended position, take a long step with the left leg toward the target, leaning forward and transferring the weight to the left leg. Let the throwing

arm "follow through", the hand lightly striking the left leg near the knee. See illustrations # 7 & 8.

My own pre-throw stance is fairly ridiculous-looking, as I balance for a moment on the right leg, the left foot slightly off the ground. Since artist Roy Pelz couldn't keep from laughing long enough to sketch it, we have omitted this illustration. Anyhow, perhaps it's better that you find your own most effective and comfortable position.

The gymnastics of the throw may occasionally evince a snicker from some onlookers, but their derisive chuckles will likely cease when they see your knife quivering in the target. If not, you can always comment, as you work the blade loose from a two-inch penetration, that you haven't tried any live targets lately.

Unfortunately, there are no "tricks" that I can pass along which will make you an instant expert at knife throwing. That critical balance between release angle and throwing force can only be attained by persistent practice with a suitable knife. Once you have mastered a particular knife, don't assume that you can do as well with any other knife. Your basic skill will be an advantage, but you'll find that each knife has its own throwing characteristics. Well, good luck and do not be discouraged if your first few dozen throws land handle first! Keep trying.

Two views of the proper grip for throwing a single-edged knife: 1. the full length of the thumb,



1.

2. three fingers on the blade.



2.

3. The proper grip for throwing a double-edged knife. With this hold, not as much power can be delivered.



3.

The three release points- 4. is close range. Released from this angle, turn-over will occur more rapidly.



4.

5. is medium range.



5.

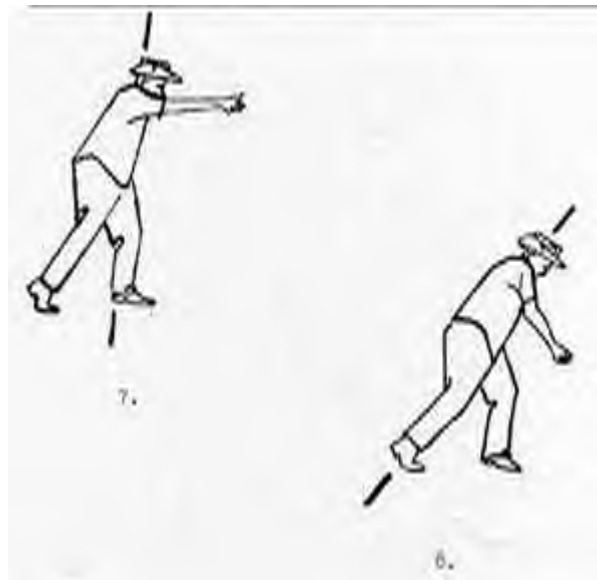
6. Long-range release point. With knife released

horizontally, it will travel for some distance handle first before starting turn-over. This is also the maximum power throw.



6.

- 7. Body and arm position at moment of release.
- 8. Follow through. With a hard throw, hand should end by lightly striking the left knee.



7.

8.

[Back](#)