

In Praise of the Halligan, Part 2

More inventive uses for the truckie's go-to tool



By Peter F. Kertzie



PHOTO JOHN CETRINO

Truckies use a Halligan during overhaul operations.

My January column, “In Praise of the Halligan,” p. 32, addressed the basic uses for one of our most versatile tools. Some people view the Halligan simply as a forcible-entry tool, but there’s so much more to it. I can find a use for a Halligan at almost every call. In this article, I’ll cover some of the most common (and imaginative) uses for each of its features: the flat end, flat side, fork, adz and awl.

ally isn’t enough to pop the door, but sometimes it is. Based on the initial wallop, I may get the sense that door may open with just a little more “oomph.” If I hold the tool against the door, a crewmember can use a maul or other flat-headed striking tool to pound on the other end, hopefully forcing the door open.

On tempered patio doors, skylights or some automotive glass, I use a window punch to crackle the glass and the flat end of the Halligan to safely remove the glass fragments.

Another use for this flat end is as a step. If I want to quickly get in a first-floor window, I can set my tool against the structure at a slight angle with the fork to the ground and the tips of the awl and adz against the house. This forms a step from which I can reach over the windowsill and pull myself inside.

If I need a higher step than my 30” tool will afford, I can puncture the siding with the awl, allowing my tool to hang at my desired height, creating an elevated step. However, if you do this, you likely give up the ability to take the tool inside with you—another reason to carry two tools. Even if you only have one, losing the tool may be your best option in order to get in or out of a window.



PHOTO PETER F. KERTZIE

FLAT END & FLAT SIDE

There are two flat portions of the Halligan: the flat end, formed by the outside surface of the adz, and the flat side (shown striking a window in the bottom photo on p. 2).

We’ll often use the flat end on an inward-opening door. After trying the door-knob, I may simply use the flat end to give the door a wallop in the area of the latching device. This usu-

TRUCK COMPANY OPERATIONS

After crackling tempered glass with a window punch, you can use the flat end of the Halligan to push aside glass fragments.



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ABOVE: To break a window, hold the Halligan at the forked end and swing the tool toward the upper portion of the window, striking it with the flat side of the tool. When possible, position your hands above the strike point to avoid falling glass.

RIGHT: A Halligan placed against a building can be used as a step, allowing entry or exit from a building through a window.

A very common use of the flat side of the Halligan: breaking windows. A building contractor in charge of the construction of our newest firehouse noticed us training on a vacant building. He said it looked like we were simply breaking windows. I explained that we were working on a technique for using a Halligan to break double-hung windows, and there's a certain way we like to do it to increase efficiency and decrease the chances of injury. He nodded and smiled, noting that he assumed there was some kind of method to our madness—he just couldn't figure it out. Although I didn't elaborate on this technique to him, I will for you.

Position yourself to one side of the opening. Hold the Halligan at the forked end and swing the tool toward the upper portion of the window, striking it with the flat side of tool. I like to strike high because hot air, smoke and fire gases rise. If I break the lower portion first, heat and smoke may chug out, making it harder for me to see where to strike the upper portion.

If possible, swing from the side so the tool will strike the window and then the window frame, stopping its forward momentum. This reduces the chance that you'll fling the tool through the opening or send it so far through the glass that you risk cutting your hands or wrists on the jagged edges. If you can't do it this way, exercise extra caution when swinging. When pulling the tool out, try to snag any screens, curtains or shades that are in the area and pull them out.

Your next swing should be toward the lower portion of the window, and the last swing should strike the center, breaking or mangling the sashes enough to remove



PHOTO COURTESY JERRY SULLIVAN

them from the opening. This will give you an unobstructed opening and also remove any remaining shards of broken glass that remain in the sashes.

FORK

The fork end of the tool can be used as a fork, a wedge or a punch. You can place the fork over a padlock's U-shaped hinged bar and rotate the tool until the lock breaks off. For more substantial padlocks, place the fork in the same position and have another crewmember give the Halligan's flat end a few whacks; this will usually get the job done.

At car fires, you can use the fork to release the hood. Simply place it around the thin metal hood latch from the side and then twist it around until it shears off or releases the upper hood latch.

I've used the fork as a wedge to get in door or window frames many times. Additionally, I've used the fork to push up roofing materials between skip sheeting during fire attack and overhaul. A few quick upward hits with the fork, and the outside roofing materials will usually pop off in chunks the diameter of a small tire.

When mechanically footing ground ladders, you can drive the fork end into the ground next to the butt of the ladder to keep it from kicking out.

And if you need a little extra leverage, simply join the forks of two Halligans together, and you've increased your mechanical advantage.

ADZ

The adz is the flat or duck-billed part of the tool's head. It's sometimes used as a fork for prying between window and door frames. You can create a great lever for prying by sticking the adz in the material and then pushing or pulling the opposite end of the tool. The adz is extremely useful for removing finish trim from windows and doors by forcing it behind the material, much like a carpenter would do with a small, flat crowbar.

For accessing boarded-up buildings, the adz can be hammered in behind the coverings, and with an easy push on the bar, nails or screws will be pulled out or the heads will pop through the material holding the boards in place. At car accidents or car fires, the adz can be slipped into the cracks between the frame and the doors, trunks and the hood and then twisted in order to make a purchase point for pneumatic or other tools.

AWL

The awl is the pointed part of the tool, and I use it more than any other feature. The awl gets me into things I otherwise couldn't get into. I may eventually switch to a different part of the tool or even to a different tool altogether, but I usually start with the awl.

You can easily swing or pound the awl into many surfaces. When forcing an inward-opening door, hold the tool up at a right angle to the door in the area of the locking device, with the adz pointing up against the doorframe and the flat head touching the door.



The fork can be used to open a roof on the inside during fire attack or overhaul.

PHOTO PETER F. KERTZIE



The adz is slipped in to the space between the door and the jamb near the hinge allowing it to easily be pried off.

PHOTO PETER F. KERTZIE



Plant the awl into the doorframe by placing it where you want it, and then have another truckie pound it in with a striking tool.

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For opening drywall and plaster walls, I swing the awl into the wall and push up, creating a hole. I then drop the forked end in the hole about a foot and keep ripping the awl away a little at a time.

PHOTOS PETER F. KERTZIE



After driving the awl of the Halligan into the cabinet you can push down or pull toward you to pop the cabinets from their mounting.

PHOTO PETER F. KERTZIE



Planting the awl of your tool into a peaked roof surface will give you an extra step should you need it.

Have someone with a striking tool hit the Halligan on the opposite side of the awl until the awl pierces the frame. Push up or down on the tool (depending whether you are on the left or right) so the awl pivots into the door forcing it in.

You can also use the awl to pry up flooring to expose hidden spaces. Working at a right angle to the direction that the floor boards are running, swing the awl into floor boards and then push forward on the forked end (like the lever that releases an old wooden rollercoaster). The boards will easily come up. Once a couple rows are up, the job gets easier because you don't have to puncture the floor boards once you've made your initial opening. Just pry them up using the floor joists as a fulcrum. Repeat as necessary to expose any hidden fire.

For opening walls, I hold the fork end and swing the awl into the surface and then push up on the tool, making a small opening. I flip the bar around and drop the fork end into the hole and then pull on the tool to rip an opening in the surface. As you rip, you move the tool down and pull again, opening the wall as far as you want.

We often need to pull kitchen cabinets away from the wall, and once again, the Halligan facilitates this. Swing the tool from the forked end and plant the awl between the cabinets and the wall. If you can't get the awl into position easily, have someone strike the flat spot on the side, driving the awl in. Either way, once the awl is in position, push or pull the bar, and the cabinets will usually separate from the wall.

Finally, do you ever find yourself on a peaked roof and you need an extra step? Hold the fork end and swing the Halligan so the awl punctures the roofing material. This will also work for footing a ladder on a section of roof. Swing the tool into position with the awl planted in the roof, and then put one of the butts of the ladder against it.

GET CREATIVE

The Halligan is not the kind of tool that you take off the rig when you see a need for one. It's a tool you have with you at all times. The fact that the uses for the tool exceed the space I have to describe them is a testament to the versatility of this hunk of metal. I certainly don't want to discount the value of tools other than the Halligan or new tools designed to do similar jobs. I simply want to show you examples of everyday situations where I have to tip my helmet to Hugh Halligan for giving me a tool that I just can't imagine working without. So get creative and see what uses you can find for your Halligan. ⚙️

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