



Top, American Tomahawk's Light Infantry Model; bottom, the Roger's Rangers Model. Both of these hatchets have a long history of American military use.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL HARRIS



Either Tomhawk can be ordered with an optional Kenny Rowe leather shoulder harness much like that used by frontier Rangers and British Light Infantry.

American Tomhawk's

FRONTIER HATCHETS

American Tomhawk's
Roger's Rangers and
Light Infantry hatchets
bring the past to
modern battle zones!

Still On Duty!

"Let them have it and then jump out and finish them up with your hatchet!" — Robert Rogers 1756

As I write this article, many Americans' thoughts have suddenly become focused on the US Army's Ranger Battalions and the US's current war on terrorism. The Rangers have a history of unconventional combat that is actually older than the United States. In pre-Revolutionary America, frontier militia units were often formed into lightly armed raiding companies to scout and attack French and Indian targets. These groups were referred to as "Rangers" due to their far ranging patrols into enemy territory. The most famous of these Ranger companies was the one formed by Robert Rogers.

BY STEVEN DICK

1913: First production automobile
1969: Man walks on the moon
2002: SOG introduces first BG-42
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Standing Orders

Rogers' Rangers developed a set of 19 "Standing Orders" for conducting patrols behind enemy lines that are still in use by the US Army today. In fact, every infantryman entering Vietnam was issued a pocket size copy of these rules to live by. Naturally, you need to paraphrase them into modern situations and equipment, but No. 2 "Have your musket clean as a whistle, hatchet scoured, sixty rounds of powder and ball, and be ready to march on a minute's notice." Or No. 6: "When we're on the march, we march single file far enough apart so one shot can't go through two men."

Such concepts are just as valid today as they were in 1756. No. 19 is probably one most important to readers of Tactical Knives: "Let the enemy come till he's almost close enough to touch, then let him have it and jump out and finish him up with your hatchet!" This is the kind of violent shock action Rangers have since become famous for.



A good score by one of the Best Ranger contestants. Now for the real thing.

The normal edged weapon of an 18th century infantryman was a triangular bladed socket bayonet. While this steel spike worked fine for its intended purpose, it was of next to no value as a utility tool for the wilderness patrols conducted by Ranger units. Their Indian adversaries seldom held their ground long enough for a bayonet charge to be an effective battle tactic. The tomahawk or hatchet soon became the preferred utility tool and weapon of the patrolling Ranger.

Around the same time, British Army units started arming their colonial light infantry units with both a bayonet and a hatchet. Light infantry on the European battlefield advanced in open order in front of the main body to both snipe at the enemy and to mask their own troops' maneuvers. Because of their need to be able to quickly retreat back to the main group when confronted with cavalry or a serious attack by

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They soon found they were required to prove their skill with a weapon as old as the Rangers as a unit.

the enemy, they were more lightly equipped than normal infantry. On the American frontier they seem to have been used in a similar manner to the Ranger militia groups. Like the Rangers, they found a hatchet to be a valuable tool for living in the field and a useful weapon against the Indians.

American Tomahawk

American Tomahawk Company has recently introduced replicas of both a tomahawk thought to have been used by Roger's Rangers and a copy of the standard British Army issue Light Infantry model. The Ranger model features a hatchet blade on

one side and a double-edged 2-inch spike on the other mounted on a 16-inch handle. The head is 1095 carbon steel hardened to Rc 50-52. Weight, 28 ounces. Suggested price, \$150. The Light Infantry model is mounted on a 19-inch handle and features a combination hatchet with hammerhead pole. Weight 36 ounces. Price \$150. Both tomahawks come with a leather head cover and are available with an optional Kenny Rowe leather shoulder harness similar to what light infantry troops once wore.

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With this historical perspective, it was interesting to hear that the 2001 "Best Ranger" competition included a surprise event of throwing tomahawks at a target. The Best Ranger competition is actually open to all branches of the service and consists of three days of round the clock endurance and military skills testing for score. Anyone that can even survive this competition has my total admiration.

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Tomahawk Throwing

Having done a fair amount of it myself, I can say throwing a tomahawk is a much easier skill to master than knife throwing. Some also feel it doesn't matter much which end of a heavy tomahawk strikes the target to be effective. Because of this, I would consider tomahawk throwing a useful combat skill, something that can't really be said about knife throwing.

Of course, like any practical military edge weapon, the real value of these tomahawks is as field utility tools. I started my evaluation with the Light Infantry model while working on our tree farm cutting next winter's firewood supply. The upper logs of the red alder we fall always require lot of limbing before they can be bucked and loaded. The relatively heavy head and short handle of this model made it ideal for the use. I also found the hammer pole useful for driving plastic falling wedges into logs. Modern logger falling axes work on the same concept, a heavy head mounted on a short, straight, handle. I also tried the Ranger model and found it to work almost as well as the Infantry version. The spike pole did prevent it being used to drive wedges.

We always end up loading lots of small saplings with the larger firewood logs as, once dried, alder in the 1/2- to 1-1/2-inch



The ATC tomahawks proved handy for knocking small limbs and stubs off firewood logs before I split them.

diameter range makes great kindling. In the past I have bucked most of these up with a chainsaw while cutting the larger logs to length. Frankly, this is kind of overkill on a 3/4-inch stick. Just as an experiment I tried laying the saplings over my splitting block and chopping them to length with the pair of tomahawks. I soon found this was actually much faster than using a chainsaw. Several wheelbarrow loads of kindling were added to the woodshed in this manner. Again, the heavier Light Infantry model was the best chopper.

Having praised the Light Infantry model several times for its chopping ability, I will have to admit I consider it too heavy for modern combat use. Here the original Ranger design would be my first choice. With a little training, this tomahawk is a fairly effective weapon against anything up to and including a fixed bayonet on the end of an AK-47.

American Tomahawk also has polished collector grade versions of most of their hatchets. They are rapidly adding new models to include a futuristic looking Walter Brend designed "fighting hawk." The time has come once again for America's enemies to learn what it means to feel the wrath of a sudden Ranger assault out of the black of the night. **TK**

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