

24. IF YOU ARE KIDNAPPED OR TAKEN HOSTAGE

After the epoch of the Iranian hostage crisis it would be hard to find an American who has not thought, however briefly, of how awful it must be to be held in a strange place, against your will, by dangerous fanatics who could kill you at any moment. Captivity is an alien and terrifying condition, it has been known to drive its victims to extremes of hysterical panic that caused them, and sometimes fellow victims to lose their lives.

The concept of "hostage negotiation" was developed in this country primarily by Dr. Harvey Schlossberg of the New York Police Department (NYPD), founder of that agency's Psychological Services Unit. His protégé, Captain Frank Bolz, headed the NYPD Hostage Negotiation Unit, founded in the early seventies. The unit's job is to open lines of communication with the kidnapers, bargain with them, and defuse the situation in a manner that results in the safe release of the hostages, and usually also the bloodless surrender of the perpetrators. Since that time, Bolz's team has worked with hundreds of kidnapers. Most of them are psychos or suddenly cornered holdup men who took hostages, but occasionally they turn out to be militant terrorists. Bolz and his people have never lost a hostage once they were on-the-scene.

Bolz and the hundreds of police experts he has trained around the country, agree that the behavior of the hostages themselves is vital to their survival. Let's look at some of the principles they teach.

Don't argue or resist! The captor is usually either a criminal or a psycho, often both. Holding you at gunpoint and the police at bay is a big deal for him; he never before felt the sense of power that is surging through him at this moment. If you challenge him you're provoking him to exercise that power in the .worst possible way. So long as ordering you around makes him feel good he'll want to keep you alive.

Don't try to talk him out of it. He probably has a background of crime and/or mental illness and has already received well-intentioned advice from psychiatrists, parole officers, and other professionals. If you, the victim, presume to give him advice, he's likely to feel that you're implying that you're smarter and wiser and better and stronger than he. He's going to want to cut you down permanently. Keep your advice to yourself. Be docile, obedient, and *quiet*.

Beware of the "Stockholm Syndrome." Several years ago in Stockholm, Sweden, a gang of gunmen held a group of customers hostage in a bank for several days. By the time it was all over, many of the victims sympathized with the captors, and one of the female hostages even married one of her captors in a prison ceremony. Since then, this development of identification with, and sympathy for, the captor has become known as the Stockholm Syndrome. Many consider Patty Hearst to have been a classic case.

The Iranian hostages never showed signs of the syndrome. Cohesive and often left alone among themselves, they developed a few ways of tormenting their captors. Some made small talk with their guards and greeted them with a deep bow, knowing that Islamic tradition required the captors to respond the same. This forced the guards, in a sense, to treat their prisoners as equals. The hostages got away with it. They were lucky. Don't *you* try it. Remember: One reason the Embassy hostages acted with such psychological aggressiveness was that they had at least partially given up hope of coming out alive. *You* don't

want to give up hope, so don't antagonize your captors in any way.

Remember the early photos that showed the hostages in Iran being led about blindfolded? This was the first thing the Red Cross strenuously objected to, and it was a major victory when they shamed the revolutionaries into removing the blindfolds. The Stockholm Syndrome works both ways: The captors start identifying with their victims and becoming sympathetic toward them, too. Blindfolded and gagged, you are faceless, a cipher. As soon as your face becomes familiar to your captor, he "knows you," and it is harder to kill someone you know (so long as he or she hasn't antagonized you) than it is to murder a nonentity.

If you are ever kidnapped or taken hostage promise your captor that you will be totally obedient and cooperative, so that he won't blindfold or gag you. The sooner he comes to know you as a benign person who won't threaten him, the safer you're going to be. Before long, you and he will have become "us." Just make sure that you don't fall victim to the Stockholm Syndrome to the extent that you begin to think of the authorities who are trying to rescue you, as "them."

Remember that time is on your side. While your captor throws threats and ransom demands back and forth with the authorities, try to calm down. Curl up and take a nap, if at all possible, or at least rest. Your captor is running flat out on an adrenaline high, doesn't dare sleep, and is going to be showing exhaustion symptoms within twenty-four hours or so. This makes him edgy and irritable and is another good reason to stay calm and benign and non-threatening. Fatigue also slows his judgment and his reflexes.

So long as you haven't threatened him, he'll be concentrating his hostility on those outside. That means he's likely to drop his guard against you. As time goes on he will get more lax about your captivity and make more

mistakes. Before long, escape avenues may become open to you. Be careful and pragmatic about this, however. An escape attempt that fails will be taken by your captor as a betrayal. With his twisted sense of values this may justify in his mind your summary execution as "a traitor." *Don't make an escape attempt unless you're absolutely sure you can succeed!*

There have been many cases where tired, careless kidnappers left a loaded gun or other weapon where the victim could get at it. In many cases the victims ignored the temptation; some outside observers attribute this to the Stockholm Syndrome, but there's some question about that. It's one thing to imply weakness when you talk from an ivory tower about kidnappings; it's quite another to be an untrained layman in the terrifying clutch of kidnappers and have serious misgivings about picking up a gun and using it. Most people don't have the training or the psycho emotional preparation to shoot their way out of a deadly danger situation, and such people are wise to leave the gun alone. (They should *never* try to hide the weapon. The kidnapper who discovers such an act is likely to feel betrayed and castrated and respond with savage violence.) *At the propertime, use mid-crisis intervention techniques.* If you're still being held captive after twenty-four hours, it might be time to meekly open a conversation with your captor. Don't start whining about your wife and children at home. He doesn't really care about *your* problems.

Instead, let him talk about *his* problems. Be a *very* good listener; ninety or ninety-five percent of the conversation, *at least*, should emanate from him. When you speak, don't chastise him or lecture him. Everything you say should either be noncommittal or subtly sympathetic. A good sympathetic remark might be, "Hey, you've had it rough. I'm beginning to see why you did something big to 'make a break.' I'm not saying I understand, because I haven't had it as rough as you have, but after talking

about it with you, you don't seem to be such a bad person."

Let him keep talking and keep a sympathetic ear. If you want or need something, a trip to the bathroom even, ask him for it. It won't hurt your position to toady to him somewhat, and once he gets used to having power over you, he's likely to feel a certain sense of paternal responsibility toward you. A comment from you like, "The cops aren't going to start shooting the place up, are they?" might even make him feel a little protective toward you, and that would be good. You don't want him to be thinking, "These are my *hostages*." You want him to be thinking, "These are *my* hostages."

Be ready to leave at a moment's notice. The police negotiators are going to be bargaining with your kidnapper for everything he demands. The only two things they'll never give him are more weapons and more hostages. When he gets hungry and starts sending out for a pizza and a six-pack, the negotiators are going to try their hardest to make him trade one or two hostages for each item he wants. It's going to take him awhile to agree to this, but when he does, it's going to be a sudden decision.

Don't wait for him to change his mind. Go now. Don't say something dumb like, "Let me stay here and send Mrs. Smith out instead. She's older and she's frightened, but I'm not scared." When you do that, you're questioning his judgment and antagonizing him. Even if he does let you stay, he's going to be wary of you, maybe even hostile. Your taking issue with him may so antagonize him that *nobody* gets out. In that situation follow orders, and come to terms with your indignation and your frustrated sense of heroism *later*, when no one else stands to die for the sake of your dignity.

If the you know what hits the fan, dive prone and stay there. The only time a *police* team will ever come into a hostage scene shooting *is* after the criminals have executed one of their victims, while *the negotiations are in progress*.

Understand this difference well. If you're in a liquor store and a couple of holdup men come in, get into a shootout with an off-duty cop and kill him, and then take the customers and clerks hostage in a back room, the cops are *not* going to come in shooting. They're going to "freeze" that scene, throw up a cordon of heavily armed officers around the store, and bring in their hostage negotiators. Anyone killed in the situation that immediately precedes the hostage crisis are, for purposes of the operation at hand, written off.

It gets dangerous when the kidnapper tells the police, "It's noon. I want my chauffeured limousine here with the three million dollars at *exactly* one P.M., and if it isn't, I'm going to kill the first hostage and throw his corpse out the window." At that point, the police Emergency Reaction Team or SWAT unit will mobilize for an immediate assault, but will hold off until one P.M. If the kidnapper lets the hostage live, the SWAT officers will return the favor.

But if, at 1:05, a gunshot rings out and a lifeless hostage is flung from the window, all bets are off. The real negotiation is over. The hostage experts believe, "Once they start killing their captives, they won't stop." The death of the first victim is the signal to attack. You can expect it within seconds or minutes, and certainly before the next "murder deadline" the kidnappers specify comes due.

They will hit hard, like an infantry assault team. Expect clouds of tear gas or perhaps the deafening explosion and blinding flash of a concussion grenade as the heavily armed rescue team makes its entry. For a period of several seconds you are going to be in very grave danger because these "police combat soldiers" *will* charge in shooting, perhaps even throw a spray of fully automatic weapon fire. Under the circumstances, their bullets tend to be indiscriminate. At Attica Prison, at the Maalot Commune, even at Entebbe, innocent hostages were struck down in the firestorm of their rescuers' bullets.

When the Israeli commando team hit the Entebbe airport, they yelled out their identity *once*, and ordered the Good Guys to dive for cover. In the din of battle however, you may not hear that warning. At the moment you hear gunfire or an explosion, you are wise to fling yourself to the floor behind the nearest hard cover, and stay there.

You can expect this sort of counterassault, on American soil, only if the kidnapers have already executed at least one victim. Elsewhere, it could happen at any time. Israel, West Germany, Egypt, and other governments, have made it strict policy not to bargain with those they consider to be terrorists. If you are being held prisoner by skyjackers at New York's LaGuardia Airport, it is safe to assume that so long as all the hostages are OK, no SWAT team is going to charge in behind a wall of flying lead.

But if you're in an El Al jetliner commandeered by PLO terrorists in Lod Airport on Israeli soil, an assault team could hit your plane at any moment, without warning, and with their Uzi submachine guns blazing; that nation considers individual hostages relatively expendable, in the name of deterring future attempts at terrorism.

If you are truly convinced that your captor is going to murder you, try to escape at an opportune moment. Let's say that your estranged spouse has walked into your office with a gun and taken you hostage. If you think he's just "making a statement" or "declaring himself," cooperate fully. But if he says, "I'm gonna take you out there in front of the TV cameras on the sidewalk, and then I'm gonna blow your brains out and let 'em kill me in a blaze of glory," *and if you are convinced that he means it*, be ready to make a very desperate move to save your life.

Once you are out on that sidewalk you may be assured that your tormentor is in the cross hairs of more than one high-powered rifle, manned by a SWAT officer fully prepared to blow his brains out at the first necessity. If you should feel his gun barrel stray from your head

and feel the hand that's holding you loosen, *rip free and dive to the ground*. If you know there's a SWAT team in place it's safe to assume that you'll hear a loud noise, be splattered with blood, and maybe have a two-hundred-pound corpse fall on you, but the chances are that you'll still be alive to talk with your psychologist about the symptoms of "post-hostage trauma"

It is most unlikely, however, that you'll have to go that far. The great majority of hostage cases are resolved without bloodshed by the expert police hostage negotiators. The cops will almost certainly get you out alive. You'll be scared, sweaty, dirty, with your altitude toward your fellowman changed forever for the worse, but you'll be alive.