

GUNNY & SOG HIT THE BEACH



LEFT: The Creed, this issue's cover knife, is reportedly Gunny's fixed blade of choice from SOG Specialty Knives. For more on it, see page 7.

RIGHT: R. Lee Ermey—a.k.a. The Gunny—is the new spokesperson for SOG Specialty Knives. (photo courtesy of Bill Rogin)

R. LEE "THE GUNNY" ERMEY BRINGS GUN-HO GRIT TO HIS ROLE AS SOG SPOKESPERSON

When we first heard SOG Specialty Knives & Tools had signed R. Lee Ermey—a.k.a. "The Gunny"—as its spokesperson, we knew we had to interview him for *BLADE*® readers. Even when we saw *Tactical Knives* beat us to the punch, we still had to talk with the colorful retired Marine staff sergeant and honorary gunnery sergeant to get his take on SOG and knives in general. And he did not disappoint.

First off, why did he want to be a spokesperson for SOG in addition to his similar duties with Glock?

"The two companies I've involved myself with, as far as I'm concerned, have the best products that money can buy," he noted, "and if you get ahold of one of the SOG combination tools, you'll see exactly what I'm talking about."

"I've just owned 'em," he said of SOG's multi-tools and knives. "I carry a SOG combination tool all the time. When you live on a place where you've got a few acres you wear a tool on your belt, and I've gone through a few. As a matter of fact, I bought a SOG multi-tool at a pawnshop and that was 10 years ago, and I've still got that thing on my belt. It's still working and the knife stays sharp, and as far as I'm concerned it's the best dog-gone product of its kind made."

Gunny grew up on a farm in Kansas and was bringing home game with his 12-gauge single-shot shotgun at the age of 8. His love of hunting and the outdoors has taken him on hunts all over the American Northwest, as well as Alaska and Africa, so he well knows the importance of a quality knife. "If you don't have a good sharp blade and you're out in the middle of the woods someplace," he offered, "you'll find yourself in need of a good sharp blade, so that's the way it works."

The star of History Channel's *Lock N' Load with R. Lee Ermey*, *Mail Call* and a number of movies, including his breakthrough role as Gunnery Sgt. Hartman in *Full Metal Jacket*, Gunny owns a ranch in California now, where he finds plenty



Spencer Frazer (right), SOG founder and president, and Gunny go over the company catalog. (photo courtesy of Bill Rogin)

of jobs for his blade of choice—a machete. "There's always something that needs to be cut up, you know that," he explained. "I've got a little ranch out here and there's not too many days what go by that I don't use that machete, and it just sits in the tree stump out there." As *BLADE* was going to press, SOG officials said they would be introducing a new line of machetes at the SHOT Show in Las Vegas Jan. 15-17.

Part of Gunny's deal with SOG is to do some design work with Spencer Frazer, SOG founder and chief designer, to create a "Gunny-approved" line of cutting tools. Gunny's vision for the line is to capture the essence of American quality and heavy-duty workmanship he champions so strongly.

"The objective of me joining up with SOG is to be able to stand behind a brand that I can believe in and build some good knives, that's all," he said. "We've sat down and put together some pretty serious designs, yes, absolutely. You'll see when they come out. They'll be first class, top quality, top drawer."

Tools, Not Weapons

Gunny comes by his love of knives honestly. He has over 100 custom and factory pieces in his collection, including his great grandfather's pocketknife. First and foremost, though, he uses his knives.

"I'm a firm believer that the only thing a dull knife is good for is cutting yourself, because that's exactly what you do with a dull knife," he said. "I believe a man ought to be able to shave with that knife and after he shaves with it, he ought to be able to fold it up and then go chop a tree down."

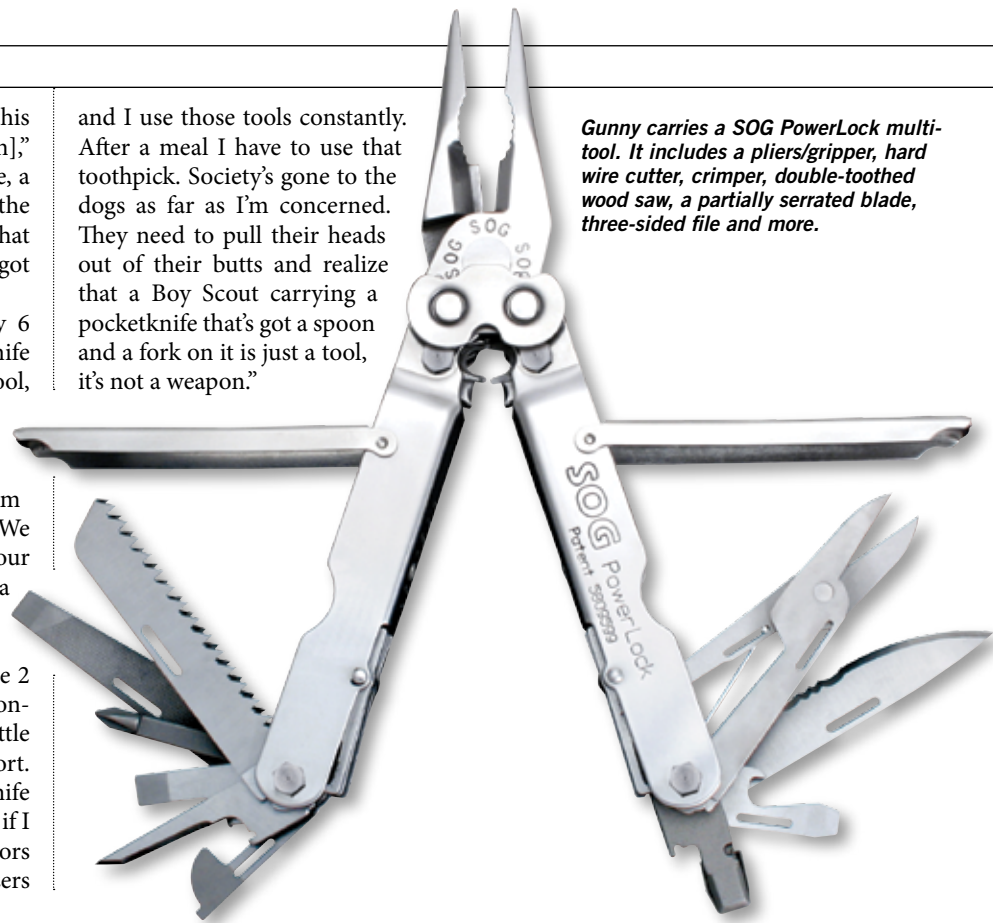
He also keeps up with the news and is outraged at the way knives are portrayed by the media.

“What really upsets me, I’ve seen this young Eagle Scout [Matthew Whalen],” Gunny began. “Because he had a knife, a little pocketknife in a survival kit in the trunk, they put him out of school. What the hell kind of a survival kit have you got without a knife? You’d be a dead man.”

“When I grew up, I was probably 6 years old, I started carrying a pocketknife and I’ve carried one ever since. It’s a tool, you know. I grew up on a farm and I went to school and I can’t ever recall any kid pulling his pocketknife out at school and wanting to do harm to another kid. Times have changed. We need to start taking responsibility for our actions, we need to teach our children a bit of discipline.”

Gunny was just getting warmed up. “My Swiss Army knife, what, they’re 2 inches long these little guys. I travel constantly, and I’ve had about 20 of those little knives taken away from me at the airport. I finally took one and just broke the knife blade off it and there’s still a big debate if I can go on board because there’s a scissors on it. There’s a toothpick and a tweezers

and I use those tools constantly. After a meal I have to use that toothpick. Society’s gone to the dogs as far as I’m concerned. They need to pull their heads out of their butts and realize that a Boy Scout carrying a pocketknife that’s got a spoon and a fork on it is just a tool, it’s not a weapon.”



Gunny carries a SOG PowerLock multi-tool. It includes a pliers/gripper, hard wire cutter, crimper, double-toothed wood saw, a partially serrated blade, three-sided file and more.

**“WHAT THE HELL KIND OF A SURVIVAL KIT HAVE YOU GOT WITHOUT A KNIFE?”
—THE GUNNY**

Standup Guy

Gunny enlisted in the Marines in 1961 and was medically retired as a staff sergeant in 1971 for injuries incurred during his tours, which included 14 months active duty in the Vietnam War, and, as you might guess, as a drill instructor (at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego and Parris Island, South Carolina). In ‘Nam he carried his issued Ka-Bar USMC fighting/utility knife, using it for everything from cutting threads off his uniform to opening “C” rations. He also carried a pocketknife and, of course, his trusty machete. He said many of his fellow Marines bought their own fixed blades and folders in addition to the issue Ka-Bar.

Did he ever use a knife as a weapon over there? “No. And I hope I never have to. I would just leave the area,” he laughed. “I would go get my gun. I don’t care for the up-close-and-personal stuff.”

Like most fresh out of the military, Gunny was unsure of what to do after his discharge, so it came as no surprise when he fell back on his Marine background.

“I didn’t have any formal training that would improve my lifestyle and I looked around and thought, what can I do, and I found out,” he recalled. “I was basically pretty much a standup comic when I was in the Marine Corps. I was an instructor, and in order to be a good instructor you have to be able to keep the troops awake. It’s almost like being a standup comic.”

“So, when I retired, I wrote a couple of scripts and I went off to Hollywood. I did some of the comedy clubs and was pretty successful at it, and then I found out they were going to start shooting a Vietnam war movie in the Philippine Islands.”

Gunny boarded a military transport, flew to the Philippines where *The Boys in Company “C”* was being filmed in 1978, landed the part of a Marine drill instructor and his acting career had begun. However, it was 1987’s *Full Metal Jacket* that, as Gunny put it, “kicked all the doors open.” In it he established his onscreen persona as the gung-ho drill instructor, Gunnery Sgt. Hartman.



Gunny has made a number of visits to the troops in Iraq and Afghanistan for the U.S. Navy Department of Morale and Welfare. Here he is with a group of Marines in front of Saddam Hussein’s palace in December 2008. (Rob Scott photo)



New episodes of Gunny's acclaimed show, Lock N' Load with R. Lee Ermey, appear on the History Channel on Friday nights at 9 or 10 p.m. in some time zones. Check your local listings for the date and time in your area. (photo courtesy of Bill Rogin)



Gunny will use his patented "kid-glove treatment" to have Spencer and SOG squared away in time for the BLADE Show. (photo courtesy of Bill Rogin)

Not only did the role earn Gunny a nomination for a Golden Globe Award as Best Supporting Actor, it played a key part in his receiving an honorary promotion to gunnery sergeant from the Commandant of the Marine Corps. According to Wikipedia, it made Gunny the first retired military member in the history of the Corps to be promoted. Wikipedia, it seems, needs to check its sources.



Gunny signs an autograph for a Marine during a morale-building visit to the troops in Iraq during Christmas of 2008. (Andrew Parke photo)

"I'm not just the first but the only," retired member in Corps history to be promoted, Gunny noted with pride.

He continues to be active in supporting young Marines, making morale-building visits to Iraq and Afghanistan when he can, as well as Guantanamo Bay and Okinawa, Japan. In between comes his acting and promotional work. "I spend 90 percent of my time working with the military," he said. "The other 10 percent I have to do shows and movies and whatever it takes because I have to support the 90 percent."

The new SOG spokesman would seem to have his priorities in order. And, luckily for his new employer, SOG is one of them.

For more information contact SOG Specialty Knives, attn: C. Cashbaugh, Dept. BL4, 6521 212th St. SW, Lynnwood, WA 98036 425.771.6230 www.sogknives.com. For more on The Gunny, visit www.rleermey.com.

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