

THE MARTIALIST: ISSUE 3.10 SUBSCRIBER

Carrying a Bandana

By Phil Elmore

One of the most versatile and useful "tactical" or "survival" products you can carry, on a daily basis, isn't the latest knife or multitool. It's not expensive or high-tech. It's not illegal, immoral, restricted, or otherwise subject to federal, state, and local regulations, at least not as far as I know. It is inexpensive, it is found for sale virtually everywhere, and its applications are limited only by your imagination. That item is the cloth bandana.



Photo by Phil Elmore

I carry a bandana every day, folded up in a pocket-sized square that I carry in my left back pocket with my Ace pocket comb. It has served me well countless times for various mundane tasks and utility chores; it has also served me in emergencies. Just the other day I accidentally reopened a bad cut on my hand while I was out and about working; I used my bandana to staunch the blood flow and prevent making a mess in a client's office. I've used my bandana as a handkerchief, as an emergency head wrap (for training and for those times when I need to go out briefly but have not yet had a chance to wash and comb my hair), to clean up the mess from a leaking water faucet when I was out of paper towels, to wipe clean a dirty car

windshield at a drive-in movie (I was out of washer fluid and had no other materials to clean the glass), to carry a load of batteries for the digital camera my wife and I take on various trips, and to filter fumes while using industrial-strength cleaners by tying the damp bandana over my face.

Previously I reviewed Jim Keating's excellent video on the combat bandana, which details how to tie off and use the bandana as a striking implement, as a disarming tool, and even as an aid to concentration (Keating explains that tying the cloth around the temples helps focus the mind). I have gone to foreign countries where I was unsure of the local weapons laws, taking only a large bandana and a few other accessories for self-defense. While I've never been forced to rely on it as a fighting tool, I could – but that's not my primary interest in it. No, I believe the best use of the bandana is as a utility item. What follows is a partial list of bandana applications. If the myriad uses here don't convince you that you should carry a bandana, I don't know what will.

- Head wrap
- Face shield
- Dirt and dust filter (dry or moist)
- Disarming/grappling tool
- Improvised strapping
- Emergency or utility flag
- Striking/bludgeoning tool (loaded with weight)
- Bandage, tourniquet, or sling
- Towel
- Handkerchief
- Improvised bag or sack
- Cleaning rag
- Padding
- Carrying strap
- Wrist, ankle, or knee brace

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The bandana is fairly universally legal, though I do know there are instances in which it is controlled (and therefore prohibited) as "gang colors." I know of a teacher, for example, who cannot carry a bandana because his school forbids them as gang paraphernalia, and it's true that wearing the wrong color head cloth in the wrong part of some cities in the United States will turn you into a target. I have found one solution to this online – plain white bandanas, which can be had in some stores and are basically just giant cotton handkerchiefs. They fulfill the same function as any other bandana but look harmless. I suppose you could use one to surrender to enemy forces, too, if that's your thing.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Most of the bandanas you'll encounter in discount and department stores are the same traditional blue-and-white or red-and-white paisley affairs. Biker shops and other specialty stores often stock different colors and even different sizes. Once in a while I run across extra-large bandanas and always pick them up when I do; the larger the bandana, the more potentially useful it is.



Photo by Phil Elmore

One alternative to the bandana, though a bit more charged symbolically and ideologically, is the *shemaugh* or *kefiyah*.



Photo by Phil Elmore

These traditional desert head scarves are all the range in certain operator and carport-commando circles, not to mention the required headgear among decapitation-prone Islamist terrorists. Given this, choose one with care so you don't end up causing yourself trouble – to some people, wearing one of these is like walking down the street in a Ku Klux Klan robe or a Nazi swastika armband.

I have black-and-white and black-and-green shemaughs that I fold up and use as scarves in the winter. They're large

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enough that, once unfolded completely, they're almost large enough to use as light blankets. My shemaugh, unfolded to a single layer, will cover a petite woman or a child.



Photo by Phil Elmore

If you can't find a bandana of the thickness or size you would like, you can easily substitute a square of cloth in any fabric you prefer. Just stop by a fabric store or check the appropriate department of a discount chain like Wal*Mart. You can buy remnants relatively cheaply, too.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Bandanas are so simple and so inexpensive that it's hard to imagine you

wouldn't carry one. They can do so many things that they're an invaluable piece of multi-use daily carry gear.



Photo by Phil Elmore

The photos above and below illustrate using batteries to "load" a bandana for use as a striking tool. It goes without saying that you would only be justified in using such an improvised weapon if your life was in danger and you could justify using such a tool, which could be considered an improvised sap or cosh, depending on who's making the judgment. Do your homework and don't break any local, state, provincial, or national laws.



Photo by Phil Elmore

If you don't have a bandana, get one. Carry it. Make it part of your daily kit. Do it today. ♠