

## Transcription – Combat Tomahawk Tactics (Ben Bradak)

**Jeff:** It's been going through a skyrocketing resurgence in both the military and law enforcement, as a tactical tool as well as a weapon. I'm talking about the tactical tomahawk. If you don't have one, you may be missing out on one of the most powerful close quarters combat weapons. But as you've heard me say a bazillion times now, the effectiveness of any weapon—whether it's a gun, a stick, a kitten, I don't care what it is—relies primarily on the skill of the person wielding it.

So how can you use the tactical tomahawk's unique qualities in real world combat? Well, that's what we're here to find out.

Hello, everyone. This is Jeff Anderson, Editor for *Modern Combat and Survival* and Executive Director of the *New World Patriot Alliance*, with another podcast to help you better prepare for any threat you may face in your role as a protector and a patriot. With me today to get you on the road to hawk combat mastery is the newest trainer in our network, Ben Bradak. Ben, welcome to the program man.

**Ben:** Hi. Thanks for having me.

**Jeff:** I'm really excited to have you part of the network. I know you had programs on Paladin Press, who's no longer around, but it's always been one of my favorite publication companies. You're in a very unique area here of combat tool mastery. So this is going to be interesting. There aren't too many people out there that are doing what you're doing and I'm really looking forward to getting some of your tips.

Listen, everybody. Ben is kind of a newcomer to our network. If you haven't heard of him before, he's a lifelong martial artist who holds a fifth degree black belt in Ed Parker's American Kenpo Karate, which he's been teaching since 1993. He's a veteran of two branches of the US military, and he served as an army infantry close quarters combat specialist in the 101st Airborne Division. He's instructed civilians, military and police in two nations, and has directly consulted for both film and print on multiple occasions for armed and unarmed combat, as well as teaching for the Counter-Terrorism Institute of America.

But the reason I asked Ben to join us here today is for his work and development of his guide on *Combat Applications of the Tactical Tomahawk*. To learn more about Ben and his training, make sure that you visit him online over at his Facebook page, which is his home online, over at [Facebook.com/DragonsTail](https://www.facebook.com/DragonsTail).

Okay. Let's go ahead and jump into this. So Ben, the tactical tomahawk has become really popular now, but we want to avoid it being just like another one of those tactic-cool weapons, rather than a truly tactical weapon that's out there. But a lot of people, that especially don't know about the tomahawk's benefits, or how

**it can be used, especially when it comes to combat, might have a lot of misconceptions out there. I think with anything that is new or up-and-coming, people look at it with some skepticism.**

**So when you're talking with people about the tomahawk, what would you say are the biggest misconceptions that they have about it that aren't true and what is the reality behind them?**

Ben: Well, as a new weapon it was kind of hard for me to come up with any really big misconceptions. They tend to come along with a lot of older weapons. But there are a few things out there that I've seen that come from probably not well rounded approaches to training.

So firstly I'd say that it's not a sword. It's not a knife and it won't behave like one. There are a couple of elements to this. One, with most straight blades, even with a percussive cutting action, if it doesn't pass through the target you can draw it through the target, or otherwise redirect the weapon.

But I see people waving tomahawk trainers out there, through their training partners, back and forth. There are certain methods that can facilitate that. But because of this misconception resulting from bad training, I have developed a little saying about hawk fighting, "Just because you don't want to hook with it, doesn't mean you won't. And just because you want to hook with it, doesn't mean you should."

**Jeff: Well put. Yeah.**

Ben: **[Inaudible 00:03:50]** more than many others, they're probably going to get hung up. So when you're training you need to be prepared for a continuous flow of action if it doesn't get hung up, and you need to be able to utilize it properly if it does, because it's very likely to.

**Jeff: Yeah. I've noticed that too. It's one of those things, it's like a surprise, especially if you're going hawk versus hawk or something like that. We've used the hawk in some of our machete training. And it's really interesting that when you take the tomahawk, and all of a sudden—we're used to with the machete, being able to go blade against blade and there's a flow of action there. Then all of a sudden you use the tomahawk and it's like [tomahawk sound effect] and all of a sudden you don't have that flow. Right?**

**It's really interesting that you say that, because you're right. You have to be prepared for both when it does go through the action that you're taking it through, and then also be prepared for when it doesn't. All of a sudden you hit that [tomahawk sound effect] and it stops, where do you go from there.**

Ben: You need to be able to use that to your advantage if it happens and be prepared for it.

Related to that, I've seen a lot of people hook with them for the sake of hooking in their training for no discernible purpose. A tomahawk can do that and it's fun, but it's also not the most realistic training.

**Jeff:** **That's interesting. I'm probably going to ask you more about that. That's really interesting. Because you're right. That's one of the benefits—well, let's talk about that.**

**So Ben, there is a reason why there's this resurgence of the tactical tomahawk, and why it's now being used more in military and even in law enforcement. But for those people out there that are maybe new to the hawk, or have never really seen it as a tactical tool or a weapon, let's talk—this is really more about the combat application of it, like your book.**

**So what are the best qualities of a tomahawk? What makes it a good close quarters combat weapon?**

**Ben:** Probably the thing that makes it the most interesting is its versatility. It's sort of a can of worms answer, because versatility means that it can do many things. From an overall perspective it's versatile because it's also a tool, like a knife or a machete. It's not usually a pure weapon, or a weapon per se, but if it was then a lot less people wouldn't carry one.

But looking beyond that, taking it from the standpoint of being a pure weapon. That's how I treat it. I'm not big into field craft or anything. It's very versatile in that regard as well. You can use it in a long or short choked up grip. You can cut, stab, slice, puncture, strike, hook, pry and trap. It has open-ended triangles on each end for a variety of uses. That's why it's such an interesting weapon to train with, because it's not too simplistic or limited. So that's reason number one I would say.

**Jeff:** **Yeah. Definitely. Probably the most versatile tactical survival/tool that can also be used as a weapon and the same versatility as a weapon. What else makes it powerful as a weapon in combat?**

**Ben:** A couple more reasons. One, it hits hard. Simple enough. It masses at the far end of the lever, and projected forward of the center line of the half. So that's the opposite of most bladed weapons, for example, which try to keep the mass near your hand.

If you want to understand the mechanics of how weapons like this work, get your average tomahawk, and maybe a full-sized kukri knife, and lay the knife on top of the hawk so the handles match up. The points and edges will match as well, the same plane. They're a lot more closely related weapons than most people would think.

Also, finally, it's easy and intuitive to use. It's a stroking weapon. But most people, even without training, they can swing something. Even from a psychological standpoint, in combat it's much easier for people to hammer on an opponent than it is for them to puncture them or carve them up, which is from a certain standpoint a much more

deliberately lethal action. You can refer to good old references, like Grossman's *On Killing* and stuff, for things like that.

**Jeff:** **Yeah. Awesome. All good points. All good points.**

**Ben, I'm ready to go out tomahawk shopping. I'm sold that this is a weapon that I should have in my survival weapon arsenal. I'm going to go out and I'm going to look for one. So take us through. What are we looking for? What are some of the specific features that make a tomahawk a good one for combat purposes, and what are some of the things that we should avoid when going out there shopping too?**

**Because as these have grown in popularity. There's a bunch of stuff coming out, some with zombie logos on it or whatever. It can be daunting for somebody that doesn't know what to look for about finding the right one. So what are those tips that you have for finding the right hawk?**

**Ben:** So that has 100 percent to do with what you need it for. There's a tomahawk for everything nowadays. What's your primary consideration, a field tool, survival, brush clearing, rescue tool, breaching. All these things will affect the design you're looking for.

From my perspective, I've looked at it as a pure weapon, which affects the desired attributes just as much as any other. I'm a fighting instructor, so keeping it as a martial art weapon I look for attributes ideal for fighting.

But first and foremost, go for quality. They're popular enough now that that's not the same thing as expensive, necessarily. Most big manufacturers out there make affordable ones that will stay in one piece. You probably know some of the usual suspects out there that have cheap steel. I've seen some with the steel half welded together in the middle under the handle wrap. Those won't hold up for anything. So it needs decent steel and a solid functional half, whatever material you prefer.

Obviously you want a blade on it. That's what makes it a tomahawk. But beyond that, what you want it for specifically will dictate what you have on the opposite side of the blade, and the shape of the blade itself of course.

But again, I'm going to give out advice on using it as a pure weapon, in which case I advise a slightly curved spike or beak on the back. That gives it the ability to puncture and more ability to manipulate, among other things.

Also, regarding the blade as a weapon, it needs a top and bottom point to the blade. The top point should be at least 90 degrees. And the lower point, or beard of the axe, whatever you want to call it, it should basically be a meat hook. We could go into my new detail on the subject, but you also want one that handles well that serve a subjective matter.

As a weapon the tomahawk is just a small battle axe. It's a battle axe, plain and simple. So what's the difference between a battle axe and a wood cutting axe? Agility. A wood cutting axe has to deliver a heavy blow at no particular pace like a sledge hammer. It can kill someone, but you can't fight with it. That's the main thing right there.

A lot of tactical hawks these days tend to be [inaudible 00:11:55]. But a particular weapon has to be light and quick. If you compare a lot of modern hawks, most tend to be really light and quick compared to modern ones. They were left for field craft and fighting, not for breaching vehicles, crates and walls or cutting down trees.

So the same thing goes for any battle axe of any era. You couldn't use them as tools. You'd ruin them. They were weapons only. So you have to take that into consideration if you're up against other weapons. A knife or a stick is going to out finesse a hawk, so you need it to move well.

Also, you could get one of the length you prefer. Tomahawks with a wood or polymer handle can be easily customized. Otherwise you're just going to need to find one with an approximate length you prefer. That's mostly personal preference too. But I have other details about that and how you can tailor the length to your own body in my book, if you can find it.

**Jeff: Let's talk about facing off against other weapons. When we're talking about this as a survival weapon, let's say that we're facing off against somebody—and I'm talking about non-firearm, basically melee attacks. So somebody armed with a baseball bat or a knife or a stick, something like that. When you have a tactical tomahawk—obviously, look, if we had a Howitzer or something, a bazooka, we could take this guy out. But we're assuming that we're in a melee fight. So I have a tomahawk, and I'm up against somebody who is armed with a baseball bat or something like that.**

**I know it might be difficult maybe to explain it a little bit over audio. But what are maybe some of the go-to moves that are specific to a hawk, that make it powerful, that somebody can at least start to envision what they can do with it, against somebody who is an armed attacker in close quarters?**

**Ben:** I hope my answer isn't too arcane, but as a martial artist I try not to have go-to moves. After all, the end goal of any martial arts is to produce effective extemporaneous or spontaneous action. And there's so many variables, including the weapon you're up against.

But that said, I can make some recommendations. I recommend taking the initiative. The tomahawk has some defensive potential, but not a lot. Kind of like a knife. It has a lot more offensive than defensive potential. If you're defending with a knife, you're not blocking with the blade. It's too little. You're not sword fighting. You're usually counter-cutting while you actually move your body out of the way. The tomahawk has a little more defensive potential than something like a knife, but not a lot.

So if you're bridging the gap, getting closer to the opponent, one thing that's really underrated that I don't think I've seen anywhere is stabbing with it. That's one reason you should have at least a 90-degree top point on the blade. It's not going to puncture someone's vital organs like a knife, but if you jab them in the hand or in the face they're not going to feel very good. So definitely try stabbing, or striking, or checking with the flat top of the tomahawk, to the opponent's hand or weapon arm.

**Jeff:** In that move you're talking about basically just extending the tomahawk, almost like the tip of it. But if the blade part of it is curved up. As you thrust it out directly horizontal in front of you, it has a stabbing point at the end of it. Not like it's a spear, but almost like that. Because thrusting it straight out in front of you with that blade up like that, it gives you an extended mini spear, in a way, is what you're saying. Right?

**Ben:** Yes. Exactly. And it works pretty good on hands and forearms. Also, once you bridge the gap and you're in range of an opponent's body, start trapping and employing the meat hook. That's what the weapon is good for. That's the range it really excels at. And never neglect your environment either, like improvised weapons. Historically the battle axe has always been well paired with a defensive weapon in the other hand as well.

**Jeff:** What you said, we apply that to so many ways. Right? Whether it's a gun owner or something like that, a lot of people think only in terms of the weapon that they have in their hand. Like, "Done guys. What do I need hand-to-hand combat for? I've got a gun." Same thing I guess with this.

You can use a tomahawk, yes—you would think that people would just kind of start trying to swing away from a distance or whatever. But in close quarters combat, most of the damage you can do is up close. Not that you can't get a good hack in with a tomahawk, but it doesn't take you off the hook for learning trapping method, things like that hand-to-hand stuff. Because those are things that are going to open up more opportunities for you with using the hawk as an actual weapon. So spoken like a true martial artist too. But it's so true. It really is so true.

**Ben:** It's hard to relate to the tomahawk itself, because it's so short and it involves so many hooking and trapping actions if you get close. Usually they're not much longer than a good Bowie knife. So you're going to have to know how to utilize your empty hand or your legs, everything.

**Jeff:** Yeah. Yeah. So let's go ahead and talk about how somebody can get started with this. They're going to go out shopping now. You've given us some great tips on how to find the right tactical tomahawk. Let's talk about—you've got it now. What's the best way for us to train with it?

Can you give us maybe a simple drill, or something like that, to start to get used to how—because I think what you said about how you've got to be prepared for the attributes of a tomahawk, whether they're planned or whether they're not planned,

**because of the hooking or something like that, it does wield differently than a club or a machete or a knife, or anything like that.**

**So are there any drills that somebody can use at home, whether with a training tomahawk, or maybe there's a way to take a tomahawk and make it safer or whatever, that they can start to understand those dynamics, if not necessarily to become a master right now off of just your answer, but just to start to understand those dynamics of what makes a tomahawk powerful and things that you need to be, I don't want to say concerned about, but aware of as a limitation or something that's just build into its design?**

**Ben:** Yeah. There are so many different drills and exercises that you can do. But I think a go-to place to start with any weapon, for that matter, is to lay out your four to eight basic angles of attack and start going through the motions.

There's so much you can do to build on that simple drill too. There's something as simple as adding footwork once you've got those down, or altering the depth or width of your strikes. You can envision whether each individual strike is an attack, a block, a hook. And it won't really alter the motion, just what you can do with that same motion. Then you can start adding in your other hand.

You can do that with any weapon, though. So beyond that with a fighting hawk, start by making each strike with the blade. Then make each backhand stroke with the beak. Then reverse that. Then try making all the angles and the strikes with the beak. Then produce combinations of the two. Start bringing the versatility of the weapon into play. Do all of it from a short choked up grip as well.

**Jeff:** Yeah. Actually, there's a lot more to it than even with a handgun. But it's the same kind of thing. Right? It should be an extension of your body, and the only way to do that is to use it in a lot of different ways. Hold it down at the bottom, hold it in the middle, hold it up near the blade and see what you can do with those different lengths, and how is the weight of it, to get used to it. Then you start ratcheting up your training. Especially if you can start with another person, safely with a training hawk or something like that, you can start to see how it can really pare out. **Awesome. Awesome.**

**Ben, thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I look forward to checking out your book. I know it's got a lot of how-to photos and stuff in there as well. I'm always looking for a new hawk, or any sort of close quarters combat type training. So I'm really looking forward to this. I appreciate you taking the time with us today.**

**Listen, everyone. Like I said, there aren't too many people out there who are doing anything when it comes to the combat application of a tactical tomahawk. This is one of the areas that Ben, it's a passion of his, but he's also gone on to train others in how to use this.**

So I highly recommend that you go check out his webpage and find out more about his training, all types of training, whether it's unarmed or if it's armed, over at his Facebook page over at [Facebook.com/DragonsTail](https://www.facebook.com/DragonsTail).

Until our next *Modern Combat & Survival* broadcast this is Jeff Anderson saying prepare, train and survive.