



FALLKNIVEN SURVIVAL KNIVES, GOOD TO GO

🕒 June 11, 2015 👁 7,125 Views

By James Morgan Ayres

From the May 2014 issue of SOF

When compared to the general run of so called “survival knives,” Fallkniven survival knives stand out like lean, tough paratroopers in a crowd of pimply faced, overweight, black-suited mall Ninjas.

Over the past 15 years, I’ve done in-depth field evaluations of over a thousand knives for Blade magazine and other publications, and for three of my books: The Tactical Knife, first and second editions; and Survival Knives, Selection and Use. During that same period, I taught wilderness and urban survival and escape and evasion. That teaching helped form the basis of my testing, as did my prior military experience and decades of travel in Asia, South America, the Mid-East and Europe, much of that time living and working in primitive conditions. During those years, Fallkniven survival knives proved their real world value.



The Fallkniven F1 was adapted by the Swedish Air Force in 1995 and is part of the standard kit of the JAS 30 Gripen fighter. In 2000, the F1, S1 and A1 were tested at the Naval Air Warfare Center at Patuxent River, MD. The F1 and S1 were accepted for use by Marine and Navy aircrews. The A1, although an exceptional knife that scored highest on all tests, was not accepted for aircrew use because it was too large to fit into the aircrew survival vests. However, the A1 is used by many US special operations personnel and is an issue item for Russian special operations forces.

Fallkniven is a relatively small, family owned company founded over 25 years ago by Peter Hjortberger with the goal of making the best possible knives. All of Fallkniven's development work is done near the Arctic Circle in Sweden. Rather than making mass-produced, cheap knives for every soldier, Mr. Hjortberger made knives for elite military personnel. Although Fallkniven's civilian market is large, they have been successful in reaching that market, in that their base of sales is to elite military units all over the world.

My approach to testing survival knives is to use them as they might be used in extreme conditions, and as daily use knives. All three Fallkniven survival knives are useful on a daily basis, as well as being reliable in an emergency. If your survival knife isn't useful for everyday chores, and isn't close to hand, odds are you won't have it when you need to survive. Using survival knives for daily chores rather than packing them away with your other gear will build familiarity and expertise.



Imagine cutting through, say, a willow shaft with a razor sharp knife you've only used a couple of times. Perhaps you didn't realize how easy it would be to cut willow and you apply so much force that you cut through the shaft and deep into your thigh where the shaft is braced, severing your femoral artery. Now you've got a major artery spurting out your life's blood. A moment ago you were working to solve a survival problem by making a hunting weapon, a spear, bow, arrow or throwing stick. Now you have a life-threatening emergency and only seconds to resolve it before you lose consciousness, bleed out and die.

Less dramatically, if you're not familiar with your most basic and important tool, you might waste precious time learning how to use your knife to split open wet wood to get to the dry center and how to shave wood curls and scrape wood dust for tinder, while the temperature is dropping, snow is falling and night coming on. Woodwork of all kinds will build the skills to safely and efficiently craft primitive tools and weapons and build shelters. Cutting meat will familiarize you with the processes required to dress game. Cutting vegetables in your kitchen will help prepare you to deal with foraged wild food. Deconstructing a cement block wall, and other urban destruction exercises, will prepare you deal with, say, an earthquake-collapsed building.

Here's a tip: by using the spine instead of the edge and pressing with the point rather than stabbing, you can grind through mortar, chip brick, concrete and stone without damaging point or edge. By prying slowly but strongly, instead of yanking, you can get through a stone, concrete block or brick wall without breaking your knife. I've taught dozens of students, many of them teenagers, who could break a bowling ball in a rubber room, to do exactly this.



Fällkniven knives are tested for breaking strength by the Division of

Solid Mechanics at Luleå University of Technology, and they publish the results on their website. This is a good thing. In addition to breaking data, Fallkniven provides on their website the rationale for the testing and the methods used. By doing this, they eliminate much of the guesswork that goes into evaluating their knives, and establish a standard of reliability. I know of no other company that has their knives tested by an independent scientific organization, and publishes the results. Mr. Hjortberger says they build the strongest stainless steel knives in the world. I don't doubt him.

A good survival knife must have three qualities:

- It must be sharp.
- It must be strong enough for the task at hand.
- It must be with you.

Of the three, with you is the most important.

The Fallkniven survival knives are highly portable, scary sharp and extremely strong. Each comes with your choice of a leather or Zytel sheath. All have comfortable, non-slip Kraton handles, tough high-tech stainless blades, and convex blade geometry that enables them to be batonned or chopped through tough materials without damage, including auto body steel. Yes, they must be sharpened after field dressing a Honda. They also cut meat and other soft materials like slicing through whipped cream with a razor. You can use any of these knives to split a four-inch chunk of seasoned oak to make kindling, dress out a deer and cut chops to cook over the fire, and the blade will still shave hair from your arm. We've done it, many times. The spines of the blades have sharp shoulders so that they will throw a good spark with a firesteel. They have no useless features such as choils, which prevent using the edge at the point of maximum leverage, or oversized double guards that get in the way when doing utility work or saw teeth that won't saw anything. Fallkniven designs as are sleek and purpose directed as an F-22 Raptor, and they do their job as efficiently as the Raptor razors through the night sky. There is no excess fat on these knives and nothing needs to be added. These are survival knives that are fit to survive with.



Fallkniven F1

Over the years, the F1 has become an icon in the survival, military and bushcraft communities. Due to its smaller size, the F1 fulfills the "with you" requirement easily and is popular with covert operators and survivors around the world.

I worked with an early model F1 in VG10 steel for over 12 years.

During that time I used it as an all around utility knife and as a teaching tool in wilderness and urban survival and escape and evasion classes. The F1 was often the knife I loaned to students who didn't have a proper survival knife and who lacked knife-handling skills. The non-slip grip is secure and comfortable in the hand. The drop point blade design is adaptable to every form of work. Its full, spine-to-edge convex grind supports a fine edge that slips through soft and hard materials with ease. The full tang protrudes slightly from the back of the handle, which makes it easy to baton lengthwise.

That old F1 was, and still is, tough. During field work, it was batonned through auto bodies, used to scrape through cinder block and brick walls, punch through plaster and lath and pry open locked doors. The only damage we have seen in over 12 years of hard use is a small chip from the point when a student was working through a concrete block wall a bit too energetically. The chip was barely noticeable and a little bit of stonework smoothed the divot into the blade, as you can see in the accompanying photo.

With that same F1, we processed dozens of small game animals (rabbits, squirrels, lizards, snakes and so on) two deer, countless fish, tri-tip roasts, chickens, ducks and enough slabs of ribs that laid end to end would go from Los Angeles to San Francisco. My students and I used it to make quickie shelters and hobo stoves, to split kindling, make survival bows and arrows, spears, rabbit sticks and traps, and to open coconuts and forage other wild food. That F1 was my choice of fixed blade for many extended overseas journeys, especially in mixed rural and wilderness areas and in countries where larger knives would attract unwanted attention. Its plain appearing blade and general non-threatening appearance are a definite plus in such areas. Its small size lends itself to discreet carry, even in cities. It is no heavier than many tactical folders, while being stronger than any folder by an order of magnitude.

Although that old F1 was still perfectly functional, I recently retired it and replaced it with two new F1s: one with a laminated, 3G powder steel blade, and the other with a laminated VG10 blade. I've been doing an extended field evaluation of them over the past year or so, alternating between the two new models. I've not yet decided which I prefer. In terms of design, they are the same as the old familiar and comfortable F1. Edge holding of both is improved, with the 3G seeming to hold an edge longest, although it's hard to say for sure because neither needs much sharpening. Both laminated blades seem to take a sharper edge. The breaking tests done by Lulea University show that the laminated blades are 20 percent stronger than solid VG10 blades, with well over 200 pounds of lateral strength. Although we never broke the VG10 model, the added strength is welcome. You just never know. Both models, the laminated VG10 or laminated 3G powder steel, make the F1 a better knife. Both are stronger and hold their edges longer than the original. Both will do everything the older version did.

Last year I traveled with a group of Yurok nomads in Turkey as they moved their tents from low to high elevations to pasture their 250 goats. From time to time I loaned the laminated VG10 F1 to Ibrahim, the headman of his clan, to slaughter and dress livestock, and for some other chores, including cutting cardboard to use for extra insulation. He was much impressed by its performance. I used it for various kinds of woodwork, to open a bushel of walnuts, for peeling fruit, cutting meat and to help slice the blocks of goat cheese that provide most of the clan's income. During a month of daily use, I didn't touch the blade to a stone and only stropped it on a leather belt every few days, which was enough to keep it sharp enough to shave hair from my arm.

As a self-defense knife, F1's four-inch blade is perfectly adequate, if you know what you're doing. When you consider material and soft tissue compression, the four-inch blade of the F1 provides sufficient penetration for most purposes. The F1 is small and light enough to be the knife you always have with you,

is sharp enough for any job, and tough enough to survive with. The F1 is often the expert's choice and is always the beginner's friend.

F1 Specifications:

Total length: 210 mm (8.3")

Blade length: 97 mm (3.8")

Blade thickness: 4.5 mm (0.18"), tapered

Tang: full, broad, protruding

Weight: 150 g (6 oz.)

Steel: Laminated 3G or VH10

Blade hardness: 62 HRC

Handle: Thermorun

Sheath: Leather or Zytel

MSRP: 3G: \$352.95; VG10 laminated: \$197 <http://www.fallkniven.com/en>

Fallkniven S1

The S1 is the middle-sized model of the survival trio. Compared to the F1, the S1 provides a little over an inch more of blade, which allows for deeper penetration and more cutting edge. Its thicker blade is stronger, supplying well over 350 pounds of lateral breaking strength, while still being small and light enough to be worn in an aircrew survival vest. Like the F1, it might be manageable for everyday civilian wear, depending on your dress and general environment. The difference in overall length is only an inch and a half and it weighs less than an ounce more. Rather than being convexly ground from spine to edge, the S1's blade, like the A1's, has a convex saber grind. This grind, along with thicker stock, provides more blade strength while sacrificing little or nothing in deep cutting ability.

During six months of extensive field evaluations for my new books, I used an S1 with a laminated VG10 blade in desert, mountain, riverine, woodland, coastal and urban environments. With it, I deconstructed a brick and plaster wall; made a survival bow and arrows, two survival shelters and a hobo stove; slaughtered and butchered a goat; cleaned and dressed a few birds and rabbits; and used it with a baton to split stove kindling daily for two months in a remote cabin in the Stara Plaina mountains of Bulgaria. Due to the daily chore of splitting about a bushel of wood, every few days I stropped it 10 strokes on a piece of foam-backed 1200-grit paper and 10 strokes on a leather belt. That brought the edge back to shaving sharp and kept it suitable for general food preparation or emergencies.

I'm currently traveling with an S1 and finding it to be a good, all around compromise between the compact F1 and the larger A1. It lacks the chopping ability and the overall muscularity of the A1 and can't be tucked away in clothing quite as inconspicuously as an F1. But that's hair splitting. The S1 is growing on me as a daily use, "have it with me at all times" knife. The extra inch of blade is often welcome, and who knows, maybe one day the extra strength will be needed.

S1 Specifications:

Total length: 9.7" (247 mm)

Blade length: 5.1" (130 mm)

Blade thickness: 0.2" (5 mm)

Tang: Full, broad, protruding

Weight: 6.7 oz (190 g)

Steel: Laminated VG10

Blade hardness: 59 HRC

Handle: Thermorun

Sheath: Leather or Zytel

MSRP: \$270.95

<http://www.fallkniven.com/en>

Fallkniven A1

The A1 is the big dog of this Fallkniven survival trio. It's a door-kicking, wall-busting, deep-cutting, bone-chopping blade. With its almost ¼" thick, full tang laminated VG10 blade, it'll lever open a locked door as well as a short pry bar, chop as well as a 12-in. machete, crack a coconut like a ball-peen hammer and hold its edge while you dress out all the deer in the forest. With over 500 pounds of lateral breaking strength, it is strong almost beyond reason. Its weight and excellent balance provide chopping ability way above what would be normal for its size. Its convex grind allows fine work, such as skinning and dressing small critters for the pot and removing spines and peeling the skin from nopal cactus pads.

I used an A1 every day for five months and it did all these things – well; OK, I didn't skin all the deer in the forest. But I could have if they had made themselves available. Every week or so I stropped the edge on a piece of 1200-grit carbon paper on top of a foam pad for 10 strokes, then 20 strokes on a leather belt, which, like its smaller brothers, kept it shaving sharp. At my direction, one of my students batonned an A1 into a tree and suspended his 245 pounds from it. The blade didn't even flex.

The A1 is the knife to choose if you're headed for the field. For me, and I suspect for most, it's too much knife to tote on daily rounds. Before leaving on my current journey, I debated which Fallkniven to take—the old favorite F1, the compromise S1 or the big gun A1. I travel as light as possible according to my circumstances, and couldn't bring all three, or even two. Well, I suppose I could have brought the F1 or S1 for daily carry and packed the A1 for field use. But I'm a minimalist at heart and my training in my formative years was to carry nothing extra, no "just in case" gear. Since I was planning to spend most of my time in mixed rural and urban areas, and very little time in wilderness, and because I wanted a knife I could conveniently and comfortably have on my person at all times, I left the A1 in my knife locker at home. Turns out, I really missed it when unexpectedly called upon to build a demonstration winter survival shelter in Bulgaria.

It takes about twice as long to build an emergency shelter with a small blade as it does with a larger blade. For survival purposes, big knives are better than little knives on all points except carry ability. A well

^

designed big knife like the A1 will do everything a little knife will do, and do it faster. Period. The only downside to big knives is that they're not as portable or carry-able as small knives. That's a pretty big downside when it comes to everyday carry for the civilian. There's an old saying: the best survival knife is the one you have with you. The A1 is a terrific knife, and really it isn't all that big; but if I wasn't going to have it with me, it wouldn't do me much good in an actual emergency. It's not really appropriate wear for, say, lunch in downtown Istanbul.

The person in uniform, or civilian in the wilderness or an area where he can carry the bigger blade, is better off with the six-inch A1 than a smaller blade, simply because it will do more work faster. The first time I used an A1 to make a survival shelter, which was immediately after making a demonstration survival shelter with the F1, I went through a stand of mixed birch and pine saplings like a beaver on espresso and finished the job in about half the time it had taken with the F1, and about half the time it would have taken with many other six-inch bladed knives. Due to its convex grind, excellent geometry and balance, the A1 slashed through those saplings in one swipe, and in general performs way above the level of most six-inch blades.

A1 Specifications:

Total length: 280 mm (11")

Blade length: 160 mm (6.3")

Blade thickness: 6 mm (0.24")

Tang: Full, broad, protruding

Weight: 305 g (12 oz.)

Steel: Laminated VG10

Blade hardness: 59 HRC

Handle: Kraton®

Sheath: Leather or Zytel

MSRP: 294.95

Any of these three Fallkniven knives would well serve a soldier, operator or contractor in the field. The F1 is small and light enough to be barely noticeable. The S1 is only slightly larger and provides a bit more functionality, and more strength. The size and weight of the A1 is negligible on load bearing equipment, on a belt, or in a day bag, and will serve as what a friend calls a "war knife." They're all good to go, and a selection should be made according to personal needs.

In addition to survival knives, Fallkniven makes a broad assortment of fixed blades and folders, including the PXL, a sleek tactical folder that James Bond would carry, and maybe does.

<http://www.fallkniven.com/en>

Share this:

[Facebook](#)[Email](#)[Print](#)

