

# Samurai SIDEARM

The C.A.S. Hanwei Tactical Wakizashi provides the modern martial artist with an all-purpose cutting tool that is still up to the demands of traditional Japanese sword craft.



## C.A.S. Hanwei's Tactical Wakizashi proves to be a contemporary cutter that can take and dish out some serious outdoor abuse!

BY MICHAEL JANICH

**S**words have a very special allure that “calls” to a surprisingly broad audience. Whether you’re a serious arms collector, a historian, a martial artist, or even a gaming enthusiast, the idea of owning a sword that reflects your character is not at all uncommon. Although there is no shortage of long, shiny blades out there, the more serious you are about swords, the harder it is to find one that is functional and truly combat worthy. And if you are lucky enough to find such a sword, you might find yourself paying a kingly price to make it yours. Fortunately, a few companies have recognized the need

for high-quality, historically authentic swords that can be offered at affordable prices. One of the pioneers of that effort—and still one of the industry leaders—is C.A.S. Hanwei.

Hanwei was founded by Paul Chen, a Taiwanese native who grew up with a fascination for swords and armor, but pockets too shallow to afford authentic historical pieces. To satisfy his craving, he became a custom maker, producing highly regarded handmade swords for discriminating clients in the U.S. and Asia. In 1991, Chen moved to Dalian, China, also known as “Steel City,” to assemble and train a group of talented sword and knife makers. In 1993, Chen

SEAN UTLEY PHOTOS

officially established Hanwei and began trading under that banner. Hanwei's early production focused primarily on Japanese-style blades, but within a few years they expanded to include authentic, fully functional European-style swords as well.

In 2006, Chen purchased C.A.S. Iberia, a well-established distributor of quality swords, and formed C.A.S. Hanwei. The company now boasts several hundred employees and, with the help of Paul's son Ron, offers a staggering selection of more

than 600 authentic, historically accurate, and fully functional items.

### The Tactical Wakizashi

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of C.A.S., the company introduced a number of unique new items in their 2010 catalog. One of the most distinctive is their "Tactical Wakizashi," a utilitarian take on the Japanese short sword that, according to their catalog, is intended for "strenuous outdoor use and protection."

## CRKT HISSHOU CERTAIN VICTORY FOR THE OWNER!

BY STEVEN DICK

According to my references, the Japanese considered anything over 12 inches in blade length but under 23 to 24 inches a "wakizashi." Using that definition, the new Columbia River 13-inch blade Hisshou designed by martial artist James Williams is technically a "short" wakizashi sword. Wakizashi were generally considered weapons suited to indoor use where the user didn't have room to swing a full-size katana. From what I understand, this was also the scenario Williams saw

While the CRKT Hisshou rides that line between long knife and short sword, it performs way out of its league as a close-combat weapon.

the Hisshou serving in modern combat. As when a soldier enters a dark room in Afghanistan, the bad guy suddenly appears and the good guy's main weapon fails for whatever reason so he then transitions to the Hisshou and finishes the mission. By the way, "Hisshou" means "certain victory" in Japanese, something we would all wish for in a knife fight. Columbia River stresses they consider this short sword a close-quarters weapon rather than a "combat/utility"-type knife.

**POTENT BLADE:** The blade on the Hisshou is .26-inch-thick YK-30 carbon steel at an Rc of 57-59. Its overall length is 18.38 inches and its weight is 16.4 ounces. The sheath is Kydex and adds another 7 ounces to the package. The suggested retail price is \$325.

YK-30 is relatively high in carbon (1.05%) and fairly low in all other alloying elements. Given there is only 0.5% chromium in it, don't expect any kind of major corrosion resistance. This knife will require the same kind of careful attention a Japanese warrior would have given his wakizashi in the old days. The factory edge is ground with very little secondary bevel in something close to what the web set likes to call a "Scandi edge." I did not find it to be particularly sharp by my own standards but this may be a case of the maker going with the "combat edge" theory of honing a blade.

**BACK TO LIFE:** Given I intended to try some tatami mat cutting with the knife, sharpening the knife on a series of traditional Japanese waterstones seemed to be in order. Starting with a 800-grit Naniwa Golden Lobster, I worked my way up through a 1000-grit Chosera to a 3000-grit Chosera. I know sharpening fanatics will wonder why I didn't take the edge on up to at least 8000 grit but it seemed plenty sharp to me at that point.

**MORE TESTS:** Next came soaking a tatami mat overnight and wrapping it around a green hazel sapling stick. The Japanese traditionally used fresh cut bamboo for the center of their cutting targets, but as Michael Janich pointed out, the right size is difficult to come by in this country. Bamboo has a rock-hard surface but it's hollow in the center. Hazel, on the other hand, is probably softer than bamboo but uniform in its consistency all the way through. By the way, I consider those cutting demonstrations where the sword wielder uses tatami mats without the wood core "cheating."

One quick draw cut and both the mat and hazel core were completely severed. Given the angle of the blow, I cut through 1-1/2 inches of hazel and 5-1/2 inches of rolled mat. Not really bad for a 13-inch blade! It is not hard to see why this blade would give "certain victory" in a close-combat fight.

For more information, please contact Columbia River Knife and Tool at [www.crkt.com](http://www.crkt.com) or 800-891-3100

The "Tactical Wak" is based on C.A.S. Hanwei's Raptor wakizashi, a traditional style of short sword specifically tuned for modern applications by renowned sword expert James Williams. Unlike classic Japanese blades that feature edge geometry optimized for cutting flesh, Williams and Hanwei designed the Raptor blades for cutting both soft and semi-hard materials. Forged from high-carbon 5160 steel, these specially designed blades replicate the thickness and weight of traditional blades, but are heat treated to be more resilient and more forgiving of imperfect cuts. This makes them ideal for sword users interested in cutting materials other than straw mat targets.

While the Hanwei Raptor series features classic cord-wrapped handles and traditional furniture, the Tactical Wakizashi boasts a full tang and modern handle and guard construction, including a modest tsuba (guard) and textured Kraton rubber handle scales. A molded fiberglass scabbard completes the package, offering a length of paracord wrap and several lanyard holes for attachment to a variety of carry platforms.

### First Impressions

I have always been impressed with C.A.S. Hanwei's products, so it came as no surprise to me that the Tactical Wakizashi sample I received exhibited excellent quality, fit and finish. The 20-inch blade, which features a full-length bo-hi (wide fuller) to reduce weight and add rigidity, has well-executed hamaguri (appleseed) grind and a handsome satin finish. There is no hamon (temper line) evident on the blade, suggesting that it is tempered to a uniform hardness. The habaki (blade collar) is nicely machined and fitted and mated to the understated but very functional guard. Similarly, the full tang is ground perfectly flush with the handle scales, with no gaps or uneven surfaces. Despite its purposely Spartan design, the Tactical Wakizashi is still aesthetically pleasing.

### Why a Tactical Sword?

OK, I know what you're thinking: It might be nice, but why would anyone actually need or want a "tactical" wakizashi? Well, first of all, cutting things is fun. As I write this, I have just returned from the Blade Show in Atlanta where I had the pleasure of spending some quality time with several top competitive cutters, including José Diaz and Ed Schempp. Based on my discussions with them, I now have an even greater appreciation for the practice of challenging and testing one's skills by cutting a variety of targets. And since this practice seems

completely consistent with the logic C.A.S. Hanwei offered in its own catalog, cutting things—especially things other than traditional straw mat targets—seems more than enough reason for this sword to exist. But does that make it "tactical?" Not yet.

My first introduction to the concept of a "tactical" sword was about 10 years ago when I shot a video with Canadian knife-maker Wally Hayes on making a tactical katana. Like the Hanwei product, Hayes' sword was a simplified, but highly functional, design. In the process of shooting that video, I met Hayes' then-apprentice Brent Beshara. At the time, "Besh" was a member of the Canadian military's most elite special operations unit, Joint Task Force 2 (JTF 2). Interestingly, his choice of edged tool while serving in that capacity was—you guessed it—a tactical wakizashi, custom made by Hayes. According to Beshara, he carried a tactical wakizashi "because, unlike a machete, it could be wielded with the full power of both hands and had a true thrusting point. These features made it a formidable close-combat weapon, yet still allowed it to function as a useful tool in the field." Given the outstanding reputation of JTF-2 and the fact that Besh was not the only one of its members to

carry a wakizashi, I'd say we have it "on good authority" that the tactical wak is a viable tool in the modern world.

### Cutting Up

Based on a clearer understanding of the Hanwei Tactical Wakizashi's intended applications, it was time to put it through its paces. To get an idea of its handling qualities, I started with some solo movements and flow drills from my Filipino martial arts background. Although I'm not trained in classical kenjitsu, the wak didn't seem to know that. It exhibited excellent balance and it was easy to orient the plane of motion of the blade.

Once I was comfortable with the feel of the wak, it was time to do some cutting. As a nod to tradition and as a standard baseline of performance, my first choice of targets was



The Kraton rubber handle of the Tactical Wak provides a secure grip and plenty of room for two hands and its understated guard provides ample protection.

the classic rolled, water-soaked straw mat. I'll save you the suspense: the wak cut as well as the best traditional Japanese swords I've used and the mats posed no real challenge.

Looking around the garage, I spotted a coil of 1-inch Manila rope that looked too long for its own good. I know that 1-inch rope can be cut with much shorter

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One of the author's cutting tests was to cut freestanding mailing tube with the wak. It proved that it was definitely up to the test.



The thick-walled mailing tube scratched the Tactical Wak's blade finish slightly and cuts exhibited slight tearing, but still powered through.

blades, but it is also a baseline of cutting performance and, unlike straw mats, can be purchased on short notice at the local hardware store. As such, it's a good cutting medium for the average guy. Again, the C.A.S. Hanwei wak made short work of it.

In addition to straw mats, one of the other traditional tameshigiri (test cutting) materials was green bamboo. Just as the mats were used to replicate the resistance



Cutting a two-liter plastic bottle filled with water is a challenge of accuracy and edge alignment—and makes for a cool photo.

of flesh, the green bamboo was basically an analog for living bone. Unfortunately, the only green bamboo I have available is the stuff I planted in my Japanese garden—a species that only grows to a maximum diameter of about 1/2-inch. Sticking with the non-traditional theme and borrowing a page from my late friend Hank Reinhardt, I grabbed a few thick-walled mailing tubes. Hank, who was a virtual encyclopedia of sword knowledge, liked to balance these tubes on end on a flat surface. Cutting them successfully therefore required both power and significant speed. Otherwise, they'd just go flying. And like bamboo, if the angle of your cut was off or you twisted the blade in the target, the cut would fail and quite often the blade would bend.

Once again, the Tactical Wak shined, powering through the tubes with ease. Its 8-1/2-inch handle provided ample room for a two-handed grip and the extra power it provides. Although the abrasive nature of the tubes did produce a few minor scratches, the plasma coating on the blade kept them to a minimum and made wiping off any residue a snap.

Cutting water bottles does little to challenge the actual performance of a blade; however, it is a viable test of accuracy and edge alignment. It's also one of the most economical ways to test your skills in live blade cutting. The excellent handling characteristics of the wak make "wak-ing" two-liter bottles cleanly and accurately easy and fun.

Convinced that the wak would cut just about anything I put in its path, I decided to evaluate its performance as a thrusting weapon. To do that, I turned it loose on a foam mannequin torso—one of my personal baseline testing targets. Thrusting knives into it is fun and clearly establishes the penetrating power of a blade. But two-hand thrusts with the 30-ounce wak took penetration to a whole new level. Both the power and accuracy of these strikes left me with no doubts concerning the deadly potential of this weapon.

Some might argue that the C.A.S. Tactical Wakizashi is not practical in today's world. Opinions always vary, but I certainly would not feel underequipped carrying one in the field. And when it comes to mastering the mechanics of live-blade cutting in a fun, economical way, this \$169 suggested retail price high-performance sword is hard to beat. **TK**

### For More Information

[www.casiberia.com](http://www.casiberia.com)

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