

# THE MARTIALIST: ISSUE 3.10 SUBSCRIBER

## The Pros and Cons of Neck Carry

By Phil Elmore

There is an old black and white movie version of Kipling's *The Jungle Book* in which a delighted Mowgli, having acquired a knife, rejoices, "Now I have a tooth!" With few other places to sling a knife, he carries it on a strap around his neck. This is the first time I recall seeing a knife carried in this manner and I have always remembered it. When I first became aware of "neck knives," this was the first image that entered my mind.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Carrying a knife on a strap around your neck – which usually involves a specialized sheath intended for the purpose – is, like anything in the self-defense world, controversial in some circles. Some people swear by it, while others roundly condemn it. There are plenty of valid criticisms of neck carry, but there are also defenses of it that can be offered as easily as can those criticisms.

Rather than list the pros and cons of neck carry in simple lists, amplifying on them as we go, let's simply look at the *realities* of neck carry. There are certain facts that are inescapable – but those that might at first appear to be major liabilities are often balanced by other

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realities (or benefits gained in exchange for accepting the liabilities).



Photo by Phil Elmore

**Neck-carried items can shift.** By definition, a “necklace” is a flexible cord or chain around your neck. When you move, a neck-carried sheath can and will shift with you. This can be bad because the knife can print against your clothes when you change position – though most people will not notice even if this happens. The shifting cord can be very noisy if it’s a ball chain moving through a Kydex sheath, too. Worst of all, a neck knife that shifts out of position can become completely inaccessible if you’re rolling on the ground grappling with someone, or even if you’ve simply fallen and rolled over.

I don’t believe you should not carry an item simply because it might, under certain circumstances, be unavailable. A knife carried in the front of the waistband is inaccessible when lying on your stomach, while a gun in a holster

behind the hip is inaccessible when one is pinned on one’s back. Yes, there are times when a neck-carried item cannot be reached – but there are other times when it can be accessed. We can drive ourselves insane trying to select our equipment and our methods based on only what can go wrong. The appropriate solution is to carry using more than one method, if possible. If not possible, we must do the best we can within our specific physical, social, and legal constraints.



Photo by Phil Elmore

The benefit of neck cord flexibility is that neck carry, provided the item so carried is not extremely heavy, is very comfortable. With a good sheath and a properly constructed cord or chain, you’ll forget the neck sheath is even there – almost. You’ll never find yourself sitting on it; it will never dig into your hip; it won’t chafe anything. (If you carry a neck cord directly against your skin, corrosion could be an issue, though.)

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**A chain or cord around your neck can be used to choke you.** I've said before that if you reach the point at which someone is using your own neck cord or chain to choke you, you've already done several things wrong. The danger of getting choked with anything around your neck can be mitigated by choosing your equipment with care, however. Ball chain will snap before it can choke you, as will certain types of cord joints (there are breakaway plastic models). The gutted sheath from paracord can be used to "clothe" naked ball chain to make it more comfortable while still leaving the resulting necklace weak enough to break before hurting you. By all means, avoid neck-carrying items with unbreakable chains or heavy cords.

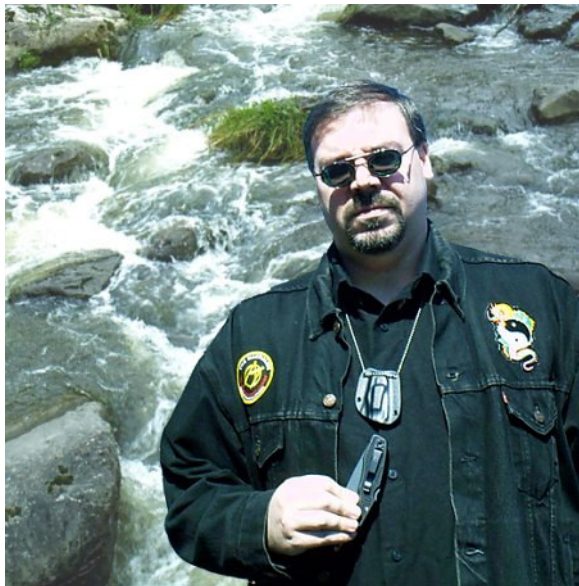


Photo by Phil Elmore

**Inverted neck carry points the weapon at your head.** With a folding knife or a plastic impact tool, the direction in which the business end of the weapon points is not a big concern apart from its positional value. If you're carrying a firearm, however, neck carry can turn dangerous very quickly. The

better sheaths I've seen keep the weapon horizontal across the torso, though they tend to print very badly. The worst among these sheaths are inverted jobs that point the barrel of the gun at your head – not a very good idea under anything but the most desperate of situations.



Photo by Phil Elmore

**Neck carry is very discreet – or it isn't.** One of the best things about neck carry is that it can be used for deep concealment in environments where a pocket knife would be uncomfortable, a clip-equipped knife is inadvisable because the clip is visible, and there are no other options. Provided the knife is small enough not to print against the shirt, such a tool rides hidden with little chance of accidental exposure. If the knife *does* print against the shirt, however, all bets are off. This will vary based on the item carried, the sheath used, and the torso contours of the person carrying them.

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**Neck carry allows weapons carry when you have no other attachment points.** Just as Mowgli didn't have much going for him in the way of pockets, people who are so paranoid they wish to carry in the shower – or who simply wish to have a knife when wearing sweat pants or shorts and who don't enjoy waistband carry – can use a neck knife to good effect. If the difference is carrying a knife around my neck while out in the summer heat, or carrying no weapon at all, I'm going to go for the neck carry.



Photo by Phil Elmore

**Neck carry sheaths can also be used as static cord sheaths.** Any neck-cord sheath can be used to carry an item in your pocket. Looping the cord against itself to attach it to the belt (or a belt loop) lets you tuck the sheath into a pocket, trusting that the cord will pull the sheath free when you draw the knife or impact tool and yank it free of the captive sheath. Some folks really love this option and I've used it myself for specific situations.

**Neck-carried items are very accessible – or they aren't.** If your outer garments are not tucked in, it's very easy to reach under your shirt and draw a neck-carried item. Such items,

as they're directly over your chest, are easier and more natural to reach than knives or guns in ankle or boot sheaths. A chest-carried item is easier to reach, at times, than certain waistband-carried items, too, though this depends on placement around the torso.



Photo by Phil Elmore

If you tuck your shirt in, everything changes. To get the neck-carried item requires you to go digging down your collar unless you care to pull up or rip open your shirt.

Acknowledging all of these facts, you can make an informed decision about neck carry. Given the item you are concealing and the specific requirements of your environment, your physical activity, and your laws, neck carry either is or isn't an option for you. This is a decision that can only be made by individuals *in context*. Don't let anyone make it for you; don't simply accept sweeping generalizations for or against neck carry. ♠