

# The history of the machete history essay



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A machete is a large cleaver-like chopping tool that is traditionally used for agricultural practices such as cutting sugar cane and/or hacking or cutting through soft undergrowth in forest areas.

It is the ultimate outdoor and survival tool as the blade is used for slicing and the weighted upper blade provides the force required for chopping. The machete will cut, chop, slash, hack, split, scrape, scoop, hammer, dig, crush, carve, whittle, crack or smash just about anything you can put in front of it. It can be used to kill both fish and game and will gut, scale, fillet, skin, quarter, and butcher. The machete also makes a deadly improvised weapon.

#### Machete anatomy

A simple designed machete consists of three parts including two scales (handle) and a blade with full tang (fixed blade that extends back into and through the grip that is fastened to it thus making the blade stronger). The blade is typically 50-60 centimetres in length, up to three millimetres thick and is sharpened on one side (Refer to Figure xx).

#### **Figure XX Basic machete**

Machetes are made of soft metals and are designed to be sharpened regularly. For example, using a machete cutting sugar cane all day would require it to be sharpened once or twice a day. However, when used continuously in violent crimes, such as the Rwandan genocide, there are reports that sharpening was necessary only once or twice a week (Refer to Section XX).

## **Machete history**

During the Stone Age (pre-metallurgic period, and the first of the three age system), man used wooden, antler or bone implements, or clubs, with sharp stones (such as obsidian in the USA or tuff in coastal NSW, Australia) attached to it to harvest wild grains. In some early cultures, these clubs were used for both agriculture and war (REFXX). For example, the Aztec maquahuitl and the Neolithic sickle (Burton ).

During the Neolithic Era (10, 000BC-5, 300BC), also known as the agricultural revolution, the sickle had a huge impact by assisting the transition to farming and crop based lifestyles (Romana 1985: 121-126). The narrow growing season and important role of grain during this period, resulted in significant design and manufacture of the sickle (Banning 1998: 188-237). This led to the start of the development of the machete.

During the Bronze Age (3300-1200 BC; the second in the three age system), machete like tools were being made, including the Billhook (Refer to Figure XX), which is still used in Western Europe today. These tools were made specifically for cutting through vegetation including small branches and saplings. The Billhook as well as other machete like tools were being made of iron during the Middle Bronze Age and well into the Iron Age (1200-1000 BC, the third in the three age system), (REFXX).

## **Figure XX Billhook**

Common tools, including machete-type tools, became ritualised versions of the working tool and so developed symbolic status. Such is the case of a distinctive sickle-shaped sword used by Ancient Egyptians from the third to

first millennia (3000-1000) BC, known as the kopesh of Egypt, and the Greek kopis.

It is thought that the first machete, as we know it today, was made in Spain and was re-engineered from the quasi-sword. The term “ machete” in Spain is also applied to numerous cutting implements of various sizes and different uses.

Prior to the 18th Century machetes were made by hand. With the development of iron smelting and metal working, advances in implement and weapon making followed. Rolling mills enabled machete manufacturers to make sheets of steel that produced razor sharp edges when sharpened, thereby producing easier, cheaper and good quality tools.

With the development of cheap and easy to make steel, the machete became the tool of the rural labourer throughout the world and used by farmers and settlers. The most famous and most successful machete manufacturer was the Collins Company which was located in Connecticut, USA. Founded in 1826 and liquidated in 1960, its first machete was sold in 1845 (Edwards 1985). The Collins Company was exporting machetes to Latin America, Africa, the Far East, and the Pacific Region in 1870, to Australia, New Zealand, the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia), the Hawaiian Islands and the Philippines by 1915 (Edwards 1995: 18).

The Collins machete was the most widely used throughout the world due to its superior design and quality. The Collins machete was designed with a type of “ blood groove” on the sides of the blade, similar to the military

bayonet, to break the suction to enable it to be withdrawn (Edwards 1995: XX).

Another significant machete development came with the invention of the “woodmans pal” (Refer to Figure XX). In 1941, Fredrick Efram invented a more light and manoeuvrable machete that was used by foresters, agriculturalists and horticulturalists (REFXX).

### **Figure XX The Woodmans pal**

The expansion of agriculture and different crops throughout the world required different too types and by 1960 the Collins Company had produced and exported over 1, 300 different types of edge tools (Edwards 1995: 20). How many types were machetes remains unknown as most of the companies records were destroyed after it was liquidated (Edwards 1995).

Although used primarily for agricultural purposes, the machete has been and continues to be used for other purposes including domestic chores, weapons in the military, during uprisings and conflicts as well as modern violent crime. A brief outline of these are discussed below.

### **Military use**

Information regarding the military use of machetes is limited. However some information is available, with the majority deriving from Edwards (XXXX) in relation to the US military.

Collins machetes were provided to both sides of the Spanish-American War during 1898, to Cuban rebels fighting for independence from Spain, to

constabularies in Haiti, Santo Domingo, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama (Edwards 1995: 19).

With the Spanish-American War (1898), the soldiers became familiarised with the local weapons including barongs, bolos and machetes all of which were used by the indigenous people of that region (Edwards 1995: 19). This resulted in the US Army developing three bolo model machetes in 1904. The Army and US Marine Corps consulted with Collins Company and a number high quality machetes were developed and tested up until the 1960's (Edwards 1995: 19).

Machetes were also used during WWI (1914-1918) and US troops in France were issued with the Engineers "Bolo" that have been previously developed with Collins (Edwards 1995: 20). The "Banana Wars" (a series of occupations, police actions, and interventions involving the United States in Central America and the Caribbean: 1908-1934) allowed Marines sent to Central America to gain familiarity and use of the local machetes, most of which were manufactured by Collins Company (Edwards 1995: 20).

During WWII, machete manufacturing increased as the US Army, the Navy and Marine Corps purchased their machetes from the Collins Company (Edwards 1995: 22).

In the USA War Department Circular No. 210 dated 29th November 1922 is the first mention of the issue of the Engineers Machete as armament. The machete had a wooden handle and steel ferrule and it was stated that the M1910 bolo took on the classification of 'armament' in the order. Thus the machete was no longer a tool it had become a weapon. The Woodmans pal  
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was also issued as standard equipment to the US Signal Corp in 1942 (Woodmans pal WW1).

During the Vietnam War (1959 - 1975), the Woodmans Pal was issued to the US military pilots as a survival tool.

The British army issued the machete for many years for jungle training and operations. Introduced in the latter stages of WW2, the 'golok' machete is a basic and effective cutting and chopping tool. This piece of equipment was used by the British in Burma, Malaya, Kenya, Borneo and Vietnam (REF XXX).

The Brazilian Army's Instruction Centre on Jungle Warfare developed a machete with a blade of 25 centimetres in length and provided a clip point ( ) and is used with a 5" Bowie knife and a sharpening stone in the scabbard - collectively known as a 'jungle kit' (Brazilian Bellic Material Industries).

German soldiers during WWII were issued the German Luftwaffe Survival machete used on the Eastern front (REF XXX).

Australian soldiers were, and continue to be issued the bowie knife???

## **Uprisings and conflicts**

As the machete is a common and ubiquitous tool, it is often a weapon of choice in uprisings and violent crime, throughout the world.

The most notorious uses of the machete include the Mexican Revolution of 1905, African and Philippines conflicts and the Rwanda genocide. These are discussed below.

In South Africa during the 1980's - 1990's the panga was used as a weapon during the conflict between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Zulu-nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party (ZIFP).

In the Philippines the itak, which is a longer and pointier version of the bolo was used as a weapon during the Philippine Revolution against the Spanish and was later the signature weapon for guerrillas in the Philippine-American war.

During WWII, the Bolo Knife was used in the jungles of the Philippines against the Japanese Imperial Army. As a result, it is a common weapon in the Filipino Martial Arts referred to as Kali, Arnis, or Escrima, as well as the survival knife of the military.

The machete was the primary weapon used in the Interahamwe militants and farmers in the Rwandan Genocide. During interviews with some of the killers involved in the genocide (those that have been tried, sentenced and convicted), (Hatfield 2005) it became clear that machetes were favoured above clubs and guns during the genocide (and previous massacres).

E'lie, one of the prisoners interviewed states that the machete is more natural to use as the Rowandan is accustomed to using one from childhood. Usually used to cut sorgum, prune banana trees, hack vines and kill chickens, the same gesture was used to cut a man (Hatfield 2005: 32).

Another prisoner, Pio, stated that the machete was easy to use as that is what they knew how to use, they could sharpen it and they were cheaper than guns (Hatfield 2005: 33). It is interesting to note that if using a machete all day in the fields it requires sharpening twice a day, but Le'opord (another



prisoner) clearly states that during the genocide (that went on every day for twelve weeks), the machete needed sharpening at least twice a week (Hatfield 2005: 33).

Although men mainly participated, women would take their place when the men were sick and vagabond and children also participated apparently with the same results thus indicating size and experience has little effect, it is the weapon that is extremely effective (Hatfield 2005: 67, 87). Finally, Hatfield (2005: 64) makes mention that as an archaic tool, the machete was outstandingly effective as it massacred approximately 800,000 Tutsis in twelve weeks.

During most of the battles for independence in the Dominican Republic, the machete was used by the Dominican patriots which led to the well known battle cry "Machete, carajo!" (Machete, damn it!). This battle cry is still used by many military units of the modern day Dominican Republic Armed Forces and the use of a machete as a symbol and a field tool within their ranks (REF XXX).

Machetes were the distinctive tool/weapon of the Haitian Tonton Macoute (militia created in 1959) and it was one of the most common weapons during the Cuban Independence War. Slaves freed by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes agreed to fight against Spain, where their only weapons were the tool they used to cut the sugar cane in the La De Majagua plantation.

They were used in Puerto Rico's Grito de Lares when the oppressed peasants took up arms against Spain. In 2002, a rebellion of peasants, most being members of the Community Front in Defense of Land (CFDL), in San Salvador <https://assignbuster.com/the-history-of-the-machete-history-essay/>

Atenco (Mexico), led the authorities to cancel a project to construct a new airport near Mexico City. In 2006, the CFDL again took arms against the Mexican police.

The Boricua Popular Peoples Army, also known as Los Macheteros (the machete wielders) assembled with machetes to defend the island of Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War (1898), (REF XXX).

Blood diamond trading (also called a converted diamond, conflict diamond, hot diamond or a war diamond) refers to diamonds illegally traded to fund conflict in war-torn areas, particularly in central and western Africa. Diamond from Angola, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone have all suffered uprisings, civil wars and coups, all of which the machete was the weapon of choice (Diamondfacts. org) where rebels usually used machetes to hack off lips, ears and limbs (Johnson 2009).

In more recent times, 17 people were hurt over two days in Sierra Leone during clashes between two parties after a local council election. Armed with machetes and rocks, machete wounds included blows to the body, shoulders and hands (Johnson 2009).

Numerous smaller attacks also occur throughout these areas such as three journalists attacked by ex-paramilitaries with machetes while covering a demonstration by former PAC members who were demanding more government compensation for help during the civil war (Reporters Without Borders 2005). Another three journalists were attacked during a similar

outbreak of violence during a demonstration by paramilitaries in Guatemala City in March 2005, again with machetes (Reporters Without Borders 2005).

Machete mutilations for traditional medicine in South Africa is resulting in at least 300 people killed each year for the medicine known as muti (Tibbetts 2008). Traditional healers prescribe body parts to patients and hire men to find them. Body parts hacked off include genitalia that can fetch â,250 and are thought to be the most prized and children's body parts are thought to be the most potent, especially if tortured first as pain is believed to add power. A head can fetch up to â,500 (Tibbetts 2008).

The machete is a common tool and affordable, thus a great weapon in many parts of the world.

## **Natural disasters**

While there has always been a problem of gangs in Haiti and there is a long history of machete attacks, desperate times bring about the worst in people. In Haiti, following the earthquake, desperately hungry people and gangs of men began looting wielding machetes and injuring people and rival gangs clashing on the streets (Cobiella 2010).

## **Violent crimes**

In the US, gangs have embraced the machete as the weapon of choice. Boston Hispanic Street Ganga have transformed the agricultural tool into an intimidating weapon. The local Boston police have seen a surge in machete attacks (McDonald 2004). This is also the case in Northern Virginia where in Fairfax alone, forty police reports over two years (2003-3005) have identified

a machete used crime ranging from suspicious persons to gang related incidents (Wtop. com).

Gang investigators in Brooklyn have revealed that the machete is the choice of weapon in that area also. The machete first appeared on the street of New York City six years ago as Latino gangs expanded. Machetes are cheap, mortal, are easy to wiped down after use, easily sharpened and they can be poisoned (Smith 2009).

The most notorious gang in the US is the MS-13 and the FBI notes them as the most organised crime entity in the US (FBI Archives 01 - 14 - 08). The majority of their founders are well trained in guerrilla warfare in El Salvador and are extremely violent. While firearms are common amongst gang members, the machete is the weapon that inflicts the most fear and trauma. Torture, rape, murder and dismemberment are common to all the gangs crimes (Bishop 2009).

Isolated attacks are also common. For example, seven machete attacks in Boston over four months were noted in 2008 (Crimaldi 2008), in New York an estranged husband attacked a man with a machete and firearm while visiting his wife's house the killed himself (Allvoices 2009).

Organised crim gangs in north London's Turkish and Kurdish communities also utilise machetes as well as guns as revealed by raids during 2003 (Southern 2003).

In Hong Kong, The Triads use the machete and it is referred to as a “watermelon knife”. A Triad Boss was ambushed and murdered by five people wielding machetes (HK 2009).

Australia

The use of the machete has much to do with intimidation and pragmatism as gangs live and breath terrorism and the machete is the way to achieve this.

## **Cultural variations**

Due to the wide variety of crops and vegetation that require cultivation and/or clearing in different regions of the world, different machete types have been manufactured. The main three variations, from which the other types are developed from, are described below.

Latin America: known as the ‘sable’ machete, it is used in Latin America for agricultural purposes including cutting through dense forest and to harvest crops. It is also used as a cleaver and for domestic chores such as food processing. The machete is also commonly used to make wooden handles for other tools and used in conflicts, uprisings and violent crime (Refer to Section XX). The sable machete has a long reach due to its long, slender blade (length here) that has a curve on both edges of the blade (Refer to Figure XX).

## **Figure XX The Sable**

Africa: the standard machete for the entire African continent, the ‘panga’ is commonly used to cut down small trees and harvest crops, as well as domestic tasks including food processing. The machete has also long been

used as a weapon in violent crime uprisings and conflicts with the most known being the Rwandan genocide (Refer to Section XX). The blade widens and curves towards the tip and is 41 to 46 centimetres in length (Refer to Figure XX).

### **Figure XX The panga**

The Philippines: known throughout Asia and Pacific Rim, the 'bolo' is used primarily for agricultural purposes such as chopping and cutting vegetation, as well as domestic tasks such as cutting meat. The blade is larger near the tip which makes it top heavy for more effective chopping (Refer to Figure XX). The machete is also commonly used to make wooden handles for other tools and used in conflicts, uprisings and violent crime (Refer to Section XX).

### **Figure XX The bolo**

### **Modern machete types**

Today there are numerous different types of machetes manufactured, each developed for specific purposes. Table XX provides a brief description of the most commonly available machetes via the internet including their specific uses and a picture. The information provided below derived from numerous sources including the internet (REF XXX) and manufacturers catalogues (REF XXX).

## **Table XX Common machetes available today**

### **Machete type/style**

### **Alternative names**

### **Description**

### **Uses**

Bush machete

cola de gallo, copeton, el salvador guarizama, pata de cuche, peinilla,

All-purpose machete with a normal, straight back blade that is evenly weighted and fairly solid

Good for green vegetation and as a utility tool

Weighted machete

barrigon, carupanero, cuta, double edge guapote, heavy machete, outback, pulla, thunder head,

A cross between an axe and a knife, is weighted toward the top of the blade for chopping, cutting edge is relatively flat for chopping

The best style of machete for chopping woody or tough vegetation

Bolo machete

Popular in SE Asia the bulge towards the tip adds heft to the fore-blade for more chopping power

Weighted and good for chopping woody vegetation

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### Panga machete

burriquito, cutlass machete, daga, puerto rican, rozador, swamp master

Popular in Africa and the Caribbean. The deep belly provides weight for chopping and curvature for slicing. The upturned point can focus force on a small area for piercing

Good for slicing and chopping moderately thick woody vegetation.

### Barong machete

barung, moro barong rawit

Known for their unique leaf-shaped blade, which is sharpened on one side and is the traditional weapon of certain tribes in the Philippines

A general utility tool, a status symbol, used in the forms of martial arts known as Kali, Eskrima, or Silat

### Kukri machete

bush hog, gurkha kukri, kukuri, khukuri, khukri magnum khukri

Have 3 parts to their blade, a pointed tip for stabbing, a wide midsection for chopping, and a narrow area near the handle for whittling and carving

The tool of central Asia (Nepal, India, Pakistan, etc), used for protection and used as a utility tool

### Colima machete



caguayano, costeno, panzon

Sharpened on both sides of the blade, is weighted on the back side for aid in clearing on the backstroke

Great for mowing or clearing vegetation by cutting on the fore and backhand strokes

Golok machete

crocodile golok golok mala, pedang batak, talibon, gununting, pinuti, parang bandol, sable

Has a distinctive curved shape where both the spine and the edge of the blade is curved, they are long and evenly weighted along the blade

Good for cutting green vegetation without lodging in the material

Cane machete

aztec cleaver, brazilian style cane knife, camp cleaver, corn knife, , machete de suelo, tunca, sugar cane machete

Wide, blunt-tipped, blade is hooked to pull the chopped cane from the plants still standing. The thin blade allows for easy cutting through cane style vegetation.

Typically used for cutting sugar cane, rice, and corn stalks, the cleaver type is great for butchering and chopping thick vegetation

Latin machete

### Spear point machete

combat, hog sticker, jungle saber, peinilla, tactical machete

Machete blade with a point for piercing or stabbing

Livestock slaughter and self-defence

### Hawkbill machete

machete cuma

A curved or hooked machete that can be sharpened on both sides or on the inside of the curve. The sharpened tip can focus force on a sharp point allowing it to pierce and cut very hard materials

Generally used for cutting tall grasses

### Bill hook machete

bagging hook, bill hook, billhook, bush knife, woodman's pal

Has a curved blade for chopping around curved objects like tree trunks

Traditionally used for snedding, the hooked blade, sharpened on the inner curve, is good for gripping and cutting vines and brambles. Also used for hedge construction and maintenance

### Coping machete

rescue machete, coping blade machete

### Machetes with a blunt tip

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Good in rescue situations to avoid harm to victims and as tools in tight spaces to prevent the tip interfering with the cutting surface

Tanto machete

tactical machete, combat machete, military machete

Japanese blade design with an extremely strong point, originally for piercing armour

Reinforced tip used almost exclusively for piercing and stabbing

Two-handed machete

calabozo, coa, scythe, two handed machete

Blade attached to a long handle for swinging and hewing with two hands

Great for generating additional power by swinging with two hands or for additional reach. good for tough, woody vegetation, palm tree trimming, and high branches

Bowie machete

large bowie knife, survival machete

Blade with a clip-point or skinner tip for skinning wild game

Machete having a distinctive skinner tip, a good utility knife for the woodsman and hunter

Tapanga machete

Blade with a distinct back-swept weighted chisel tip popular in certain parts of Africa

Has a flat cutting edge for general use and a front-weighted blade for chopping. The blade can be turned over and the spine of the blade sharpened for hacking

Double edged machete

Can keep one edge thin for light vegetation and the other a little on the thicker side for heavy vegetation, or keep both edges equally sharp so that when an edge gets dull, you can flip it over and keep on going

## **Types of blades**

Today there are three types of blades including carbon steel, stainless steel and high carbon stainless steel. These are described below along with their advantages and disadvantages all of which contribute to tool selection for use and display.

Carbon steel

Carbon steel is an alloy of iron and carbon and has been the traditional material used to manufacture machetes for over 4, 000 years (REF). To give iron the strength and increase the hardness of the alloy, carbon is added to the iron. However, increasing the carbon content also makes the steel more brittle and it rusts. Additionally these machetes are difficult to sharpen.

Advantages of carbon steel include it being harder and cheaper than stainless steel and it stays sharper for longer. A machete manufactured from carbon steel is ideal for a functional tool.

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## Stainless steel

Stainless steel is carbon steel with nickel and chromium which oxidizes to create a protective coating which prevents rust. Stainless steel can be re-sharpened more easily than high carbon steel but is softer than carbon steel and becomes blunt quicker. These machetes are less useful as functional tools and are mainly used for display purposes only.

## High carbon stainless steel

High carbon stainless steel is a recent development in the manufacturing of machetes. It combines the best attributes of carbon steel (maintains sharp edges) and stainless steel (rust resistant). Machetes manufactured from this material are good functional tools as well as display pieces. However, they are more expensive and have a low tolerance to heat before becoming brittle.

## Types of scales

The scales are manufactured from stag, wood, synthetics, injection molded rubber (Kraton) or plastic (Zytel). Alternatively, the tang may be wrapped or bounded by cord or Para cord (Wikipedia).

## Sharpening a machete

Generally, the harder the material being cut, the higher the edge angle is needed as this makes a stronger and duller blade. The softer the material being cut (such as grass and non woody vegetation) a small edge is needed and an angle of 20-30° works best. This is because razor sharpness is

needed and there is a reduced risk of chipping the fine edge. As a rule, an edge of 25-30° is fine for general utility (REF XXX).

To sharpen a new machete (if not sharpened when bought) a mill bastard file is used to create the initial edge on the machete. These files have teeth that range from rough to smooth. The machete is placed at the required angle in a vice and the mill file is drawn repeatedly over the blade. Alternatively, the machete can be drawn across a mill file that is secured.

Burs can be created during the grinding process and develop on the opposite side of the blade being sharpened. All burs should be removed to ensure a fine edge. A finishing stone or knife sharpener is used to finalise or re-sharpen the edge.

An alternative to the mill file is the grinding wheel. This method of sharpening is typically reserved for people experienced in sharpening blades and may be used in the initial sharpening of the machete, removing large nicks or restoring a rusty or worn blade.

## **Australian crime statistics**

### **Machete selection for this research**

### **Possible evidence in a forensic setting**

It is possible that this angle may be manifest in bone cut marks made from a machete. Additionally, those inexperienced users may in fact sharpen incorrectly, resulting in chipped edges and this may in turn show in the cut marks on bone thus linking weapon to injury.