

# The Chinese



# Militiaman's *Best* Friend

By JERRY AHERN

Photos By SHARON AHERN

**C**urved Chinese swords are considered the inspiration for the scimitar and the saber, as well as other curved blade swords.

The Dadao – a term literally meaning “big knife” in Mandarin – is the Chinese “great sword,” and is most frequently associated with militias mustered to meet a military imperative. Training soldiers to become expert with any weapon takes time and considerable effort. During the Colonial period in America’s history, for example, the typical British soldier wouldn’t have needed great marksmanship skills. First, his smoothbore musket wasn’t capable of any real long-range accuracy. Add to that the tactics of the time as employed on European battlefields: Two armies stood facing one another and fired in volleys, the volume of projectiles thus compensating for the lack of individual accuracy. Essentially, as typical marksmanship skills went in such armies, all that needed to be taught was loading and firing techniques and basic field maintenance.

## **Dadao: a Rifle Replacement**

The Dadao was the equivalent of a smoothbore musket when it came to training. Based on agricultural implements, it was something with which the typical Chinese peasant farmer would already have at least some nodding familiarity. And, to be deadly effective, this forward-balanced, blade-heavy implement merely needed to

As late as the 1930s, the Dadao-style sword was issued in place of rifles to fight invading Japanese troops.



The Dadao from CAS Hanwei comes with a leather sheath. Most or all of the Dadao swords in use in the 1930s did not have a scabbard. By modern safety standards, carrying such a sword without a sheath would be unacceptable.

be swung. Even China's enemies acknowledged that the Dadao was extremely effective at severing heads. During the 1930s and into World War II, the Dadao was sometimes the only weapon with which a militiaman might be armed, because the Type 24 Zhongzheng rifle, otherwise known as the Chiang Kai-Shek rifle, was initially in short supply.

The rifle, a shortened copy of the 8mm '98 Mauser, didn't go into production until 1935, the 24th year of the republic that overthrew the last Chinese emperor.

When the Japanese decided to acquire territory in China in the early 1930s, the standard infantry weapon was the Type 88, based on an even earlier German rifle, the Model 1888. China started producing the rifle in 1895. Learning to shoot accurately took time and wasted resources. Put a Dadao in someone's hands and point him at the enemy - a simple solution for a country in which manpower was never an issue.



Ahern holds the unsheathed Dadao. With a December cold snap in Georgia, Ahern is wearing his Woolrich Elite Series Tactical Algerian Field Jacket and his Woolrich Elite Series Discrete Tactical Pants—"discrete" because some of the pockets are very craftily hidden. The result is that they look more like casual slacks.

### Japanese Expansionism, Conflict with China

Toward the close of the 19th century, Japan made enormous strides on the international stage, and its territorial interests eventually led to the war in the Pacific.

China, on the other hand, under the Ching dynasty's dowager empress, was weak, dominated by foreign interests. A society arose, initially interested in overthrowing the monarchy and casting out the foreigners. It was called the I-ho Ch'uan, otherwise known as The Righteous and Harmonious Fists - the "Boxers."

By 1900, the overthrow of the monarchy was put on hold as the empress had thrown her support to the Boxers. They were murdering any Europeans they could get hold of, as well as Christian missionaries and Chinese converts to Christianity. The Boxer Rebellion was on.

Imagine this Dadao, if you will, against a Katana with an average length of 27 inches in the blade."

The Dadao is a terrific two-handed chopper, as in hacking and slashing. That said, there is no attempt to imply that there is anything crude about the design. Indeed, the Dadao is a classic sword.





The Dadao can easily be wielded one-handed.

Troops representing the United States, Germany, France, Italy, Great Britain, Austria-Hungary, Japan and Russia fought their way in from the coast to reach Peking to save the non-Chinese holding out against the Boxers for 55 harrowing days from within the diplomatic compound. One can



Ahern is making a two-handed blow with the Dadao.

be certain that Dadao figured heavily in the fighting.

In the aftermath of the struggle, Japan was given a small base in China, from which it could monitor developments. And, China was still weak.

As the third decade of the 20th century



The Dadao balances well and is weight-forward heavy. It is a massive blade that rivals the Katana for deadly efficiency but is more robust, all things being equal in manufacturing.

opened, the Japanese emperor gave the nod for Japanese expansionism in China. An incident was created to which the Japanese "responded," and the fight was on, although no war was declared. Declared or not, this



**Knives Illustrated**, in association with **Cas Hanwei**, is giving away a sword in each of the next six issues of *KI*. This month's prize is the Shobu-Zukuri sword, which is one of five katana styles in the Raptor series. This sword features an elegant shape and powerful cutting ability. The blades are forged in 5160 high-carbon steel, and the edge geometry is configured to facilitate the cutting of both soft and semi-hard materials without chipping, allowing the cutter a wide choice of targets. Designed under the auspices of cutting master James Williams, the Raptor series has been created for the cutting practitioner who does not necessarily have access to mats but wishes to practice and perfect his or her cutting technique. This steel structure also avoids the need for excessive thickness, allowing the blades to replicate the weight and handling characteristics of Japanese originals. The Shobu-Zukuri Sword's retail value is \$375.

For more information on the sword, visit [www.knivesillustrated.com](http://www.knivesillustrated.com) and click the Cas Hanwei banner for more details. To enter, please email your name, address and phone number to [dbeckler@beckett.com](mailto:dbeckler@beckett.com) or mail this information to:

**Knives Illustrated August Sword Giveaway**  
4635 McEwen Road  
Dallas, TX 75244





Ahern is removing the protective cover supplied with the CAS-Hanwei Tactical Wakizashi.



The Tactical Wak is a modern version of the weapon sometimes referred to as the "sidearm of the samurai." A samurai would doff his katana when paying certain social calls or when at home, but the Wakizashi was always on his person or beside him, awake or asleep.



The Tactical Wak has a true Wakizashi-length blade, thus allowing it a wide range of offensive/defensive uses at varying distances and in the full spectrum of tactical situations.



The Tactical Wakizashi lends itself to a variety of holds.

was prologue to the second Sino-Japanese war, which would officially commence near the end of the decade and not conclude until Japan's defeat at the close of World War II. Several battles of note were fought in the intervening years, one on the Great Wall of China itself in 1933.

### Dadao Versus Katana

CAS-Hanwei offers two versions of the Dadao, the one in question here and the military Dadao. (Once again, think in terms of a farmer leaving his field and given a sword with which to fight an enemy attacking his homeland.) This sword is to commemorate the Chinese victory at the Great Wall. As is said in numerous accounts, this was a battle that pitted the Dadao against the Katana. Despite the Dadao's agricultural connection, it is a fine and stalwart sword.

The typical Dadao used in this battle would have had a hilt that was simply wrapped, perhaps with rags or old clothes—



The tang is full length, full width and full thickness. The Tactical Wakizashi is made from one piece of plasma-coated, hand-forged, high-carbon steel.

anything to give a gripping surface to the handle. Likewise, albeit frightening to contemplate, these swords were rarely accompanied by a sheath.

### **Military Dadao Replica From Cas Hanwei**

The military Dadao from CAS Hanwei has a leather-wrapped handle, a simple, but effective, guard and, to my relief, it comes with a leather scabbard that allows the sword to be carried without chopping off pieces of one's body. It should be noted, however,

that the Dadao will move slightly in its scabbard, and about 2.5 inches of the edge may become exposed. So, be careful. The Dadao is sharp just as it comes.

### **Two and a Half Pounds of Forged Sharpened Steel**

Like all CAS-Hanwei swords, the military Dadao is hand-forged by expert craftsmen at Hanwei. Its overall length is 37 inches; the blade length is an inch under 23, while the handle is 1/8 more than 14 inches. Its weight is just shy of 2 1/2 pounds.

Now, imagine this

The Tactical Wak has a longer-than-standard-length Wakizashi handle, which enables the user to employ the tactical Wakizashi with one or two hands.



The Tactical Wakizashi handle is drilled through in two locations and the small but effective guard has two holes in it, as well—all this to enhance lashing options when the Tactical Wakizashi will be used in the field.

Dadao, if you will, against a Katana with an average blade length of 27 inches. Watching such a fight to the death would have been grisly in the extreme but undeniably interesting and very fast.

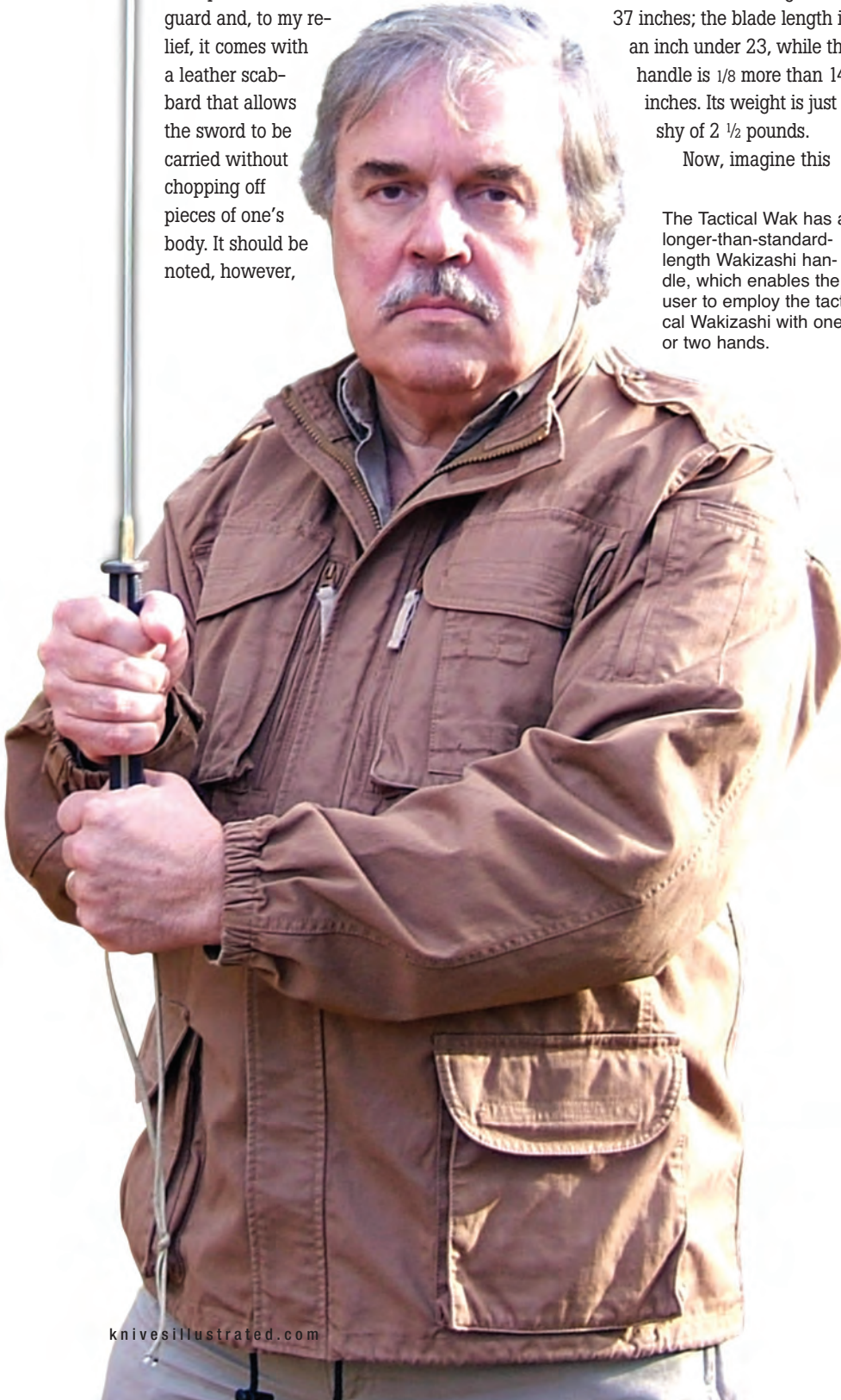
### **A Cas-Hanwei Sword for Modern Warriors**

CAS-Hanwei has still another classic weapon - one tailored for the modern warrior. I recently wrote about this in my column in this magazine's sister publication, *Gun World*. It bears mention here, as well.

I'm referring to the CAS-Hanwei Tactical Wakizashi. Where the present-day warrior is concerned, the Tactical Wak is something I would consider a serious improvement on the classic Wakizashi, although blade length is about the same. The classic Wakizashi has a handle, or hilt, that is clearly designed solely for one-handed use and a tang that is pinned to the handle with a single mekugi, or peg. This Tactical Wakizashi has a handle that easily allows two-

### **DADAO INSPIRES A SONG**

The Dadao was so effective that an uplifting, patriotic song was made up that honored the role of this massive sword. The battle at the Great Wall became the stuff of legend, and the Dadao is, indeed, a blade of epic proportions.





The fiberglass scabbard will not retain water, and the base of the scabbard, as shown here, features a drain hole.



Two fullers serve to lighten the massive blade of the Dadao.



Although most of the Dadao used in battle in the warfare in the 1930s had handles wrapped in rags, the Military Dadao from CAS-Hanwei has a handle wrapped in sueded leather.



handed use. There's a small, but effective, guard. The tang is full length, full width and full thickness. Using 51-60 high-carbon steel that is plasma-coated, Kraton handle slabs are riveted to the tang. The result is what amounts to a "snub nose" Katana that is ideal for our modern warriors or anyone looking for an edged tool that can be used in an impossibly wide range of survival and defensive scenarios.

All the old arguments apply that an edged weapon

The Tactical Wakizashi is ideal field equipment for a variety of reasons, one of which is weight. It weighs in on our antique postage scale at 2 pounds, 3 ounces, including the scabbard and protective wrapping.

won't run out of ammunition, etc. There is no disputing that. But, in the current conflict against fanatics who do not value human life at all, having an edged weapon that is superior to most knives and certainly the equal of any longer blades one might en-



The Tactical Wakizashi is an item of equipment Ahern views as potentially quite valuable to troops in the field facing the possibility of close combat against a thoroughly ruthless enemy.

counter cannot be minimized. As I wrote in my *Gun World* column, if I had a loved one fighting for freedom today, the Tactical Wakizashi would be something I'd get into his hands as quickly as possible.

The Tactical Wak is one of those items that the designers really thought out perfectly. The plasma coating imparts rust and corrosion protection to the steel, the handle slabs are nicely checkered Kraton and, to further improve the efficiency of this serious tool under all conditions in the field, the scabbard is fiberglass. That means it won't take on and hold water; it even has a drain hole. Para cord is provided on the scabbard, which enables the user to lash the Tactical Wakizashi to equipment in various ways. Weight is 2 ounces short of 2 pounds.

If you are excited about the Tactical Wakizashi, as I would hope you would be, since this is such an outstanding piece of equipment, you may be in for a temporary disappointment. The Tactical Wakizashi has proven so popular that it is constantly going out of stock. So, you may have to get in line to get one of these. Sharon and I are often times known for our novels such as *The Survivalist*. Similarly, one of our most recent books, from *Gun Digest Books*, is *Survive! The Disaster, Crisis and Emergency Handbook*. Although this is a recent book, if I were writing it today, I would definitely include the Tactical Wakizashi as an item of essential equipment, a survival essential.


Both the Military Dadao and the Tactical Wakizashi from CAS-Hanwei are fine pieces of fighting gear. The Dadao is rich in history and traditionally as accurate as one could ask for. The Tactical Wak is an updating of a classic design, made to be ideally suited for today's warriors. Either will

“To be deadly effective, this forward-balanced, blade-heavy implement merely needed to be swung.”



This picture from CAS Hanwei depicts the battle at the Great Wall, wherein the Dadao and the katana went “head to head,” and the men wielding Dadao were victorious. Each Dadao, so far, is accompanied by a beautifully rendered oil-on-canvas picture depicting the fight. The story of the painting’s creation follows: “... the artwork is teamwork. Paul Chen put forward the idea and request; I did the picture composition, and Tiger Wang finished the painting. My full name is Frenchie Jin, by the way.”

serve you well when all your firearm does is go “click.”

I’ll always remember the story of one of our brave GIs during the Korean War, a man who was being assaulted by a human wave attack. Out of ammunition, this inspiring American went down, swinging his trench shovel against his enemies until he was overcome. The Military Dadao or the Tactical Wakizashi would have been a better bet than a trench shovel. We live in uncertain times and face implacable enemies. As good guys, we need every advantage we can get. Check these out from CAS-Hanwei at [www.cashanwei.com](http://www.cashanwei.com); you’ll be glad you did! 

**BLACKSMITHS DEPOT**

Anvils  
Hammers  
Tongs  
Gas Forges

Professional Quality Tools for the Knifemaker, Blacksmith and Metalworker

See our work at [www.customforgedhardware.com](http://www.customforgedhardware.com)

[www.Blacksmithsdepot.com](http://www.Blacksmithsdepot.com)  
Kayne and Son  
100 Daniel Ridge Road Candler, NC 28715 U.S.A.  
Phone: 828 667-8868 Fax: 828 665-8303  
International Shipping available  
Inquiries welcome

NEW! Blacksmith Depot KISS Hammer!

**MADE IN USA** **UTICA CUTLERY CO.**

UTK WARRENTED  
BIG PINE HUNTERS

Utica Cutlery Company  
820 Noyes Street  
Utica, New York 13503  
PHONE 800-888-4223  
FAX 315-733-6602  
Sales@kutmaster.com  
[www.Kutmaster.com](http://www.Kutmaster.com)

Features:  
Lavish, Deep Green, Smooth Bone Handles  
1095 High Carbon Steel Blades  
Solid Nickel Silver Bolsters

**WORLD FAMOUS**

“Tomorrow’s Collector’s Pieces Today”

**Randall Made Knives**

Write for new 40 page Color Catalog — Price \$2.00 Celebrating 60 Years

Box 1988  
Orlando, Florida  
32802

**KNIVES WANTED**

- NO COLLECTION TOO LARGE OR TOO SMALL
- IMMEDIATE PAYMENT
- FAST AND FAIR OFFER

CUSTOM ANTIQUE COMMEMORATIVE

**BLUE RIDGE KNIVES**

166 Adwolve Rd. • Dept KI • Marion, VA 24354  
Phone 276-783-6143 • Fax 276-783-9298  
[www.blueridgeknives.net](http://www.blueridgeknives.net)