

# TACTICAL KNIVES

THE CUTTING EDGE OF SURVIVAL

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# +BIANCO

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# Backcountry BANTAMS

We try Swiss Bianco's new light-but-rugged fixed blades, ready for camp and trail

BY DR. TERRY M. TRIER



The S.B.T. took a pounding with no ill effect when the author split several seasoned hard maple branches by hammering on the pommel and driving the point through the sides of the branches.

**T**he older I get, the more I appreciate the advice of the great 19th century outdoorsman George W. Sears (also known as Nessmuk) when he wrote, "Go light; the lighter the better, so that you have the simplest material for health, comfort and enjoyment."

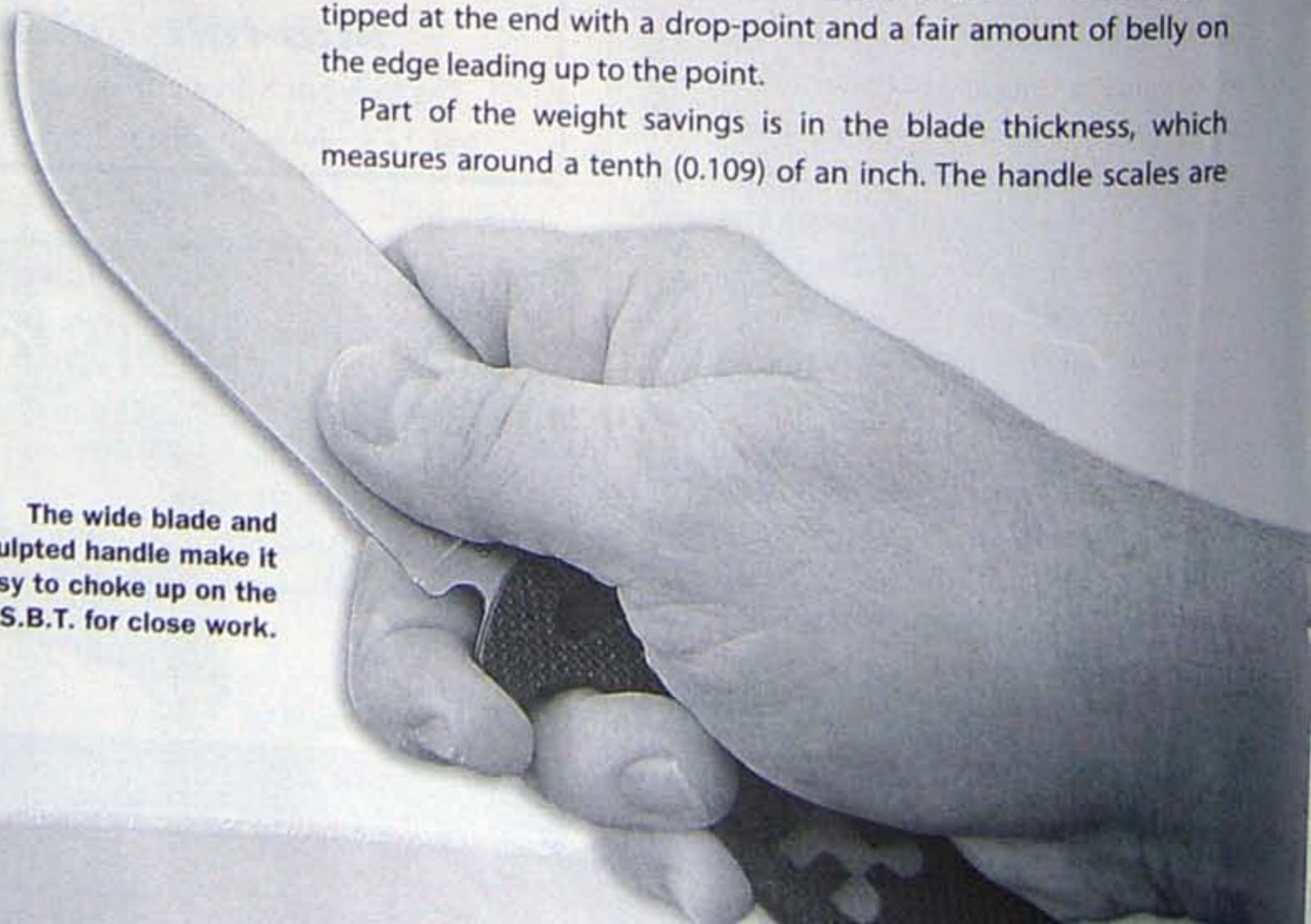
I don't know if Roger Remund, CEO of Swiss Bianco, knew of ol' Nessmuk's writings, but Remund's knives surely fit in with Nessmuk's go-light philosophy. Both Bianco knives I received, the S.B.T. (Swiss Basic Tool) and the Neck Angel, are definitely on the light side. Yet, as I discovered, they handle a wide variety of cutting chores quite well.

## Swiss Basic Tool

Weighing 5 ounces, the S.B.T. is a reasonably light knife for the belt, but by no means is it a small knife. The overall length is 8 3/4 inches, and the flat-ground blade is 4-1/4 inches long from the edge of the scales. It's also 1-1/4 inches wide along most of its length, tipped at the end with a drop-point and a fair amount of belly on the edge leading up to the point.

Part of the weight savings is in the blade thickness, which measures around a tenth (0.109) of an inch. The handle scales are

The wide blade and sculpted handle make it easy to choke up on the S.B.T. for close work.





The SBT (top) and Neck Angel (bottom) are a pair of rarities, new fixed blade designs from Switzerland.



straight and slender, and this contributes to the light weight. Overall handle thickness measures 0.34 inches.

The lean, modern design of the handle will fool you though. This is a knife you can really hang on to. The G10 scales are wonderfully textured and very grippy. I'd like to see this checkering pattern on more knives. The top of the handle is straight along the spine, but the bottom is smoothly and deeply contoured. This, along with the nicely chamfered edges, makes the handle comfortable and secure in a variety of grips. There is also a very substantial feel to it in the hand.

A series of fairly wide grooves is cut across the edges of the handle and are strategically placed for traction. Four grooves extend into the spine of the blade, forming a thumb ramp that is very grippy. The grooves lack the sharp edges you often see on thumb ramps (although later I discovered they were sharp enough to strike a firesteel). They are also widely spaced, measuring 1/4 inch from valley to valley. Though nontraditional, I found this

design to be very functional and comfortable and prefer it to most thumb ramps I've tried.

### Kydex Sheath

The S.B.T. rides securely in a well-designed and very-well-made Kydex sheath fitted with a Tek-Lock that provides a variety of carry options in the vertical and horizontal plane. Remove the Tek-Lock, slip some rope through the eyelets in the bottom of the sheath, and you've got a "necker." The whole package is slim and trim and totes easily, whether clipped to the belt, pack, or slung around the neck. I carried the S.B.T. off and on for six months and found it very unobtrusive, yet very capable.

The S.B.T. comes standard with premium S30V steel and a heat treat by Paul Bos. Given the thin slicing geometry of the blade, I decided this would be the perfect tool to process the mound of cardboard boxes that was accumulating in the basement. An hour later, I had a big pile of cardboard neatly sliced into manageable



pieces for the recycling bin. One minute of stropping on a piece of charged leather, and the blade was back to a shaving-sharp edge.

Although the blade is thin, there is no distal taper. This reduces penetration ability but it provides added strength to the tip. I had no problem using the tip to pry heavy staples out of cardboard boxes, being careful though to pry with the spine and not chip the edge. Later, I discovered that the S.B.T. was strong enough to use a baton on the pommel to drive the tip through several seasoned maple branches. This is handy when you are trying to split curved branches to create splits for carving spoons or camp utensils. A 10x loupe revealed no hint of damage to the tip.

### Trips Afield

The S.B.T. rode with me on a half dozen outdoor trips. It was never a burden to carry or add to the pack for backup. The unique flat design tucks nicely into a day pack or shoulder bag. Blade geometry is excellent for food prep, whether you are slicing summer sausage or spreading peanut butter.

When canoeing, I rarely carry a knife on my belt, but with the Tek-Lock I found it easy to slip the S.B.T. out of my pack and onto my belt for use around camp. The S.B.T. easily handled camp chores such as rope cutting, making fuzz sticks for fire, and scraping fatwood for tinder. In fact, I found the S.B.T. to be an excellent scraping tool. For close work, I found it easy to choke up on the blade by hooking two fingers around the finger groove of the handle and pinching the wide, flat blade between the thumb and forefinger. The middle finger perched easily on the guard. I'm thinking folks who like to work close when skinning deer would find this rock-solid grip very useful. Your hunting buddies might think you've been hanging out at the modern art museum when they see you wield the S.B.T., but you can assure them that the venison will taste just as good as it always has.

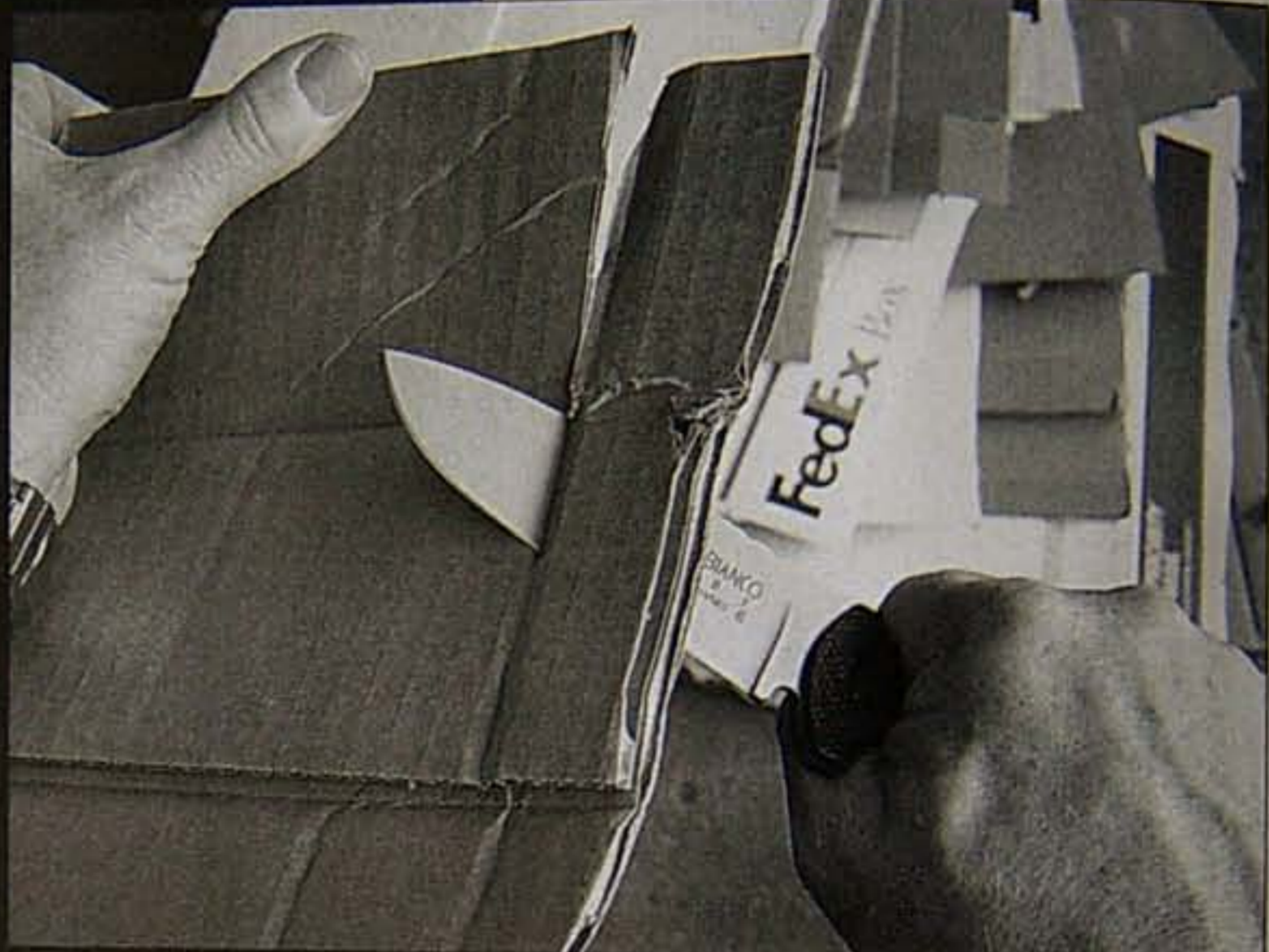
### Neck Angel

While I found the S.B.T. to be a great utility knife, the Neck Angel really attracted my interest. Small, lightweight, straight-bladed neck knives are few and far between for some reason—unless you go custom. When I saw the Neck Angel, I immediately knew I had found an "EDC" (every-day carry). Although I don't mind carrying heavier knives baldric style, for neck carry I insist on light weight. I don't want something heavy hanging around my neck on a daily basis. The Neck Angel looked perfect for me and, as it turned out, was exactly that.



The thin, flat-ground blade proved to be excellent for food prep around the house and in the field.

An excellent utility knife, the S.B.T. easily cut through a couple layers of cardboard and held its edge well after an hour of work cutting up boxes.



Though less than two ounces, the Neck Angel is still a lot of knife. Overall length is 5-7/8 inches, with 2-3/8 inches reserved for the flat-ground blade. The knife was ground from 0.12 inch, 440C stock, and came with a nice, shaving-sharp edge. It was housed in a Kydex sheath that is simple, light, and well made. The Neck Angel comes with a drop point or clip. I much prefer the clip for better tip penetration. A variety of holes are drilled into the handle, making it easy to cord-wrap and in fact, one of the Neck Angels I received was cord-wrapped. The added weight is almost negligible.

### Every-Day Carry

I carried the Neck Angel for six months (and still do) and hardly a day went by that I didn't find a use for it. I found it especially handy for keeping my pencils sharp in my office. Around the home when I'm wearing sweats and no belt, the Neck Angel is my go-to knife. What I really appreciate a neck knife for, though, is its handiness in the outdoors. I especially like them for cutting line when fishing. I gave the Neck Angel a simple test: would it nip off the excess 30 lb. braided spectra line after tying on a

hook? No problem! Modern Spectra and Kevlar lines are tough and a sharp knife works better than most scissors to get the job done.

Whether I'm ice fishing, wading, boat or canoe fishing, I generally depend on a neck knife to cut my line, and the Neck Angel fills that niche perfectly. The handiness of a neck knife also makes it my preferred tool around camp for striking a ferro rod. Unfortunately, the smoothly chamfered spine on the Neck Angel did not work well for this. However, 10 seconds on a grinder and I was in business. Now sparks fly aplenty. Also worth noting, the curved pommel nestles smoothly into

the palm of the hand, making it comfortable to choke up on the blade for scalpel-like cuts.

Overall, the S.B.T. and Neck Angel are uniquely designed knives and a great first entry into the knife world for Swiss Bianco and Roger Remund. If you want to keep things light on the belt or around the neck, or just need a lightweight backup knife handy in the pack but don't want to compromise on utility and dependability, these knives are well worth a look. **TK**

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