

## **MSK-1 Survival Knife: Q & A with David - Founder / Owner Ultimate Survival Tips**

**Give me a little bit of background about yourself: when did you interest in gear and the outdoors begin, etc?**

Here's the entire story:  
<http://ultimatesurvivaltips.com/about/>

### **Describe the origins and purpose of Ultimate Survival Tips?**

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### **How has your background, as well as running Ultimate Survival Tips, prepared you for designing your own knife?**

Adding to the "About" story from our website....

I am an inventor and designer by nature - I suppose God made me that way. Early on we were dirt poor. I had to improvise and design most things from junk and scrap if I couldn't find what I needed for 50 cents (or less) at a garage sale.

My love for the outdoors and my education as a Landscape Architect at Penn State University... honed my design skills.

I also spent over 10 years working at an INC 500 Company as a graphic designer and creative director, as well as a product developer.

Give me a napkin, paper and a crazy idea and we are in business.

Having probably one of the largest private collections of outdoor and survival gear in the country [David says jokingly] and having a crazy large collection of knives (maybe hundreds? I never counted) many of which I have reviewed on our 320K+ sub YT channel) has helped me hone in on what I like, but what is lacking in all-in-one utility knives.

So years ago I started sketching... actually in the back of my prayer journal. I'd be out in the woods, praying and reading my Bible and crazy ideas for gear would come to me... and I would sketch them in the back of that notebook to get them off of my mind so I could get back to praying.

Jeff and I met even before I officially started Ultimate Survival Tips... and kinda had this thing between us that if I ever wanted to design a knife with him... we would do it.

Honestly Jeff brings all the street cred to this knife. He is an awesome dude, never complained once about my crazy ideas or seemingly picky tweaks... he always lined up my sketches and suggestions with an absolutely brilliant solution.

For instance... the stainless steel bow drill divot on the MSK-1. We had a problem. I always thought it was stupid to burn your handle using it for a hand socket when doing bow drill fires... There's quite a bit of friction there, plus your \$200 knife handle looks like crap. Then you eventually burn through your handle and... AHHH! steel. And lower friction. The problem we had was the skeletonized handle compartments. There was NO steel behind the handle slabs in the right place... so we started talking about options.

I remember one day Jeff said, "Ah... I have an idea" and a few days later the steel bow drill divot was born.

## **Were there any knives that you took inspiration from for the MSK-1?**

Ahh... I'm glad you asked... Sure! The MSK-1 would not exist if it wasn't for the great knives (and great men behind those knife designs) that came before.

Here's my short list...

Probably #1 is the Becker BK-2 by Ethan Becker built by Ka-Bar. It's overbuilt toughness, functionality and 1/4" thick steel inspired me.

Next the Blackbird SK-5 inspired me in the area of elegant simplicity and the importance of clean functional design.

The Gerber LMF 2 ASEK - designed by Jeff "The Man" Freeman - is just a rock solid kind of a hybrid multi-function blade with a wide range of multi-scenario application.

Other mentions: the Cold Steel SRK, SOG Seal Team Elite and Seal Pup, Schrade SCHF9 and even the Bear Grylls survival knives.

It would also be wrong if I didn't mention my "Rambo" knife that I had as a kid growing up... and my Estwing hatchet.

## **The MSK-1 is a fairly ambitious design (the dual sheathes, the survival kit, etc.). What were some of the challenges in terms of making it a reality?**

In short, I had NO idea what I was getting into and how passionate and focused I would be on the MSK-1 and ACS sheath design. That's why it's take over 2 years to get this puppy out there. We had no time constraints. We just wanted to get it right!

I'm smiling... when I submitted my original sketches to Jeff he three things right off...

- 1) Wow, you have "mad" design skills... That was good right?
- 2) This is a really ambitious design...
- 3) I just want to let you know there is no way anyone in the USA can build this knife at the price point you want.

So, probably the biggest challenge was reconciling with myself that I was going to make the knife of my dreams, without compromise, whatever the innovation and cost and make it in the USA with American materials by American craftsman.

Jeff would finish a design revision and / or prototype... I would play with it for a few days and start playing the "What If We Did This..." game with him.

He would often say stuff like, "You know these bolts don't exist, they will have to be custom made... and it's going to cost more money." I would usually say, "How much?" He would give me a number and I would usually say, "We're going to do this right or we're not going to do it at all."

Because of this I can honestly say that this knife has virtually everything I wanted or came to want or thought others might want.

Another example goes back to the steel bow drill divot. The original protoype was only set up for right-handed users. I wanted it to be reversible for lefties too. Jeff ran the numbers and I said, "Let's do it. 15% of the population is left handed. No one ever thinks of them. But in a survival situation, this innovation may save them minutes, even save their life."

Now other than this article, this innovation will get NO attention... but to me it was important, so we did it.

The other end of the spectrum was the sheath. We probably spent as much time on the sheath as we did the knife. And with this being a Kydex AND Nylon sheath in one with all the upgradability and built-in carry options - it went through at least 6 if not up to 10 major and minor prototype modifications. And right up to two days before the

Kickstarter Campaign launch... I just received the most recent sheath prototype... which did make it into some of the video shots of the sheath... not all.

And there are still some minor final adjustments to the design that we will make prior to final production... stuff people will never know about except to say, "wow, that's cool..." when they use the knife and sheath.

## **Jeff Freeman is a legend in the knife industry. In what ways did his expertise guide the development of the MSK-1?**

Holy cow! There would be no MSK-1 without Jeff Freeman.

Jeff brought to this project a lifetime of using outdoor knives and nearly 20 years at Gerber designing and leading the design and innovation of some of the most popular, successful and iconic knife production in the history of the world.

He took my "crazy" ideas and sketches and developed solutions. I was then able to test them in my training and recreational use and provide feedback and suggestions... and that's how the process went.

Jeff knows and "lives" design, but he understands manufacturing, sourcing, costing, the bidding process. He already had relationships with other US manufacturers and did all of the CAD design work and 3-D modeling. As of May 3rd, 2016 the MSK-1 was rewarded with a design patent by the US Patent and Trademark Office due to its unique design. We would not have that if it weren't for Jeff's design skills.

Jeff handles all vendor relations, prototyping and manufacturing intricacies - that I have no clue about. His mind is also an "intellectual property database" so we never got close to trending on other patents or established designs which is easy to do with 19 billion knives in the world.

Jeff is Tier 1, VERY respected in the industry, totally trustworthy, innovative, humble and a good friend. He's iconic. But he's a real dude with a passion for excellence. I think we make a great team.

## **You mention on the Kickstarter page that there were four prototypes. How different did those earlier models look from the final product, and what sort of changes did you have to make as the MSK-1 developed?**

Haa,haa...

Well Proto #1 earned the MSK-1 the nickname “Mongo”. It was a great knife but was a bit fat, wide, and unbalanced... had serrations... on the spine side.

Proto #2 was similar to Proto #1 but eliminated the serrations with a few other tweaks. The serrations were a waste and really didn't function well, so I scrapped them to free the clip point for military and tactical users to sharpen the false edge... which works really nice.

Proto #3 was the biggest leap. It honed in on steel types, finishes, and is probably 95% (or more) the profile, dimensions, and built of the following protos. Proto #3 honed in more of the coating and heat treat of the steel. And the handle bolts started to take shape.

Proto #4 the version shown in all the photos and video saw the reversible, bow drill divot, slotted handle bolts (so that a coin, zipper pull or rock could give access to the handle survival kit). And we settled in on the durably, look and how the black powder coating wears. There was also a minor tweak to the pommel end firesteel striker. We changed the diameter to accommodate larger ferro rods up to 3/8”.

The sheath and add-on tools like the MSK-1 Mini Neck Knife, Kit pouches is another story for another day.

## **How important was it for you to produce the MSK-1 in the USA?**

Making the MSK-1 in the USA was part of the core value statement from the onset of this project and part of my heart to bring jobs, help Jeff realize his dreams and build a ridiculously tough all-purpose knife that I could use for my lifetime and then be proud to pass on to my grandkids. This is MY knife. It's a legacy knife. So I honestly almost didn't care if we ever sold one. But I am glad others have caught the vision.

But I'll be honest with you, my desire to manufacture in the USA was was challenged from the very start.

Even in the initial prototype phases, I realized that just the materials and manufacturing costs to do this knife were MORE than the retail “sweet spot” price that I wanted to be able to sell it at.

The ONLY way, I could make and sell at that price would have been sending this knife to Asia.

I remember the day that I resolved to keep the MSK-1 in the USA... “I said, “I'm going to take a US Made MSK-1 to the world on Kickstarter... if people want it, they will support

the project and we will go into production. If not, I have 7 prototypes to pass on to the next generation. And I go do something other than product design, and Jeff and I have lost nothing but our time. And we have gained a rich friendship.”

I guess the world sees value in MSK-1. So we are doing this thing.

## **Is there a plan for continuing production of the MSK-1 after the Kickstarter is over? That is, will it be available to purchase through the usual avenues?**

I am surprised at how often I am asked this question. Only because I am still in shock that we are actually going to be making them.

I'll be honest with you. I have not totally decided what is next after Kickstarter. Regardless of what I do, Jeff (now the Founder and Owner of Freeman Outdoor Gear ) will stand behind each knife with his Lifetime Warranty.

I have no less than 15 other product innovations in my brain and some in sketch form... so an Ultimate Survival Tips Gear brand is not out of the question.

But I have had many dealer inquiries and such. But a lot depends on where we end up with the Kickstarter Campaign. The more interest by the world, the more my compass points in the direction of distribution channels, future gear or even direct to customer distribution.

## **The Kickstarter project has been hugely successful. Has its success made you consider other possible Kickstarter projects in the future?**

Oh man... Kickstarter is a love / hate deal.

Here's the LOVE part... It's a crazy day we live in... where a dude who lives in the Wilds of Pennsylvania can bring a crazy knife to the world without selling out, taking on huge debt or giving away half of his idea to a big bucks investor... and take it to the world on Kickstarter to see if anyone is interested in it.

But doing it RIGHT on Kickstarter is a TON of work. However, I honestly think it only gets easier from here. And if the MSK-1 keeps trending the way it is and I have funding to get more help for the next time around, I'd be an absolute FOOL to not use crowdfunding.

There IS a bit of a algorithm to “hack” to be successful on Kickstarter and what I come to call the “6 Step Kickstarter Success Plan”... but, using Kickstarter or Indegogo in the future for my other whacky outdoor and survival gear innovations is definitely in play.

I may even consider helping other brands navigate and succeed on Kickstarter.

We'll see.

### **Any other questions, comments, plugs, etc. put them here:**

I'd like to appeal our readers that if they want more USA Made products and innovations from Jeff and I (or even others), go to our Kickstarter page and Pledge any amount. Our Rewards start at just \$2. Every little bit helps and encourages us to consider offering more innovations in the future... and give us a connecting point for others who believe in what has become my mantra for the MSK-1 project, “We're gonna do it right, or we're not going to to it at all.”

Thank you all for your encouragement and kind support.