

# Nylon Tactical Gear

**For the most demanding missions---where only the strong survive!**

By Chris McLoughlin

*BEYOND GOD'S EYE...the cold, clammy dampness crept into his bones, reached for his soul and touched it. With a half-sneer of casual confidence, not snidely worn but worn in combat, he acknowledged it. Cramped from the hours of stillness and watching he half-rested alert, to the vermin both inside and outside his hiding place. His nostrils flared slightly at the scent of pungent smoke, excrement and something putrid that wafted in on the gentle, icy breeze. Just beyond arm's reach but within easy range of his weapon he could see the fires scattered through the compound warming the subculture of men who deserved to be there. The babel of their mumbled languages tingled his ears; their occasional harsh, bragging laughter caused his eyes to narrow as he watched them fashion crude but deadly weapons from shattered glass, remnants of furniture and skeletons of metal framework pulled from the ashes.*

I saw him before he went in: a black wraith in body armor with an MP5 at his side, a pistol, ammunition, grenades, flares, knives, optical enhancements, kits for this, packs for that, and other instruments of life strapped to his body. He carried it all easily---as though he wore it every day---with the grace of a warrior. Reflecting on it afterwards, he told me the experience recalled memories of a war in another land; eerily alike, but different. That was then, this was Atlanta 1986: the riot at the federal penitentiary.

The war was more than a decade, almost a full generation, ago. Fundamentally, the equipment was the same although in some respects significantly enhanced by progressive (but routine) technology. The carrying systems too were similar in design but with one overriding difference. No longer are holsters, pouches, packs, carriers and accoutrements made from leather and heavy cotton canvas. Evolution has taken us to the age of nylon for webbing and strapping, and parapak, cordura,



**Armament Systems and Procedures has designed the most sophisticated baton scabbard ever offered. The new carrier now incorporates a "back pocket" which will retain a fully extended baton while the user is occupied with applying handcuffs or otherwise taking care of business.**

and ballistic weaves are the preferred fabric texture.

Some jokingly say that **Brigade Quartermasters** sponsored the uprising at the Atlanta pen. Indeed they did benefit from it, but they say they hardly survived the siege on their store in Kennesaw, Georgia. When word of the seriousness of the situation at the pen got out, special action teams from coast to coast stormed Atlanta like nothing since Sherman's army from a century before. The FBI took charge and they were joined by prominent law enforcement SWAT teams from around the country, and military spec-ops units were discreetly ready to assist if necessary; even command personnel from groups that exist only in fabled whispers arrived from central Europe to be on hand as observers and advisors. And they all went to Brigade, many straight from standing watch at the pen and before getting any sleep. By the time the siege at the pen was over, BQ's shelves were as barren as the swath of land that Sherman torched on his way to the sea.

One of the country's principal suppliers of military, paramilitary, and police equipment for professionals, BQ routinely stock virtually every nylon case and carrier pack made for the fighting man. They had seen the trend to nylon accessories early on. It was found to be lightweight, durable, impervious to rot and crud (just wash it off), and it could be easily sewn thereby making it more readily adaptable to a number of applications that previously were answered by unsatisfactory solutions.

The use of nylon products for the gun industry got off to a clandestine but auspicious start in the latter part of the 1970s. A private contractor in the US was sanctioned to deliver

a small load of equipment, including rifles, to, oh---let's say somewhere remote in Central America. Everything had to be dropped in from a low altitude and moved from there on foot. There wasn't much to choose from in the way of rifle cases in those days, and all of it was wrong for this operation. The hard cases were too heavy and clumsy to carry quickly and handily, and the soft cases were simply too fragile for the terrain. A solution was effected by starting with a dense foam padding material cut approximately to the size of an M16; this was covered with a camouflage pattern, heavy-weight nylon in a cordura weave, and the case was closed by a heavy duty nylon zipper. Magazine pockets with velcro closures were sewn to the outside of the case. Since cloth pile linings tended to hold moisture and therefore foster rust, the inside of the cases were not padded; instead, the inside was done with the same cordura as the outside. Over a long period of time this might rub the weapon's finish somewhat, this was not regarded to be a liability for this particular operation.

Some two years later **Assault Systems** in St. Louis began marketing the rifle cases similar to these to civilian and police markets. The company met with good success and continued to rapidly expand its line with the addition of various sizes of gear and equipment carry bags. Assault Systems also originated the development of a variety of ballistic nylon shoulder, hip, thigh, and ankle holsters that were the forerunners of much of what is seen on the market today. Simultaneously with Assault Systems' development another company in St. Louis, Eagle Industries, started up operations and working as rivals these two companies aggressively courted the gun market. Before long almost everyone in the holster and/or luggage business started working with nylon as their medium of modern expression.

Substantially less expensive and significantly easier to work with than leather, nylon held the promise that it could be transformed into gun gear by anyone with an electric sewing machine. In fact, it was almost that simple. Overnight new companies with exotic names sprouted touting their lines of nylon products; sadly for them, most were inferior in design and quality. The properties of leather do not translate directly for nylon products, and new rules had to be discovered through trial and error to make soft gear work properly for its stated purpose. Failing to realize this until it was too late, most of the new companies floundered and folded. Asian entrepreneurs and American importers added to the problem by selling inferior products to U.S. consumers.

Their nylon standards were poor, and to make things worse they usually used cotton thread to stitch their products. Cosmetically, these bags and cases and pouches looked good, if a little lightweight, and they were priced "right," but there was no quality and little value to be had in them. The overlong stitching at the seams (a fraction of an inch makes a lot of difference in a few lengths of seaming) was weak, and the cotton thread soon gave way under the mildest of stress, or it simply rotted out from sweat or exposure to inclement elements. All that is now history and what remains are several companies who have stood the test of time and who have developed some superior products. A few of them are spotlighted here.

**Armament Systems and Procedures** of Appleton, Wisconsin is world known for their superlative ASP 9mm pistol and SWAT .44



If you're searching for a soft-sided briefcase, look no further. **Armament Systems and Procedures** has developed a series of **Duty and Tactical Attache** cases that have no equal. Variations of these cases incorporate flashlight or baton compartments (or newspaper rolls for the faint of heart), file and cargo pockets on the outside, and there are 14 interior compartments to hold all the things that get lost inside a conventional briefcase. Attention to details including a totally lined interior, structural foam frame, bound edges and a key strap are standard. You'll see these cases everywhere from embassy functions to SWAT actions.

## New From Uncle Mike's

Michael's of Oregon, often known in the marketplace as Uncle Mike's, has been in the nylon gear and equipment business since the early days. The company's solid reputation is built on a line of quality products ranging from rifle slings to ammunition carriers, and almost anything within that realm for hunters and sportsmen. Now Uncle Mike's has developed a line of gear designed for law enforcement, security, and military personnel including two "Ultra Duty" belts, a "GunRunner" fanny pack holster, a "Tactical Submachine Gun Triple Clip Pouch," a "Police Shotgun Case," a "Universal Radio Carrier," and a variety of handcuff cases.

Three pistol holsters have been made for the **SIDEKICK PROFESSIONAL** line, two for convention belt carry and one for thigh wear. The belt holsters, one called the "High Ride" and the other the "Jacket Slot," both feature two retention devices for safety and they incorporate a metal-

Special revolver (both now out of production and true collectors items), and for their current line of expandable batons. The company's reputation for excellence is well established and extends to their offerings of tactical attache cases and gear bags which have been praised by gunwriters not only in **COMBAT HANDGUNS** and **GUNS AND WEAPONS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT**, but also in the professional arms journals as well. Their most revolutionary and intriguing development is a nylon case which features a back pocket that allows extended batons to be reholstered while the user is occupied, say applying handcuffs. ASP's product line in nylon is not extensive, but it is without equal in terms of rugged elegance and design sophistication; you're just as likely to see one of their bags carried by a SWAT officer as an Embassy attache.

**Assault Systems** continues to be the industry leader in storage and portation cases for rifles, shotguns and submachine guns. Their nylon product line is extensive and includes not only holsters and accessory carriers, but also wallets, ID cases, and a full range of luggage and gear bags.

**Bianchi International** entered the nylon products market a little later than most of its competitors, but they were doing their homework in the design department while others were floundering. Their research and design work has paid off handsomely and today they offer a diverse line of some of the best looking and best made holsters and equipment carriers you'll find on the market.

**Cathey Enterprises**, a prolific maker of military and service holsters, will enter the nylon marketplace with Jerry Ardolino's "Original Dirty Harry" shoulder holster. For years Ardolino has insisted that his rig be made only of leather, but he has just recently redesigned it using a combination of nylon and

cowhide. Look for this and other unique items from Ardolino and Cathey Enterprises before the end of the year.

**DeSantis Holster and Leathergoods** pioneered the "Gunny Sack" a couple of years back, and if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, the company is one of the most esteemed in the land. Their other holster and carrier offerings also deserve your attention.

**Eagle Industries** is now most significantly known for the SAS-type leg rigs for guns, ammunition, flash bangs and distraction devices, and knives. While they also make load bearing and tactical assault vests, their slickest new product is the unique DMP-2FB and DMP-3FB pistol magazine carrier. This device combines nylon with a reinforcing insert that represents a significant step ahead in the design of secure yet quick access to spare ammunition. Look closely and you'll see the DMP rigs on FBI SWAT and HRT team belts. Get one for yourself; you won't be disappointed.

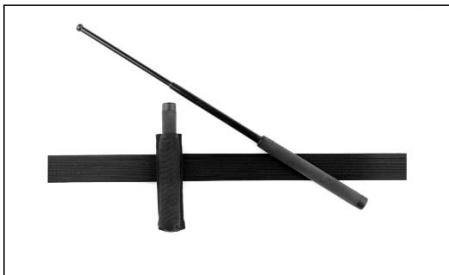
**Galco International** has a number of very clean looking belts, holsters and accessory carriers that compliment their extensive line of leathergoods. Review their offerings before accepting less.

**Brigade Quartermasters** markets many of the products by the companies listed here, and in addition and to fill in the gaps they also manufacture an impressive array of products themselves. Under their own label you'll find just about anything worth having in nylon from watch bands to suitcases and everything in between. If they don't have it, you probably don't need it.

And don't believe the rumors that they sponsored Operation Desert Storm any more than they did the riot at the Atlanta pen. They wouldn't do that, would they . . . ?

reinforced thumb break. The "Tactical Thigh Auto Duty Holster" utilizes similar safety and retention devices, and the harness rigging system allows a full six inch adjustment span. All three holster bodies are laminate construction of Cordura nylon, waterproofed closed cell foam padding, and smooth nylon lining material. Eight sizes are available for most Beretta, Colt, Glock, Ruger, SIG, and Smith & Wesson pistols. Prices range from \$40.00 to \$50.00.

ASP telescoping batons are internationally regarded to be state of the art in the field of less lethal



**ASP Baton holders are available in sizes to fit 16", 21" and 26" batons in either plain or foam handle style.**

confrontational weaponry, and the **SIDEKICK PROFESSIONAL** line includes a family of belt carriers for these defensive implements. For proper retention and fit, three lengths are made for the plain or the foam handle ASP batons, and all will fit belts up to 2.25" wide. The baton carriers are price at about \$12.00.

For all things that need to be kept in an organized, orderly fashion, Uncle Mike's **SIDEKICK PROFESSIONAL** line offers the "Police Gear Bag." A roomy, open compartment in the 11.5" x 18.5" x 9.5" case and front and rear pockets are standard as is a baton/umbrella/newspaper loop arrangement. As with other **SIDEKICK PROFESSIONAL** products, the "Police Gear Bag" is constructed of heavy duty nylon cordura, significant padding for contents protection, nylon webbing and strapping, and Velcro and YKK zipper closures. The "Police Gear Bag" is priced at about \$55.00.

All **SIDEKICK PROFESSIONAL** products are sold only at gun, sporting goods, and law enforcement products retailers, but a free catalog is available to **COMBAT HANDGUNS** readers from Michael's of Oregon, P.O. Box 13010, Dept. CH, Portland, OR 97213.