



Mad Dog's TUSK was originally developed for USMC snipers.

KNIVES FOR SNIPERS

BY LEROY THOMPSON

Just as the military or police sniper has a different mission from most of his comrades, he also has a different rifle, different equipment, sometimes a different uniform, and a different mindset. It only makes sense then that he may need a different blade. The military sniper may well operate separately from other soldiers, often with just one scout, and may be in the bush for days on stay-behind missions or hunter-killer ops. He may have to construct a hide or clear a field of fire, but he may also have to exfiltrate, creating a situation where silent killing becomes a necessity. A sniper's knife must be able to assist in these missions as well as perform the myriad other tasks of a combat knife. For the police sniper, his

knife may not be required to help him survive behind enemy lines, but with so many law enforcement agencies employed in rural drug suppression or counterterrorism, the police sniper may find himself carrying out missions with some similarity to the military sniper. A good knife is also essential to the sportsman who may become lost, injured or otherwise required to stay outdoors for some time.

In this column I want to examine two approaches to the sniper's knife, both of which combine quality, toughness and utility to the degree needed for this mission.

The first knife I want to discuss is Mad Dog's TUSK (Tactical Utility Sniper Knife). Developed for U.S.

Marine Corps snipers based on the snipers stated needs and on Kevin McClung's own extensive experience in tactical marksmanship, the TUSK is a classic example of functionalism. In some ways the TUSK is a logical extension of Mad Dog's most popular knife in the special operations community—the ATAK (Advanced Tactical Assault Knife). In fact, the ATAK is currently viewed by many special operators as the ultimate combat knife, much akin to the view of the Randall Model 14 my comrades and I had during the Vietnam War.

The ATAK and TUSK are fabricated of Starrett 49-06 high carbon tool steel which is selectively tempered, then hard chromed. It combines outstanding



Mercwor Snipers come with a ballistic nylon sheath. The top and bottom knives have the Chili handle and the middle version has the standard handle.

edge-holding with the toughness needed for prying or chopping. The ergonomic grip is constructed of a glass/epoxy composite which is compression bonded to the hidden full tang. This grip is designed to withstand incredibly hard usage, be insulated against electrical shock, and withstand chemicals, solvents and heat. In the special operations community, the ATAK and other Mad Dog knives are legendary for standing up to tasks that would destroy other knives. The ATAK was, in fact, a trial winner at the Naval Special Warfare Center at Coronado, California, in 1992 and was the only knife to survive the rigorous testing.

The TUSK retains these features but is bigger and even tougher. It has a ten-

inch, full flat ground, straight clip blade which is fully serrated. The TUSK weighs twenty-three ounces. I should note, too, that unlike many knives which have serrations/saw teeth, those on the TUSK really work, and Mad Dog includes a special sharpening stone with each TUSK designed to keep the teeth sharp. The TUSK's sheath is like the knife—no nonsense and functional. Constructed of Kydex, it combines friction retention and a snap retention strap. Because the TUSK is 15.2 inches in overall length, it is unlikely to be worn in the upside down position on webbed gear, but it does have good upside down retention. I jumped around holding mine upside down with the strap unsnapped for a full

minute, and all that happened was my Airedale barked at me—the TUSK stayed put.

The TUSK can perform tasks such as cutting limbs or foliage for a hide or clearing a field of fire, though Kevin McClung offers the very useful tip that pruning shears work just as well and do not cause the flora to shake as much while removing it. Not all sniping hides are built in the woods, however. The TUSK is tough enough to pry open doors to get into outbuildings or onto rooftops. It can be used to chop planks for building a hide on a rooftop, or it can even chop through walls of buildings for movement into shooting position in urban combat, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism ops, etc.

Reportedly, ATAKs and TUSKs have even been used to pry open car doors in Afghanistan and Iraq. Though intended primarily as a heavy duty combat knife which can perform utility tasks, in close combat the TUSK is well balanced and lively in the hands and can still deliver devastating slashes or chops, and its point is sharp enough that it can be used for thrusts or thrust cuts. This is a true combat knife—all aspects of combat!

In simple terms, the TUSK is a knife sturdy enough to carry out the tough missions, carry them out without fail, and carry them out every time.

The other approach to the sniper knife is from Mercworx. Although Mercworx has supplied a number of their Sniper model to members of the U.S. special ops community, Mercworx also supplies knives to contract advisors in many Third World countries, often advisors who are ex-SAS or ex-SBS. As I have found when working as an advisor assigned to help "developing" countries develop free of terrorists or insurgents, a knife with an elegant, striking appearance helps add status to my position. The Sniper does just that. Its recurved blade and flared tip give it a very striking appearance, while its large land area toughens it for prying and chopping, but don't be misled. This is also a serious heavy duty knife.

At thirteen inches overall with a seven and one-half inch blade and weighing over a pound, the Sniper is still large enough and tough enough to hack and chop. In fact, I did not appreciate its blade fully until I did some chopping with it. At this point, I should note that two different grips are available for the Sniper—the standard and the "Chili." The latter takes its name from the combination of the green Micarta and its shape. This grip is fuller in the hand and quite ergonomic, especially when chopping. The blade is fabricated of 154CM polished bright. I should point out that I have the usual prejudice in favor of matte or blackened combat blades, but Mercworx does make some good points in explaining why they supply the Sniper with a satin finish blade. Their arguments are based primarily on the fact that many of their knives go to areas where they will see hard usage for extended periods, often in damp conditions and/or where salt water is commonly encountered. In these circumstances, they argue that blackening may wear off and matte fin-

ishes are harder to clean. I would suggest that readers might want to read the Mercworx discussion of finishes on that maker's website.

The Mercworx sheath is of ballistic nylon and incorporates lacing holes and D-rings to allow a wide variety of mounting options. It also incorporates a good-sized accessory pocket on the front of the sheath. The sheath's liner offers good friction retention and is complemented by a snap retention strap. The grip incorporates three holes for lashing/lanyards/attachment cords as well. For combat swimmer or parachute operations, these holes can be advantageous for attaching the knife to the gear to prevent loss if drawn from the sheath.

The Sniper's double-edged blade and sharp point allow it to be used effectively in a variety of close combat techniques, the grip even lending itself well to a reverse Tanto Jitsu-style hold. I also find it balances well for close combat, especially with the standard grip. Having said that, I think I would choose the Chili grip for the Sniper. I've tried both, and it's my favorite.

Mercworx does offer a larger version of the Sniper which is designated the Equatorian which has an eight and one-half inch blade. If one wanted an even heavier duty knife, this might be a viable choice. Likewise, many snipers might choose the Mad Dog ATAK which is more compact than the TUSK but is still very tough.

Both the Mad Dog TUSK and the Mercworx Sniper are well-made, tough knives designed to stand up to hard usage. Both have seen service with real-world snipers, in real combat, where people have been killed and targets destroyed. Both are designed to give a lifetime of service, and then become an



The Mercworx Sniper with the Chili handle.

heirloom for a second generation of special operators. I would suggest that any reader interested in one of these knives have a look at the websites listed while considering a purchase. I should also note that both makers attempt to expedite shipment for military or law enforcement personnel. ☺

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