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Valiant Company Survival Golok

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- Gear reviews and tests - Edged tools - Long blades -



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Description :

Why would you consider purchasing one - and what's so special about them that you might want to read more about them?

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The [Golok](#) is a traditional knife of [Indonesia](#).

Big Blades and Me

The unfortunate part about outdoor stuff is that you do find yourself wrong on a pretty regular basis. It's always good to be willing to learn - but it must discourage a lot of people. The reason for that - is that usually the first and main characteristic bred into people who go out a lot is obstinacy. One thing I've always been sure of is that I would never be one of the Rambo knife people. I own some fairly large knives, but they are thin bladed affairs more suitable to the proper tasks of outdoor work. I have also worked a lot more with machetes of late than some of the other pages would indicate - and the proper word there is work - clearing and cutting trails, not playing. But after trying some large knives for chopping, I considered the likelihood of my owning one and actually carrying and using it - to be a possibility only after the onset of total senile dementia. It came as quite a shock therefore when I decided to actually try some large knives to see if I could replicate the cutting exploits of Jean-Marc, known as singularity on the forums. I got the knives more to see what traditional workmanship was like, than a true belief that they would chop well. I soon became a believer, though.

Most large knives really aren't. By that I mean that they don't have the length to provide the dual possibility of being used as a chopping implement and for clearing, as a machete. That's a pretty fair answer as to why I've never really been interested, but unfortunately there's also personal prejudice. I don't like many of the added features. It's a free world at least as far as knife choice goes, and I don't like idiot labels on my things. As an older guy I well remember when Ruger first stamped the warning labels on gun barrels... Sadly seeing protective coatings on blades, and names that have some dramatic significance have the same effect. Maybe it's old age coming on - but I fail to see how someone who can't look after a knife, or need the added confidence of a warlike name can hope to return from things are hazardous to them. Anyway hopefully I've stated where I'm coming from on things before starting.

So if like me you are totally prejudiced against big blades from inexperience with them - or worse from experience - well these are a whole different proposition..... We go from warning people that large survival knives might not be the great choppers they're supposed to be - to warning people to be careful just because of the effectiveness of these.

We can start off by looking back on what I wrote for the Valiant page. I'd done a lot of chopping and some abusive tests in the short time I'd owned the blades. Having done a lot more since, and having the benefit of tests by others, well we've learned far more. Now we know just what it takes to break one, and further techniques for use, a person can be confident of the performance in tough conditions. It's sure easy to get lost in detail though! Basically what we are talking about with chopping blades is what they will chop for their weight. One day the worst may happen and you'll have to get a fire going quickly for warmth or signalling. If you are unlucky and conditions are bad - then your tools for getting to dry wood are as vital as your skills. The three options of saw and small knife, axe/hatchet, large chopping blade are all viable. It's simply a matter of seeing whether your choice will work by doing some practise.

Also - here's what I wrote for the Valiant Company Page;

...After seeing a review by singularity on knifeforums I corresponded with him and subsequently bought a Kelapa (AJ-05) and a small Survival Golok (AJ-01S). I was intrigued by his fantastic claims and wanted to see just what these blades were capable of. I've only had the blades for two weeks but since my fantastic claims now probably

exceed his, it's time to write my letter of recommendation. There is of course a purpose in doing so at such an early stage of testing. My interest in blades is centred around the wilderness and survival uses, and a blade for outdoor living or survival is a serious matter. I've certainly tested the blades very abusively, but I am one person and the experiences of many are needed. There are three factors at play any time any tool is used - the situation, the tool, and the user. Only by using the knife you have purchased and discussing with others its use, can you really learn its potential and shortcomings - for you. Every tool has those regardless of cost or even centuries of development. No tool by itself will ensure survival, but in combination with experience and knowledge it very likely might! So please come over to Knifeforums and read all of the details in full. Perhaps you will wish to join in the discussions.

But let's get onto the blades! Why would you consider purchasing one - and what's so special about them that you might want to read more about them?

The blades I received are certainly beautiful, as shown in the pictures. Many will put them on a wall, instead of hiding them in a drawer when not being used. Just be careful of children or uninformed people examining them! More astounding to me was the sheer amount of workmanship that went into blades of such low cost. Some people of course are only impressed by the latest steel and synthetic sheath - but that's something to know about oneself before ordering. One can go further in beautifying the blades by using an etching solution to bring out the tempering lines even in the cheapest of the Valiant blades. For those less caring of looks, it gives a great deal of information about your particular blade in terms of its tempering. The handling characteristics of the blades are superb. The horn handles are well designed for grip, allow a variety of grips and do not become slippery when wet. Despite their security, they do not leave your hands blistered after a few hours chopping. The hidden tangs are certainly an advantage in very hot or cold conditions. The blades I have are well balanced and accurate in chopping. Those are very important factors because such an efficient tool is also capable of doing deadly damage to the user: it cannot be otherwise.

The wooden sheaths work well. It's an advantage to have a very rigid sheath with a long and extremely sharp blade. Much more testing remains to be done, but the sheaths are durable and in the end you will have to do your own testing in your climate conditions to see if they shrink or loosen. There are remedies for both situations. Be aware that while the sheaths are designed to be protective of your hand, there is a traditional grip for drawing the blade to avoid cuts and one is better not to take risks.

The blades are zone tempered with a sufficiently hard edge and a very tough centre. This is essential to avoid blade breakage, and still have a hard edge. In contrast most machetes are tempered soft throughout: they're tough but easily blunted. I find that I could chop very hard wood for hours of continuous chopping without resharpening: keeping a blade at peak sharpness though, avoids the possibility of glances. Abusive testing on hemlock stubs (which have very tough inclusions) did not damage the edge, which I find incredible. Normally one would use the sharpened false edge (or back of blade) to cut and break these as they make good firewood in wet conditions here.

A convex chopping edge is essential in allowing chopping without the blade binding in the wood being cut as happens with a machete - which is flat sided with a standard bevel. I have reprofiled the 2" in front of the handle for better cutting potential. This makes the knife more versatile, but necessitates more care in use. That first 2" is not used in chopping, and is the section of any blade most useful for whittling wood since it allows more leverage and control. Some of the blades come sharp and some not so sharp. Unless one wishes to test out of box performance, it is advisable to sharpen them, even before first use. They are forged to shape and then ground and so there will be irregularities. The present cost of the blades would have to be increased to cover increased sharpening, and I believe the purchaser will learn a great deal by sharpening their own blades. You will learn about both the steel and the bevels. I believe this to be essential in learning to trust a blade - serious defects are more often found in sharpening than in actual use - with any blade. Sharpening tools are cheap and advice is freely given on the Internet forums concerned with blades.

I've tried to cover a lot of ground in few words to explain my enthusiasm for the blades. There is the subject, though, of practical usage. In my area, and in going out alone in variable conditions, a chopping tool is vital, since a saw is limited. One has the choice of a hatchet/axe or of a sufficiently heavy knife. Both are absolutely devastating tools/weapons, as history and use well inform us. If one is to be secure in the wilderness under tough conditions, however, one must master their use: there is simply no alternative. I am particularly enthused with the survival golok because of its price and capabilities. One simply can't be concerned with avoiding damage to the blade while learning: that will lead to an accident. Hitting a rock might cause you upset, but hitting yourself will result in major injury. There is the point too that while there are many expensive survival blades around - you will only be able to choose one based on your experience. And there are no shortcuts in learning. The survival golok might not be the blade that you end up with - but there are many compelling reasons why it should be the blade you start with. There is the point of course that a blade is only useful if it is on your person when you need it. I'll begin testing the lighter models in the lineup shortly. I'm expecting to find the same quality based on other people's experience - but there's the question of usage to consider.

I've certainly enjoyed exchanging emails with Suwandi - what a straight up guy! He didn't know who I was or what I was going to be doing to his blades when I first purchased - but he cared enough to ask and soon found out! I was amazed that he cared enough to ask in the first place - it isn't a common experience with people who sell you blades. I've only ever got an honest answer from him: if he doesn't know or isn't sure he says so. I've never had any wild claims from him - any wild claims as to the blades have come from me and other users - and he has presented his blades as simple and honestly made. - always. It can be remarkably hard to have a decent relationship when you are checking someone's product, and even everything they tell you. It just has been a pleasure dealing with wandi for both his understanding and humor!

I guess that's a long answer to the questions of "Any Good?", "Worth trying?" and "OK to deal with?" The simple answer of "Yes." doesn't tell you much, however. "Wild fantastic claims" is a neat term to describe what you have evidence for, in 24 hours of straight chopping and trying to destroy blades and finding only good things. So far the blades look like they're going to outlast me, so you would have to wait a while for the final review. One claim that I can't substantiate with pictures and evidence is how much enjoyment and fun I've had with the blades...

Chopping Tools

A chopping tool is indispensable at times in the bush. For many of course that might not be true. In summer one can easily shave some dry sticks and get a fire started - and a light Mora knife with a baton will provide shelter poles and all else required. When conditions get mean though, then a chopping tool is of prime importance. The choices are an axe or hatchet - or some version of large knife. A light axe or hatchet has always been my preference - but it demands a large learning curve, and a lot of respect. Without those it is more likely to injure than help. I believe that most large knives are inherently safer than hatchets - as long as you are talking about the nine inch variety. When you move up to the efficiency and potential of larger blades such as the kukri, or golok that changes. These like the hatchet demand learning and experience.

In my recommendation on the Valiant page I wrote that the survival golok may not be the survival blade that a person ends up with, but that there are very good reasons why it should be the one to start with. Let's see if I can present a convincing argument.

The survival golok is a large blade with a convex profile so that it doesn't keep wedging in wood like a machete. Sharpen it properly though and it will do the work of a machete. For it's weight of 1lb4oz with sheath for the small, up to two ounces more total for the large - it will for many jobs on green and seasoned wood, do much the same work as

a good hatchet of similar weight. A blade of that weight can be carried on the person.

At about this point most people are willing to consider the golok - but a strange idea is surfacing - well it did with me. For all intents and purposes you are going to be going out with what could pass for and act as - a sword. You really can't joke about it as you would with a cheap machete, and say "Oh just trimming the campsite, cutting back the devil's club, can't be bothered with an expensive knife..." It's pretty clear from the sheath with the buffalo horn handle sticking out that you are packing what most would consider a sword. You could go out with the most expensive heavy duty survival knife made and most people would think that it's something you got off ebay under the Rambo \$14 section - and just don't know any better about knives. But a sword...

It bothered me too! First off, how do you wear a sword. This isn't the olden days and a sword on the belt isn't too convenient for driving etc.. That one is easy - if you carry it on your person you use a thin strap that goes over your shoulder - or you just tuck the sheath in your belt when you stop the truck and go for a walk. Both work very well. The point is that in the real bush people are going to figure that you have a real purpose in mind - far more so than with carrying a large bowie style which usually denotes a person of little experience. Sorry about that - but up here it does. Around campsites of course it's best left in the pack unless being used for good purpose.

Strangely up here, the golok - and even the longer parang have not gotten any derisive remarks. I really was expecting a few Zorro jokes at my expense. People really want to know what I'm carrying and I explain that it's a tool despite the fancy looks. I never unsheath it and explain that it's sharp.

So yes it would appear that you can carry the golok without any great inconvenience or discomfort - and without looking ridiculous.

So it's possible to carry a golok around and I say it works well. So what's wrong with it?????

Strangely - what's wrong with it is also what's right with it.....

It's inexpensive:

Lots of people want an expensive blade because they're wanting to buy life insurance or wanting to show off. In the bush you can't buy life insurance with tools - only with tools combined with experience. Same for showing off: people are only going to be impressed by skills, and what they see you are able to do. In actual fact the golok is priced very low - and you get a hand made blade and sheath with about 10 hours of work in it. Because it's hand forged and hardened differentially, you have a very strong package that's made for efficiency. In terms of actual use - once properly sharpened, and used with skill, this blade is going to outperform just about anything in the weight range by a large factor - so you won't lack confidence once you've used one.

I often get email asking for recommendations as to a big blade. That's tough because really you can't cover all the possibilities. I can recommend that people try this blade just because it's inexpensive. It sure doesn't mean that it will be the blade that a person ends up with though! A survival blade has to be on the person and work for what they want to do. That sounds simple and reasonable enough - but people come in all sorts of sizes and strengths. The first rule of survival blades is that they only count if they are with you, and not if they are back at the truck or in camp because they felt too heavy to carry today.. With the golok, if it doesn't work out you'll know what to try next - and you

won't be out any money because you'll easily be able to sell it, or more probably you'll want to keep it for display or other jobs. The survival golok is sold at the price it is to get people to try a Valiant blade - with the idea in mind that once you see what you get, that you'll want more. The fact is that with me, once I got a couple of blades I wanted more: if it that works the same with you then you might still consider the blades as incredible value - but you'll sure end up owning a bunch. That of course won't be inexpensive....

It'll require some sharpening to work optimally:

Really - you'll need to sharpen it before you do much. That doesn't sound like much of a recommendation - but it is. A blade as effective as this one is, demands some learning and experience. Best to start right away, with the basics, and at home. Sharpening a blade of this size and of this temper will give you a feel for it that will give you far more confidence in it than the price. I'll go into the sharpening details later.

It's deadly:

At least unlike a little hatchet - it looks the part. There are three components to consider: the situation, the tool and the user. The tool is obviously deadly - anything that can chop through small trees could obviously do the same to one of your limbs if you let it. If you never give it chance to hurt you - by showing the proper caution and respect, all will be fine. That leaves how to get experience - both with the blade and what you haven't thought of - the situation. Learning demands concentration on doing a job and not getting hurt. You simply can't be thinking about the tool. If you ding it, dent it - whatever - tough you are out \$40 plus postage. Unfortunately besides not hitting yourself you have to consider the situation. An effective chopping tool will easily cut down a tree, and most people will of course be thinking of the possibility of the tree falling on them. there are other hazards to consider too, such as branches under tension that spring up when cut. These are less obvious and only thought and experience will help avoid bad situations.

what we've really come down to here is that when "survival" is part of the name of a blade, it assumes some things of the user. Willingness to learn technique, discipline, and eventual skill and knowledge. Best to buy in as inexpensively as possible and see if a long blade is what you need. Maybe a hatchet will work better for what you need to do, maybe a different blade. No matter what you get, for however much you pay, the tool will always be only one component.

The Golok Specifics:

Once you go to the [Valiant page](#) you will be confronted by a lot of blades. It'll be tempting for some to look at a picture of a blade like a parang or bolo and decide that it's even better looking than the survival golok, more expensive and so must be even better. They come in damascus too at super prices. I think it honest to warn people that few of us have stopped at one or two blades. See what you get with the damascus blades, and you'll be wanting a bunch of the expensive ones too. There's no problem in ordering one and admiring it, but if you start your cutting adventures with an even more specialized blade than the golok, you'll likely hurt yourself. I know - warning after warning - but I'm very strong and now have had lots of cutting experience - but you have to learn how these blades

work by starting with the one that's easiest to master. The others can wait for use, if not admiration, until your blade swinging arm is in shape.

The specifics of the survival golok do not tell the whole story. It's not just another big chopping blade. If you learn the technique of the drawing cut for which it is optimized, by accident, you'd better be prepared when the blade sails right through the material and not let it hit you. You can read the specifications in all sorts of detail on the various threads - but that's one detail that won't readily be apparent.

The blade:

Here's picture of the blade with the Kelapa above it:



So, as you see, a blade that's slightly weighted toward the tip, moving the sweet spot for heavy cutting to a section of blade well forward - but not so much forward that the blade becomes difficult to control. You can handily make heavy cuts, using a section about half way down the blade. You can sweep through smaller or softer stuff by using portions of the blade closer to the tip. If you imagine your arm and blade making an arc as you swing it, then clearly the part of the blade toward the tip covers more distance and so is going much faster. Blades such as the parang are optimized for this, and so will readily out-chop the golok. The thing to remember is that having a wide heavy section of blade far from your grip makes them far more difficult to control if the blade meets a knot in the wood and deflects slightly. If the golok blade were more pointy, then with less weight at the tip to counterbalance, the sweet spot for heavy cutting would move much closer to the grip. Without going into great detail, the blade on the golok is about as optimal in

shape as it can get for general use. Later if you wish for a different shape, models exist.

Cliff Stamp has gone into great detail with the convex overall shape of the blade profile [here](#). All you really need to know though is that the blade has about the best cross section possible for general use on a variety of heavy and light materials to cut through. Once you get beyond being amazed by what you can do with the blade out of the box, and more importantly have learned the drawing cut, you can consider reprofiling the blade. This is far more than a simple job of cleaning up the blade bevels so that all is neat and even. You find a thick piece of the stuff you cut through most, and give it your best drawing cut. The blade won't wedge because of the convex profile. Notice the depth of the cut. Now you go home and fire up the trusty belt grinder and hone back the bevels to make them more acute, yet still convex. Now out you go again and hit the same piece of wood with your best blow to see if the blade wedges. About twenty trips and belt grindings later, you notice that the blade now bites far more deeply - and is just starting to stick. So yes the blade can be optimized from the out of box performance - but only by you since someone else might not hit as hard and might be able to stand more reprofiling. Another might hit harder and find the blade wedging with the deeper cuts much sooner.

Notice the wedging action of a blade with minimal profiling..



For most, a dramatic improvement might be seen with just keeping the overall profile and just having someone with a belt grinder clean up the bevels. Even that is a long job on a blade of this length and edge temper so expect a good job to cost as much as the blade or get a cheap 1" belt grinder and some experience. The blades are effective as is for beginners and to have them come with super grinding jobs would double the price.

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The manufacturing details of the blade are that it's forged out of spring steel, and differentially hardened by putting a clay mixture on the parts of the blade to remain softer - for quenching. The hardened edge extends about 1.5cm into the blade and the rest is left quite soft, including the tip. You could spend a few years learning the details of the forging and zone hardening, but all you really need to know is that it works very well, is very uniform from blade to blade, and you are getting it at a steal of a price. Lots of people, including me at first, have thought that having the whole blade hardened more to provide more toughness. This is actually likely to make the blade more liable to breakage though! Lots of us would like to improve things with our wonderful ideas, but the bottom line is that the people making and using these blades for generations aren't exactly stupid either, and things are made the way they are for a purpose. One particularly nice feature of the blade is that if you happen to have some acid handy to rub on the blade, it will reveal the line where the hardened edge meets the softer bulk of the blade. This line is called the hamon. It's rather pretty to see, but in real use the blade is likely to be too smeared with sap to see it. Anyway if you've ever been an admirer of Japanese swords, the etching solution is pretty cheap and you'll want to do it!

I guess these are the days of toughness, with people chopping through cinder blocks and other such stuff. It doesn't take much thinking to realize that cinder blocks are kind of special: they are composed of hard particles in a brittle matrix. That's why a child can break one with a hammer. Hemlock trees though have their silicious inclusions supported in lignin and aren't frangible. Yep, where the branches meet the trunk are nasty hard inclusions which will quickly show where some high tech alloys have their problems. I just had to try chopping some of these -and when the blade and edge survived I became very enthusiastic toward the traditionally made golok. Many modern knives will survive too - but being made tough with steep bevels, you can't cut too much with them...

Hemlocks sure look innocent enough though...



The Handle:

The handle is a nicely carved piece of buffalo horn. The tang is heated and pushed into it. At this point, lots will be thinking that they want a full tang on a chopping blade, that the handle attachment doesn't sound too durable, and that the horn will be far too slippery for use. Wrong on all counts!



The handle is little short of amazing. It does a great job of reducing shock to the wrist, elbow and shoulder: use a blade all day and you'll find that ideas of full tangs disappear. Cliff did manage to crack a handle in his tests, but that was due to his chopping and prying trying to emulate the worst that someone new to chopping might try. The crack didn't make the blade unsafe and was repaired until he went to great lengths to destroy the whole golok to see just what it took. In normal use, expect the handle attachment to outlast you - simple as that. Occasionally I expect - a poor piece of horn will get by, but it will crack without life threatening blade flinging and can either be repaired or returned.

The horn is great handle material in that it's smooth yet allows good grip dry or wet. The handle shape is excellent, also providing comfort and grip with a loose hold. Just don't be too loose at first! If you look closely at the golok handle in comparison to the kelapa, you'll notice that the length and shape of the golok handle allows you to turn the blade better to use the false edge for smacking tough things such as dead conifer branches. These are hard but brittle so they'll be more easily broken than cut. I would like to try a golok without the false edge, and with the kelapa style handle. This handle is more oval and offers a little more control. In the long run though, I doubt that it would offer much, and I'm sure that anybody really wanting it could get one.

The Sheath:

I guess on something sword sized, you call it a scabbard. Here's a picture of the darker ironwood SG sheath compared to the kelapa:





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The top image is the front, since if you wish to wear with a belt, the sheath goes inside the belt with the belt loop to hold it in place. The best idea though is to make a baldric or loop from some nylon webbing and sling the scabbard over your shoulder. It's far handier and more comfortable to carry that way!

The more expensive Valiant blades have very sturdy wooden sheaths. These are very beautiful, but are mostly to be thought of as light containers for the blade. To withdraw the blade, you make a U shape with your fingers and thumb and hold the sheath that way while you draw the blade to avoid cuts if the blade slices through the sheath. That isn't likely but it could happen. The sheath isn't very tough and without the blade inside can be broken by smacking it against a hard object. This doesn't sound too promising until you remember that the sheath is rigid. People who go out into the bush will be fast to start wrapping the sheath with cordage, duct tape, boiled doggy chewies (rawhide), and anything else that can be wrapped on. That's just the way it is - cordage is so useful that anything rigid gets wrapped! And then of course you won't need to be worrying about fragility or paying more for a high tech sheath replacement.

The Golok in Use:

I've found myself carrying either the survival golok, the parang, klewang, or horn golok in place of a hatchet - but that was in summer and fall. At times in winter, here, things are so wet that one has to split 1 1/2" - 2" dead conifer branches - and a hatchet/axe beats everything by being able to be driven through a branch into a log and then a split opened in the branch in both directions by prying on it. For sure you can chop the branches shorter for splitting first - and even use a tough knife in place of the hatchet. Experience soon teaches that even a hatchet trivializes what is

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work and time consuming with other tools. Where the golok will win you over is in the cutting of browse for a bed, or simply to sit on. you don't simply sit down in winter here. A neat compromise is to carry a hatchet and the small horn golok or something equivalent. The cutting power of this smaller golok has to seen to be appreciated.

I've really enjoyed using the heavy klewang Sumbawa, but such weight is not really required. The straight cutting edge, too, is less effective. That being said, going out to wreak havoc on some small trees is a wonderful way of reducing stress and clearing at the same time! Perhaps the best way of summing up the blade is to say that it is so beautiful with its damascus blade and awesome handling characteristics - that I'd never part with it. Then there is the parang! I doubt that it is possible to produce a more beautiful blade than this - seriously. The flowing lines combined with the damascus look good at home, but far more beautiful in the bush. There's something about the way it catches the light that I doubt could be captured on film. It's so devastating in what it is capable of, that I'm sure that this is part of the picture one sees out there, while honing it beside some river. Except in certain situations, I rarely carry a gun any more - and so it's obvious that I don't fear attack other than by mosquitos and blackflies. If I were ever attacked though, this is the blade I'd most hope to be carrying at the time. You can walk through thick brush clearing as you go by a figure of eight swing - well as long as your arm holds out. The problem with the blade is its extreme effectiveness. You'll need some serious leg protection under the 6 layer kevlar chainsaw pants.... I've yet to test the bolo and bolo camp, but I'm expecting deflection problems with them to go with their tip heavy effectiveness.

All in all, I believe that I've found the long blade that I first didn't believe existed - and it's the golok. As I add pictures of things it will do, I believe that most will be encouraged to try one. You could spend years playing with them, and still be learning new things: I'm sure it'll be that way with me. As I've said I enjoy the many other blades - and I value both the effectiveness and what they teach me. In the end though, the golok is the tool to beat in overall effectiveness.

Please read this [safety warning](#) if you intend to use big blades.

Post-scriptum :Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).