

BY: ERIC GUIDA

Sacramento Fire Department
Engine 57

ENGINE COMPANY OPERATIONS- RESIDENTIAL FORCIBLE ENTRY

Forcible entry is usually considered a truck company operation. Engine companies stretch hose and put fire out and the more tool orientated operations, such as forcible entry, are left for truck companies. That doesn't mean that engine companies should completely disregard how to do forcible entry. There are definitely situations when truck companies are delayed and engine companies must do their own forcible entry.

Forcible entry is an art. On an engine company the art is in accomplishing the job with the tools that are ordinarily carried on an engine. Anybody can grab a circular saw and cut their way into a structure. The true art comes in doing it with just a halligan and 8 lb flat head axe. This article intends to cover a broad variety of forcible entry problems that might be encountered by an engine company. The main focus of this article will be forcing entry on the residential front door with and without security doors. It will also cover locks, gates, and security bars on windows.

THE BASICS

For years the mule kick has been the preferred way to make entry on the typical residential front door. Kicking in a door was the cool way to force entry. The problem with this technique is if the locking mechanism was reinforced in any way the "kicker" usually wore them selves out trying to get thru the door, wasting time and energy. A better way is to use the adz (or flat part) of a halligan in the jamb of the door and push the door away from you.

By putting the adz in the door jamb and pulling the halligan away from the door jamb, the force created at the top of the halligan (where the adz and point meet) will force the door open. **(Photo 1)** Sometimes a couple taps of the flat head axe to secure the adz in the jamb is needed.

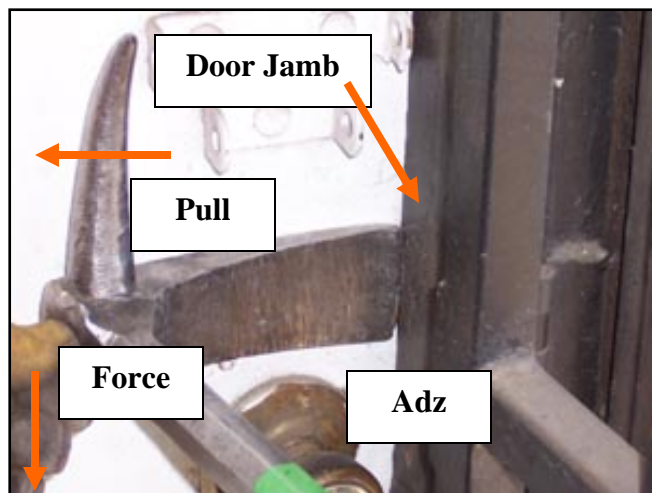


Photo 1: Using the Halligan to force a door.

This method works by destroying the integrity of the door jamb on the inside of the door, where the locking mechanism is. This method will work on almost all residential front doors and reduces the amount of damage done, since usually only the jamb gets damaged.

If this method does not work, the next method to try is to attack the hardware of the door. Anytime you have a doorknob, dead bolt assembly, or both, accessible to you, you have a way in. Taking the doorknob and/or dead bolt assembly off will destroy the locking mechanism and allow you to force the door open. One firefighter can accomplish this by either swinging the halligan or flat head axe right down on the knob or deadbolt assembly until you shear off the hardware. For stubborn hardware, two firefighters can do this by having one firefighter place the adz of the halligan on the knob/deadbolt and the other firefighter hit the halligan with the flat head axe. Once you have removed the hardware you will need to drive the rest of the hardware out the other end with the point of the halligan. With the hardware out of the way the door should be easier to force.

SECURITY DOORS

Sometimes we encounter a security door in front of the front door. These doors do not pose a big problem, if you understand how to force them. Understanding how these doors are made and mounted will greatly improve your ability to force them. The idea of the security door is obvious. It provides an extra line of defense for the homeowner as well as provides a secure way to provide some ventilation. The flaw of these doors comes in the manufacturing as well as the installation. There are basically two types of security doors, lightweight and reinforced.

The lightweight door is the easier door to force compared to the reinforced door. **(Photo 2)** The lightweight door has no cross members of any substantial weight or strength. This style of door tends to be flexible and it is this flexibility that we can use to our advantage.

The reinforced door, **(Photo 3)** because of the additional reinforcing bars above and below the



Photo 2: Lightweight security door.



Photo 3: Reinforced security door.

door handle is not flexible, and thus presents a more difficult forcible entry problem. It is important to recognize which door is which as soon as possible as the reinforced door because this style of door requires the use of the irons to force it.

The easiest way to force the first door is by the “pull” method. By simply grabbing the middle bar and pulling hard you will flex the door in the middle enough to clear the throw of the deadbolt past the keeper, thus opening the door.

The easiest way to force the lightweight door is using the “pull” method. **(Photo 4)** By simply grabbing the middle bar and pulling hard with one quick jerking motion, you will flex the door in the middle enough to clear the throw of the deadbolt past the keeper, thus opening the door. **(Photo 5)** Be sure to “foot” the door. This will help prevent losing your balance in the event the door releases easier than anticipated. **(Photo 6)**



Photo 4: Grab the middle bar on lightweight doors.



Photo 5: A quick jerk of the door will create enough flex to clear the deadbolt from the door frame.



Photo 6: “Footing” the door will prevent a sudden loss of balance.

The reinforced door, due to its more rigid construction does not flex and cannot be pulled. **(Photo 7)** This door can be forced by placing the adz of the halligan in between the door and the frame and rotating the handle of the halligan downwards. This motion will force the door away from the frame and with a slight outward pull by another firefighter (like that of the first door) the door will open. This method can also work in tight quarters because the firefighter with the halligan can stand in front of the door and rotate the halligan. Although this becomes slightly cumbersome it can still be done.



Photo 7: Leveraging down against the door frame will cause the door to flex enough to clear the deadbolt.

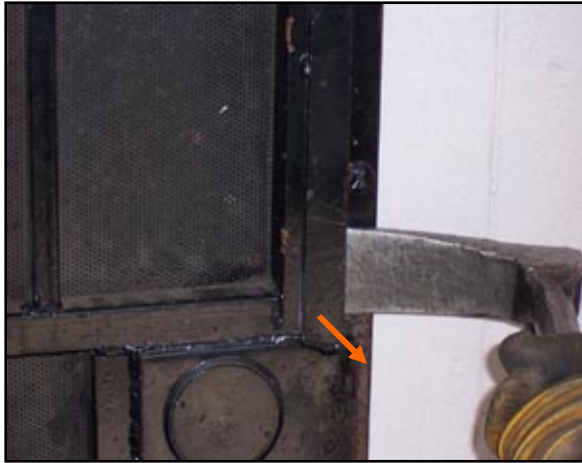


Photo 8: Prying back the protective strip of metal will create a space so the adz can be placed between the frame and door.

Another way to force a security door that is reinforced or has a protective strip is by prying the entire door and frame off the building. (**Photo 9**) Often the frame is set into old stucco or wood siding. By sliding the adz of the halligan behind the frame of the security door one can pull the entire door and frame off. Now you don't have to worry about wedging the door open because you completely removed it.

Occasionally the security doors come with a piece of metal that is welded to prevent anyone from putting something between the door and the frame. Prying up the metal to get to the space between the door and the frame will work if the welding points are weak. (**Photo 8**)

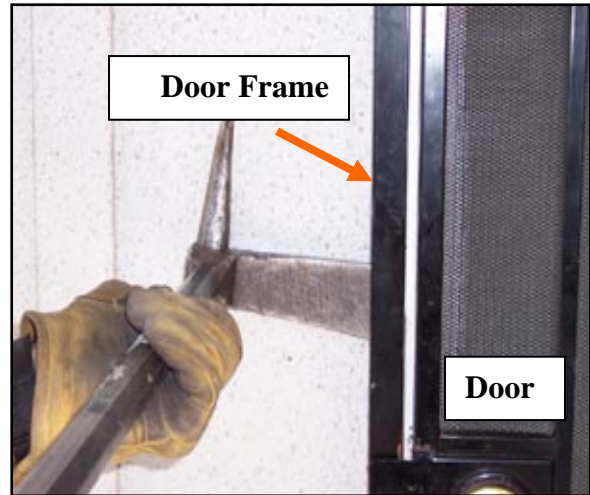


Photo 9: Prying the frame from the building.

BARS ON WINDOWS

There are two basic construction types for bars on windows, hollow and solid. The construction of these bars will dictate how to remove them. Most bars on windows are constructed out of hollow metal which are slid over a solid mounting bracket. The bracket is affixed to the wall and the hollow tube of the security bars is slid over the bracket. For large windows the spread of the security bars may be that you can pull them in the middle just like the security door. Providing that there is not an additional attachment point in the center, pulling will flex the bars away from the mounting bracket enough to clear one side. Once you have one side off you simply pull the other side off their brackets.

For smaller windows or those that are reinforced or have additional attachment points you must cut them. Remember, you are on an engine company and do not have a saw but do have bolt cutters. Bolt cutters will cut through the bars. The bars can be cut in the middle away from the bracket or near the ends right through the brackets.

Cutting the bars (*Photo 10*) in the middle tends to mash the hollow metal sometimes requiring moving the bolt cutters up and down to finish the cut. Cutting through the brackets is harder but is a clean cut.

Another option to remove security bars is to attack the mounting bolt. Using the flat head axe and hitting the bolt and the stucco will destroy the stucco around the mounting bolt. Destroying the stucco will allow you to pull the bolt out of the stucco, thus freeing the security bars. Once you have removed one side you can slide the other side off the mounting bracket.

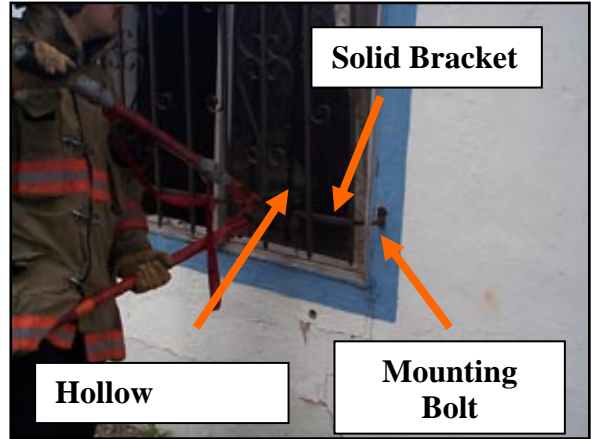
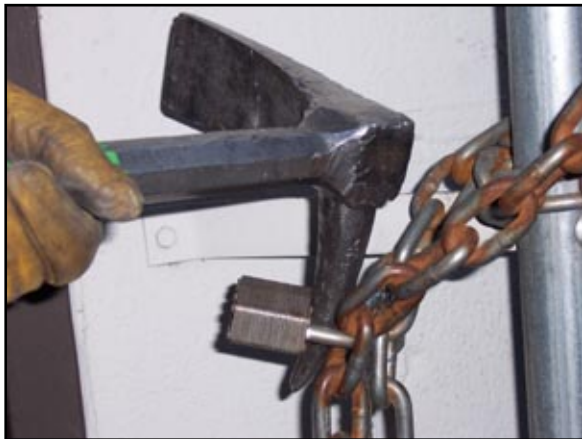


Photo 10: Using bolt cutters on lightweight hollow tube window bars.

SECURITY GATES & LOCKS

It goes without saying that the easiest way to get through a lock is by cutting a link closest to the lock, or the lock itself, with bolt cutters. But if for some reason bolt cutters are not available you can use the halligan and flat head axe to open the lock. Simply insert the pick of the halligan (*Photo 11*) into the lock and strike the halligan with the flat head axe. A couple of hits should break the lock. You can also slide the clasp of the lock between the forks of the halligan (*Photo 12*) and again strike it with the axe. Both ways will get you through that lock in no time.



Photos 11 & 12: Using either the fork or pick of the halligan can be used when trying to defeat a pad-lock.

If the lock seems to be too hard to get through you can sometimes force your way through the gate itself. The hinges of many gates are of a pin type, (*Photo 13*) with a pin sliding into a receiver.

Tapping the pin through the receiver or sliding the collar that holds either the pin or receiver is an easy way to gain access through that gate. Just place the halligan on any collar and strike with the axe to drive one collar away from the other one. (*Photo 14*) Once one hinge is dissembled you can lift the gate off the other hinge and remove it entirely.



Photos 13 & 14: Attacking the hinge side of the gate is a quicker and easier method than trying to defeat a pad lock.

TAKING UP

Those are some of the common forcible entry problems that you can encounter as an engine company. Knowing how to gain entry using just the irons will allow the engine company members to make short work of getting in and getting to what is really important, fighting fire. Of course, anything that we can't handle with our irons will require that the truckers use their tools. By not relying on them for the simple forcible entry problems frees them up for some of the many other tasks that they have. Beside as an engine company, we don't want to rely too much on those truckies, there'll be no living with them.