

# THE SLINGIN' SOUTHPAW FROM ST. ALBANS

His performing days done, Paul LaCross will go down as one of knife throwing's best

by Bobby Branton

**F**ascinated with throwing knives as a boy, I made the usual mistakes, such as trying to throw my pocketknife and my mother's kitchen knives. I gravitated toward other interests as I grew older but, in the 1980s, my love for knife throwing was rekindled by the late Harry McEvoy. I read every book I could find on the subject, and one name that always seemed to stand out was that of Paul LaCross.

LaCross was billed as the world's fastest and fanciest gunslinger and knife and tomahawk thrower. He is also a superb instinct archer and sharpshooter. However, with a full tour of knife throwing events booked in 1990, LaCross had to hang up his knife-and-tomahawk throwing act due to health reasons at the ripe old age of 76. It marked the end of a career that saw him perform all over the world, from the former Soviet Union to New Zealand, and before national television audiences.

Almost from the outset, LaCross seemed destined for knife-throwing greatness. Born in St. Albans, Vermont, he learned to throw knives in the Boy Scouts. He said that on long hikes the scouts would throw knives and hatchets at trees to pass the time. He said that even then he must have had the knack because in no time he was putting the knife just where he wanted it.

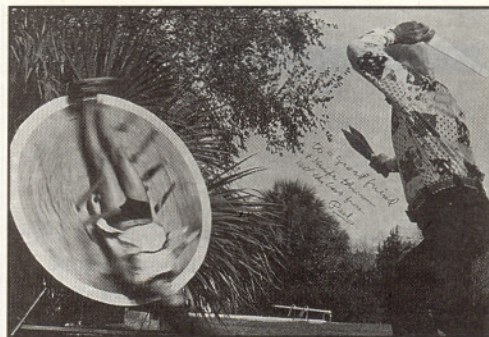
When Paul was 18, he saw a sports show featuring a knife-throwing and shooting act performed by a native American. He knew that he could do the same thing and began working up his own routine. When he realized he could make money at it, he turned it into a career.

LaCross has performed his act at state

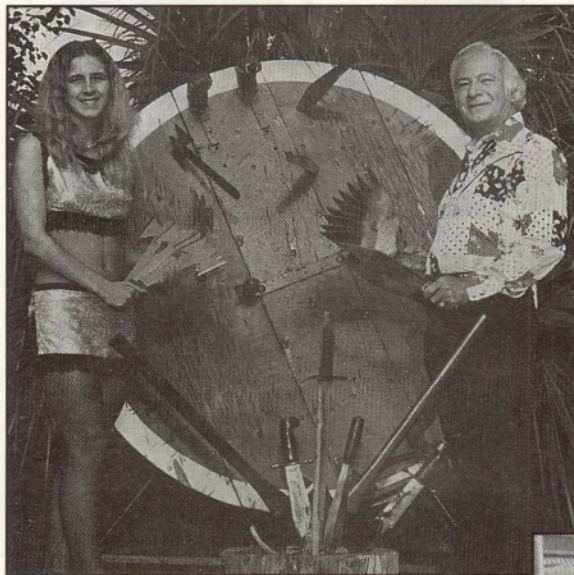
fairs, rodeos, nightclubs, circuses, shopping plazas and sport shows. He toured what was then the Soviet Union on an American cultural exchange, Japan for Expo '70, New Zealand, Canada, Hawaii and even performed in Carnegie Hall.

His television appearances include "The Tonight Show," the Merv Griffin and Mike Douglas talk shows, the "Thrillseekers" hosted by Chuck Connors, the "What's My Line" and "To Tell The Truth" game shows, and hundreds of local television shows. In 1983 he appeared on the "Circus of the Stars," where he threw knives to outline the body of actress Linda Blair.

One of his first stunts was cutting the



(Above) LaCross takes aim while his assistant spins at 120 revolutions per minute on the "Wheel of Death." The veteran knife thrower autographed this picture for the author.



(Left) LaCross and one of his assistants in front of the "Wheel of Death." Note the lumberjack axes stuck in the piece of wood in the foreground and the double-bladed axes held by his assistant—two of LaCross's favorite throwing tools.

(Below) Daughter Paula (left) was among those to join LaCross on his tour of the Soviet Union in 1967. In addition to the U.S.S.R., LaCross performed in such exotic locales as Hawaii, Japan and New Zealand.



(Left) Paul LaCross and actress Linda Blair at the "Circus of the Stars" in 1983. LaCross appeared on such television programs as "The Tonight Show" and once performed in Carnegie Hall.

ribbons off his 3-year-old daughter's satin dress. She would have ribbons on each shoulder and one on her side near her waist. He threw the knives to cut each ribbon, and her satin dress dropped to reveal a glittering costume.

Some of his more spectacular stunts, some done while throwing two knives simultaneously:

- While blindfolded, he would throw 12 flaming knives and tomahawks outlining his assistant's body from up to 30 feet away;
- Chopping potatoes off his assistant's bare throat and neck with a Samurai sword;
- Cutting strips of paper from his assistant's mouth with thrown knives while facing her and then, with the help of



a mirror, doing the same stunt with his back to the target;

● The "Wheel of Death": outlining the body of his assistant with thrown knives as she spun head-over-heels at 120 revolutions per minute on a wooden wheel (this act was brought to the USA in 1938 by Joe and Hannah Gibson);

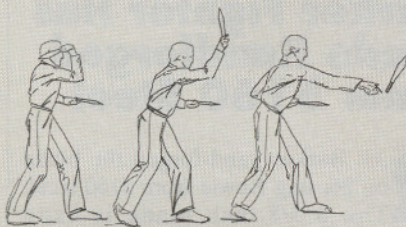
● With his assistant behind a curtain concealing her body and the knife board, LaCross would throw knives through the curtain, outlining both sides of her body.

Paul would hit a 2-inch bullseye at 25 feet with a lumberjack ax. To keep his audience entertained between throws, he would often spin his Tru-Balance 16-inch throwing knives point-down in the palms of his hands. He says it took some getting used to but eventually his hands got tough enough to do it.

Paul said to throw knives all you need is good vision, a steady hand, lots of practice and, he laughed, a willing relative. He has thrown at just about every female member of his family: his wife Bea, daughters Paula and Betty, granddaughters Bonnie, Tammy and Kim, and even his son Bob.

LaCross said that he has had a few accidents while throwing but nothing serious. One of the worst involved Bea.

## How To Throw Knives



1) Grasp the handle or blade firmly, keeping the plane of the blade vertical; lay the thumb along the top edge of the blade for use as a "pointer"; b) To throw by the handle for one complete spin, position yourself 12-14 feet from the target; c) Right handers step forward one long pace with the left foot only (the opposite for lefties) and release the knife at the end of your arm extension as if the knife is "hot" to eliminate wrist snap. Finally, make sure your target is made of a pliant material, such as soft pine, so it won't break the tip off of your throwing knife. (From Harry McEvoy's "How To Throw Like A Professional.")

*Note: "Blade Magazine" cautions you to practice extreme care and common sense when throwing any kind of edge tool—for instance, we don't recommend a blade throw with a double-edged knife—and we cannot be held liable for any injuries that may occur as a result.*

One of their routines called for her to rap with her hand on the target board where Paul was to throw the knife. Blindfolded, LaCross would zero in on the sound. He heard her knock but for some reason she thought the knock wasn't loud enough and started to knock again. At that moment Paul threw the knife and the blade went through the board and her arm. She had to go backstage and have the knife pulled out. Luckily, there was a doctor in the audience and Bea wound up with only a few stitches.

Paul's performing days are over now but the thrills and chills he's given scores of

knife-throwing fans live on in their memories. The late Harry McEvoy may have said it best of LaCross when he wrote: "Special mention should be made of Paul LaCross. He has performed amazing feats with revolvers, rifles, lumberman long-handled axes, bows and arrows and, best of all, with his 16-inch throwing knives and small hatchets. His left-handed style of throwing is unique."

*The author is a knifemaker/knife thrower who specializes in throwing and other knife designs.*

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(A) **Red Handle**—This variation has a raised lock release and the butt end of the knife is rounded. #1-BWK-232...\$44.95

(B) **Gray Handle**—The butt end of this variation is squared off. #1-BWK-233...\$44.95

### Soviet Pilot's Bolo

(C) Issued to pilots and cosmonauts. This stainless steel blade is 9 5/8" long, 3 1/2" wide and 3/16" thick. It's ground with a chopping edge, plus a scraping edge on the tip. A 7-digit number (ex: 384 2189) is stamped into the blade back. The black, hard rubber handle has a grooved grip and a gray lanyard. 14 1/2" long, overall. Wt. 1.2 lbs. Includes the gray nylon issue sheath that is marked "HO<MA<ETE".

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All in brand new condition with stainless steel, double edged blades. There are three variations.

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(F) **Gray Handled Knife**—Identical to the knife above except the handle is gray. #1-BWK-236...\$69.95

(G) **Red Handled Paratrooper's Knife**—An earlier issue knife. The blade is 5 1/4" long and has a "wasp waist" shape. This serrated blade is marked with a serial number and a cyrillic letter. The handle is marked with a rooster (trademark?).

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