

Police spurn city's nightsticks, buy their own

A nightstick is a very special thing to a Baltimore city policeman.

Rather than a simple piece of wood to be used in the line of duty, the nightstick is seen as a constant companion and even a life-saver. As Sgt. Larry Leeson, a police

spokesman, said recently, "It's like his best friend, almost."

And as one exercises care in choosing a best friend, policemen are very careful in selecting a nightstick. They have definite ideas about how big and how heavy the

sticks should be to do their job effectively. Many officers also enjoy carrying a stick that has some feature that makes it uniquely their own.

The strapless, 21-inch-long, 1½-inch-wide, unfinished nightsticks issued by the city Police Department to each of its officers just don't measure up, many policemen say. Thus, it has become a tradition for many officers to buy their own longer, thicker, heavier and fancier nightsticks.

A supplier of such sticks whose products are currently in vogue with the police is Edward W. Bremer, 75, who said recently that he has sold more than 300 of his \$12 sticks during three years in the business—mostly to officers who have just graduated from the Police Academy.

Mr. Bremer believes the policemen come to him rather than buying from one of the large commercial suppliers "because they like the fact that I'll make it the way they want."

He gives the officers their choice of wood, which determines the weight and the force of the impact the stick will have.

"I have made some as long as 26 inches and some 2½ inches in diameter," Mr. Bremer said.

The biggest and hardest nightsticks are usually ordered by policemen serving in the Western and Northwestern districts, he said.

Mr. Bremer stains the sticks in the color of the officer's choice and attaches braided leather straps with metal swivel hooks so that the stick can be twirled with a flick of the wrist.

"Some policemen also like a little nib on the end of the stick to poke in stomachs," he said.

Despite the sadistic sound of it, Mr. Bremer has a sense of high purpose in his work.

The nightsticks issued by the department, referred to by one officer as "toothpicks," are smaller and lighter than the sticks he makes, Mr. Bremer believes, "because they just don't want nobody to get hurt."

But a nightstick, he maintains, is a defensive weapon.

"It's supposed to be able to knock somebody out," he said. "A policeman with a heavy stick in his hands has a feeling of protection. A light stick is no protection at all. The boys patrolling the beat run into some bad characters. They want their sticks good and heavy."

Mr. Bremer recalled that he was in his

boyhood when he "took a liking" to police officers.

"A lot of my friends joined the police force," he said. "So I want to give them something that will do the job and keep them out of trouble."

Officers stationed throughout the city, some of them carrying Mr. Bremer's creations, echoed his views. Many also confessed to a sentimental attachment to their nightsticks.

A stick that is distinctive in some way or was passed down by a friend or relative who has retired from the department is a source of pride, several officers said. They also stubbornly cling to the old-fashioned term, "espantoon," when referring to nightsticks in their reports.

Mr. Bremer said he is very discerning about who buys his products. He deals only with policemen or security guards who show identification, he said.

"I'm not going to sell to every Tom, Dick and Harry," he said.

He was glad to make 10-inch, purse-size sticks for women who feel they need to protect themselves, Mr. Bremer said.

A retired custom home builder and lifelong amateur carpenter, Mr. Bremer began turning out nightsticks in a little workshop near his home in the 3500 block Old York road as a way to fill his idle time.

He says he doesn't earn much of a profit on the sticks.

"But even if I didn't make any money, it would give me something to do," he said. "Anyone who retires without some activity is foolish."



Sunpapers photo—Irving H. Phillips Jr.

Edward W. Bremer, 75, displays several of his custom-made nightsticks at his home.