



Episode 366 – Chief Instructor David Kahn | [whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com)



#### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey everybody. Thanks for tuning in. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 366. Today, I'm joined by Chief Instructor David Kahn. My name is Jeremy Lesniak. I'm your host for the show. I'm the founder here at whistlekick and I'm just a guy who loves martial arts. So, I made it my job. You can find all the different things that I do with whistlekick and the rest of the team does with whistlekick at, pretty easy, [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). You can find the show notes for this and all of the other episodes - we never put them behind them behind a paywall - at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). And we've got most of our products available on Amazon but if you want to buy direct, we'll save you a few bucks. You can use the code `PODCAST15` to save 15% on our foam sparring gear, our Olympic Taekwondo sparring gear, forearm guard, shin guards, uniforms. What else do we have over there? That's the heart of it. And there's more coming all the time. Oh, yeah. We've got apparel, shoes, hats, lots of good stuff for you to express to the world that you're a martial artist - that you love martial arts. Maybe but probably not as much as I do.

We've had quite a few people on the show over the years who have participated in Krav Maga. Even some who have converted in a sense, who left the more "traditional", the more traditionally traditional martial arts like Karate or Taekwondo, and embraced Krav Maga, which I still consider to be a traditional martial art. But today's guest, Chief Instructor Kahn, is a Krav Maga native. It's the art that he started in. It's the art that he continues to practice. And now, 25 years later, it's the art the he is travelling the world, sharing with not only other martial artists but first time martial artists and even the military. We talked about a ton of stuff today from cultural influences on Krav Maga to how Krav Maga's changed



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who he is. So, let me step back and welcome him to the show. Chief Instructor Kahn, welcome to whistlekick Martial Arts Radio.

**David Kahn:**

It sure is great to be on here. Thank you.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Hey, it's great to have you. I appreciate you coming on. We're going to get into some stuff today, aren't we? I mean, we're just chatting for a few minutes and you have stories. I can tell. I can tell already.

**David Kahn:**

Thanks, again. I'm honored to be on the show.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, before we get into stories, we've got to know a little bit about who you are. So, we start in the most fundamental of ways. How did you find the martial arts?

**David Kahn:**

It wasn't until my first year of law school that I encountered the instructor, Rick Blitstein, my first Krav Maga instructor. Prior to that, I played football at Princeton University, and I suppose that the only self-defense at that point was running at somebody full speed with my head, which was not the best defense for sure. But I'd always been interested in the martial arts. I just hadn't had the opportunity really to invest in it. And Krav Maga fit the bill simply because the more work you put in, the more one got out. So, it was immediate gratification. So, I didn't have any experience prior to meeting Rick Blitstein in my first week of law school.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And so then, the next obvious question is why? What got you in there?

**David Kahn:**

I was interested in continuing my fitness regimen. Self-defense and martial arts had always been an interest. I tend to be intense at what I do. So, I was looking for something that would provide immediate gratification, if you will. I've just been in Israel that summer working with technology. After attending Princeton, I worked for a year and then I went to Israel within that year. So, on coming back, I've just



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been in Israel and I happen to stumble on Rick underneath a Succah, which is an outdoor structure in Judaism that used to commemorate and... It's like the holidays. And I saw a Krav Maga shirt they're just wearing. It said Krav Maga, I remember to this day, black shirt and then it says Israeli Martial Arts below it. I've never heard of Krav Maga before. In fact, I don't even pronounce it correctly for probably the first few weeks that I was training in it. And for those who are not familiar with the term, Krav means struggle or fight and Maga means close. So, it's usually translated as close combat. But I saw Rick and I said, Krav Maga, what is that? He said, oh that's just really hand-to-hand combat. And I looked at him expressively and said, wow. He sized me up. He said, yeah, you look like you'd like to do this. I was still weightlifting and running and that sort of thing. He said, do you want to come on by? I said, I'd love to but I'm a first year law student and I've really got to focus on my studies. Back then it was important to me. I graduated Princeton with honors and everything, but law school is a different animal. And I took one week of class and decided this was awful, what am I doing here? But I'll continue. And I went to Rick and said, hey, I'd like to start training. And honestly, the training with Rick and the friendship I developed with him got me through law school, which I absolutely hated. It was a good education, I suppose. But it just wasn't the ideal thing for me to be dealing, but the training got me through it. So, I began with him and I trained for three years as often as I could, taking as many private lessons as I could. He was ultra-generous in not quoting me a higher rate just so I could afford it. And I began to help him teach down in Miami. One word about Rick, he was actually the first American to ever be exposed to Krav Maga. In 1977, he was in Israel on a Kibbutz which is a... It's simply a farming establishment. It was an early experiment in socialism and they still have them in Israel. He had done Kung Fu for a number of years. And he was practicing Kung Fu on his own and a couple of the Kibbutzniks or the members of the Kibbutz saw him and said, what is that? And he said, Kung Fu. And he said, you look like you like martial arts. He said, yes. Then they invited him subsequently to a training session and he had his... Well, 06:24 handed to him and they were impressed because he kept coming back for more. They would take him down, they were hitting him in all the vital places. They were using knives, guns - everything that you'd understand as some of the military 06:37 or street, depending on where you are - and he loved it. So, he kept coming back and ultimately, they had him perform a few of the things that they'd showed him to two older men sitting on a bench. One of them was the founder of Krav Maga, Imi Lichtenfeld. So, Rick was then invited back to the first instructor's course in the U.S. with two other individuals who brought it back. That was a six-week brutal program, which I simulated later on in life, where they basically condense several years of Krav Maga into six weeks and they came out as instructors - the first American instructors. So, I was privileged enough to meet Rick. He basically adapted me and my Krav Maga journey began.

#### **Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. That's pretty good stuff. We don't... You may be, and forgive to any past guests if I am forgetting you, but you may be the first guest to come on who started in Krav Maga. In fact, plenty of people who have incorporated Krav Maga trained in multiple systems at the same time or even some who left their more traditionally thought of traditional martial arts for Krav Maga. But I think you're the first Krav Maga native that we've had.



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**David Kahn:**

I could be. We're really lucky in that sense because when we train in our schools, sometimes I'll get a terrific person - male or female - who's got an athletic background who's never done any form of martial arts training. And in many ways, if the person really wants to learn and, again, who's got good athletic base, they're the best kinds of students because we don't have to redo anything. On the other hand, we have people who had good boxing backgrounds or Jiu Jitsu backgrounds or any backgrounds that are very helpful. There are a couple of martial arts which we've got to retrain the movements and hand positions and footwork. But any background, which would certainly make sense given your previous comment, will be complementary to Krav Maga. We build whatever you have and whatever makes sense for you to use. Obviously, people are built differently - tall, short, wider, thinner, male, female, strong, not so strong - but whatever their capabilities, Krav Maga has got to conform to them, to the person. The person does not have to conform to Krav Maga. In other words, the system is highly adaptable and it can be customized or it is customized for each person within a certain parameters who may have to use it.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. As you were talking about some of the differences, the idea of having to unlearn... I've done some Krav Maga, some very short seminar, single class type of stuff as I travel around.

**David Kahn:**

Great.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And it's wonderful. It's phenomenal stuff. It intellectually resonates with me pretty strongly. And some of the... There's a cultural tie there. I was raised Jewish. You were talking about the Succah earlier to celebrate the holiday of Sukkot. So, I'm right there on that side of it too. But yeah, absolutely. As I've participated, some of the training, the decades on non Krav Maga certainly got in the way.

**David Kahn:**

Yeah. And what makes... What sort of astounds me is that the particular defense were developed around weaponry, particularly firearms. It took Imi to recognize how to best disarm somebody where firearms had been used - larger ones in 1400s, hand guns began 1500s - the disarms are deceptively simple. There are many variations out there now. I believe, of course, the way I have been taught by Grandmaster Haim Gidon in Israel, I can spend a little bit more how I arrived on his doorstep, but the one crucial thing that we, as the original Krav Maga association, weaponry and 10:48 handgun defense





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have got to be done correctly. Because if you don't do it correctly, it can get you killed. And so, I can talk more about the weaponry and such, but circling back, I guess it's a great segway. Rick trained me for three years and I said to him at the law school before going to work, I would like to learn this at its highest level. And of course, that meant going to Israel. Anybody who obviously wants to go, if it's an Asian discipline or maybe Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, would think to go to the source. Of course, that source for Krav Maga is Netanya, Israel. So, Rick contacted the original organization, the Israeli Krav Maga Association. And just before Imi passed away in 1998, we received a letter of invitation where Imi instructed the association to host me as Rick's student. I was truly honored to have Imi's quick audience and for him to endorse my going over there. I was met there with open arms by then and current Grandmaster Haim Gidon, 10th Dan. Haim had been training with Imi since 1969. He's only one of two people who was awarded 8th degree black belt by Imi. And then in 1996 when he was awarded that 8th Dan in a film ceremony, Imi Lichtenfeld said to Haim Gidon, 9th and 10th Dan were to come. So, Imi appointed him, Haim, as his successor and I know why. The Krav Maga that I've been exposed to with Haim over the last 27 years is non12:27 It is obviously, in my opinion, the best in the world. I went to Israel for a six-week private training course with Haim. I didn't know that it was going to be a private course at that time. When I showed up, there was Yigal Arbiv and Yoav Krayn and then Haim and Haim's other sons showed up a little later to welcome me. And I asked, where are the other students? And they looked at quizzically and said, well, you're the only one. So, I had an unparalleled six weeks of training with Haim, six days a week. Most I did in one day. Thank goodness I was still in my very early 20's. It was 11 hours a day. And that's how I began my 20 something year journey back and forth Israel. I frankly cannot remember how many time I'd been, but it's been at least a couple of times every year since. And Grandmaster Gidon was just here in November conducting a course. So, he comes over regularly as well. So, I had constant interaction. The system is constantly updated to meet modern threats. I am not the best but I certainly had been trained by the best. So, it complements to my original instructors.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Awesome. The idea of someone dedicating themselves to something so... I think we can say uncommon, maybe even rare at that time. You said 20 years ago. I didn't hear anybody talking about Krav Maga 20 years ago.

**David Kahn:**

No. You're right on. The first Krav Maga article that I'm aware of was in 1986 in the 14:06Gazette. I've got copies of it. We do a lot of work with the Marine core. It was just an honor to follow up on the 1986 article and to have gone to the Marine Corps Martial Arts Center of Excellence, the MACE, in Quantico where the FBI, DEA are also located. We work with them there as well. It helped augment MKM which is a lean core martial arts program, amazing program. Good minds think alike. It's a military fighting style. We were brought in to give the Marines a few tactics focusing on 14:45 They very much appreciated it. It's a two-way street. I love learning from the Marines. I can talk a little bit more about the Marines when we discuss maybe about Krav Maga competition and non-competitions and why I got so.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. One of the things that I kind of want to... I don't want to have to talk about it but I have to talk about it. Because in a lot of circles, Krav Maga is not a traditional martial art. But what a lot of people don't realize, and this is... I'm going to say this. Krav Maga predates Taekwondo.

**David Kahn:**

It may well. Certainly a difficult reference is there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Well, I don't mean it in that way. I mean, we've done the research and we even have a Krav Maga episode, and we'll link to it in the show notes of course. For anyone that might be new, [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) is where we keep all that. But Krav Maga, not by long, is old enough certainly that we can call it that traditional stuff. Call it in with those traditional flavors of martial arts. But I think that there are a lot of people who don't realize the age, they don't realize the legacy, and they don't realize that Krav Maga was started for very similar reasons to every other martial art and has adopted, kind of cultivated, its own cultural elements in the same way that Karate and Taekwondo and Kung Fu have based on where it comes from. So, I say all that to pose a question to you that I don't believe I've asked on the show before. Do you ever feel left out from martial arts conversation or from... Well, I'll leave it at that. Do you feel left out?

**David Kahn:**

No. Everyone who I've been fortunate to encounter is very generous with their knowledge and their openness. People have... It's sad that some of them are accusing 16:48 that Krav Maga has stolen a number of things from different martial arts. In fact, I don't think stolen is the correct word but certainly borrowed. Maybe he was looking for a system that would combine the best of all worlds and that's probably why Krav Maga could be considered so popular. And perhaps it's even the original mixed martial art but without rules. Krav Maga also develops specific defenses and these mostly revolve around the weapon defenses for the impact, edged and firearms. Those are specific to Krav Maga. I'm developed those. I'm not aware of any disarms the way we do it for some of the traditional styles. Because again, they are old and flying kick to knock a horseman off his horse is an amazing skill set. 17:41 of course. Not everybody can do it. But the other focus, of course, of Krav Maga after it was formally adopted by the IDF, Israel Defense Forces, was to make it applicable and doable for everyone. So, it's not to say that the other martial arts are not simple, they're not practical, but everything in Krav Maga is based on utility, practicality and ease of use. So, it's got to be... The lowest common denominator and it's not a criticism, but the average person has got to be able to do it. If the average person can't do it, it doesn't belong to Krav Maga curriculum.



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**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And I think that that formation of Krav Maga, I think we could make the same claim for every martial art. Whenever a martial art is formed, it's taking a look at what else was available, what was needed, what made sense to the person putting together the curriculum, if you will.

**David Kahn:**

Sure

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

And that became that style of Karate or that style of Taekwondo or Judo or Krav Maga. I don't think there's another way to do it. I don't think you can put together an effective, an intended effective martial art without stealing or borrowing or however you want to look at it. And if you are, if you're saying I'm only going to use techniques that no one's ever used, you're not left with anything worth using.

**David Kahn:**

Agreed. Again, I'll repeat my 19:16 in saying that good minds think alike. In the military systems that we train, there are going to be more similarities than dissimilarities. So, I absolutely agree with your 19:27 point there. Great, great comment.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Now, you mentioned that you've been to Israel more times than you can count. You threw around huge names. I don't think there are too many people training in Krav Maga today who have had a letter from Imi written with their name. I mean, that's...

**David Kahn:**

Oh, no. There are many. Imi granted many, many black belts. This happens just to be a letter where, again, Imi instructed the association to welcome me. The American training was in the early '80s and I hadn't... Americans really hadn't been there often in the '90s. And so it was curiosity to guys who hadn't 20:07 Americans. There are many splits in the Krav Maga community.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure.



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**David Kahn:**

Suffice to say that there are many, many good instructors out there. We use the phrase that, because not all Krav Maga is the same, like all the other great martial arts, there are splinter groups. And unfortunately, with Krav Maga, it's become 20:26 commercialized and it's turned more into a fitness-fed at least on the American side, I'm afraid. But that's not to say there aren't many good Krav Maga instructors in the United States because there are. But that could be another topic.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Sure. And I appreciate your sensitivity to it. That wasn't... I wasn't attempting to say that offshoots or different...

**David Kahn:**

No, not at all.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

... looks at Krav Maga were wrong or inferior.

**David Kahn:**

No, of course.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

If we were to take a statistical look at the number of people who are training in Krav Maga today who hold the honor of knowing who the founder, of knowing that the founder had written their name, that's a small percentage. And so, the only reason I bring that up is to say between that and being there and some of these relatively earlier days as Krav Maga was coming to this country and your trips to Israel, I'm sure you have a ton of stories. And so, that was my set up. I wanted to offer up an opportunity if you could tell us about one of the more impressive or dramatic or entertaining or funny - however you choose to look at it - your favorite story that you might offer to our listeners today.

**David Kahn:**

Sure. I really like that. It comes at my expense.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**





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That's what it's tend to.

**David Kahn:**

Yeah. The first class that I ever took was with Rick Blitstein. And again, I was about 5'11" and 195 lbs. I was still lifting and playing football. He said, David, come up here. And I said, me? He said, yeah. I eventually went up and he said, alright, stand there. And before I knew it, I was on my 22:10 in Hebrew, with my wrist contorted with a size 8.5 ft. on my throat looking up at Rick holding my hand, extending my body. He had taken me down on a Cavalier number one before I even knew what was happening. And I looked up at him and I said, wow. I just had my ass handed to me and I've got to learn this. So, I certainly was humbled. I was amazed at how quickly he did that. He was not a big guy, about 5'7" or 5'8", maybe 160 lbs. and he took me down effortlessly, seamlessly and had me at his mercy. So, I was most impressed and that's how I began my training.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Wow. I think we can all relate to that about being put on our butt unexpectedly especially early on. But some of us, and I'm super 23:04 have had it happen more recently than early in our training. If you're the best person, 23:12

**David Kahn:**

I have many stories with training. We were doing some training in New York at a place down 67th St. called Macaulay and I had two of my amazing Israeli instructors. Ohad Gidon, Haim's son, I think he was certainly one of the best practitioners in the world; and Yigal Arbiv, another great guy who's trained me. 23:36 Anyway, we're walking in New York and we had what are called 23:41 guns with us because we're going to do demonstrations at the Macaulay. These were an M16 and MP5 but it was at night. We were walking on the Upper West Side of New York and it just so happen that Hillary Clinton, first lady, was speaking at Macaulay that night. So, there's a heavy Secret Service presence. And Yigal, because of his military training, I suppose, put the MP5 in his hands as we're walking down, probably forgetting that this was a civilian street in New York. Kind of like he was on patrol. So, the Secret Service, they got worried about that. We were cornered. We didn't have guns drawn at us because we identified ourselves right away. But after that said, they came down and took a look at what was going on. They were kind of interested in the training. And you couldn't have two better instructors than Ohad or Yigal. And again, we work with all the major federal agencies so we came back years later. But that's another story. Let's just say there are many, many. What really... When I was teaching in New York, one story quickly comes to mind where I had a gentleman come and see me. His name first name is Martin, and said, had I ever met a gentleman named Ernest Kovary who was Imi Lichtenfeld's oldest living student? I said no, I hadn't and I would be thoroughly honored to do so. He said, well, he lives in Queens. Would you be interested in meeting him? And I said, absolutely. At the time, my first book, Krav Maga, was being published and I tried to get the interview in that book that I'd done with Ernest but the publication



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date was too far advanced. But I did meet with Ernest in Queens and I had an interview with him and he explained to me how Krav Maga came to be, and that it was developed firsthand to protect the Jewish community in Slovakia. He then went on and tell me how Krav Maga may have saved his life. Ernest was 15 at the time when Imi left Bratislava but he had been training with him for about 10 years. So, Ernest really saw the beginnings of Krav Maga. Imi hadn't called it Krav Maga at that point but it was the beginnings, the foundations of it. And one of the explanations Ernest gave is that they were out, about to go to a synagogue 26:12 the day that World War II broke out. So, they were on their way to a synagogue and their mother had pleaded with them not to go. It was dangerous and she was right, she was 26:24 So, when they left their apartment building dressed in their Saturday finery, they saw a three Hitler-Jugend beating up the local baker on his way to work. So, they didn't intervene but they quickly ran back into their apartment building. The Hitler-Jugend saw them do it and they chased them. Now, Ernest and Tibor had been training in what we'd call Krav Maga for many years. And when the three Hitler-Jugend fought with the two Jewish boys, the Hitler-Jugend were really beaten. Ernest and Tibor it turns out that the Hitler-Jugend ended up in the hospital and the German Gauleiter or the section commander, basically the military mayor said, how did this happen to you? And the three Hitler-Jugend explained that the two Jews did that to them. Well, given the Nazi's convictions and racial supremacy and that Jews wouldn't fight and all the other unfortunate things that were said at that time, the Gauleiter did want this information led out that two Jews had beaten up three Nazis. So, there were a number of articles that were published of which I had for this second book which I was able to get it in by St. Martin's, and it's really one of my favorite stories. But it goes on that the Stapo were after the two brothers, Tibor and Ernest. 28:00those are old enough for maybe 28:02 with leather coat and all that. They came after the two brothers who were then... They were compelled escape up the roof through the stairs. The 28:13 is that the Stapo were drawing their P30 pistols. Ernest turned around and delivered a very strong straight jab to the lead Nazi, knocking him all the way down the stairs. 28:28 Ernest and his brother escaped. So, Ernest credited Krav Maga and its emphasis on combative, on doing things correctly the first time, that every strike had to count, every movement's got to count. Because there's not necessarily a time for another. We emphasize something 28:47 which is continuous combat motion which is a seamless stream of combatives but every one's got to count. Because you don't know how many you'll be able to administer before the next attack is on. So, he counted that one straight punch. Imi was a champion boxer, as is Haim, the boxing skills, the 29:06 skills probably emphasize knocking the Nazis backwards. And so, he escaped and he attributed Krav Maga to saving his life. And so, I always keep that in mind with training - about how it was developed. Fortunately, Imi was able to get to Egypt and then to Israel to continue the training. He served as the chief military instructor for hand-to-hand combat for the IDF up until the late '50s, early '60s when they started to get some help. But what Imi emphasized is that Krav Maga is for everybody. It's not just for Jews. It's for anybody who's a law-abiding citizen who needs to be able to defend themselves. And it's open to everybody, provided that their motivation is good and they're not criminals and all that sort of things. So, Ernest explained all this to me and that too is one of my favorite stories. So, I don't want to inundate you with stories. I'll stop there.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Please. That's kind of the whole purpose of this show. We've had episodes where I've got to two or maybe three questions and the guest just kind of...

**David Kahn:**

Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

... went.

**David Kahn:**

Understood.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

It's fun. There's something to be said for those historical elements and helping to bring some context to the why; the why the martial arts are important. I think when we look at the martial arts that have more, let's say, writing about them, when we think about Funakoshi's books or we think about General Choi and the early days of Taekwondo or when we talk about the early days of Krav Maga. There's certainly something to be said for hearing these stories and saying, the roots of what I do now come from these very real situations. And almost universally of the... we'll call them origin stories of martial arts that I have read or heard, there's always this overcoming element. There's almost biblical quality of going from being oppressed to rising up, of gaining that confidence or that standing or however you want to look at it - something that is so important and something that we still today put children into martial arts so they can gain that.

**David Kahn:**

And good people gravitate towards good things. That is absolutely true.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

You said it so much more eloquently than I just put it.

**David Kahn:**

No. You hit it on the head. Forgive the pun.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Cool. Now, outside of Krav Maga, is there stuff that you're passionate about? Is there time?

**David Kahn:**

Yeah. I was a history major at Princeton. So, I really enjoy history which is also why I enjoy reading about other martial arts and their evolution and how they might have affected certain historical outcomes. In fact, I'm just in the process of finishing up my 6th book on Krav Maga but parallel to that, I'm writing a book on South Africa and the American Civil War which is a bit of an odd topic, admittedly. At Princeton, we had to do a senior thesis and I had probably the foremost civil war histories in the world as my adviser, Prof. James McPherson, who won a Pulitzer-Prize in 1988 for his book *Battle Cry of Freedom*. In that event, I wanted to do something that hadn't been done before to break some new ground and much have been written about the American Civil War. But I was interested on what South Africans, the tip of Africa, would think in the American conflict given their conditions of racial supremacy and what they would have thought about America tearing its national fabric of apart over the issue of the evil institution of slavery. And they were very interested. So, I've been toying a little of that, enjoying the writing of it, sort of bring history to the life and looking at it from a little bit of a different perspective. So, I do enjoy reading and writing. I can't say I enjoy weight training still because of all the wear and tear injuries. But I think it's very necessary for stamina strength and most of all the speed in terms of training. I enjoy travelling when I can do it as well. Fortunately, with my Krav Maga training, I always try that. If I can, combine some teaching with some sightseeing. It's taken me as far as Japan at Hiroshima when we visited the Marines twice to train them. They're 33:51 instructors in Krav Maga. I've been lucky enough to go to the U.K. to train with the Royal Marines 33:57 He's going to be in Europe training with some other military personnel. I even got to go to Hawaii to do a seminar there and work with some local people. So, travelling is great too. I've done some stuff in Italy, France. It's nice to be able to combine your passion, my passion for Krav Maga, with the passion for travel.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I mean, there's nothing like travelling. There's nothing like opening yourself up to new experiences whether it's martial arts or non-martial arts. I think the more stuff we get to observe, just the better people we get. The more martial arts we train in, the better we are, the more tools we have in our toolkit.

**David Kahn:**

I'll be... Maybe not so 34:42 people can relate. I've had to actually use the Krav Maga overseas a little bit more than I would have thought.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Really?



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**David Kahn:**

Yeah. Well, fortunately, it was all preemptive. I was in France and I'm walking through a park with a girl from when I was in law school at the time. And a bunch of kids, they were trying to pickpocket us. I knew what they were up to because it was fluttering newspapers. I swept her behind me and made sure her bag was in between my back and her front. I basically took a fighting stance and they backed off because they knew that I wasn't fooling around. Another time, another girlfriend later on in life, I was in Italy teaching but she had come. And she had some shopping in Rome and I saw a motorcycle with two guys at it suspiciously approaching from the rear revving. They were very keen on grabbing all of her bags out of her arms. I saw them approaching very quickly and I again whipped her behind and I prepared to launch a straight kick to kick him as they were passing, wait off their motorcycle. And I was about to launch the kick but they veered away and that was, I guess, a good thing. So, it comes in handy. One of the important things that we said, good people gravitate towards good things. The mindset has got to be I will only use this if I have to. We want to obviously promote de-escalation, deconfliction, escape - anything one can do to avoid 36:17 confrontation. And that's more from a moral standpoint than a legal standpoint. I mentioned that I'm not practicing law but the legal training has come in quite handy literally and figuratively with the civilian training that we do. If you have to defend yourself, you've got to be able to explain what you did and why you did it. I actually emphasize this a lot in this book number 6, Krav Maga Combatives about a jury pool and what they're going to think of one's training. And it's probably a misconception out there that a martial artist in whatever discipline, because most juries are not going to have firsthand knowledge, should be able to do what... I don't know, one of the martial arts heroes out there could do. Maybe Jason Bourne or something but not that violent. Otherwise, you should be able to put some kind of wristlock or some kind of a pressure point hold or something where you can control this would be aggressor and not injure him or her. So, that fact is in it as well with all the training. We'll get back to that if you'd like to.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. Well, you've spoken a bit about the military and I know you've spent some time working with military personnel - as you said in Hiroshima. You were also telling me earlier before we came on the call that you've done quite a bit of that. So, I'm wondering if you might talk about what is that like. Because the difference being, I would imagine, is that you have a defined endpoint. Most of us, when we start our martial arts training, it's not a six-week course or an eight-week course or even a two-year program. It is on-going. But when you have an endpoint, obviously as an instructor, it's a whole different way of approaching that curriculum.

**David Kahn:**

Wonderful question. I'll speak about the curriculum quickly then. The Israeli Krav Maga Association probably has the most extensive curriculum for Krav Maga in the world. It would only make sense given its the original organization where somebody of these other groups have come from. The actual materials go through 5th degree black belt. And at the highest black belt level, that's where you'll find





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military training, police training, security training and aviation security - all the professional skill sets, counter terrorism and that sort of thing. Quite frankly, the reason why I'm able to work with our military, which is probably the greatest honor I've got along with our law enforcement, same can be said is because of what Grandmaster Haim Gidon has taught me and has imparted over the years. That level of curricula was really reserved for some of the top people who have done it some time, understand the core curriculum and can be entrusted with it. I've had books and the videos that we've done, not just mine of course, but anybody who's well known or an expert in the field end up in terrorist training camps. We've been warned of this and that's why we're very careful about what we disseminate. So, what we train the military, the factors and techniques are not something that we do or we disclose publicly. I have a few references in a book by YMAA called Krav Maga Professional Tactics which shows a number of military application but there are certain things that are purposely left out. I was fortunate enough to co-author my very good friend who was the head of MKM program, that's how I met him. Master Sergeant Ron Jacobs, he was the hand-to-hand combat instructor from MKM, 6th degree black belt is the highest there. He's since retired. He's now working in a very special capacity with another military branch as their hand-to-hand combat instructor. We're working together on that. So, when we first trained the military, we were brought into a camp 40:22 by a great guy, Capt. Frank Small who had a background in special operations. It actually gets to a question you posed about competitions. Krav Maga, although the IDF has had a number of competitions, the nature of Krav Maga, the anatomical targeting, the injury factor or the idea of 40:49 people is not going to 40:50 tournaments. So, when I had competition, let's call it, it's the military guys who are all... As tough as they come, testing what we do. I put myself in some difficult positions with the Marines in the beginning to show that we could get out of some of the most difficult chokeholds, for example, because we could do that safely. Except one of the great Marines who later became a great friend, he had me in a 41:16 on the ground and he was 41:19 around choking me. And I said, I wouldn't get in his position if I could help it but here's how Krav Maga would defend it. And I usually 41:27 I'd really choke you? I said, yup, three things are going to happen. You either choke me out and I'll tap, you choke me out and I won't tap or I'll get out of this. And of course, the 3rd option was my preference, to get out of it and I did. And the reason that I was able to do it, he started saying under his breath, I'll assure you, my eyeballs are coming out. Because I was being choked, I said, so let go. And he did. And we became great friends after that. So, when we do a military training, we're talking about a level of additional training that can only come with a military mindset which can be adopted for the street. The main corps uses cadavers to test certain things out. I haven't gone that far but we shared some knowledge on that. But truly, it's an honor. The marine training was some of the best the world. We train all five branches now - Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Navy - and we know that they may have to use these attacks. This not something that's just insurance policy. This may actually come literally handy. Same with police. And probably, the police are the group who use Krav Maga and like 42:42 attacking some others because others 42:44 for arrest and control, you need to put your hands on somebody. And that goes to one more factor which is I would say really particular to Grandmaster Haim Gidon training, it's that we conduct the training against 42:57 assistance. In other words, the person's not just going to let you do or have your way with what you intend to do to them. They're going to fight back literally tooth and nail and try to destroy your anatomy just as much as you might have to injure their anatomy. In other words, it's not a passive type of thing. They're not going to be cooperative partners in certain elements. Others in the beginning with Krav Maga or any good



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fighting discipline of martial arts, you'd want to help your partner. You've got to be a good partner in the training. But the best part is in Krav Maga at the highest levels, don't allow you to choke them, don't allow you to simulate an arm break. They don't allow you to win. You've got to have a determined opponent if the training's going to be realistic. So, that's one of the best things about working with our military. We don't replace what they do. All the military branches are very well-trained. We just supplement and hopefully give them a few more 43:53 for their well 43:55

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I've had the privilege of teaching quite a few people over the years but I've never taught anyone that I knew was bound for the military. More than a class or two here or there. Is there anything different going through your mind when you're teaching, we'll say, civilians versus military people because of the fact that they are so much more likely to need it?

**David Kahn:**

Yes. It's also a two-way learning street. Again, when working with some special operation guys, the best of the best, let's put it that way. I, again, go with profound respect, hat in hand, and deferred to their combat experience and get feedback to make what we do better. Make no mistake. What I've been taught by Grandmaster Gidon and Rick and others is prove them the respect is mutual. I am honored that they'll listen and incorporate what we do and 45:01 they have. I recently just trained with a Special Forces group going abroad in some anti-abduction tactics curriculum which I did develop for him. They're just, on a personal level, some of the best people we'll ever meet. Their dedication for the country is unparalleled. It's the same thing with the police as well. We know that these brave men and women are going out and doing their job. One of the 45:31 that I've tried to place again is that public must be protected. There are definitely some problems in policing if there's excessive use of force that don't adhere the 45:41 standard. But with the general public, 45:45 martial artists would is that it's very difficult to control somebody let alone passive resistance to active resistance too. So, we know that they've been there and they've done that, and that they've gotten appreciation. And that's one of the reasons. Again, we've been so lucky. We're really one of the few Krav Maga groups in the U.S. There are a couple but we do a lot of military training. And today, we've had no pushback. Nobody's questioned it because we've proven it - how we do it and why we do it. I had to prove why our 46:16 choke defense on the ground work against some special force guy who just recently... Top level guys in Jiu Jitsu and I was able to defend it although I obviously wouldn't want to get in that position. We call that a negative fight where you're in a complete disadvantage. But if we can get out of a position of complete disadvantage such as negative fight, obviously, if we're in a neutral or unprepared state, we're going to do that much better and they seem to appreciate that.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**



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Nice. And you've talked about books - books that you've written - as we've discussed your past today. So, let's take a moment and step out and talk about that, your writing career through all this.

**David Kahn:**

Sure. I referred to that senior thesis about South African and the American Civil War. That's how I sort of began my writing career in college and I published a few articles from it. I was approached while teaching in New York by St. Martin's Press, a very, very big press. I was really quite flattered. And the editor, Maryanne said hey, we'd like to do a book on Krav Maga. We want you to do it. Would you like to do it and if so, do need it ghost-written? Which means another writer and then I sign my name to it. I'm not too keen on that concept but anyway. But I said to her hey, I've written a thesis. I did really well with it and I'd like to give it a shot. So, that was my 1st book, Krav Maga: An Essential Guide, published in 2004. That launched a writing career. I was fortunate four years later to do another one for St. Martin's Press again about Krav Maga. And then I seem to produce one every four years but I'm getting better at it because I produced the books 4 and 5 in 2016. They were both published about three months apart. And I don't know anybody, any idiot like me, who writes two books at a time but that's what I did. And there are a couple more. There's one going into publication in June 2019. I'm really excited. I'm just editing it. Before we spoke, I was editing it. It's called Krav Maga Combatives which is focusing on Krav Maga's most important combatives in my opinion and some 48:23 which is continuous motion, compound combatives and that sort of thing. So, I really enjoy it. We have gone through photographs for the last many books. I've got great help from all of my fantastic partners and instructors and I'll just launch it out there. Renaldo Rossi, Don Melnick, Chris Eckel, 48:44 - these are all accomplished instructors who had helped me. I'm in their debt along with everybody else's posts in the photographs - Joe Drew and Mike Osgood, Sean 48:54 and a bunch of others as well. So, it makes us better Krav Maga instructors and Krav Maga practitioners when we do these books. Because it test everything that we do and it really makes an instructor a lot much better when you've got to widen it out and explain it without having the ability to show it. They put into words, they put it into photographs and have to take the 49:15 through it. So, I've got another couple of books in the docket as well dealing with ambushes and skilled fighters which is, in other words, a trained fighter, another person perhaps in another discipline, it could be anything. But in other words, this is defending against somebody who's trained. It's not just an amateur throwing at you a wild foot punch or push or some kind of half-measured tackle. So, that's mostly what the Krav Maga I've been training. It's to be able to fight against somebody who has trained and trained well.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Right on. Now, you're still going. You're not slowing down. I mean, if I'm doing the math right, we're around 25 years of Krav Maga. Is that correct?

**David Kahn:**



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Yeah. Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Okay. Most people don't do something for 25 years. They get bored, they fall off and unfortunately, even with martial arts. But you're still training, travelling, teaching, writing. Clearly, this is something that continues to resonate with you and I think your passion is quite evident from our conversation today. So, the question is why? Why are you still so passionate about this pursuit?

**David Kahn:**

Thank you. That really is a very good question.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I try to ask good questions.

**David Kahn:**

No, I think it's great. I do love Krav Maga. I enjoy... I love teaching it. In fact, I do other parallel things in private equity and technology, but it is a great way of staying fit. What intrigues me the most is that it needs to keep developing. For example, everybody these days has got a mobile phone in your hands. You need to be able to fight with a mobile phone in your hand. We've done some testing and I've got some scientific data that if you're well-trained, you obviously should drop the device unless you're going to use it as a weapon of opportunity or an impact weapon. For most people, because we're conditioned not to drop the device, they're not going to do it. So therefore, you've got to tell your defense with your favorite thing in the world in your hand, probably your mobile device, and be able to defend it. So, these are the kinds of things that technology evolves, Krav Maga's got to evolve with it. That's just one example. Another one is road rage. You've got this mobile device, you can record what's happening, stay in your vehicle and that sort of thing. So, we have the curriculum but we constantly have got to adopt and adapt it. And on a professional level, again, with their martial arts and others, learning how to, for example, defend against a blade on an airplane following the horrific 9/11 events. There's still people out there who want to do us great harm and they make no mistake, or are studying what we're studying. In fact, my last trip to Israel on page 28 of the Jihadi Manual, it directs the Jihadi's 52:25 in Krav Maga. So, we need to be able to counter even what we're teaching. We keep that close to the best, and it continually evolved. As we discussed earlier, one of the driving factors for me, the motivating factor, is just helping the professional security community, the law enforcement, the military communities, come home at night. And if possible, control the suspect very, very quickly for the police that is, using distractions which are lower body distractions and not police combatives. There's a difference that we were very careful to make. People who shouldn't be getting hit in the head repeatedly because they're not cooperating with the police officer. There are different ways to do it, saves the officer's hands from



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damaging somebody's head. But more importantly, it also preserves the health of the suspect. I can get more into that but point is that we're delivering it to people who need it. We don't do it for the thanks. It is a business but we do a lot of it pro bono because that's what it should be - helping and giving back to our community.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Very well said and I'm sure that there are quite a few nodding heads as folks are listening to what you're saying right there. So, this is your chance to let people know how they can find you, those books. I don't know if your seminars are available for people to schedule with you but let people know where to find you online.

**David Kahn:**

Absolutely. We've got a couple. Our main training centers in New Jersey in Bordentown and Cherry Hill for the moment. We do have an affiliate program where highly regulated 54:05 very closely 54:07 Krav Maga. But we have many, many seminars that one could come to regardless of your background. That's the best thing about Krav Maga, is that whatever discipline one might study, you can always take and pick and add Krav Maga tactics - discard what you don't like, add what you do like. And that's why so many people, I would say, gravitated towards Krav Maga are compelled to try it because it's additive. And whatever you like, you take. Whatever you don't like, you don't take. So, we have a couple of websites. I'd be delighted to mention it. One is [www.davidkahnkravmaga.com](http://www.davidkahnkravmaga.com), all one word. It is not [davidkahnkravmaga.com](http://davidkahnkravmaga.com) and it sets to my own brand. I teach under Grandmaster Gidon. But it's about our instruction and what we offer. And other one would be for the online training if somebody were interested, [www.masteringkravmaga.com](http://www.masteringkravmaga.com). And for our schools, 55:06 [www.israelikravmaga.com](http://www.israelikravmaga.com). So again, one last time, we've got [www.davidkahnkravmaga.com](http://www.davidkahnkravmaga.com), [masteringkravmaga.com](http://masteringkravmaga.com) and [israelikravmaga.com](http://israelikravmaga.com)

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Awesome. And of course, again, we'll have those links for anyone who is not in the position to write down with pen and paper as I am.

**David Kahn:**

Sure.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

Yeah. I really appreciate your time. This has been a really fun conversation. I feel like we've got a good vibe going so I thank you for that. You've made my job very easy today. But I'd love to ask you for one





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more favor and long-time listeners know, we do this every episode, what parting words would you give to the folks today?

**David Kahn:**

Thank you. That's super good to end with this. All training is good. Obviously, we believe strongly in our Krav Maga. It will complement any style in what you're training. As far as actual self-defense, the actual street defense versus a dojo mentality or the ability to simulate what will actually happen, I would highly encourage people to watch some actual attacks on the internet, YouTube in particular, and watch the speed and ferocity at which somebody will attack with open hands, personal weapons, a knife or even shoot somebody at close range to understand the dynamics at play and the often lack of recognition of an incoming attack. There were indicators or 56:44 indicators that one could have picked up if you analyze the film. But that really will sort of drive home what we've got to prepare anybody for that which they'll hopefully never face. And that lastly, over above training, the only fight or self-defense situation you're sure to win, anybody who'll probably smile, is that what you don't get into. It can 57:06 deescalate and walk away.

**Jeremy Lesniak:**

I seem to be getting pretty lucky lately and that the guests that we're having on the show, they're just such great people and we're spending a lot of time after the episode closes just chatting - chatting about life and martial arts and hoping that our paths might cross so we can train together or even just have a cup of coffee or a beer. I'm so fortunate in what I do and I really got that sense from Chief Instructor Kahn today. That he feels just as fortunate about what he does. And so, I thank you, sir, for your time and for sharing everything that you have today.

If you want to check out the show notes with photos and links, maybe of the books that we've talked about, websites, those are at [whistlekickmartialartsradio.com](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com). You can find all of our products, our apparel, our shoes, hats, uniform, sparring gear - all of that - at [whistlekick.com](http://whistlekick.com). Don't forget, PODCAST15, saves you 15% on everything over there. We're on social media, @whistlekick on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram. And if you want to get to me directly, my email address is [jeremy@whistlekick.com](mailto:jeremy@whistlekick.com). That's all I've got for you today. I'll be back soon. Until next time. Train hard, smile and have a great day.