Evaluation of

Wilson Combat/Steve Woods

Hide Fighter Fixed Blade Knife

Item Number WTK-HF-G

by

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29 January 2018

**HISTORY**

Bladesmith Steve Woods has been crafting the Hide Fighter since 2004. During the knife’s conception, Steve was in direct contact with a variety of military special operations personnel, snipers in particular, seeking advice as to what these specialized warriors wanted and needed in a knife. After receiving and evaluating a substantial number of recommendations, the Hide Fighter was born.

Once word of this new blade made its rounds through the special operations community, Steve could not keep up with the demand. Since then his knives have been used effectively throughout the Middle East and other hotspots where terror overcomes what Lincoln once called the better angels of our nature.

The Hide Fighter was featured on the cover of the March 2011 issue of Tactical Knives magazine. According to the accompanying article, at that time over 600 knives were in the hands of specialized personnel and not a single blade was returned or suffered a performance failure. Since that time nearly seven years ago, many other Hide Fighters have successfully joined the ranks of their predecessors with continued success. If designing a combat knife with input from real combat vets and keeping the price at a level that could be afforded by the people who need them the most were not enough, the aforementioned article continues by reporting that “Woods had demonstrated his patriotism and gratitude by donating a number of these knives to returning service personnel and disabled veterans.”

**Initial Impression**

The Steve Woods Hide Fighter may well be a military member’s dream come true. While I believe this knife is highly versatile and will well serve the varied needs of hunters, campers, explorers and sportsmen of all configurations, its primary calling is to provide disciples of evil one-way tickets back to the infernal region. This is a killing blade.

The overall appearance of the Hide Fighter radiates intrigue. Its sleek, slender and aerodynamic design reminds me of a Great White shark: an absolute master of its environment.

This knife was designed and hand-crafted to provide a maximum level of performance. The steel is thick and robust, and the handle’s shape has been ergonomicaly configured to provide a grip that is both secure and comfortable. The overall length of the knife and its six-inch blade were fabricated with total practicality in mind: it’s not too large, not too small. It’s not too heavy and not too light. It balances like a ball on the nose of a performing circus seal. Completing what may be a near perfect package is the ferociously sharp cutting edge. The blade’s tip is equally impressive, wielding an incredibly sharp point – all reinforced by a substantial amount of high-grade steel.

A fitting tribute to this blade’s birthright is the sheath. This scrapper is made by the Spec-Ops company, a U.S.-based firm widely recognized for producing high-end American-made products designed to withstand harsh military environments.

**SHEATH**

Finding a sheath with enough quality and heart to serve as a fitting accompaniment to the Hide Fighter would normally be a formidable undertaking. Steve, however, has found the ideal match. The Spec-Ops sheath is soundly constructed of Cordura nylon, well known for its strength, durability, and ability to successfully fend off the grueling forces of Mother Nature.

The sheath attaches to one’s belt via an adjustable dual-loop system for added strength and stability. The front of the sheath incorporates an integral covered pouch suitable for securely holding a single or double pistol magazine, folding knife, paracord, fire-starting implements or literally anything of a similar size.

Spec-Ops warrants its products for life, and they would not do this if they did not have the utmost amount of confidence in the products. I have used Spec-Ops gear for a number of years and have never had an issue with anything.

**HANDLE**

The five-inch handle is made from a material known as G10. This is an epoxy-filled composite reinforced with glass fibers. The end result is that one ends up with an extremely strong material ideally suited for the toughest environments. In addition to being waterproof, this material is also impervious to a number of hazardous elements, such as various acids and oils. I tried breaking the handle by pounding it with a heavy mallet and the results were little more than a few marks.

The multi-dimensional ridge and valley configuration of the gray and black handle invokes an awe-inspiring image of an apocalyptic lightning avalanche brought down from the heavens by the Norse deity and defender of the cosmos, Thor, as he terrifies the night into submission. These ridges will aid in maintaining a secure grip and will help deflect water or other fluids from its surface.

An examination of how well the handle fits the tang reveals two significant factors. In this case, the G10 handles fit the tang with as much precision as can humanly be obtained. The result is that the user will find the handle to be extremely comfortable and easy to maintain a proper grip. The second factor aids in revealing the knife’s overall quality. To properly fit a handle, the bladesmith must skillfully apply the variables of experience, time and patience in order to achieve a superior fit. Steve Woods has clearly gone the extra mile.

At its tallest point, the handle rises from the surface of the tang over ¼”. At both the front and rear of the handle, the material drops off at a ninety-degree angle. The edge where vertical meets horizontal has been radiused in order to provide a smooth and comfortable transition. In fact, all edges of the entire handle have been slightly rounded for comfort. The user will greatly appreciate this factor during periods of heavy use.

The handle is securely attached to the tang with two substantial screws on both sides and is enhanced with red Loc-Tite. This will make it very difficult to remove them, which is what I believe the bladesmith intended. With a knife of this quality, there is no practical need to remove the handles. As an enhancement to the knife’s already-regal status, the left side displays Steve Woods’ personal crest, and the right side that of Wilson Combat.

In sum, this handle appears more than capable of performing its mandated tasks with unfailing reliability.

**BLADE**

Having a six-inch blade, the overall length of this knife measures right at eleven inches. While one’s choice of blade length is strictly personal in nature, my experience has shown that many feel a knife having a five-inch to six-inch blade is optimal.

The blade’s steel is made of CPM (Crucible Particle Metallurgy) 154 stainless. This is a premium-grade American steel produced by Crucible Industries, Solvay, New York. This steel begins life in a powdered form and through the application of heat and pressure, becomes solidified, resulting in a tight molecular structure that increases overall strength, durability, corrosion resistance, edge holding ability, and ease of re-sharpening.

At its widest point, the blade measures nearly one quarter of an inch. It is thick, designed for heavy work. The tang and blade are one piece for added strength, offering an exposed tang measuring over three-eights of an inch. This portion of the blade contains three holes, perfect for installing a wrist loop, lanyard, or for securely lashing the entire knife to a pole or straight tree limb in order to improvise a spear.

A solitary half-moon has been cut into the blade for one’s index finger. Directly ahead of one’s finger is a lower guard measuring about one-half inch that is intended to prevent one’s finger from moving forward onto the blade. Both features are comfortable and effective.

The blade’s spine at the forwardmost position of the handle rises about three-eights of an inch and then peaks. The spine then drops down at a slight angle and continues to the tip. While holding the knife, the rise of the spine fits well onto the curvature of my thumb while the peak then comes to rest midpoint. I feel that this configuration provides an added measure of stability during cutting processes.

Discounting the height of the aforementioned peak, the height of the blade from the cutting edge to the top of the spine is one and three-eights inches. The blade is hollow ground, meaning that it has a very fine cutting edge, rendering it incredibly sharp. Generically speaking, a cutting edge this fine can also be a bit more prone to damage. Because of the massive amount of steel supporting the edge, I don’t envision this as being an issue of concern.

The leading edge of the blade has a short clip-point. The significance is that a blade having a clip point tends to have a stronger tip, a feature of crucial importance during piercing operations. The left side of the blade also features a Fuller Groove measuring nearly three inches in length. A Fuller Groove is a shallow, horizontal channel cut from the blade’s body. The purpose of this channel is simply to enhance strength and blade stability. For decades, this groove has often been referred to as a blood groove. The theory behind this belief is that a concave groove would allow the blood of one’s adversary to flow away from the knife, making the insertion and removal process easier. This belief, however, is total fantasy. The Fuller Groove has absolutely nothing to do with blood. Some myths die hard, others not at all. In some cases, however, an unintended feature of a Fuller Groove is that it may enhance the blade’s physical appearance. In this case, I believe that the grove does accentuate the blade’s already-attractive countenance.

In sum, the blade appears ideal in every respect. I believe that the performance phase will sustain my argument.

**PERFORMANCE**

During this phase of the evaluation, the Hide Fighter was subjected to numerous events designed to reveal its strength and weaknesses. While I could damage even the strongest knife on the market, doing so for its own sake would be irresponsible. An evaluation designed to provide the reader with factual information necessary to formulate an informed decision must remain within parameters governing the nature of the instrument being evaluated. It is for this reason that my testing reflects situations that a knife such as this might reasonably be called upon to perform, and maybe bit beyond.

Because even the most formidable battle knife under the worst of conditions will be used to open crates and packages of MREs (unidentified substances the military refers to as food), and cut a variety of straps, ropes, etc, far more than it will be used to send adversaries to meet their maker, it is vital to make sure that it can perform these tasks without incident.

The tip of the Hide Fighter is one of its claims to fame. I, therefore, had to be certain that it could live up to its reputation. I placed the tip of the blade (where the short clip-point section begins) into a padded vise and then exerted a reasonable amount of force to see if it would snap off. It did not. It held fast and sustained no visible damage.

Using a mallet, I drove the tip about ¼ inch into a 2x4 piece of wood so that the knife would stand up on its own. I then slammed the body of the knife down onto the wood. This event was repeated four times. The result was that chunks of the 2x4 were churned up and the tip remained totally sound.

The blade was then thrust into a partially thawed turkey carcass. This may have been the easiest of all the tip’s encounters because it pierced the nearly ready-to-bake bird with no effort.

The other critical aspect of this knife is the cutting edge itself. If an edge dulls easily or sustains damage, the knife is useless. This could be a disaster for the user if this were to happen at the wrong place at the wrong time. Even though I knew how the knife would perform on a wide variety of mundane articles such as rope, webbing, leather, cardboard, strapping material, etc, I spent a fair amount of time cutting, slicing and dicing about everything I could get my hands on, because this is what a combat knife will be called upon to do with regularity. The blade made easy work of everything without losing its substantial cutting edge.

I feel that one of the best trials around to determine the strength of a cutting edge is to chop a solid block of ice. This test is also distinctly abusive and is best performed by a device intended for heavy use, such as an axe. I delivered four heavy blows to the ice with the knife’s edge. A detailed inspection of the edge thereafter revealed no deformation. This is as good as it gets. I then smashed the ice block into several pieces with the exposed portion of the tang. It is most efficient.

One of my favorite methods of simultaneously abusing the tip, the cutting edge and the surface coating/structure is to place a section of sheet metal onto the ground and then use a mallet to beat the entire blade though the metal, driving it into the ground right up to the hilt. After performing this task three times, I thoroughly cleaned and sanitized the blade in preparation for the last event.

The final exam for the cutting edge involved a sizeable Christmas ham before it went into the refrigerator. With the ham still in its package, I delivered one slicing motion. The blade cut well into the meat with little effort and the resulting wound would easily have caused a fatality.

After all the tests were complete, I gave the blade a detailed inspection and found no significant damage other than relatively minor abrasions and scratches which were clearly expected and which an application of Semi-Chrome or Flitz should pretty much remove. After all this misuse and abuse, the cutting edge was not as sharp as it had been prior to commencement of the trials, but it remained adequate for continued use.

Many of these trials are clearly abusive, representing situations beyond those which the knife was intended to perform. In my view, the tip is rock-solid and capable of successfully performing tasks better suited for heavier implements.

In sum, the blade is strong and can withstand a significant amount of physical abuse.

**WARRANTY**

A warranty is nothing more than a reflection of the confidence displayed by the manufacturer. Steve’s warranty does not fill volumes with legalese terminology and disclaimers. Quite simply, he personally guarantees his knives for life as long as one does not abuse them. He also offers a no-charge re-sharpening service.

**FINAL ANALYSIS**

If I were looking for a fixed blade knife to carry me into, through and out of harm’s way, I would want answers to a few questions before deciding upon any given make or model. Does the knife have a verifiable history of success? Who designed it and why? Where is it made? What steel is it made from? Is the design practical? What kind of support does the manufacturer offer? The answers to these questions may determine one’s success or failure, life or death. One should never leave anything to chance.

The result of my using and abusing the Hide Fighter is way beyond favorable. The knife emerged victorious from every trial to which it was subjected. When one’s life is on the line, one must have absolute confidence in one’s equipment. The supreme quality of this knife combined with the bladesmith’s extensive experience and unyielding quest for sustained excellence makes it, in my view, an ideal choice for anyone who needs a knife of this design.

There is another aspect of this knife that is also worthy of preponderance: quality vs. price. If one could legitimately define what features constitute the world’s finest knife and one had theoretical access to that knife, what would be its significance if its price were beyond the reach of those who need it most? If I need it but can’t afford it, what’s the point? One of the primary considerations the bladesmith has maintained with prejudice since day-one is the cost. He has done everything possible to make the knife as affordable as possible without sacrificing an ounce of quality. At this, he has been most successful.

In sum, what we have here is a precision tool of the highest quality that is truly affordable. Take reasonable care of this knife and you’ll be handing it down to the next generation.