



Hostage

Survival

Skills

for CF Personnel

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Hostage Survival

Introduction

"The Serbs did not immediately retaliate by killing peacekeeping troops, as NATO had feared, but at least two were wounded - and one subsequently died - in the continued fighting. Serbs abducted some blue helmets at gunpoint and held hostage more than 200 UN soldiers and civilians. They surrounded several artillery depots around Sarajevo and on Saturday reportedly seized heavy weapons sequestered by peacekeepers."

Time, April 1994

In reference to the first NATO air strikes outside Gorazde.

"... the Khmer Rouge have become increasingly brazen in defying the UN, refusing orders to disarm, even taking UN personnel hostage in an effort at intimidation."

Time, 18 Jan 1993

"March 12, 1985: Three Armenian men stormed the Turkish Embassy in Ottawa, killing a Pinkerton security guard in the initial siege. They held seven hostages for approximately three and a half hours..."

Peter Shoniker
Canada: New Crossroads for International Terror

None of us expects to be taken hostage but the possibility exists. Being part of a peace operation will increase the chance of being exposed to, or involved in, a hostage situation. Many UN personnel have been taken hostage in recent years, for periods of hours to weeks. It is also an age of increasing terrorism and criminal activity, both of which use hostage-taking as a key tool for gaining recognition and influencing others. No country is totally safe from terrorist attack. For these reasons, it is important to be acquainted with many aspects of hostage situations. Knowing proven strategies for responding to being taken hostage can increase your chances of survival and enhance your well-being both during captivity and after release. This document outlines various issues related to being held hostage.

Types of Hostage Takers

There are several main types of hostage-takers. It is useful to identify them as this can provide information as to the reasons behind hostage-taking incidents:

- military and paramilitary personnel (for example, to prevent being targeted)
- terrorists (for example, to right a perceived wrong),
- criminals (usually for money),
- the mentally ill (may include the above types), and
- the emotionally distraught (for example, in response to a personal crisis or domestic dispute).

Types of Hostage Situations

Barricade. In this situation, people are held with the hostage-takers in a building, plane, train or other clearly identified location. The lives of the hostages are bartered for demands. This is the favored action for terrorists seeking publicity. However, barricade situations are highly charged because the terrorists themselves are, in a sense, captives as well, usually being surrounded by police and special forces personnel.

"Sixty armed Iraqi security men have surrounded the bus since 9 am Tuesday and refused to allow the 44 UN officials to leave, until they hand over documents and a videotape believed to show details of Iraq's secret nuclear weapons program."

Newspaper report on the 'standoff' with UN weapons inspectors, September 1991

"... vowing to deploy the POWs as human shields at "civilian, economic, educational and other targets," Saddam aimed to curtail the allied aerial campaign ... the plan backfired as miserably as his earlier threat to put the now released Western hostages to the same use."

Time, February 1991,
During the Gulf War

"One night they said I was going home and dressed me in nice clothes. When I dressed, they said, 'Just kidding,' and laughed. I started to cry."

Father Lawrence Jenco,
who spent 564 days
in captivity in Lebanon

Containment. This is an increasingly common experience for peacekeepers. It refers to situations where a group, such as a convoy of vehicles, is surrounded and restrained by a larger force that has control of the local area. Violence is averted as long as the group held 'hostage' remains stationary. There is no direct control over the hostages but rather a zone of containment.

Human shields. This is often used by ruthless or desperate military and paramilitary personnel and involves the deliberate placement of captured people (may be soldiers or civilians) at sites or on equipment in order to deter targeting or attack.

Kidnapping. This is where people are captured, taken to a secret location, and kept for ransom or political leverage. The motive for terrorists to use this method of hostage-taking is usually for the release of political prisoners or imprisoned terrorists. The majority of hostage situations are kidnappings but they generally involve only one or a few people at a time.

Stages of Hostage Situations

The following are the typical stages associated with a hostage-taking incident:

- planning and surveillance (which will not concern us here),
- attack (the taking or restraining of hostages),
- movement (normally only in a kidnapping situation),
- captivity (the main focus of this guide), and
- release.

The Behavior of Captors Toward Their Hostages

Although there is great variability in the experiences of hostages, the behaviors below should be expected from captors:

- physical restraint and sensory deprivation (for example, chains and blindfolds),
- mental cruelty,
- interrogations,

At one point, his captors told him he had only five hours to live. Waite requested - and was given - a last cup of tea. Ordered to stand against a wall, he felt a muzzle being shoved against his head. "I said my prayers," Waite recalled, "and then they put the gun down and said, 'later.'"

Time, January 1992
On Terry Waite's hostage experience of 1,763 days

She and her fellow hostages suffered a terrifying few minutes when her captors appeared to have prepared for a hanging. "I thought it was the end of the road - literally - when someone started making nooses. But it was only to tie up cows ... we thought at the time it was for us."

Maree Worthington,
Australian nurse held hostage for 38 days with a Canadian and a Kenyan pilot in Sudan,
Nov/Dec 1996

"If you can last a month, you can last forever. The only danger is illness."

David Jacobsen,
former hostage for 18 months

- indoctrination / brainwashing (often associated with enforced sleep loss),
- verbal abuse and humiliation (such as being stripped naked),
- threats of injury and death, and
- physical, perhaps sexual, abuse.

Stages of Adaptation to Captivity

Six broad stages of reaction and adaptation to being held hostage have been identified.

- **Startle / panic** (first seconds to minutes)
Hostage situations are not usually anticipated and are life-threatening: an abrupt transition that is difficult to assimilate quickly. Typical initial reactions are a desire to flee, uncontrollable trembling and confused thinking.
- **Disbelief** (first minutes to hours)
Common thoughts are: "This can't be happening" and "We'll be rescued shortly."
- **Hypervigilance and anxiety** (first hours to days)
This refers to the state of being extremely wary and alert to minute details. It is often accompanied by startle reactions to noise or sudden movement, and a tendency to think the worst - to catastrophize the situation.
- **Resistance / compliance** (first days to weeks)
Captive behavior is highly variable across individuals, some resist all coercive attempts while others cannot cope with relatively minor pressure.
- **Depression and despair** (first weeks to months)
Loss of freedom, boredom, isolation, cruel treatment and lack of contact with the outside world usually combine to cause depression and passivity in even the hardest person.
- **Gradual acceptance** (first months to years)
The final stage of adaptation (not reached by many captives due to relatively short periods of detention) where a decision is made to gain some control of their life and make constructive use of time and the limited resources available.

Stress Reactions in Captivity

The most important thing to attempt to do is bring your initial reactions under control as soon as possible.

"I thought I was in control, but s---, I couldn't stop trembling."

UN Military Observer, reflecting on the moments after his capture in Lebanon

In December 1987, overcome by frustration when he was forbidden to send a Christmas message to his family, Terry Anderson slammed his head against a wall until the blood streamed from his scalp.

Terry Anderson was held hostage in Lebanon for 2,455 days.
Drawn from *Time*

"The police response to such incidents (hostage taking) is simple and well known... They try to take things slowly, letting tempers cool, letting the relationship between the criminals and their victims develop to reduce the chance of a killing."

Joseph Scanlon,
Hijacking the Media

The type, intensity and duration of reactions to being taken and held hostage vary dramatically across individuals. Many such reactions should be considered understandable responses to what is a most unusual and stressful situation. The most important thing to attempt to do is bring your initial reactions under control as soon as possible. It is often said that the first 45 minutes of a hostage situation are the most dangerous - presumably because both captors and captives are highly stressed and prone to impulsive behaviors. The more quickly you can gain your composure, the more sensibly you can respond to the situation.

Initial phase. The first moments after capture are usually characterized by shock, disbelief, denial, confusion, a sense of unreality, and fear.

Intermediate phase. Emotional numbness, apathy, social withdrawal, scapegoating, complaining, bickering, irritability, hysteria, crying, generalized anxiety, anger, protective behaviors toward female and child hostages, extreme talkativeness and reflection upon one's life are common reactions during the first hours and days after capture.

Long-term phase. If captivity extends more than a week, the following may occur: depression, fatalistic thinking, deliberate self-injury, sleep disturbance, vivid dreams, mental confusion, ritualistic behaviors and loss of emotional control and general ill-health that may be partly stress-induced (for example, asthma, diarrhea, skin disorders, stomach complaints, aches and pains).

The 'Stockholm Syndrome'

This rather overworked term refers to the positive relationship that can occur between captor and hostage. It has been frequently observed that some hostages begin to perceive their captors as protectors and believe that the actions of government officials, police and family unjustly jeopardize the safety of the hostages. Or hostages may come to identify strongly with the political cause of terrorist hostage-takers. Fortunately, the syndrome can be a two-way phenomenon. Captors may begin to develop an interest in, or concern for their hostages - in some cases even feelings of friendship. Some hostages have used this to their advantage to elicit sympathy, erode resolve and gain a variety of concessions - even freedom - from their captors.



Case Study

In 1977 in Washington D.C., over 100 hostages were held for about 40 hours in a large room by members of a religious sect. All hostages were threatened with death - many by decapitation with a machete - and some were abused. The captors spoke of particular religious views that one male hostage initiated an argumentative discussion over. The situation was resolved with only one death which occurred during the takeover. However, the captors later stated that if they had carried out their plan to execute some of their prisoners, the argumentative male would have been the first to die.

Steen was beaten more than once, but ... at least one of those beatings was worth it. Shortly after Steen attempted to escape in 1987, a Lebanese guard who knew karate tried to kick him. Steen sidestepped the blows, then decked the guard with a left cross and a right hook. "They got even later ... but it took a Kalashnikov and a length of chain to do it."

Former hostage Robert Polhill on fellow hostage Alann Steen, *Time*, December 1991

Surviving a Hostage Situation

Surviving a hostage situation remains, to a considerable degree, a matter of chance. However, hostages can maximize their chances of survival and minimize their suffering by managing themselves, their time, and their environment in certain ways. Below are the gems of advice drawn from previous hostages and experts in the field. These are not strict rules that must be followed rigidly, but rather general guidelines. There will always be exceptions.

Regain - and maintain - composure. Attempt to gain control over one's panic reactions upon capture as soon as possible. Try to be calm and clear-headed at all times. Without jeopardizing your own safety, try to calm any other hostages who are not coping. Hostages who are hysterical draw attention to themselves and are troublesome for the captors to manage.

Maintain a low-key, unprovocative posture. Overt resistance is usually counterproductive in a hostage situation. It is safest to control impulsive behavior, remain calm, and follow instructions. In the early, edgy stages of captivity, be aware that even eye contact may be regarded as a challenge to the captor's domination. Studies show that military personnel in uniform and others who present a threatening manner to captors are the most likely to be killed or injured. In most instances where hostages have been killed, the hostage had antagonized the terrorist.

Get captors to recognize you as a human being. Hostages are generally considered by their captors as expendable objects. You should attempt to show them your humanity so they begin to identify you as a person. To achieve this you must foster communication on nonthreatening topics. Talk about family and interests but avoid political and sensitive issues.

Follow the rules given by the captors. Unless you have clear reasons for not doing so, such as the violation of your personal dignity or security reasons, it is wise to consent to the demands made by your captors. Many observers believe that overt resistance is counterproductive in hostage situations. Be aware that some captors will play games with you by varying the rules in order to deliberately 'catch you out.' Of course, there may be rules, such as forbidding all communication with other hostages, which you may want to thwart and be willing to pay the price for if detected. Be careful and be devious, and balance the likely payoffs of your behavior with the possible consequences.

"I kept track of meals and guards, a habit I kept up until I was freed so that after a time the personnel would sometimes ask me when they were next on duty, or what we would have for supper."

Roger Cooper,
Held in Iran for five years

"I fought to create systems to maintain control. I tried to think of beautiful things, like Barbra Streisand's voice or Jack Nicklaus' golf swing, or how to introduce new rules for pro football. I thought up a new golf board game. Out of cigarette boxes I made a pack of playing cards, marked the different suits by dots of orange shampoo and played solitaire for hours. I hid them in my underwear..."

Frank Reed
Hostage for four years,
Time, August 1991

"Their ideas were often totally at odds with reality: for example, many Iranians think the Queen secretly appoints the American president."

Roger Cooper

Say as little as possible if questioned. It is always wise to give only short answers to questions. Also avoid making suggestions.

Win your captors' respect. Be stoic, that is, maintain an outward face of acceptance of adversity with dignity. Live your values rather than discuss them. Avoid open displays of cowardice and fear. Learn what behaviors your captors value and regard as 'honorable' and make use of this information in your dealings with them. (Captors from some cultures are often astounded by Westerners kneeling in prayer as they often believe they are all "infidels" without any religious faith.)

Set goals. Be determined to survive until a certain date such as a family anniversary but be prepared to reset these dates if your captivity is prolonged. Note that the longer a hostage situation lasts, the safer you are. Plan on a long captivity as this helps stave off disappointment and depression. Christmas is almost always the most dismal time for long-term hostages.

Maintain some form of control of your environment. This strategy reduces stress by enhancing self-esteem and reducing feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. One hostage always kept a small amount of his food to offer to any captors who came to his cell. In this way he transformed his apparent situation of powerless imprisonment into one of welcoming 'visitors' to his 'home.' Sharing food with any fellow hostages can also pay important dividends such as bringing you out of yourself and creating much needed bonds of friendship.

Keep your mind active. Take in and store as much detail as possible about your captors' habits and characteristics, your surroundings, and so on. This will also have the effect of diminishing the fear of the unknown as you begin to recognize patterns in behaviors and procedures. Develop mind games to stimulate your thinking, for example, try to remember the plots of movies you have seen or passages from books read. The possibilities are only limited by your creative ability.

Attempt to understand your captors. Be sensitive to, and learn about the cultural norms of your captors. Many guards may have limited intelligence and minimal skills in your language. Do not make assumptions about their general knowledge. During extended captivity, it is common for captors to engage you in games such as cards. It may be wise to be a subtle loser most of the time: outdoing your captors may not be in your best interests.

"I tried to block out the dark thoughts and remember the funny things. Some of the Americans exercised in the nude because it violated Islamic law and nettled the guards. I got a laugh out of 'moonning' a surveillance camera set up in the bathroom."

Colonel David M. Roeder (USAF), held for 444 days at the US embassy in Teheran

What pulled the men through such moments of hopelessness? For Sutherland it was thoughts of his wife, three daughters and a granddaughter he had never seen. For Anderson it was a Bible and a photograph of his daughter Sulome. Men with strong religious affiliations relied heavily on their spiritual muscles. Three bare wires hanging from the ceiling evoked for the Rev. Benjamin Weir the fingers of the painting on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Time, December 1991

"I think our leaders and our people have wrongly attacked the peaceful people of Iraq," says Lieutenant Jeffrey Zaun, 28, his swollen face speckled with dried blood.

Saddam's use of hostages for propaganda purposes backfired. Time, during the Gulf War, Feb 1991

Look for, or inject humor into your situation. In the early stages of captivity, when captors are tense and intent on instilling fear and compliance, it would not be wise to engage in humor. However, once the captivity has settled into a predictable routine, humor can be a very strong antidote to hopelessness. Even laughing inwardly, to yourself, can provide relief from anxiety and frustration. Try to find something funny in your situation, but be careful and use common sense. Remember, you don't want to stand out or invite nasty reprisals.

Eat and exercise as much as possible. This will have the dual effects of maintaining general body conditioning and counteracting the physical effects of stress and confinement. Adapt to imposed restrictions - it is amazing how some hostages have continued to exercise despite being bound and blindfolded.

Maintain hope. Believe in something that is strongly meaningful to you, whether it be family, God, country, or an ideal. Religion commonly becomes more prominent in the thoughts of hostages. One military member held hostage in Teheran was strongly motivated by the need to win the respect of his father (a retired Senior NCM): *"I had to come back and look my father in the eye. That thought helped me make sure that things I did would be acceptable to him."*

Actively use stress management techniques. Most of us know the theory and several methods of managing stress but we may rarely, if ever, put them into practice. For example, physical relaxation techniques can reduce stress levels and can be very useful as a method to manage pain (if required). Relaxation can also assist in coping with feelings such as claustrophobia that physical restraints can cause. Practise other stress management techniques such as positive self-talk, developing a daily routine, accepting negative emotions and keeping a diary (secretly if need be - for example, one hostage used a pin to poke holes above letters in a bible to record his thoughts, smoothing them down to avoid detection).

Accept your failings. Avoid dwelling on feelings of weakness or guilt about your behavior during captivity. You have been placed in an extraordinary situation with little or no warning or preparation. You are likely to be under extreme stress. You may regret making statements, while under duress or stress, sought or used by your captors for political purposes. The world accepts statements made under coercion and stress as simply that.

"Each of us had different ways of dealing with confinement. Sometimes those differences even caused friction among ourselves... I didn't speak to one of my fellow hostages - chained right next to me - for three months over some minor personal argument. The constant tension led from time to time to irrational behavior."

Frank Reed

"You just do what you have to do. You wake up every day, and you summon up the energy from somewhere. And you do it day after day after day."

Terry Anderson

KOMPONG THOM, Cambodia: Six unkempt UN peacekeepers who had been held hostage by Khmer Rouge guerrillas for four days arrived yesterday at this provincial capital, in need of a beer and a shave. "It'll be nice to get cleaned up," the group's senior officer, British Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Walton, said before the six were debriefed and given food and a check-up.

Newspaper report, December 1992

"One of the most basic elements of concern for any freed hostage is his or her privacy."

US State Department Hostage Repatriation Team spokesperson

Be tolerant of fellow hostages. Just as each person has different reactions to stress, each individual will have different methods of coping as a hostage. Some methods are not effective and may endanger the group. You may need to help these people cope in other ways. Methods that may be effective for one person may have a byproduct: they can be very annoying to other hostages (for example, constant talking). Be tolerant. And be aware that there is a tendency to vent frustrations on fellow hostages as it is too risky to do so against the real cause of your upset - your captors. Don't regard incidents of emotional breakdown in others as weakness: everybody has a breaking point.

Overview. Each individual has different preferences for coping with stressful events. Sometimes we revert to habitual ways of coping when there are better options available. By being acquainted with a range of options - as outlined above - you will have a better chance of quickly finding those that work for you in the dynamic hostage situation. Effective, adaptive coping techniques will enhance both your chances of surviving and your psychological adjustment during captivity; which in turn should minimize the aftereffects of being held hostage. These guidelines also allow the hostage to survive with their integrity, dignity and self-respect intact.

Release

It is often said that more hostages are killed during rescue attempts than by execution by hostage-takers. But this is not the only danger or problem associated with release from captivity. Re-entering the real world can be as much a shock as leaving it. Upon release, hostages generally transfer in a matter of hours from conditions of isolation, deprivation and powerlessness to celebrity status, prosperity, sensory overload and freedom. Although these changes sound appealing, the transition is often accompanied by significant adjustment difficulties.

Comments to the media

Try to avoid media exposure immediately after release. Until you have been properly debriefed, avoid talking about your ordeal as you may unintentionally create difficulties for any hostages remaining in captivity. Similarly, due to the possibility of the Stockholm Syndrome influencing your thinking, avoid comments on your captors. Instead, pose for photos and focus any remarks on the joy of freedom and your eagerness to see loved ones.

Negotiations secured the release of nurse Maree Worthington, of Sydney, Canadian pilot John Early and Kenyan pilot Mohsin Raza after 38 days of captivity in Sudan. Following medical checks they were expected to travel to Geneva for 'debriefing' before returning home.

Newspaper report,
December 1996

"My life is very, very busy - it is full of joy. The world is fresh and bright and beautiful."

Terry Anderson,
following debriefing and
recuperation, *Time*, May 1992

"When American hostage Edward Tracy emerged from nearly five years of captivity in Lebanon last week, every minute of his confinement seemed to be graven in his body and spirit. Though he declared himself "in perfect health" and "ready to do the 100-yard dash," he appeared weary, bewildered and at times incoherent . . .

In dramatic contrast, John McCarthy, who was also held for five years, bounced back into freedom looking as if he had just been away for the weekend."

Time, August 1991

Debriefing

It is crucial that all hostages are thoroughly psychologically debriefed about their ordeal immediately upon release. Irrespective of the length of captivity, there are numerous issues that should be addressed to set the released hostage on the proper road to recovery. Psychological debriefing programs are well-established in most Western countries. Depending on the duration and hardship of captivity, these debriefing programs can last from several hours to two or three weeks.

The aims of debriefing are numerous. Most fundamentally, it demonstrates care and concern - something probably lacking during the hostage experience. Most importantly, debriefing assists released hostages to deal with any psychological consequences of their hostage experience (for example, guilt, confusion, fears, loss of self-respect). It provides the opportunity to freely discuss feelings, opinions and experiences related to captivity and their newfound freedom. Debriefing informs released hostages of the typical problems that can arise when returning to family, job and general society after captivity. It also identifies any personnel in need of further support.

Recovery

Released hostages need time to rest and recuperate from the physical and mental hardships or deprivations most suffer. Generally, how well hostages cope with recovery depends on the duration and harshness of their captivity. There are always exceptions, however, due to differences in character. Some released hostages claim they are unaffected by their experience, while others admit to significant, long-standing personal changes and concerns. Sometimes the joys of release and a need to appear to be coping can mask serious readjustment difficulties. These problems may surface and become apparent after a period of struggling to cope. Unfortunately, such 'denied' problems can become more severe than problems faced early on after release.

Post-release stress reactions

Stress reactions to the experiences of captivity can continue long after release. Sometimes stress reactions are delayed and do not occur for days, weeks, or months. Often those afflicted by such delayed reactions do not realize that the hostage experience is the cause of their disturbance. Stress symptoms can include:

"There are too many reminders. I might be out on the golf course or somewhere drinking a beer, and suddenly I know that what I'm enjoying - at that very moment - is what we hostages used to fantasize about. I get angry and sad and guilty."

Frank Reed,

"I've become much too self-centered. In captivity you learn to concentrate totally on yourself. On the outside that doesn't work. As a hostage, I learned one overriding fact: caring is a powerful force. If no one cares, you are truly alone."

Frank Reed,
on how 4 years of captivity
had changed him

"It happened years ago now and I'm still angry, bloody angry, about it. I'm not the same person any more."

UN Military Observer who was held
hostage for three days in Lebanon

- insomnia and nightmares,
- intrusive thoughts, distortions of time and space, and 'flashbacks' (a sense of reliving parts of the experience),
- chronic fatigue,
- headaches, skin disorders, high blood pressure, diarrhea, back trouble, and other health problems,
- sexual and social inhibitions,
- depression, helplessness, generalized anxiety, guilt, and other emotional responses,
- memory problems, and
- fears of retribution from the terrorists or their associates and intense fears triggered by reminders of the hostage experience (such as a person's accent or a dark room).

Such feelings are understandable reactions to a very unusual and stressful event. These stress reactions are not uncommon and can often be remedied or reduced with assistance from mental health professionals with experience in post-trauma stress reactions. It is important that help is sought early so that usual functioning can be restored as quickly as possible.

When to Seek Assistance with Post-release Stress

People may need extra help in getting over the experiences of being held hostage or in adjusting to work and family life following homecoming. If the difficulties listed below apply, then you should consider seeking formal assistance. Family and friends are often better judges than the released hostage of how much the experience has affected them. Show them this pamphlet and heed their advice as to whether you would benefit from assistance.

- If you cannot handle intense feelings or physical sensations.
- If you feel your emotions are not returning to normal.
- If you have chronic signs of stress, such as heart problems, general hostility, migraines, alcohol misuse and depression.

"But since late Tuesday night, when a Foreign Affairs official phoned with word that André was being held captive, their nights have been practically sleepless and their days have been filled with prayers. Their voices seem strained, and they repeatedly say that the hostage-taking a continent away still seems unimaginable."

Ottawa Citizen report on the family of a Canadian held hostage in Lima, Peru, 20 December 1996

"More resilient hostages have a firm sense of identity, self-confidence and optimism. They tend to hold strong beliefs, political or religious. And they have stable ties to family and friends, which give them a reason to live and comfort that they have not been forgotten. In captivity they are able to forge new bonds with other hostages and often make sacrifices for the others' benefit."

Julius Segal, psychologist

- If you continue to feel numb or empty and have inappropriate feelings such as a desire to avoid intimacy with your loved ones.
- If you cannot confront your thoughts and/or feelings; for example, you keep extremely busy in order to avoid them.
- If you continue to have disturbed sleep or nightmares.
- If you have no person or group with whom you can share your thoughts and feelings.
- If your relationships and work seem to be suffering or changing for the worse.
- If you are having frequent accidents, or are increasing your intake of alcohol or drugs.
- If your partner or children are showing any of these signs and you wish to discuss the matter.
- If there are any other changes in emotions or behavior that are worrying you.

Family issues


The families and friends of people held hostage are confronted with numerous issues in coping with fears and uncertainties relating to the incident. In a sense they are held hostage to the situation as well. A companion guide to this document which discusses the issues facing friends and family members is also available. It is entitled *"When your loved one is held captive."*

Conclusion

It is hoped that you will never have need to remember the contents of this pamphlet. However, life is unpredictable, and several Canadian Forces personnel on peace operations have been held hostage, albeit for relatively short periods. An understanding of fundamental hostage survival strategies will give you the best possible chance of adapting to the demands of captivity, irrespective of how long this endures.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Further Reading

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Hostage Survival Strategies

Regain and maintain composure

Maintain a low-key, unprovocative posture

Get captors to recognize you as a human being

Follow the rules given by the captors

Say as little as possible if questioned

Set goals

Win your captors' respect

Maintain some form of control of your environment

Keep your mind active

Attempt to understand your captors

Eat and exercise as much as possible

Look for, or inject humor into your situation

Actively use stress management techniques

Maintain hope

Accept your failings

Be tolerant of any fellow hostages

Postscript

When Major Kushner arrived at First Camp in January 1968, Robert had already been captive for two years. He was a rugged and intelligent corporal from a crack marine unit . . . Robert was convinced that he would soon be released. The Viet Cong had made it a practice to release, as examples, a few men who had cooperated with them and adopted the correct attitudes. Robert had done so . . .

[Then] it dawned on him that he had been deceived - that he had already served his captor's purpose, and he wasn't going to be released. He stopped working and showed signs of severe depression: he refused food and lay on his bed in a foetal position, sucking his thumb. His fellow prisoners tried to bring him around. They hugged him, babied him and when this didn't work, tried to bring him out of his stupor with their fists. . .

After a few weeks it was apparent to Kushner that Robert was moribund: although otherwise his gross physical shape was still better than most of the others . . . In the early hours of a November morning he lay dying in Kushner's arms . . .

Hope of release sustained Robert. When he gave up hope, when he believed that all his efforts had failed and would continue to fail, he died.

Can a psychological state be lethal? I believe it can.

Martin E. P. Seligman,
Helplessness, 1975

