

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

Jeff Anderson: It was a quote I saw in an Internet self-defense forum several years ago, and it said, "Welcome to the wonderful world of knife fighting, where everyone is an expert and everyone is always right." It seems to me that, in the world of self-defense instruction, no topic is more abused than that of fighting with a knife. For years, you haven't been able to swing a dead cat in an empty room without hitting three or more self-appointed knife fighting experts, and the only thing their advice has in common is that it's typically all based upon outdated, regurgitated, artsy-type fighting techniques that work great in the relaxed atmosphere of the local dojo against a willing participant, and fails miserably in a very deadly way when applied to a real street attack. That leaves us with a very serious question on the table: How do we use a knife for practical, workable, functional self-protection? What really works against a vicious criminal who is looking to make you his next victim and is potentially armed himself? These are questions of life and death, and these are the exact questions that we're going to be answering today.

Everyone, this is Jeff Anderson, editor for Modern Combat and Survival Magazine 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 us today to take a good hard look at the realities of edged weapon combat is Scott Babb. Scott, welcome to the program, man.

Scott Babb: Thank you for having me, man. I'm excited to be here.

Jeff Anderson: Yeah. This is awesome. I've been checking out your stuff online, and I'm an instant fan of your work. I'm really looking forward to introducing you to our network. Listen, everyone. This is something that is a topic that I love to touch on, but it's also really hard to actually get people to kind of understand the realities of this. I think you're going to see why Scott's work has become a newfound interest for our magazine. Listen, Scott's been a lifelong martial artist who grew up tired of unworkable nonsense found in much of the martial arts out there. Determined to create something practical, he founded Libre Fighting. He's been called the bad boy of knife combat, and his no-nonsense approach to what really works for using edged weapons for personal protection has granted him a very loyal following. You can find out more about Scott and his training by going to www.LibreFightingSystems.com. That's L-I-B-R-E Fighting Systems dot com.

Now, Scott, I always like to start off these podcast interviews with getting people to empty their glass, because I think a lot of people get caught up in myths and misconceptions and just a bunch of BS that they find out there when you go around to these self-appointed experts out there, no matter what it is. It could be firearms. It could be survival. Whatever it is. But, there's so much misinformation out there that I think people get programmed with the wrong information that can be kind of just as deadly. So I'm curious. I'm going to let you help them empty their glass first. In your training and in working with

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

people, in your analysis, what have you found to be the biggest misconceptions that people have about knife fighting and using a knife for personal protection?

Scott Babb:

The first would be that people tend to think that real-world bladed altercations are going to be a duel, that people are going to square off like two people in the French countryside and take shots at each other, or that it's going to flow back and forth. In certain parts of the world, things like this do still happen, like when you get into parts of rural Mexico you'll see that they'll actually wrap the jacket around their arm like old school, and they'll hold the knife in an icepick position, and they'll stand with their right leg back and sort of take hacks back and forth at each other.

But, in the Western world, which is really what I try to gear my work towards, and how knife violence unfolds in the Western world, we don't duel. A knife's a murder weapon. It's not a dueling weapon here. When someone makes a decision to attack you with a knife, they're not going to let you see it coming. They're going to get close to you. You're going to be inside a blender before you know what happened. You're going to be getting stabbed, and the opponent's going to be controlling you and on top of you. That's a much different dynamic than actually squaring off with someone and taking your shots and trying to cut and not get cut. There's nothing that's going to flow about it. It's not going to be pretty. It's not going to be artistic. It's going to be extremely violent.

The other thing is that people tend to radically overestimate the stopping power of a knife. I think this is because most of the traditional knife-based martial arts were geared around using large knives, like in the Philippines they use large agricultural knives that can do a tremendous amount of damage. But when you look at the kind of knives that we carry in the Western world, pocketknives or smaller knives, they're not going to have that kind of stopping power where you're going to hack into someone once or stab someone once and they're just going to collapse. Even if you do lethal damage, the person's still going to be able to fight for a time. You're going to have to contend with that while the person is bleeding out.

The other thing is that people tend to train knife work for an ideal situation, fighting on a level surface, where it's well-lit, in a controlled environment. When you look at where knife attacks actually occur, it's going to be in a home, in a bar, in a parking lot. It's going to be a confined space. More often than not, it's going to be after dark. You're going to be in a close-quarters environment where you don't have space to work, where you have to think about walls and obstacles, where you can't take a strategic step back and reassess. It's going to be a chaotic, enclosed environment.

I think it's important if someone wants to be proficient with the use of a knife, they have to be prepared to work in a confined space on unlevel ground, and especially in low-light conditions. I think that's really a neglected aspect of not just knife-based martial arts but all martial arts, is factoring in the environment

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

around you and learning how to utilize the environment while you're fighting, rather than ... seeing walls and tables and chairs, or cars, whatever's around you, not as obstacles or barriers, but seeing those as tools that you can use. You can pin an opponent with a wall and stab them there, similar to a prison shanking. That's really where we try to start from, is looking at the way knife violence occurs in our culture and working backwards from there.

Jeff Anderson: The other thing I want you to talk about, because I noticed in your e-mail, when we were e-mailing back and forth, that you have a tagline underneath the signature that says, "The knife is not the weapon." I think that any time people put a tag quote underneath their signature, it's something that they feel like has to be driven home over and over again in people's minds because it's something that's not there to begin with. Do you want to maybe talk about that? I'm sure it's a core concept that you use in your training.

Scott Babb: When you look at the kind of weapons that a criminal is going to use, especially in third-world countries, they're not using purpose-built knives. They're using shanks. They're prisoners. They don't have access to a real knife. They're using something they've forged themselves. They can be equally as effective with some shank they made in prison as someone on the outside can be with a knife. It's not the weapon.

John Lennon once said, "I'm an artist. You give me a tuba, I'll bring you something out of it." I kind of feel that way about knives. You give someone who knows what they're doing something sharp and pointy, they'll make it work. It's not the weapon that's going to do the damage. It's the intent and the methodology behind the weapon that's actually going to make it effective.

Jeff Anderson: That's a really good lead-in to my next question, because here's one of the things I really like about when I was doing some research on what it is that you put together, is because you ... and I love it when instructors do this, and they take real-world analysis, not just stuff that they learned from grandmaster so-and-so who learned it from great-grandmaster so-and-so who learned it from great-great-grandmaster so-and-so. But you looked at real-world analysis of knife attacks, and especially looking at prison knife shankings, where they don't have firearms, unless they're making them out of toothpaste or whatever. That's where an edged-weapon combat really is life-or-death. It's meant to be a murder weapon. You analyzed those attacks in videos of knife attacks.

I'm really curious. From your analysis, what were the biggest takeaways that ... When you were putting together your knife-fighting system, what were the biggest revelations that you noticed in looking at all this video footage of the way knife attacks really happen and how you have to really be in a knife fight?

Scott Babb: The major one is that the key is to overwhelm the opponent. If you have a mindset of dueling or trading shots, again, someone who's coming at you with murderous intent, even if you're very proficient at that style of fighting, it's

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

possible for you to be overwhelmed just by someone who's got it in their mind they're going to murder you. From my point of view, you have to be willing to engage the opponent in a way where you're trying to overwhelm them, put them on their heels and put them on the defensive.

I've done a lot of work recently. I've done some joint seminars with Lee Morrison of Urban Combatives. One of the things that he talks about with combative mindset is, you can't have a your-turn, my-turn, your-turn, my-turn mindset. It's got to be my turn, my turn, my turn, my turn. That's kind of the philosophy I teach, as well, in that once you engage an opponent you can't be thinking defensively. You have to think offensively. You have to think about putting the opponent on their heels and keeping them there, because as soon as the opponent starts fighting back, now we're in a situation where we're both being cut, we're both being injured. There's an old saying that says there's three possible outcomes in a knife fight: I'm way better than you, I live and you die; you're way better than me, you live and I die; we're both about the same, we both die. I think that you really have to control the altercation. Once the violence is started, you have to be imposing your will on the opponent nonstop until it's over.

The other thing that you really see in prison work is they use the walls. Occasionally you'll see them attack in an open situation, but usually they'll get close to the opponent, they'll get them in a confined space, and they'll put them into the wall, and they'll just start shanking until it's over. The reason why they do this is because it works. If you can trap the opponent while you're doing your damage, you're not having to engage them. You're not having to move back and forth and give ground and take it, and give them a chance to put you on your heels.

When you look at prisoners, the reason why they're proficient with bladed weapons is because they have nothing better to do than sit around all day long and think of effective ways to shank each other, and then pass that down from generation to generation. They're getting real-world experience because they're using techniques that they've seen more senior prison members and more experienced prison members use. I know a lot of people, there's a sort of visceral reaction when you say you're emulating attacks that have been used in prison settings, where immediately people kind of want to reject that just because they don't want to think like a prisoner. But, to me, I'm not thinking about the moral character of my sources. I'm thinking about what works and what doesn't. Prisoners are effective with shanks.

Then, the other thing you see is just what we were talking about earlier. Prisoners don't have really refined weaponry. They're making their own shanks and they're still using them in an effective way. When you see that someone can take a toothbrush and turn that into a deadly weapon, you really start to realize that you don't need to have a super high-end knife. The knife isn't going to do

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

with work for you. You're going to be the one doing the work. The knife's just the tool.

Jeff Anderson:

Those are great insights. You've got great insights. Listen, we've been talking with Scott Babb of LibreFightingSystems.com about the realities of edged-weapon combat and how to defend yourself with a knife. We have a lot more to get into here coming up, including covert carry and deployment of your backup fighting knife, the best edged-weapon targets to quickly defeat violent attacker, and training for a knife fight, practical tools for building your skills fast. All that and more coming right up. But first, check out this special message.

Okay. We're back with Scott Babb of LibreFightingSystems.com and getting his tactical and training tips in how to best defend yourself with a knife against a real attack. We have a lot more to get into, so let's go ahead and jump back in now.

Scott, there are so many different knives out there, so many different knives that you can choose to carry for everyday carry for personal protection, and there are so many different ways to kind of just employ the knife and carry it even just so that it's not ... so that it is covert but you can get to it really fast. Obviously everyone needs to check their local laws and what they can carry and what's legal for them. But, I want to get your perspective on, when it comes to an ideal scenario, what are your most practical suggestions for what to carry and how to carry it so that it can quickly be deployed to be able to use for personal protection?

Scott Babb:

Obviously a fixed-blade knife is going to be the ideal weapon. It's not going to have the same chance of failure that a folding knife is going to have. But the problem is, for civilian use, even where it's legal to carry a fixed-blade knife, if you ever use it you're probably going to have a hard time convincing the DA and potentially a jury why you were carrying around a fixed-blade knife on you. It's just people who don't train regularly, who don't think about combatives and self-defense, it seems like a very weird thing. When you think about what a jury's going to see, they're going to look at this fixed-blade weapon covered in blood in an evidence bag, and there's going to be a chance they're going to start to think that you were out looking for an excuse to use this weapon.

I always tell people to be very careful about carrying anything that looks like it was designed to hurt another human being. I prefer knives that look a little bit more utilitarian. One of the things we've found is, we've done a lot of work with Ed Calderon, Ed's Manifesto. He does organic mediums seminars, where he'll actually bring in a pig carcass and test out blades on those. A lot of the tactical knives, a lot of the knives that are built for fighting, when they're tested against an organic medium like a pig carcass they actually don't function especially well. A lot of times, non-purpose-built knives, knives that aren't built to fight I mean, actually do a lot more damage than the tactical knives. A lot of times, cheap knives outperform expensive knives. We've seen knives that cost several

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

hundred dollars, even thousands of dollars, break as soon as they've hit a bone. We've seen a \$12 paring knife destroy a pig.

To me, there's no logical reason to carry a knife that looks like it was designed by a Klingon. But, for military or law enforcement, someone who has justification to carry a fixed-blade knife, for me, the ideal carry is horizontal on the belt line with the handle facing your strong hand. The reason I like this particular carry is, one, it's easy to conceal. You can just drop a shirt over it and it's hard to see it's there. But you can also ...

Jeff Anderson: You're talking in the front or are you talking in the back?

Scott Babb: In the front.

Jeff Anderson: In the front. Okay.

Scott Babb: In the front. Yeah. The reason why in front is so you can access it with either hand. If someone's latched onto your right hand, you can still pull it with your left hand. If someone's latched onto your left hand, you can still pull it with the right. This carry, you can also draw into a hammer grip or an icepick grip. I personally prefer an icepick grip. I think it's important ... If you want to be proficient with a knife, you have to be comfortable using it in any grip it might end up in your hand, because you never know. You might drop the knife. You might be picking up an improvised weapon. It might end up in your hand in any position, so you need to have a working knowledge of how to use it however it ends up in your hand.

But, given the choice, I prefer point down and edge in. There's two reasons for this. One is, the targets I like to go for in the face and neck and the upper torso. Stabbing in an icepick grip, just the way your body naturally wants to move, it lends itself towards these high line attacks. Whereas, a hammer grip, your body instinctively wants to swing in more of a midline entry.

The other thing I find is that, in a hammer grip, and this is something you see when you actually start looking at footage of knife assaults, is when someone attacks someone with a knife in a hammer grip, because the momentum's coming forward, they're pushing the opponent away every time then stab. So you get this expansion and contraction, where the attacker will grab onto the guy and stab him, and it pushes the guy away, and then he pulls him back in and stabs him again. Because you have this expansion and contraction dynamic happening, it actually slows down the rate that the knife is being employed, which is good for the person who's trying to defend. But from the perspective of training with a knife, you want to be able to stab as quickly as possible. When you're in an icepick grip, your momentum is actually coming down on the target. Instead of pushing them away, you're actually driving them into the ground and you're keeping them more in front of you so you can actually stab at a faster rate when you're in an icepick grip.

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

When it comes to folding knives, I'm a big fan of the Emerson Wave Feature. The little hook that's on the back of the blade that can catch on your pocket so when you pull it, it deploys on its own by catching on your pocket. You can set it up so it can be deployed in an icepick grip, which is rare with folding knives. Generally, folding knives that can be opened with one hand will usually open into a hammer grip. Since I prefer an icepick grip, I like the Emerson Wave Feature because I can set it up to actually deploy with one hand very quickly into an icepick grip.

Jeff Anderson:

The what-to-carry always is a real challenging one. I always try to think of what is the best way to carry it, as well. I actually carry the same way that you just described, which is really good confirmation for me, because and a lot for the same reasons that you just talked about, as well. But let's talk about that targeting, also, because I do believe, like you do, an icepick grip I think is ... and this is different I think than what you see in a lot of prison knife fights because, and you're the expert in this, so I want you to correct me if I'm wrong, but they'll typically come in with a sewing needle-type thing under in the abdominal area, which I believe is because guards could be wearing some sort of a bulletproof vest or a knife-resistant vest, or something like that, and it's meant to go under that.

But the natural ... whenever you see somebody in an attack, like a civilian in an attack, they typically end up going into this just kind of pounding with your hand as a hammer down on top of the person. It seems like a very natural response, like you said. The icepick grip just naturally fits into fighting the way you would normally fight, the way you would normally fight back against somebody. It just so happens that now you have that knife that's there as well.

Let's talk about those targets. What are the best targets to stop an attack? Now, you started off earlier saying that there's a misconception people have out there with the stopping power of a knife. It's going to take a lot of stabs potentially before this person decides to give up the fight or is physiologically not able to carry on the fight because they're losing consciousness. But what are the best targets that somebody should think about when it comes to attacking with a knife?

Scott Babb:

When I started doing work with Ed down in Mexico, if you're not familiar with Ed, he has a background in law enforcement and military working in the Baja region. We started training the teams to go up against the cartels. These guys are crazy. They'll find an excuse to go out and use what we showed them, so we started getting a lot of real-world feedback happening pretty regularly. That really was what shaped Libre into what it is today, is getting reports back from people who had implemented our teachings in the field and debriefing them and saying what happened? How long did it take them to bleed out? What was his reaction? Did he know he was stabbed? Sort of back-engineering through there.

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

What we found was that, while the knife didn't have stopping power most of the time, the one shot that consistently dropped someone was a stab to the eye, which is why in Libre you see us on a lot of our entries one of the first things we teach students is how to attack the opponent's eyes. Building off of that, whichever eye we attack, that's the direction we'll move in. If we attack the opponent's left eye, we'll step to the opponent's left, because that's where their vision is going to be impaired, and we'll press the attack from that angle. If we attack the right eye, we'll step to the right and press the attack from there.

Even though the knife isn't going to be a lethal shot, a lot of the reports that we got back, when someone was hit in the eye, they would just drop like a stone holding their eye. Even though it's not lethal, it ends the altercation. If you're looking to escape, it's a quick way to just flick the point of the knife into someone's eye, and while they're reacting to that you can get away from them. Or, if you can't escape, you can put them on their heels quick enough that you can take control of the altercation and really overwhelm them.

Going back to what you were saying about hammer grip versus icepick grip, this is very much an endemic thing. It's very cultural. In the West, because we're not a knife culture, people tend to attack in the hammer grip. The reason they do this is because they tend to use a knife the way they fight. They tend to latch onto the opponent with one hand and start sticking them with the other. They're essentially just punching the person with a knife in a hammer grip to the ... usually to the left lung and the left side of the abdomen.

An interesting note about how knives are used in the West, though, is women are more apt to use a knife in an icepick grip than men are. Women seem to more instinctively grab the knife in an icepick manner and start stabbing down on someone. You also see this same sort of mechanical similarity in the way untrained women fight and the way untrained men fight. Men who don't have training tend to latch onto the opponents shirt with one hand, then punch them in a straightforward manner. Women who haven't been trained tend to rain down with more hammer fist or more downward slapping knife strikes. Because we're not a knife culture, when people pick up knives, they tend to use a knife in roughly the same manner that they do when they fight empty hand, the way they just naturally gravitate towards using this.

But when you start looking at other cultures, other parts of the world, the way you see people pick up a knife is in an icepick grip. In some parts of the world it's because folding knives are common but the folding knives are very poorly made, so they're worried about the knife collapsing onto their hand, so they'll hold it point down with the edge facing their hand, so if it does fold it doesn't fold on their fingers. It folds onto their palm.

When you look in Mexico, for example, in Northern Mexico, the parts that are closer to the United States, they tend to use knives more the way we do in America, and latching on with one hand and moving straight forward in a sewing

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

machine prison style attacking. But the further you get away from Baja, the more you get into rural regions of Mexico, you start to see them gravitating more towards the point-down grip. It's a very interesting dynamic. Because this is what people see, especially people who grow up in bad areas where they actually are exposed to knife violence, they tend to emulate what they've seen others do, even though they might not be trained in that, if they've seen a knife used in a certain way they're going to pick up the knife and use it in that same way. In America, men tend to gravitate naturally towards a hammer grip, even though my personal opinion is an icepick grip is going to be more effective.

Jeff Anderson: Awesome. Scott, let's go ahead and leave everybody with something that they can do right now to maybe prepare, skill-wise, to be better prepared for this. I highly recommend people go and check out your DVDs. There's a ton of really good information on there. It's brutally obvious how realistic the scenario is that you've developed the system around. But if you could give somebody maybe a simple training drill that they can do that will help them to maybe implement some of the techniques that you're talking about, or some of the tactics or philosophies that you're talking about, what's something that they can do right now for a simple drill that would make them better prepared today with a knife?

Scott Babb: For me, it would be more of a mental exercise. I think the best thing someone can do if they really want to get serious about learning how to use a knife for self-defense purposes, is go on YouTube and start studying footage of real-life knife assaults. Start watching not just how the violence plays out, but the pre-attack cues, how the knifer contacts the opponent, how long it takes for the knifer to actually make contact with the opponent before they start stabbing them, if the knifer's going to brandish the knife or keep it concealed. Really start studying the way knife violence unfolds in real-world surveillance footage.

We actually live in a really interesting time, in that for the first time in human history civilians can see knife violence unfold on camera like this. When I was coming up through the martial arts, you might hear a secondhand story about how someone who got stabbed. You might see a couple stabbings yourself. You might talk to someone who had been stabbed. But this was all stuff that had been seen in realtime, not recorded, passed down in an oral tradition, and the story had probably been shaped a little bit and skewed. For the first time in human history, we can just go on YouTube and actually study real world violence. Do a search on YouTube right now and just see dozens of real life knife attacks happening, that you can sit there and study, and be brutally honest with yourself and say, "Would my training hold up against that sort of assault? The way that guy stabbed that guy, would what I've been doing have stopped the perpetrator of that attack?" Really start adjusting your training from there.

The other thing I would recommend, and I don't make any money off this. It's not a product I've put out. It's just something I'm a fan of. There's a company that makes an anatomy rash guard. It's a rash guard that actually shows the

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

anatomy on the torso. It's something that, when you're training, you can have your partner wear it. If you're training solo, you can put it on a bob dummy. But it really familiarizes yourself with human anatomy and targeting, and it really develops more precise technique in your training. In whatever discipline you're training, as far as knife work goes, this is something that can aid you because you can actually see where your cuts are going. You can see the targets you're trying to hit and if you're being accurate. It's a great tool to use in sparring, too, if you get two of them and you're sparring against someone, because you can record the session and actually see the sparring on both and see exactly where you're hitting someone. Did they hit the brachial artery or did they miss it? Did they hit the liver or did they hit the lung? Sort of realize how effective you are against a moving, resisting target.

Jeff Anderson:

I think something that would go really well with that also is, we've told people before, if you have a safe training knife that you're using, to get some sort of like a Halloween lipstick or something like that, that you can put on the edge of it. I've never heard of that, that shirt before. But that sounds like it'd be a great, if you could take your training knives and have some sort of ... like that lipstick on it. When you're done with your training session, you really see. You can look at your own shirt and see where you would have been stabbed in your own anatomy, as well.

That's the other thing that I'll add here, is that even if ... People that are listening to this are ... you don't necessarily see yourself carrying a knife for a knife fight, because we have a lot of concealed carry people that listen to the podcast. Obviously you can't chop a bullet in midair. "Well, I don't need a knife fight. I have a gun." But, like you said, if you look at actual attacks with people that have knives, and the criminals carry knives. It's not like they're going to say from across the street, "Hey, I've got a knife. Give me your wallet or I'll come over there and stab you." No. They know. That criminal that's using that knife for an attack, they know that they have to be up close and personal for that knife to be a threat.

It's really good, even for those people that don't carry knives or don't want to carry knives or don't want to learn knife fighting, look at it from the standpoint of, go check out those videos and see how somebody with a knife is going to fight, because that's what you might have to defend against with your firearm. When you realize that, if somebody is stabbing you, it's not like you're going to get that perfect draw like you can get down at the local tactical range or anything like that. That's really good advice, even for those people that don't see knife fighting in their future or being able to fight with a knife. That's great advice.

Okay. Well, thanks everyone. Listen, definitely go and check out ... I'm an instant fan of Scott's work. I highly recommend you go check out his fighting system and the knife fighting that he has over there as well. There's DVDs over there. There's a lot of stuff you can get to. It's over at www.LibreFightingSystems.com.

Podcast #195 Transcript: Close Quarters Knife Fighting

That's L-I-B-R-E Fighting Systems dot com. Go check it out. And until our next Modern Combat and Survival broadcast, this is Jeff Anderson saying prepare, train, and survive.