

# Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

# swiss knives

I first saw it in my dad's dresser drawer, and it beckoned to me — shiny and puzzling with gorgeous curves. I pawed it with my 7-year old hand, and discovered the most practical item known to humanity — the Swiss Army knife.

I slid my little fingernails into the grooves and slowly unfolded a bevy of tools of varying sharpness and wondered how you could get it all in such a compact package. Even then I knew knives weren't toys, but how could a little boy resist a diminutive saw, a twisting corkscrew, that magnifying glass and those tweezers?

What I didn't know then was that the son of a Swiss hat maker leveraged everything back in the 1890s in hopes of making a quality knife/tool suitable for use by soldiers. But Karl Elsener lost his financial fanny because German mass-production crafted the knives faster and cheaper. However, Elsener went back to the drawing board and came up with a lighter, more versatile knife deemed The Officer's and Sports Knife.

That knife has more than 400 variations — small ones for key rings, pocket tools, a snappy golf tool, watches, cutlery and, the beauty of the line, the Swiss Champ, which features 33 different functions. In addition, the Swiss Army knife has been a favorite gift of American presidents to guests of the White House. The knives have



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HUMANITY **BY MARK LUCE**

been to the peak of Mount Everest, to the North and South Poles and even orbited the earth on the space shuttle. If that's not enough, the Swiss Army knife has saved lives. It was used to perform an emergency tracheotomy on a young girl and to cut the clothes off a man who fell into water during an expedition to the North Pole.

If you have one of these gems, you know how handy they are. If you need wine opened, desire to cut rope, need a close peek at the fine print or need to rid the frayed cuffs from your fancy clothes, the Swiss Army knife always saves the day. Beyond the sensible and practical uses, the knives are a triumph of aesthetics and engineering. Unlike so many things American, the Swiss know how to

merge style and substance. Outside of the standard knife, there are two Swiss Army products that will provide instant relief in the car or on the course. First, the SwissCard is the size of a credit card (and double the thickness) and fits snugly into a wallet. Whip it out and you have scissors, a letter-opener/blade, nail-file/flat-head screwdriver, a small pen, tweezers, a toothpick, a straight pin and a ruler. It's only about \$27 and makes a great gift.

The other is the Swiss Tool. Sleeker and stronger than other brands, the Swiss Tool (\$75) features 24 different items to help you get through a day on the course. Wire cutters, five screwdrivers, a couple of blades, a crimper, can opener, and, of course, pliers. It folds together nicely and can be worn in a sheath on the belt.

I'm looking at my three Swiss Army tools right now, especially the standard knife that makes its home in my desk drawer. I find myself wondering when I will pass the knife along to our son, Miles. Whenever that is, I'm sure the knife will be as good as new.

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