

Make mine Automatic

Automatic Knife for the Military Air Force's MC-1

Survival Knife gets an upgrade to the M724, a new blade produced by Colonial Knife,

By Chuck Karwan, editor for Tactical Knives magazine

Back in WWII the Army began to issue the George Schrade designed automatic M2 Paratrooper knife to its airborne personnel. The idea was that a paratrooper might need to cut himself free of his parachute harness in the event of a tree, water, or other abnormal landing. Because of injury or circumstance he might only have had one hand available to deploy the knife, so it was decided to have the knife be an automatic opener.

The U.S. Air Force eventually realized that its pilots and air crew needed a similar knife for the same reasons should they have to parachute from their aircraft. In 1958, the Air Force adopted a knife called the "MC-1 Survival Knife". The most noticeable thing about this new jump knife was the bright orange plastic handle scales. The other significant change from the MC 1 was that a manually opened blade was added in addition to the automatic blade. This is universally called a "Shroud line cutter". It is hooked-shaped with the inside of the hook sharpened. The final difference is that the bail on the MC-1 was on the same end as the normal knife blade instead of on the opposite end.

The MC-1 is still in use with the USAF. Recently, Colonial received a contract to supply a new version of the MC-1 that is intended to be a major improvement over the original design. Designated the "M-724" by Colonial, this new knife has an official IAW General Service Administration Description of "5110-00-525-8740" Knife, Pocket" and currently carried by units of the British SAS (Special Air Service)

The M724 is functionally the equivalent of the old MC-1 with regard to its capabilities, but it is constructed completely differently. Instead of using metal liners with plastic handle scales (orange to military use or black for law

enforcement) all riveted together, the M-724 has a handle constructed of two high strength injection molded polymer pieces that are screwed together without liners. This is a huge improvement with regard to maintenance and repair compared to the MC-1.

While the M-724 uses what appears to be the old push button opening system with sliding lock, the mechanism is actually a much stronger type using a coil spring like that of the Florida Black knife. Instead of using a flat kicker spring like the MC-1, the M-724 has a constant force torsion type spring. The Biggest flaw of the old Schrade type button system of the MC-1 was that it was prone to blade rebound. If you push the button and don't release it almost immediately, the blade can snap open and bounce partially closed before the button can lock it in place. With the M-724 and its constant force spring this is not a problem. This too is a significant improvement over the MC-1.

The 3-inch-long blade is stainless as have been all MC-1 folders. This is a knife that is intended to be carried constantly, and hopefully never used. Stainless steel makes excellent logic under those conditions. The master blade has a useful shape, a sharp point, and good edge geometry. Just a slight touch-up with a fine diamond hone would make it truly sharp.

With regard to the "Shroud Cutter", I am an experienced military qualified Jump Master, and I have no idea why a parachutist would ever need to cut his parachute shroud line until he was already on the ground and might need them for survival purposes'. In that case, any sharp knife would be just fine. I have even asked experienced combat pilots who have had Air Force survival training what the hooked blade was for and got the universal response that it was for cutting shroud lines. When I asked them why they would need a special blade for the purpose, or what situation would call for cutting their shroud lines other than for survival use, not one could give a satisfactory answer.

It is my contention that the "Shroud line Cutter" is actually intended to cut web straps in case the normal harness releases' are jammed. My tests indicate that it does just that quite nicely. Thus, if the jumper lands in the water and cannot manipulate the quick releases on his parachute harness, he can cut himself free

quickly with this blade without risk of cutting himself. The same would hold true for a tree landing. Pilots were originally instructed to carry this knife in the special pocket of their flight suit with the hook blade opened and the lanyard attached. That way the hook blade is instantly available for emergency strap cutting. Once on the ground the hook blade can be folded out of the way.

The Colonial® M-724 is an improvement over the original MC-1 design and I believe it should serve our military pilots and aircrews nicely.