

AFGHANISTAN SAVIOR

A FATHER'S HANDED-DOWN DOZIER FREEDOM FIGHTER TAKES A BULLET INTENDED FOR HIS SON

What's a knife worth? Just ask U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Ned Clysdale and his son, U.S. Marine Lance Corporal Josh. What started as a not-so-uncommon gesture of a father passing a knife on to his son turned into a lifesaving event beyond both their expectations.

The Clysdales come from three generations of hardened military stock. Josh's grandfather is a retired Army colonel. Active in the Army Reserve 415th Civil Affairs Battalion in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Ned served in two Middle-Eastern tours—Mosul, Iraq, in 2008 and Khost Province, Afghanistan, from 2010-11.

Ned is a self-confessed believer in Bob Dozier knives. Over the years he has bought four: a pair for military duty—a small 7.6-inch Bodyguard and large



Josh (foreground) and two fellow Marines near Helmand Province, Afghanistan. The Dozier Freedom Fighter is attached to Josh's vest near the crook of his right arm. (photo courtesy of the Clysdales)

(Left) At right is the Dozier Freedom Fighter that stopped the bullet that saved Lance Corporal Josh Clysdale's life. Next to it is the knife Dozier Knives made to replace the damaged one free of charge.



The guard of the Dozier Freedom Fighter stopped the bullet, shattering the sheath and saving Lance Corporal Josh Clysdale from serious injury and possibly death. Knifemaker Daniel Crotts of Dozier Knives dug the bullet jacket (at left in the inset picture) out from under the knife's handle. (SharpByCoop.com photo)

12.2-inch Freedom Fighter model—plus another two as gifts for friends. “I used the Dozier Bodyguard as my go-to utility knife through both tours,” he begins. “The Freedom Fighter was for CQB [Close Quarters Combat] and was secured so I could access it with either hand between my front plate and right side plate. Other than drawing it, I kept the razor edge. My friend and Filipino martial arts instructor, Tim Greenman, made an aluminum replica of the Freedom Fighter to train with. The climate during both tours was arid and harsh, and my duties placed me in both urban and rural environments.”

By 2012, Ned's tours had ended and he was back on American soil. Josh's tour was about to begin, so Ned thought it only fitting to pass the Dozier Freedom Fighter on to him. “I gave Josh both the KM-5 Bodyguard and the Freedom Fighter just before he deployed to Afghanistan,” Ned says. “I showed him where I attached the knives while deployed and told him ‘I don't care what happens, just make sure the knives make it back.’ Little did both know at the time just how handy the knives would be.

In DAD's FOOTSTEPS

Following in his father's footsteps, Josh set off for the Middle East. “I enlisted in 2009 and am in the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, Echo Company. I was deployed

to Helmand Province, Afghanistan, in February 2012,” Josh notes. “I used the Freedom Fighter as a utility knife and during minesweeping operations to check for buried IEDs. The environment was mostly rural with some small villages and *qalats* [Afghan compounds].”

In April 2012, two-and-a-half months into his tour, Josh was part of a patrol scouring poppy fields when he located a potential IED. “The unit slowed down as we approached, and we began taking contact from my 9 o'clock,” Josh recalls. “I returned fire with my 32 grenade launcher. We moved to contact and started taking accurate single shots, trying to keep our heads down and moving slow. My squad flanked right across the field to the enemy while the other squads in the platoon maneuvered to contact.

“The fighting died down and we began a tactical exfiltration. During the exfil, we took sporadic contact until we came to a *wadi* [dry stream bed]. At this point we had been on patrol for over 12 hours, and had been in contact with the enemy for over four hours. Once we were in the wadi, we started taking fire from the element's front and right.”

From there, things went from bad to worse. “My fire team was the rear element, and at this point I was pinned down with accurate fire with dirt kicking up all

around me. I started engaging the enemy with my rifle, and was shot in the right leg,” he says. “I don't remember getting hit with the other rounds”—there were four total—“but I heard another burst of machine gun fire close enough to me that it actually deafened me temporarily, so I threw myself farther down the wadi for more cover. My knife was attached to my body armor between the chest plate and my right side plate. The bullet it stopped would have gone into my lungs.”

The Dozier Freedom Fighter had earned its stripes, taking a bullet that could have injured young Clysdale much more seriously or even proved fatal. Josh was evacuated to his base and from there his journey would take him to Germany and on to California, where he was still recuperating and rehabbing at press time. “My friends still had my knife and they kept it until the end of the deployment,” Josh notes. “They loved the knife so much that if it hadn't saved my life one of them probably would have kept it, but I got it back when they came home. I have had five surgeries on my leg and am still serving in the Marine Corps.”

BATTLE HEIRLOOM

The story of the Freedom Fighter did not end there. According to Ned, this past November he was asked to go to Africa on a civil affairs mission. “Josh's unit had just gotten back from Afghanistan and had given the knife back to him,” he says. “He brought it home on Christmas leave to give it back to me, and he showed me where the knife had stopped the bullet.

“Since I was deploying again, I sent it to Dozier Knives to fix the handle and make a new sheath. With the knife I sent a letter explaining how it had gotten damaged and that it had saved Josh's life. Dozier's Daniel Crotts responded that they viewed the knife as a battle honor, and didn't want to fix it, but return it to me as an heirloom. Daniel asked if he could instead make a new knife for me to take to Africa, which was surprising and very generous. Both Josh and I were very touched that they wanted to do that.”

Recalls Crotts, who oversees the Arkansas-Made division of Dozier's shop and is an accomplished custom knifemaker in his own right, “When I received the damaged Freedom Fighter, I had no idea it had been shot. I was just thinking, ‘How can I



U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Ned Clysdale (right) served two Middle-Eastern tours—Mosul, Iraq, in 2008 and Khost Province, Afghanistan, from 2010-11. (photo courtesy of the Clysdales)



Staff Sergeant Ned Clysdale—here in Khost Province, Afghanistan—passed his Dozier Freedom Fighter on to Josh for Josh's tour in Helmand Province. (photo courtesy of the Clysdales)

a piece of shattered jacket from the round found its way under the Micarta® handle, the Kydex sheath receiving damage as well. A half an inch one way or another would have told a different story, one that most definitely would not have turned out as well—all because a father chose to pass on what will now be an heirloom that will stay in his family for years.

For more information on the Dozier Freedom Fighter, contact Bob Dozier Knives, Dept. BL12, P.O. Box 1941, Springdale, AR 72765 888-823-0023 www.dozierknives.com.

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BLADE

fix this?' When I put a screwdriver under the handle and pried it up, a bullet jacket fell out. Then I thought, 'Holy cow! This knife has been in a firefight!' Bob and I talked about the knife and decided to replace it. This knife has a story to tell and we didn't want to erase that."

There was obvious damage to the Dozier Freedom Fighter. As you can see on this issue's cover and in the accompanying photographs, the bullet hit the guard and

Three generations of Clysdales served the U.S. military, from left: Ned Clysdale, U.S. Army staff sergeant, Edward G. Clysdale, U.S. Army Colonel, and Josh Clysdale, U.S. Marine Corps lance corporal. This picture was taken Nov. 24, 2011. Mr. Edward G. Clysdale has since passed away. (photo courtesy of the Clysdales)

